

1 Kings 3-4

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[0 : 0 0] Great, if you can open up your Bible again to that passage that was read about King Solomon. Before we dive into the passage, it's really helpful to get our heads into 1 Kings and get thinking like the author wants us to be thinking.

In case you've not read 1 Kings or 2 Kings before, it's a book all about the rise and fall of the monarchy of ancient Israel. Starts with the golden age of David into Solomon, then his decline, the splitting of the northern and southern kingdoms, the conquering of the Assyrian army of the north and the south by the Babylonian army.

1 Kings isn't simply a history book though for us, rather it's a sermon from history and it's not a sermon just for the Jews but for all of God's people.

But if we were to think of what is the one main thing running through the book, it's written on the screen here on the next slide. This is the one whole message of the book, it's this I think.

If we as God's people are to experience God's blessing, we need to follow a king who will perfectly follow God's words. That's the message of Kings in a nutshell and we'll see that begin to come through in our passage this morning.

[1 : 2 8] And of course we were looking at Solomon and Solomon, he's a really interesting figure. I was chatting to one of the elders earlier about a mutual interest in civil engineering and one of the things you do in engineering is you have blueprints, you have drawings, you have a picture of something that is to come and that's what Solomon is like.

He's like a blueprint of Jesus. What I mean by that is in Solomon's failures we see that the better one is to come. And in Solomon's great magnificent acts, we see them even magnified in Jesus.

We look at Solomon as a bit like an architect's model, a blueprint and we see something of what is to come. But then when the real one comes, we go, wow, that is so, so much better.

Because Jesus is the king who perfectly obeys God's words and in him we are blessed. Don't you pray for us? Let's ask for God's help and then let's start looking at this passage this morning.

Let me pray. Father, as we look at your words, may you incline our hearts to it, not to anything this world has to offer us, but instead to you.

[2 : 5 2] Open our eyes, we ask, to see wonderful things written in your words. Unite our hearts in reverent fear of you and satisfy our hearts in your steadfast love.

We ask and pray. Amen. Since first 15 verses here, we see the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon. We see, don't we, Solomon, he heads up to the high place at Gibeon and graciously, God meets him there in a dream.

There's a film you might have heard of called Bruce Almighty. It's not the best film, I wouldn't watch it to be honest. But there's an interesting thing which happens in the film.

Here's the premise of it. There's a man named Bruce and after his life takes a bad turn, he blames God for treating him so poorly. And so God gives him his powers and responsibilities and says, okay, you do a better job.

Now imagine if you had God's powers. What would you do? That's sort of what Solomon has here.

[3 : 59] He's got a blank slate. He's got a blank check. Ask what I shall give you, God says to him. I wonder how would you respond to that question?

Nobody had to know. Just your little secret with God. What would you ask for? Let's look at what Solomon asks for.

Looking at verses 7 to 9. Now, 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.

Your servant is here among the people you've chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

But who is able to govern this great people of yours? See, as we read this petition, I think Solomon begins to recognize something. He begins to recognize that all of God's promises are tied into him, into God's king.

[5 : 08] And here is God's king. He's on the throne. And Solomon, he's referencing what God said to Abraham. He's seeing what God said to Abraham in Genesis 13 being fulfilled before his very eyes.

I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. He's seeing God as faithful to his word.

Here's a question. Why did the writer include this here? Why include the story in the books of history?

There's a lot I think we can learn here about prayer. There's something we can learn here about pursuing wisdom. But I don't think that's the intention of the author here.

What the author wants us to see is that we need a king like Solomon. We need a king when given a blank check from God. It's completely selfless.

[6 : 15] A king who wants God's wisdom so he can rule and lead his people well. A king who prays for his people and seeks to put their desires before his own.

And is Solomon going to be God's great king through whom the promises of God are going to pass? Well, you read this, he starts well, doesn't he? But of course, we already see seeds of decline in his life.

I wonder if you notice that opening line? Solomon made an alliance for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married his daughter. See, Solomon's just promised in chapter 4 that he will fully obey God's word.

And here we see that he isn't doing that. He's not trusting in God, he's trusting in himself. The author's given us an inkling that something great's going to happen, but Solomon's not my man.

