

CHAPTER FOUR

KING SOLOMON'S WISDOM

¹ *My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ yes, if you cry out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
⁴ if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures;
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 2:1-5 (RSV)

*A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
*Proverbs 1:5 (NASB)**

*My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ yes, if you cry out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
⁴ if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures;
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 2:1-5 (RSV)

*How blessed is the man who finds wisdom
And the man who gains understanding.
¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver
And her gain better than fine gold.
*Proverbs 3: 13-14 (NASB)**

⁵ *Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!
Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
⁶ "Do not forsake her, and she will guard you;
Love her, and she will watch over you.
⁷ "The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom;
And with all your acquiring, get understanding.
⁸ "Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her.
*Proverbs 4: 5-8 (NASB)**

*Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life.
*Proverbs 4:23 (NASB)**

*Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
And call understanding your intimate friend;
Proverbs 7:4 (NASB)*

*"For wisdom is better than jewels;
And all desirable things cannot compare with her.
Proverbs 8:11 (NASB)*

*Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser,
Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.
Proverbs 9:9 (NASB)*

Let's look at some more of the things which King Solomon had to say about the value of wisdom and also how it can be acquired. The whole of the first eight chapters of the book of Proverbs focus on this theme. That in itself indicates how important God feels it is for us to seek wisdom. Even where God tells us something once or twice it is important. Some doctrines are actually founded on just one or two verses.

But, where He spends eight whole chapters repeatedly urging us to seek for something, and explaining in many different ways why we should do so, then you can be sure it is really crucial. For now, let's look at part of chapter two of Proverbs. We are told that wisdom is obtained by those who really *want* it and who are willing to *seek for it* earnestly and with persistence:

*¹My son, if you will receive my words
And treasure my commandments within you,
²Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
³For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;
⁴If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
⁵Then you will discern the fear of the LORD
And discover the knowledge of God.
⁶For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
⁷He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
⁸Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
⁹Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course.
¹⁰For wisdom will enter your heart
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you,
Proverbs 2:1-11 (NASB)*

How King Solomon got his wisdom

Except for Jesus, King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. God gave him that exceptional wisdom as a gift, simply because he wanted it so earnestly. At the time when he became the King Solomon made wisdom his top priority, ahead of riches and power. This is how it happened. The LORD (Jesus) appeared to him in a dream and invited him to make a request. Solomon chose to ask

for wisdom. That inspired choice pleased the LORD and He granted his request. So, Solomon was given great wisdom because he had asked for it.

However, the very fact that he chose to ask God for wisdom instead of riches, power, long life, success, etc, shows that Solomon already had an unusual amount of wisdom to begin with. If not, he would have asked God for something else. It is fair to say, therefore, that one of the surest signs of already having some wisdom is the fact that you are seeking for more of it. Conversely, to have no regard for wisdom, and no desire to pursue it, is a clear sign that you are foolish.

⁵In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." ⁶Then Solomon said, "You have shown great loving kindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great loving kindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. ⁷Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted.

⁹"So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" ¹⁰It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, ¹²behold, I have done according to your words Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

1 Kings 3:5-12 (NASB)

King Solomon began to put that gift of supernatural wisdom into operation in one of the first legal judgments that he gave. In those days a King also had to act as a judge and to decide the hardest cases. On this occasion King Solomon had to decide which of two women was the real mother of a child. There were no witnesses to support either of them. In fact there was no independent evidence at all. Look at the amazingly simple, but brilliant, way God gave Solomon the solution:

¹⁶Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. ¹⁸It happened on the third day after I gave birth, that this woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house. ¹⁹This woman's son died in the night, because she lay on it. ²⁰So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom. ²¹When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, behold, he was dead; but when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son, whom I had borne."

²²Then the other woman said, "No! For the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son." But the first woman said, "No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son." Thus they spoke before the king. ²³Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! For your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.'" ²⁴The king said, "Get me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵The king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other."

²⁶Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!" ²⁷Then the king said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother." ²⁸When all Israel heard of

the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.

1 Kings 3:16-28 (NASB)

How we can get wisdom from studying the Bible - especially the writings of King Solomon

So that was how Solomon got his wisdom, but how can we get it? For us it is a much slower process. It comes primarily from studying God's Word, memorising it, reflecting on it, obeying it, and applying it over a long period of time. There is no short cut or easy way. It takes time, effort and determination.

But, if we are willing to pay the necessary price, and to keep doing so for long enough, then we will eventually gain a level of wisdom which even the cleverest, most educated people in the world cannot match. That's because real wisdom is not about cleverness, or even education. It is about *seeing the world the way God sees it and thinking the way He thinks.*

We see that illustrated in the lives of the prophet Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. These four young Hebrew men were living in the competitive environment of the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, surrounded by the cleverest men in Babylon. However, because they had the Scriptures, Daniel and his friends were able to operate at a level of wisdom far above what any of the Babylonians could manage:

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hanani'ah, Mish'a-el, and Azari'ah; therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

Daniel 1:17-20 (RSV)

Joseph had a similar experience in Egypt. God gave him wisdom and insight which made him stand out so much that Pharaoh promoted him to be the Prime Minister of Egypt. No Egyptian could match Joseph's wisdom:

³⁷This proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. ³⁸And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are; ⁴⁰you shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." ⁴¹And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; ⁴³and he made him to ride in his second chariot; and they cried before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

Genesis 41:37-44 (RSV)

Likewise, the Psalmist spoke of how his study of God's Word gave him an unusual amount of wisdom. It even put him ahead of his teachers:

⁹⁷O how I love Your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

*⁹⁸Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,
For they are ever mine.*

⁹⁹*I have more insight than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.*
¹⁰⁰*I understand more than the aged,
Because I have observed Your precepts.*
¹⁰¹*I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.*
¹⁰²*I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
For You Yourself have taught me.*
¹⁰³*How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*
¹⁰⁴*From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.*
Psalm 119:97-104 (NASB)

Moses told the people of Israel that if they would keep God's Word, and do it, then it would make them wise and give them understanding:

⁵*Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*
Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (RSV)

Joshua was told by God Himself that ongoing, daily study of the Scriptures would cause him to be both prosperous and successful:

⁷*Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.*
Joshua 1:7-8 (RSV)

God has promised that He will give such wisdom to all who really want it:

⁵*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, ⁸unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.*
James 1:5-8 (RSV)

King David also tells us that wisdom, and many other benefits, are to be found in studying God's Word:

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring for ever;*

*the ordinances of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.*

*¹¹Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psalm 19:7-11 (RSV)

The three books written by King Solomon deserve to be studied over and over again. He wrote Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in middle age and Ecclesiastes when he was old. If you want to become wise then they are all well worth the effort of working through them carefully, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Consider King Solomon's credentials. Here is what the Bible says about his exceptional knowledge and understanding:

²⁹And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore, ³⁰so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ez'rahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about. ³²He also uttered three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. ³³He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. ³⁴And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 4:29-34 (RSV)

This is what the Queen of Sheba thought of Solomon's brilliance:

¹Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ²She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. ³And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king which he could not explain to her. ⁴And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her. ⁶And she said to the king, "The report was true which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom, ⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me; your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report which I heard.

1 Kings 10:1-7 (RSV)

In fact the whole world in his day knew of Solomon's unprecedented wisdom. He was far above the level of any other man:

²³Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. ²⁴And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.

1 Kings 10:23-24 (RSV)

In the light of what the Bible tells us about the extraordinary level of wisdom and understanding that Solomon had, why would any rational person *not* want to know what he had to say and what discoveries he made? You have got the opportunity to read the thoughts, and take the advice, of the wisest man who ever lived.

Given how much Solomon obviously has to offer, it is self-evident that it is worth making the effort to study his writings diligently. Study of the whole Scriptures, but especially the books that Solomon wrote, is the main way we can acquire wisdom.

I find it remarkable that that fact does not seem to occur to people, or that it does not interest them or matter to them, even when it is pointed out. Thus, multitudes of people who claim to be Christians leave this resource of the Bible, especially Solomon's writings, unused or under-used. We are told that the whole world in Solomon's own day travelled long distances to meet him so that they could learn from him.

Today we can do that so much more easily by simply reading what he wrote. Yet so many of us cannot be bothered to do so at all. And even those who do read the Bible are often half-hearted about it, reading it sparingly rather than devouring it.

Wisdom also comes from associating with wise people. Therefore, deliberately set out to associate with people who are already wise, or at least *wiser than you*. Seek out those who love the Bible, who want to do right, and who are committed to obeying God. Spend a lot of time with them and you will inevitably become like them. What they have will rub off on you.

This second aspect of the process of becoming wise is relatively simple - just find people who are already wise, relative to you, and spend as much time with them as you can. You will then improve automatically. It will happen even faster if you are actively seeking to imitate them, rather than just passively being in their presence.

Why did Solomon subsequently go wrong and turn towards foolishness?

Solomon had great wisdom but, in the middle years of his life, he went astray for a time. Despite all his dazzling brilliance, he made some very wrong choices. The fact that he did so illustrates the point we saw earlier, i.e. that all of us are a mixture. Even a man as wise as Solomon still had some foolishness left in him. At least he had the potential to become foolish.

It all went wrong because in middle age he indulged his sinful nature or 'flesh'. He took a ridiculously excessive number of wives and concubines, amounting to over 1000 in total. Many of these were pagans and idolaters and they led him into idolatry. That brought Solomon onto a collision course with God. Had it not been for the promises that God had made to his father, King David, he would have been deposed from the throne. Instead, God decided to wait and to tear the Kingdom away from Solomon's son, Rehoboam:

¹Now King Solomon loved many foreign women: the daughter of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Ammonite, E'domite, Sido'nian, and Hittite women, ²from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods"; Solomon clung to these in love. ³He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. ⁴For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵For Solomon went after Ash'toreth the goddess of the Sido'nians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. ⁷Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

⁹And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, ¹⁰and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD commanded. ¹¹Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my

covenant and my statutes which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. *1 Kings 11:1-11 (RSV)*

It seems clear, given the contents of the book of Ecclesiastes, that in his later years Solomon repented and got right with God again. He had wanted to experiment for a while with folly and excess, and to test them to their limits. Although that was totally wrong, there are still some things we can learn, even from Solomon's sins and wrong choices, all of which he writes about. So, make Solomon's writings a life-long study. They will not disappoint you.