

1st Kings Chapters 3-4 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "The pro's and con's of asking God for wisdom". To explain that title I want to share a true story that happened to me many years ago, combined with a bit of wisdom that I heard about what it is we should desire of God. Here goes:
 - a) Many years ago, when my wife and I were first dating, I remember going to a restaurant and we got into a bible discussion. A man sitting at the table next to us started answering the questions I was pondering. Most of us who have gone to church for a while, know the type: the "bible know it all" who can't resist sharing what he knows with everyone around him. He was stating how King Solomon asked God for the gift of wisdom. That is part of Chapter 3 here. I then asked him, "What did King David ask God for in comparison?" He didn't know the answer and I admit I did enjoy that little moment.
 - i) For those who care, the answer is in Psalm 27, which is attributed to David. Verse 4 reads, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life". (Psalm 274a, NIV). After that exchange we all had a nice conversation and that was the end of that story.
 - b) The point is, as good a thing as it is, as ask God for wisdom, a greater thing to ask for is to be with Him forever. The idea is about trusting in His wisdom and His guidance for our lives. The comparison between Solomon and David is to say, yes, God I would like Your wisdom but more importantly I want You to guide me as how is the best way to live. But isn't asking God for wisdom the same thing? Technically no. The problem is we can have wisdom but still sin because there are way too many moments in all of our lives where we are trusting in our own ability to do things as opposed to only applying God's wisdom to guide for our lives. That's the key point I want to get across through these chapters.
2. Speaking of these chapters, I would also like you to think about them another way. We're going to read about the kingdom of Israel at the peak of its power. Consider as we read these chapters what was it that caused Israel to go from being a great power to a conquered nation over the next four hundred year period. What caused their downfall? The short answer is they ended up living like the world around them and not how God wanted them to live. As we read of Solomon in all his greatness and power we'll start to see even in the first verse of Chapter 3 that Solomon mixes wisdom from God with trying to live like the world around him. That "wanting it both ways" is in effect the downfall of the nation. More importantly it can cause the downfall of you and me if and when we take too many moments of our lives trying to live like the world around us and not living how it is God wants us to live.
3. With that said, let me summarize these two chapters with a few key points:
 - a) The first point is about how Solomon married a daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh as a peace gesture. This event is not chronological to the events of this story. It is listed here to show that not everything Solomon did was God's will, despite his gift of wisdom.
 - b) Next is a discussion about how Israel made sacrifices to God and well as to false gods in the high places (think small mountaintops) of Israel. It is another example of mixing what God desired of His people with what He despises of us (idol worship).
 - c) Next is the story of Solomon asking God for wisdom, which God grants to him. I believe Solomon already had that gift but in this chapter we realize Solomon became aware of it because he asked for that and not say long life or say wealth. God blessed him with those other things because Solomon desired His wisdom.
 - d) Next comes the most famous Solomon story in the bible, the "splitting of the baby". Those who know nothing else about this story. The main point here is to show that Solomon is applying his God given gift of wisdom to his ruling as a king.
 - e) Next is Chapter 4. The entire chapter is in effect a proof of how much power and wisdom God has given Solomon based on who worked for him and what he accomplished.

4. It is important to see these chapters as not happening in chronological order based on Solomon's life. It lists key moments that God wants us to learn about Solomon, both good and bad. As one reads these chapters, realize that Solomon was at the height of power, both based on how David left it for him and how Solomon increased his fame by diplomacy as opposed to fighting wars.
 - a) Before we start, think about both King David and King Solomon from a New Testament perspective. The term "Son of David" is associated with Jesus. King David to this day is regarded as a hero in Israel. One can find products there today with his name on it. On the other hand, not much is said positively about Solomon. Jesus compared the beauty of the "lilies of the field" as more glorious than Solomon. (Luke 12:27.) Jesus point was that despite all of the wealth and fame associated with Solomon, he will not be regarded in heaven as great as anyone who dedicates their lives to serving God and relying upon His power in order to live that life that He desires we live. My point is despite all of David's faults, he is considered greater than Solomon, because David turned his life over to God for guidance. Solomon asked for wisdom and then relied on his own decisions for his life.
 - b) To say it a shorter way, Solomon is not regarded historically as great as David because he trusted God with the results of his life while Solomon too often, relied on his own ability.
 - c) All of that leads me back to my title: "The pro's and con's of asking God for wisdom". It is a good thing to ask God for wisdom. What is more important is that we continue to trust and rely upon His wisdom daily in order to live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do.
 - d) With that said, we are ready to read of both the successes and failures of Solomon here.