See, here's this new king, and in the eyes of the world, he's making this partnership with a superpower. And that seems sensible, it seems wise, it makes sense, doesn't it? Especially for this new young king, but he's not trusting God's word.

[7 : 32] See, Solomon, he's not the finished article. But I think he really loves God. We read in verse 3, don't we, about his love? It's sincere.

It's genuine. But his love like ours, it's fragile. It's fitful. And if you were to read on, you'd see how this one small decision will have catastrophic consequences later on.

See, what we need is a king who will always follow God's words. A king who's always faithful. A king who's always selfless. We need a king who is greater than Solomon.

And of course, that's exactly what we see in Jesus, isn't it? That's what he says about himself. In Matthew chapter 12, he's talking to some religious leaders about when the Queen of Sheba came, or perhaps your translation says the Queen of the South, and this figure from the ends of the earth.

And she comes to meet King Solomon. And Jesus says this, he says, The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

[8 : 40] And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Jesus is saying that he is the king that the world needs.

Because he's the king right now who is praying for us. He is the one of whom Paul wrote in Colossians, Are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God.

See, Jesus is the truly wise king. Because all wisdom is found in him. Perhaps some of us, we might think of Jesus ruling as our king, and we rejoice in that.

For others here, or people we know, we might rile against it and go, I don't need a king. I don't need someone to rule over me. See, everyone doing their own thing.

Everyone being their own king. That's a horror movie. If you don't believe me, read Judges, because that's exactly what happens there. See, all of us have a king.

[9 : 44] I don't mean politically. Please don't mishear me in that. But I guess spiritually, a king who leads and guides our lives. The question is, what is that king like?

Some of us might think that power always corrupts people. Leaders always look out for others like them. But Jesus, he's not an oppressive tyrant. He isn't someone who we perhaps think is incompetent.

He's not somebody you only ever hear from when he gets told off. See, Jesus is the wise and selfless king under whose rule all people flourish.

He is the selfless king who left eternal glory and became a man. So he knows exactly what it is that we're going through. See, in 3, 1 to 15, we see the wisdom of Solomon.

What we'll spend the rest of our time looking at is the implications of wisdom. Because what we see is that wisdom is not for the self, but rather wisdom is for other people. And we're going to see in these chapters here what it looks like to live under a wise king.

[10 : 55] So to help us, I'll read the rest of our chapter 3. And then we'll see what life is like under a wise king. Let me read from verse 16 to the end of the chapter as we look at wisdom for the sake of others.

Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house.

I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my baby was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone. There was no one in the house but the two of us.

During the night, this woman's son died because she lay in him. 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.

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 I wasn't the son I had born. The other woman said, No, the living one is my son.

[12 : 00] 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. The king said, This one says my son is alive and your son is dead.

Or that one says, No, your son is dead and mine is alive. Then the king said, Bring me a sword. So he brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order, Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.

The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for his son and said to the king, Please, my lord, give her the living baby. Don't kill him.

But other said, Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two. Then the king gave his ruling. Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him.

She is his mother. When all Israel heard the verdicts the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

[13 : 04] So we see here in this section that wisdom brings justice. It's a tragic story, isn't it? It's a surprising story as well.

Here in God's holy city, before God's royal throne, we find these two prostitutes. It's a tragic story as two prostitutes. I guess they've come from a brothel.

Both have babies. And during the night, one's been crushed or smothered by their mother, and the other swaps them. Swaps her dead baby for the one that's alive. Or at least that's the claim.

What does Solomon do? Well, wisdom knows human nature. He calls for the sword to cut the living baby in two, knowing that the mother of the child who is alive will rather see their child alive and live with someone else than see her child die.

Look at the response in verse 28. 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.

[14 : 19] See, a wise king cares for his people and will see a just society come about, even to prostitutes. People who would have been, and I guess still are, at the bottom of society.

Yet we see here, don't we, that even the outcast can approach the throne of the king. What a king that is. How do we see that today?

Well, under the rule of Jesus, we see that we can all come to him and justice will be found. And what does that look like?

How will justice be found? Well, how is it possible for the guilty to come before the king and to be totally known and totally loved by the king? Well, it's the cross, isn't it?