5. Chapter 3, Verse 1: Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem.
 - a) Let me start with a quote: "This was not Solomon's first marriage. 1st Kings 14:21 tells us that his son Rehoboam came to the throne when he was 41 years old. 1st Kings 11:42 tells us that Solomon reigned 40 years. This means that Rehoboam was born to his mother - a wife of Solomon named Naamah the Amomitess - before he came to the throne and before he married this daughter of Pharaoh." (David Guzik's commentary on this verse.)
 - i) I start that first simply to show that Verse 1 is not in chronological order versus the rest of the chapter. A purpose of these chapters about Solomon is to show both his wisdom and what mistakes he made when he turned from what God commanded him to do as the king of Israel. As we read of his "greatness" in these chapters, we can also read of what did lead to his downfall. Part of that downfall was marrying multiple foreign women that turned Solomon's hearts to other gods. (Forbidden as stated in Deuteronomy 17:17.)
 - b) OK, too bad for Solomon. Why should I care? The answer is about our own relationship with God and what he desires of us. Did Solomon pray about marrying this girl? Doubt it. It was probably a political marriage in order for Israel to have peace with its neighbor, the nation of Egypt. Either that, or Solomon prayed something like, "Dear God, may this marriage strengthen my relationship with Egypt" and he didn't considering that the bible prohibits Israelite kings from marrying multiple women. (Again see Deuteronomy 17:17). My point is praying something "anti-biblical" can never be blessed.
 - i) The point for you and me is about taking our bible seriously. I'm well aware of the fact that we are saved by grace, and not by obeying the law. The issue comes back to whether or not we desire to please God with our lives after we are saved. If we do, then it is a matter of caring whether any action we do pleases Him. If Solomon was so wise, then consider that he probably married this Egyptian princess many years after he had asked God for wisdom.
 - ii) Let me end this discussion this way: Just because we asked God for wisdom and have gotten it, doesn't mean we won't make foolish decisions. The reason we stick close to Him is to minimize the number of foolish things we do in our lives.

6. Verse 2: The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD.³ Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.
- a) Speaking of things that aren't so smart, I present these verses. To understand these verses we have to recall a little bit of Israelite history up to this point. One of the things to grasp about ancient Israel as a kingdom and even before kings started to reign there, was that a lot of Jewish people who lived there, mixing worship of Judaism with other religions. It's kind of like saying, I want to cover all my bases in case my religion is wrong. That's why they sacrificed to the true god, but also still sacrificed to false gods during the hundreds of years that the Israelites lived in that land prior to the end of that kingdom.
 - b) With that said, let me explain this history another way. Israel is not a flat country. It's full of small mountains. People felt closer to God by traveling up to those mountaintops. At the mountaintops, they would bring an animal to sacrifice. I suspect by the time of King David and King Solomon, most of the sacrifices were to God, but I also am sure that was mixed in with the worship of false gods. Also know that Solomon was going to build the first official temple in Israel. God also desired at that time He only be worshipped in one place, which was the original tabernacle until the temple was built. My issue is, why does God care about where we worship Him? Accountability. If we go off on our own, or say just worship God at home, no one else can watch how we worship Him. The idea of there being a central place to worship God was about Israelites being accountable to each other.
 - c) All of this leads me back to Solomon and the choices he made as a king. The good news is that he cared about God and worshipped Him in those high places. The bad news is the word "except" in Verse 3. To put it simply, Solomon was worshipping God, but Solomon was doing it at a place that God didn't desire he do it. It's as if Solomon is thinking, other people who live in Israel travel to hilltops to worship God, maybe I should do the same.
 - i) While that seems like a wise thing, it was not God's will either for Solomon or for the people of that country. It again would be like thinking, "Why should I go to church to worship God? Why can't I just do it here at home or someplace I enjoy?"
 - ii) Remember my answer of accountability. The reason God set up a specific place for Him to be worshipped in Israel is the same reason God desires that we gather as a body of believers in order to worship Him and be accountable to each other.
 - iii) The good news coming up in a few verses is that God is going to "Call Solomon on the carpet" for that act. In the meantime, Verse 4.
7. Verse 4: The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.
- a) Stop and think about how one would offer 1,000 animals on a mountaintop. To perform that act would require a lot of help to bring those animals up there, let alone to kill them all and place each of them on that altar. This act gets God to speak to Solomon. I don't believe God spoke to Solomon based on the number of animals, but simply because God wanted Solomon as the king to be an example of how God is to be worshipped. Therefore we will get God lecturing Solomon on the topic of how He is to be properly worshipped.
8. Verse 5: At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."
- a) Before I talk about God's comments to Solomon, let me talk a little about dreams. First, know that God is not under any obligation to talk to us when we demand it. We can't offer say 1,000 sacrifices and then demand an audience with Him. God responded here because He had something to say to Solomon, not based on his sacrifices to Him.
 - b) With that said, there is nothing wrong with asking God to speak to us when we dream. It can be the only time we can keep our mouths shut long enough for Him to talk to us. At the same time, we should be very leery that any dream is a special message from God

- c) One has to see this dream as a test from God. He is effectively saying to Solomon, "Yes it is My will that you be the king over Israel. I want to bless your life not because you are the king or because you are David's son." God wanted to bless Solomon just because He wants to bless him in the same way He wants to bless our lives. This is not about getting lots of wealth. This is about using our lives to make a difference for Him. God wants to find out here if Solomon is interested in using his life to make a difference for Him.
- d) With that said, Solomon in this dream, gives God his answer.
- 9. Verse 6: Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.
 - a) I have to give Solomon credit here in his dream, he is being humble before God. Solomon realizes that God was faithful to his father. Solomon also realizes that he is only the king because it was God's will to be done. Remember that Solomon was not the oldest son of David so it was only through circumstances of that family's life that he became the king.
 - b) Bottom line here is that Solomon in this dream is giving God the glory for what happened and not taking any credit for himself for becoming a king. Solomon continues in Verse 7:
- 10. Verse 7: "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"
 - a) To really grasp these verses, remember that Israel was at its peak of power. David had conquered all the nations that surround Israel (with the except of Egypt.) The land that Israel controlled included much of what today are Syria, Lebanon, and parts of modern Iraq and Iran. I suspect that most the Israelites still lived in the traditional area of Israel, but David conquered these other places, so Israel can live in peace. So you know, that is one reason why modern religious Jews reject Jesus as their Messiah, they desire a warrior like David who rules from Jerusalem and there are no more enemies.
 - i) The classic joke is when Jesus returns, Israelites will ask, "So is this your first visit or your second?"
 - b) I give all of that background, as one has to understand that Solomon was young when he first started to rule as a king. I'm pretty positive this encounter with God was early in his reign as king and long before he married the Egyptian princess as a political arrangement.
 - c) Either way, Solomon realized that he was put in a position of authority not only over all of Israel, but also over the surrounding nations. I'm also speculating that one reason this chapter started with the reference to the Egyptian wife is to show how the nation of Israel not only ruled over all the other nations, but also had peace with Egypt at that time.
 - d) Without actually using the word "wisdom" in this translation, that is what Solomon asked God for. Solomon wanted the wisdom to be a good king since he is "stuck" with that job. Notice that Solomon refers to that nation as "God's people" and not his own. We need to give him credit here for realizing that the people living under his rule belong to God and not to himself as the king.
 - e) OK John, good for Solomon. You and I are not kings. Why should we care about any of this ancient history? That leads me back to the lesson title. Asking God for wisdom for our own lives is a good thing. Realizing He is in charge of the world and the people who are around us is also a good thing to realize and keep in mind. A key difference between what David desired and what Solomon desired is that Solomon just wanted good wisdom so that he could make good decisions. What David desired is to be dependant upon God for every moment of his life. There is nothing wrong with asking God for wisdom. Again, it is a good thing and God will reward Solomon for asking for wisdom instead of money or fame. My point is a greater thing is to ask for our dependence upon Him for our lives.

11. Verse 10: The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for--both riches and honor--so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.
- a) Meanwhile, Solomon is still fast asleep, dreaming and talking to God in his dream. In this dream, God responds to Solomon's request for wisdom. God says in effect, that since you asked for wisdom and not wealth or long life or even the death of your enemies I will give you what you have asked for.
 - b) Didn't you just say it is better to be dependant upon God than to just ask for wisdom? Yes I did. Never forget that God works on our level. What Solomon asked for is a good thing. My point earlier is that it is better to ask for dependence upon God. Still, to just ask for wisdom over say, long life or fame or wealth or fill in the blank is a good thing.
 - c) Let's all assume for a moment that this dream really did occur as Solomon recalls it. Did Solomon change at that point? Yes in the sense, that for a long time we won't read of him worshipping any false gods and only sacrificing to God where He desired. To explain this dream another way, "It worked in the sense that it got Solomon on the right track in terms of how to worship God and got Solomon's focused on pleasing Him with his life.