The cross that is the wisdom of God that is foolish to the world. Because you know that, because on the cross, Jesus died in our place, bearing the punishment for our sin, it means that we can freely approach the throne of this great king.

[15 : 28] And he will always do right for us. It means that all the injustices that we ourselves face now will one day be made right.

He may leave us wrongly imprisoned in a cell, but one day all things will be made right. And true justice will come from the hands of the king.

Wisdom brings about justice. Now, chapter four, it's a list of other areas of life where we see wisdom making an impact.

And first off, verses one to 19, we see that wisdom brings order. Have a look, scan your way down these verses here. It's a cracker of a list, I think. And let's apply what we know about scripture.

How is this big list here helpful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness to help us be equipped for every good work? Or to put it bluntly, what good is it knowing that the sons of Shisha were secretaries?

[16 : 34] But we see in these verses, in this list here, that Solomon had a well-structured and ordered government. Wisdom isn't just about doing the morally right thing like the last section.

Wisdom also helps set up good structures to enable people to live, to enable people to flourish. Think of it perhaps like this. I wonder if you've seen kids play football before. I've got three young kids, myself, and what happens?

Well, it's like bees around a hive. There's no structure, is there? There's no real game going on. There's loads of kids swarming about a ball. You need structure, formation, people knowing where they're supposed to go. That enables a good game of football.

Think of working in a job. Imagine a place with no structure. No one knows what they're doing. People unsure of what they're meant to be doing.

Huge loads borne by some. Others cruise by. Perhaps that describes your morning tomorrow. Many of us know what it's like to work in a job like that when an unwise leader is making decisions.

[17 : 41] See, Solomon's wisdom brings order to the country. And how do we see that today? Well, the parallel, I guess, is it's in the church.

People made up of different gifts to benefit the people of God. God's placed a structure in the church. Elders, deacons.

And we see this ultimately in the new creation. A perfect society. Great diversity. And great unity. All to the glory of God. Wisdom, we see, brings about order.

And wisdom as well brings about peace and happiness. Look at verses 20 to 28. Let me read verse 20 for us. The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

They ate, they drank, and they were happy. Sounds great, doesn't it? I read that and I go, oh, fancy living there.

[18 : 41] Yeah. Notice here the language of the covenant with Abraham again. People as many as the sand by the sea. So many that you can't number. They ate and drank.

They were provided for. And they were happy. Look at verse 24. A huge land. The river Euphrates from Tipshire to Gaza.

And there is peace on all sides. God's people in God's place with God's king under God's rule and reign.

And there's peace. See, we see in these verses here the great promises of God promised through Abraham coming true. The people are coming to know the blessings of God.

What about now? Where's this peace and happiness now? Well, being under Jesus' rule means that we can also have joy. It means that we have the ultimate protection of the great shepherd who sits on the throne.

[19 : 53] Yes, when you become a Christian in many ways your life gets harder. But there is real joy. It's how we long for the great king who has defeated Satan, sin and death to bring us into the promise and the fullness of the new creation where there will be everlasting peace.

Everlasting happiness. We shall live forever and be with the fountain of joy in life the Lord Jesus Christ. Wisdom, it's multifaceted, isn't it?

It's got a huge impact in life. It brings justice, it brings order, it brings peace and happiness. And here we see Solomon's wisdom about all things for all people. Just skim down verses 29 to 33 where we see every part of the body stimulated to enjoy all of life.

In fact, let me read that for us. Yeah, we've got time. God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the east and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else including Ethan, the Ezraite, wiser than Heman, Calcol and Dada, the sons of Mahal and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.

[21 : 17] He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005. He spoke about plant life from the seeds of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the walls.

He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. See, think about Solomon's wisdom. It wasn't just for himself. He could easily have had books on everything, couldn't he, in his house and just kept it to himself.

But he wanted other people to enjoy his wisdom. His wisdom shared meant that people knew the choices to make and he meant that they could enjoy the beauty of God.

I wonder if you know the saying that a degree is knowing not very much about a lot but a PhD is about knowing a lot about not very much. You read here and it's as if Solomon, he's got PhDs in everything, doesn't he?