 - d) As I stated in the last lesson, I believed that Solomon already had a gift for wisdom. That was displayed in the last chapter and will be displayed later in this chapter. For Solomon to ask God for wisdom here is a little like asking God to give us more of what we already have. It would be like me to ask God now for a better gift of writing than I already have. (Yes I know I should ask for a better gift of editing, but that is why I desire prayer.)
 - e) The main point here is that Solomon was more concerned with how he should govern the kingdom than he was with riches or fame. Because Solomon was concerned with caring for other people, God in effect said, "Good answer Solomon. I'll give you wisdom. While I'm in the neighborhood, Solomon, because you didn't ask for riches or fame, I'm going to give you those things anyway so that you have the opportunity to use all of those things to make a difference for Me in this world."
 - f) OK, so why can't I ask for those things? Why can't I ask for wisdom and also receive lots of say, fame, or fortune? The answer is to remember who we are talking to. It is His will to decide whom to and who not to give it too. Our job is to serve Him and not vice-versa. As one person joked, "God is not here to better our golf score". It is He who decides who is to get what gifts and we have to accept His will for our lives. That, and balance it with simply asking for whatever is His will and accepting whatever it is as the results.
 - g) Meanwhile, I interrupted God as He is still speaking to Solomon:
12. Verse 14: And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." ¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke--and he realized it had been a dream.
- a) God's comments end with a condition: As long as Solomon is obedient to what God tells him to do through the bible, he will have long life and that wisdom. The point for us is that any gift that God gives us, He also has the right to take away. The purpose of having special gifts is to use them to glory Him in this world. If we fail to do that long enough, He has the right and privilege to take away that gift or even end our life to take it away.
 - b) On that tough note, it is time for Solomon to wake up. Unlike most of our dreams, he did remember this one vividly, and I suspect Solomon immediately wrote it down himself or had a scribe write it so it is recorded for all of history to see.
 - c) The lesson for us is like Solomon, God wants to bless our lives with the same condition: That we are obedient to Him and use our lives for His glory. That was Jesus point about us when he said "the lilies of the field" (reference to believers) are greater than Solomon.

13. Verse 15, Part 2: He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.
- a) Meanwhile, Solomon was in a good mood after this encounter with God. Instead of just offering more animals where he was on a mountaintop, he traveled back to his home in Jerusalem and offered sacrifices, as there was where God desired to be worshipped.
 - b) Since Solomon was in this good mood and he realized that God was going to give him the wisdom to oversee the kingdom, it was time to spread that good news to all of those who worked under him. That is the feast reference in this verse.
 - c) In effect, Chapter 4 is an expansion of that comment. Chapter 4 coming up expands on who is working under Solomon's leadership. We'll get to that after the next story.
 - d) I want to consider one more thing before we move on. If Solomon is king, isn't he in effect sacrificing other people's animals in order to honor God? After all, the king didn't work by himself to raise those animals. It was a tax on the people. My question is how much of a sacrifice did Solomon personally make with these offerings and gifts? Consider it this way: That is "food" that Solomon could have kept for himself or his household. By doing that sacrifice, it is a show that he is trusting in God to provide for his future.
 - e) In case you don't know, the reason Christians are not called to sacrifice animals, is that Jesus Himself was our full sacrifice for our sins and we can't add to that payment.
 - i) So you also know, religious Jews today don't offer animals, mainly because "the" temple does not stand in Israel, so until it does, no animals are sacrificed for sin.
 - f) With that said, we now come to the most famous story about Solomon in the bible: The "splitting of the baby". There are many people who know nothing else about Solomon do know this story. With that said, we'll read ahead.
14. Verse 16: Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ One of them said, "My lord, this woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me. ¹⁸ The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. ¹⁹ "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. ²⁰ So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. ²¹ The next morning, I got up to nurse my son--and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne." ²² The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king. ²³ The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.' "
- a) Let me give the short version for the few of you not familiar with this story: There were two unwed prostitutes living together who were both pregnant. They both gave birth to sons a few days apart. One baby accidentally died and the mother whose baby died then stole the other baby so she could have a son for herself. Now both women are presenting their case to Solomon and both are claiming that the living baby is really theirs.
 - b) I could give lectures here about "crib death" or prostitution but that deviates from the true purpose of this story. The main point here is to show how Solomon was truly given a gift of wisdom and how he used that gift to govern over his kingdom.
 - c) There was no DNA test in those days. Solomon could have said, "Let's wait until that boy grows up and see who the baby looks like". Instead, he wanted to give an answer on the spot if for no other reason, than to show the court and all of Israel that he possessed a God-given gift of wisdom. Solomon could use his gift to govern well over the country, despite the fact that he was young and didn't have David's natural leadership skills.
 - d) The main point is that these two women got to argue their case before the "supreme court" which is the king himself. Both were claiming the living child was theirs. It was now up to Solomon to render a decision not only to end the case, but also to show all of Israel that he had the wisdom to solve tough cases as a judge.

15. Verse 24: Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. ²⁵ He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."
- a) If you like good courtroom drama, this scene is a good one. The story is one that we can all relate easily to and it is easy to picture. The point here is that Solomon never intended to kill the baby, but just see the two mother's reactions to the idea of splitting the living baby into two in order to settle the argument.
 - b) I should add that this story does not mean we should apply the "split it in two" solution to every case we decide. It just shows that applying Godly wisdom to our lives does help to solve problems that seem impossible to solve. With that said, let's read on.
16. Verse 26: The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"
- a) Even if one knew nothing else about this story, one can see which mother cares about the life of her son and which one was angry that her baby died. The real threat of having this second baby die caused the real mother to say, "Do what you can to keep the baby alive". It becomes obvious to anyone there, which is the real mother of the living baby.
17. Verse 27: Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother."
- a) One has to admit that sometimes the bible tells stories that are so vivid, they don't require a lot of commentary on what actually happened. Instead of actually killing the baby with a sword, Solomon realizes who was the real mother, and awards her the baby.
 - b) OK you might say. I've known this story most of my life. It is cute and it teaches us that Solomon did have wisdom. Now comes what I consider the important part of this story: Learning how to apply wisdom to our own lives. Let me ask a question, how often are we face a situation where we have no idea how we are going to work it out? For many of us, this is a daily occurrence. I can't tell you how many times that I have had to pray my way through a situation, wait on God's timing, and somehow things did work out well. I have found that God does His best work, when we run out of options. When we truly let go of a situation and say there is nothing else we can do here, let's put it in God's hands is often when He does His best work for no other reason than to give Him the credit for providing solutions to problems that we see as being impossible to solve.
 - c) I'm not saying we shouldn't try our best to solve our problems. I am saying that when we get God involved in the process, it is amazing how it then works out. I've lost count of the number of times that I've prayed, "Dear God, I can't solve this problem. You need to take over this situation" and then somehow and somehow the issue gets solved. All He wants from us in exchange is gratitude. It is to acknowledge His existence, acknowledge that He is guiding our lives, acknowledging that He is real and He is guiding our lives and when we do trust in Him, He does show off His power for His glory.
 - d) Time for the big disclaimer: This does not mean life always goes well when we pray for Him to solve all our problems. It never means our problems magically go away. Often God wants me to go down a certain path in life that is difficult. I have to accept that He wants to teach me something by that experience and I've learned to accept His will when life does get difficult. What this does mean is that He promises to be with us as we do go through our difficult times as well as our good times in life. The idea is that God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives. To quote one of my favorite bible teachers, "Are you going shopping? Great. Take God with you."
 - e) OK John, nice speech. What does it have to do with Solomon "splitting" the baby? What the bible is teaching us is that God wants to guide our lives to make good decisions just as He was guiding Solomon. Trusting Jesus as the complete payment for our sins is only the beginning of our relationship with Him. Being completely forgiven of our sins means that we now get the privilege of having God Himself guide our lives for His glory always.

18. Verse 20: When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.
- a) One has to remember the other purpose of miracles here: It wasn't just to solve this case about the two mothers and who really owned this baby. The point about applying God's wisdom to our lives is also to be a good witness to others around us.
 - b) God not only wants you and me to trust Him to guide our lives, but He wants to draw as many people as possible to live for Him and through Him to guide their lives. Here in this verse, we learn that Solomon grew in respect among the Israelites based on his ability to show that He had a God-given gift of wisdom. It shows that we can have faith that God can work through our government leaders if and when we pray for God to guide them.
 - c) I'm sure Solomon had his critics back then who overanalyzed everything the king did and complained about him behind his back. That is human nature. At the same time, one can see when one does rely upon God, He helps us through situations that seem impossible to us. That is the lesson to be learned here. With that said, I'm ready for Chapter 4.
19. Chapter 4, Verse 1: So King Solomon ruled over all Israel. ² And these were his chief officials: Azariah son of Zadok--the priest; ³Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha--secretaries; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud--recorder; ⁴ Benaiah son of Jehoiada--commander in chief; Zadok and Abiathar--priests; ⁵ Azariah son of Nathan--in charge of the district officers; Zabud son of Nathan--a priest and personal adviser to the king; ⁶ Ahishar--in charge of the palace; Adoniram son of Abda--in charge of forced labor.