He books that trend. And look what wisdom did. He didn't become some sort of guru who lived distantly in a mountain alone. Instead, his wisdom led him to enjoy nature, to enjoy beauty, to enjoy art.

[22 : 26] He wrote 3,000 proverbs as Sinclair Ferguson says, ignite the imagination to capture our affections. Isn't that a great saying? He also wrote 1,005 songs and I bet they were banging tunes because he was wise.

He knew what made people tick. He spoke of the greatest in creation all the way down to the smallest. It was all of interest to him. The animals that roam the earth, he knew about them.

He loved them. Why? Because he saw the signature of the master, creator and artist and everything. It satisfied his mind.

What does that mean for us today? It means that we can sing that great song, How Great Thou Art. I don't know if we're including this verse or not, but there's a verse that says, When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees, when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and see the brook and feel the gentle breeze, then what?

That sings my soul, my saviour God, to thee. It means that we value education. It means that we can explore God's creation without needing beforehand a practical application of it because there we are learning God's thoughts after him.

[23 : 50] It means that we value the arts, the humanity, sciences, sports, gardening, ice cream, music, Great British Bake Off. We can enjoy these things.

See, wisdom brings about happiness in all things for all people. And finally, the last verse, wisdom draws in the nations.

Finally, look at what verse 34 says and see what his wise rule led to. From all nations, people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon's wisdom, it has an impact, doesn't it? Right across the world. It was so unique. Life was so good under his rule that his nations noticed and they came to him.

This reminded me of when I used to work for a church now called Chalmers Church in Edinburgh and used to live in Bruntsfield, a part of Edinburgh and there was a cost of coffee there and I was sitting doing some work and two students came in and they sat down on the table beside me and I was overhearing their conversation and they weren't Christians, these students, they were talking about some of their friends.

[25 : 01] They'd been at a friend's flat that night and said there's something different about these people there. The way they treated each other, the way they spoke about one another, the way they shared their things, the way that they laughed about each other.

It was striking one said, but the only thing different was they were Christians. the way they were Christians. The way the wisdom of God called them to live their life was noticeable to these students.

We see here the king's wise, the king's obedient and now the world is coming to see the God who reigns. See, God's wisdom spoken through, lived out, it's got a global impact and it draws people in.

And we see this in the church, don't we? It's great standing up here, seeing people from different nations, different classes, different cultures coming together.

And we long for the day when finally people of all nations through all the ages shall gather before the throne of the king and sing praise to him. So under what do you think about living under the king who's greater than Solomon?

[26 : 18] What is life like to live under this king? Is it restrictive? Well, no, it's the only way that I can be free. Living under this king means that I'm free from condemnation, free to fail and try again, free from performance, free to come before the throne of Jesus and there find mercy and justice, just like those two prostitutes did before Solomon because it's the wisdom of God on the cross that's enabled me to be forgiven.

Is this life boring? Well, no, it means I can enjoy all areas of life. Go for a walk today in the beautiful winter sunshine and just enjoy being outside and see the wisdom of Christ reflected in the beauty and art and nature.

Is this kingdom closed off? Well, no, he's made an ordered community of people from all nations that care deeply for one another. It's called the church.

It's the wisdom of Christ that brings people of all nations to himself. I think as you read this passage and points forward to Christ and his kingdom, what a king. What a kingdom we live in, isn't it, under Christ?

What wisdom it is that reigns on the throne where we can go to and there finds help in our time of need. Let me pray. Lord Jesus, we rejoice that it is you who reigns on the throne, the one who is greater than Solomon, the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[28 : 05] Thank you that when we become Christians, when you save us, it's almost as if life goes from black and white to HD, full color. That we enjoy the good things that you have given us in this life.

And so we confess that we are what foolish people need of your wisdom. Grant us your wisdom to know how to live, not just, I guess, ethically, but also in the things that we enjoy.

Help us to enjoy them properly and fully. Help us be wise in our interactions with one another. Help us be wise as your church here to live these things out and to be salt amongst this city, a light on the hill in this city.

Lord Jesus, you are our king who is so good to us. God bless you, we pray all these things in your name. Amen.