- a) I have to admit the text just went from a famous bible story to something boring. So why go from telling one of the most famous stories in the bible to listing those who worked for Solomon? Why should I care about this? If you want to be a "bible know it all" I suppose you can memorize all of these names or their functions, but that is not my goal here.
 - b) What I want you to see is that Solomon not only had the gift of wisdom to make the right decisions, such as the splitting of the baby court case, but he also had the wisdom to put the right people under his authority. To say it another way, wisdom is also learning how to delegate and finding the right people to put in charge. As I have been taught, the secret to good leadership is to find the right people for the right job and then let go of control so that the people we hire can do their job.
 - c) It may help once again to stand back and see the big picture here. A reader of 1st Kings is going to see the slow decline of that nation from a great power to one that is conquered as a nation mainly because they refused to collectively trust in God. They wanted to live like everyone else around them and that is always the great danger for the Christian. This isn't about losing one's salvation. The point is God can remove us from being a good witness for Him if we refuse to be obedient to how He has called us to live. That is the big picture thing to observe as one reads their way through 1st and 2nd Kings. In this chapter we are seeing examples of life when a king has the wisdom to rule properly over a nation.
 - d) So is this chapter a model of life in heaven or say a model of life on earth after the Second Coming of Jesus? In some ways yes, but in other ways no. Yes in the sense that those of us who do trust in Jesus as Savior will watch Him ruler over the world from Israel. No in the sense that Jesus will rule with an "iron rod" (Revelation 2:27 and 19:15). That reference means Jesus, as a ruling king will command how He is to be worshipped in that day.
 - e) Meanwhile, a few quick facts about these guys in case you want to be a bible trivia expert. For example, Zadok and Abiathar were top priests in Israel. Solomon stripped Abiathar of his duty (1st Kings 2:27), but apparently he still held the title of the head priest. Benaiah is the guy who struck down General Job (1st Kings 2:25) and became the head general.
 - i) The others included overseer of district offices (think Secretary of State), another was in charge of the palace guards. Another was the king's personal advisor. The bottom line here is we have the people who were the closest to Solomon as he ran the country at the peak of its power.

20. Verse 7: Solomon also had twelve district governors over all Israel, who supplied provisions for the king and the royal household. Each one had to provide supplies for one month in the year.
⁸These are their names: Ben-Hur--in the hill country of Ephraim; ⁹ Ben-Deker--in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh and Elon Bethhanan; ¹⁰ Ben-Hesed--in Arubboth (Socoh and all the land of Hephher were his); ¹¹ Ben-Abinadab--in Naphoth Dor (he was married to Taphath daughter of Solomon); ¹² Baana son of Ahilud--in Taanach and Megiddo, and in all of Beth Shan next to Zarethan below Jezreel, from Beth Shan to Abel Meholah across to Jokmeam; ¹³ Ben-Geber--in Ramoth Gilead (the settlements of Jair son of Manasseh in Gilead were his, as well as the district of Argob in Bashan and its sixty large walled cities with bronze gate bars); ¹⁴ Ahinadab son of Iddo--in Mahanaim; ¹⁵ Ahimaaz--in Naphtali (he had married Basemath daughter of Solomon); ¹⁶Baana son of Hushai--in Asher and in Aloth; ¹⁷ Jehoshaphat son of Paruah--in Issachar; ¹⁸ Shimei son of Ela--in Benjamin; ¹⁹ Geber son of Uri--in Gilead (the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and the country of Og king of Bashan). He was the only governor over the district.
- a) Speaking of names one is likely to forget right after reading them I present this list here. Remember that God will not quiz us as to the names of all these people. They are listed here for us to show us a little what life was like when Solomon ruled.
 - b) It may help to explain these verses another way: Solomon divided up the land of Israel and all the land that his father David conquered into twelve districts. One month per year, (all the months had the same number of days using a lunar calendar) each district had to pay their annual taxes to run the kingdom. I read somewhere that the tax amount was twenty percent of one's income. (If I only had to give 20% of what I earned to the fed, state and local government, I would not complain). The bottom line is that these were the people in charge of each district. One can think of it as 12 "governors" of 12 states.
 - c) Notice that two of the 12 men married daughters of Solomon. (See Verse 11 and 14). My point is these men were prominent and had close contact with Solomon and his family.
 - d) So if (big "if") this is a model of life on earth after Jesus returns, does that mean everyone still has to work and pay a 20% tax? Don't know. I suspect that when He rules, there will still be people to feed and farms to run. Again, I believe a 20% tax is not burdensome and if that is what it takes to operate an efficient government, let it be.
 - e) Speaking of bible trivia that can be memorized, besides the fact that two of these men did marry daughters of Solomon's, notice in Verse 13, it mentions one district with sixty large walled cities. Again, it is an example of the power that Solomon had as he ruled over this large area. If one studies the life of Solomon, it was one of peace during most of his life. He had the time and essentially the unlimited resources to go study the world and think about life since he didn't have anyone to fight. That great amount of time on his hands becomes a problem for him as we'll read later in this book. What Solomon learned by all of that free time is coming up later in this chapter and is a basis of the book of Ecclesiastes.
 - f) Meanwhile, it is time to brag some more about Israel at the peak of it's power.
21. Verse 20: The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. ²¹ And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life.
- a) Remember that the extent of Israel's power covered most of what we think of as Lebanon, Syria and even parts of Iraq and Iran. Chapter 3 opened with Solomon making a political marriage with the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh, so there was peace with Egypt too. The point is all of these territories paid taxes to Solomon. It is believed he was the richest person ever to live in the ancient world.
 - b) As I read this, I kept thinking about how the New Testament treats David and Solomon. King David is associated with Jesus, and Solomon in effect gets the back of the hand. The point is God thinks more of anyone willing to dedicate his or her lives to serving Him than he is of anyone with great authority, power or fame.

22. Verse 22: Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ²³ ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. ²⁴ For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River, from Tiphseh to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. ²⁵ During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.
- a) It is estimated based on these verses that the amount of food brought to Solomon daily was enough for between 15,000 and 35,000 people. This does not mean that Solomon was a "fat pig that stuffed himself daily". It means there were lots on the government payroll and this description of food shows us the power and riches that Solomon had.
 - b) Again, I don't believe God is going to quiz us on the amount and type of foods that were presented to the king. It is for us to understand that Solomon lived in a time of peace over that surrounding world and he benefited well from that tax collection system.
 - c) Notice in Verse 25 the phrase, "each man under his own vine and fig tree". That phrase is used a number of times in the bible including one by Jesus Himself (John 1:50). It refers to living a life where there are no significant national problems and God wants us to live in a world of peace and prosperity.
 - d) OK John, I admit this is sounding pretty good to read. Even if we don't get to live like the King in those days, to not have enemies and to only have to pay 20% of what we earn to the government seems like a good deal. Is this what life is like after Jesus Second Coming?
 - i) I am convinced that every aspect of Jesus First or Second Coming is either hinted at or bluntly stated somewhere in the Old Testament. I suspect that this chapter is a glimpse of life on earth after that event happens. Assuming that none of us are alive when this happens, how will we experience it? Jesus stated that we will be like angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30 or Mark 12:25). I believe that refers to our status in heaven as being equal or greater to angels as we serve Him. Whether or not we have the privilege to travel back and forth to earth or just watch all of this play out "from the balcony" is God's business as we serve Him and not vice-versa.
 - ii) If we do happen to have the privilege of being alive when Jesus returns, then we too will live "under our own vine and fig tree" in a time of peace and prosperity after Jesus like David conquers over the enemies of Israel. Personally, this sounds like a good deal to me and I would say, OK, where do I sign up for this?
23. Verse 26: Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses.
- a) Speaking of bible trivia, it is time for a quick discussion about horses and horse stalls.
 - b) First of all, the bible forbids Israelite kings to multiply horses. (Deuteronomy 17:16). This verse shows that while Solomon did worship God, he was not fully obedient to Him and did not obey all of the Old Testament laws. So if collecting horses is forbidden (so that the nation of Israel would be dependant upon God and not a strong army), why didn't God punish Solomon for collecting horses? In effect God did. Often a way God will show us the consequences of our actions is by letting our actions play out in life. If you have ever studied Ecclesiastes, Solomon states probably late in life what a waste much of his life was doing things that he knew was not pleasing to God and that probably included Solomon's collection of horses.
 - c) This verse is also the source of one of the most famous "copyist errors" in the bible. If one reads the King James Version, the text says 40,000 stalls. The same references to horses is also found in 2nd Chronicles 9:25, where it definitely says 4,000 stalls. The difference in the original Hebrew is one letter stroke between "4,000 and 40,000". The odds are pretty good that somewhere in history there was a copyist error. I've always held the view as do most Christians that the "original autographs" are God's word. The number of errors that do occur are pretty trivial. Unless you study little things like the comparison of these two numbers you would not even be aware of the words in the bible that are considered to be controversial like the number of horse stalls here.

24. Verse 27: The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking.²⁸ They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.
- a) Remember again why we are reading all of this stuff. It is not to become an expert on the life and times of Solomon. It is to get us to understand how Israel can go from being in a peak of power to a few hundred years later being an empty piece of land after what was left of Israel was conquered and scattered by the Babylonians (think Iraqi's).
 - b) The underlying point for you and me as Christians is that our salvation is only based on our trust that Jesus is the Son of God and He did live and die for our sins and He has been resurrected as both fully man and fully God. With that said, God can take away our being a witness for Him if we turn from serving Him. Ignoring God with our lives is the danger we all face as Christians and the underlying point of this book.
 - c) In the meantime, we are reading both of the success and failure of only applying some of God's wisdom to our lives as we read of Solomon. We read of his wisdom in his decisions about who to pick to govern under him. We read of his ability to be a good court judge. We read of how much he was blessed as a king. At the same time, he did not fully obey God as evidenced by all of the marriages he had to foreign wives (coming up) and even with the amount of horses that Solomon collected as mentioned here.
 - d) What I want each of us to remember from this lesson is not that Solomon was wealthy. It was that he was blessed by God but didn't fully trust Him with every aspect of his life. That fact lead to his downfall as we'll read later in this book. In the meantime, we still get to read more of Solomon's glory, power and wisdom as we finish this chapter.
25. Verse 29: God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.³⁰ Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.³¹ He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite--wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.
- a) For those of you who desire to be famous, I would say that Solomon was by far the most the most famous man of that region at that time. Remember that Egypt has been a great power for millenniums before Solomon, so they were known for their wisdom. The idea for us is to understand that we too can have wisdom by asking God for it and regularly studying His word for that wisdom. My goal is never to make us bible trivia experts. My goal is to get each of us to study His word and trust in Him daily for our lives so that we too can be wise based on our dependance upon Him and not try to live based on how the world around us lives.
 - b) Oh, and for those of you that do like bible trivia, two of these other famous men are listed as authors of Psalms. Ethan was the author of Psalm 89 and Heman is listed for Psalm 88.
 - c) Bottom line here is that Solomon asked God for wisdom and in many ways Solomon did use that wisdom as he ruled as king.
26. Verse 32: He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.
- a) I would challenge anyone to try to come up with a meaningful proverb. It is not an easy thing to do. Yet Solomon is said to have come up with 3,000 of them. There are only a few hundred proverbs in the Book of Proverbs. Therefore, know that Solomon wrote far more proverbs than what is recorded in that book.
 - b) This verse also said that he wrote 1,005 songs. I was thinking of Bob Dylan, who most consider the most famous song writer of our generation. He is currently in his seventies and has been writing songs since he was a teenager. According to "Wiki" he has written over 500 songs. Here we read of Solomon, writing twice as many. Only one of Solomon's songs is recorded in the bible ("Song of Songs"). The point is God really did give him that great amount of wisdom and more than can be attributed to arguably anyone in recorded history. Solomon did have faults, but he definitely had a gift of wisdom.

27. Verse 33: He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. ³⁴ Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.
- a) Well when Solomon wasn't busy writing songs or proverbs, he liked to study things. These final verses teach us that Solomon had the time and energy to become an expert on plant life and animal life. His ability to learn and acquire more wisdom resulted in kings from other countries traveling to Israel just to meet Solomon and observe his wisdom.
 - b) Remember that God desires that we all be a witness for Him. He wants us to use the gifts that He gives us to be a witness to other people. Here we read of Solomon using his gift of wisdom as a witness to other kings.
 - c) So if Solomon was using his gift to be a witness to others, isn't that what God desires of our lives? Yes it is. Solomon's downfall (coming up in later chapters) is that he wanted to live like those other kings. It is another example of when we end up living like the world around us is when we turn from trusting God to guide our lives. It shows both how God desires we do use the gifts He gives us and the danger of not being dependant upon Him to guide our lives at the same time.
 - d) That of course is the purpose of this lesson: To teach us that God does give all of us gifts that He desires we use to make a difference for Him in the world. At the same time, we have to stick close to Him (by daily praying, daily reading His word and spending time with other believers) so that together we can use our gifts to glorify Him with our lives.
 - e) On that positive note, it's time for my closing prayer.
28. Let's pray: Father, we thank you that You do love and care about us. We thank You for the gifts and special talents that You have given us. Help us to recognize what those gifts are and to use them to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to keep in mind that our time here is limited. The greatest purpose we can have in life is to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to use our time and talents together for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.