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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1–2 Kings & 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

OVERVIEW:

Sometimes common sense is not so common. The kings of Israel and Judah often jettisoned God’s common sense. A few good kings and godly prophets called for reforms in God’s troubled kingdom. Students will learn to embrace God’s wisdom, pray earnestly for revival, witness God’s miracles, and avoid the heartache of disobedience.

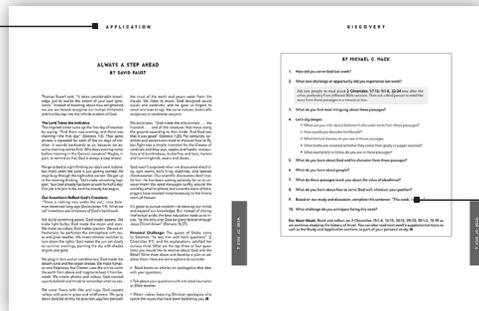
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 4, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Embrace wisdom
and knowledge,
find God's pleasure.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1-2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 9:1-8, 22-24

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Proverbs 1-3; 1 Kings 4:29-34

THE WISDOM OF GOD

BY MARK SCOTT

The founders of the United States prayed for wisdom. Pastor William Rogers prayed the following at the Constitutional Convention on July 4, 1787: “Be Thou their wisdom and their strength.” On this Independence Day, praying for wisdom is still more than a good idea (James 1:5). And it should not just be when times are hard. King Solomon prayed such a prayer at the zenith of Israel.

The Request for Wisdom*2 Chronicles 1:7-13*

David had died (1 Chronicles 29:28), and Solomon was now king. Solomon’s request for wisdom came while he was worshipping the Lord. He had gone to Gibeon (site of the tent of meeting). Solomon’s request for wisdom came within the context of the new king offering a thousand burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 1:6).

God took the initiative. He *appeared* to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5) and challenged him to *ask* (inquire, beg, or request) for whatever he wanted (cf. Matthew 7:7-11). Solomon acknowledged God’s greatness before requesting anything. He acknowledged God’s *great kindness* (loyal love) that he had shown to his father and God’s grace and *promise* (word) in making him king to govern a people *as numerous as the dust of the earth*.

But then came the big ask. Solomon requested *wisdom* (ethical and religious prudence) and *knowledge* (cognition that shows up in street smarts)—words that appear 11 times in our printed text. The request was not selfish or turned inward. The purpose of this wisdom was for leading the people (being able to go in and out among them) and for governing (ruling or judging) them.

Here is a stunning truth: God answers prayer. God underlined the sanctity of Solomon’s request by highlighting five things Solomon did not request (*wealth, possessions, honor, death of your enemies*—the lives of those who hate you—and *long life*). As a bonus for such a pure request, God granted Solomon the *wealth, possessions, and honor* he did not request. In fact, God gave Solomon most impressive gifts (2 Chronicles 1:14-17; cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34).

The Demonstration of Wisdom*2 Chronicles 9:1-8*

Several years had transpired between chapter 1 and chapter 9. During that time, Solomon built and dedicated the temple. The word on the street was Solomon

was healthy, wealthy, and wise. Word of his *fame* spread 1,200 miles into southwestern Arabia. So, the unnamed *queen of Sheba* journeyed to *Jerusalem* to test Solomon with *hard questions* (riddles or proverbs). The queen sweetened the state visit by bringing a very *great caravan*. Her camels carried spices, gold, and gems. The queen peppered Solomon with *questions* (words) and told him everything *on her mind*.

In a word, she was *overwhelmed*. Nothing was *too hard* (hidden) for Solomon. With amazement, she noticed seven things: Solomon’s wisdom, his palace, his food (good quality and in abundance), his officials, servants, cupbearers, and his burnt offerings (1 Kings 10:4-5). She admitted what she had heard (the word) in her country about Solomon was true. She admitted that she had to see it with her own eyes. She admitted that Solomon’s fame *far exceeded the report* she had heard.

The queen remarked how *happy* the people and the officials must be to experience Solomon’s wisdom. Then this pagan queen did something remarkable. She praised Solomon’s God. She took note of how Solomon’s God had *delighted* (took pleasure) in him and had placed him on the throne of Israel. She could see that Solomon’s God loved Israel and had the *desire* to *uphold* them forever through Solomon’s ministry of *justice and righteousness*.

The Reward of Wisdom*2 Chronicles 9:22-24*

The queen was so impressed with Solomon’s wisdom that she gave him all kinds of gold and goods. This created a domino effect. Other kings followed the queen’s lead (2 Chronicles 9:9-21). God’s promise to bless Solomon with wealth and possessions came via pagan kings and their kingdoms. The result? Solomon *was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth*.

All the kings of the earth wanted in on what the queen had experienced. They sought to *hear* (to be in the presence of) the great king. They wanted to know what *God had put in his heart*. Solomon’s wealth grew exponentially as the kings of the earth kept taking their gifts to Jerusalem *year after year*.

The Continental Congress could well have become the “contentious congress” were it not for praying for wisdom. ■

APPLICATION

ALWAYS A STEP AHEAD

BY DAVID FAUST

Thomas Sowell said, “It takes considerable knowledge just to realize the extent of your own ignorance.” Instead of boasting about how enlightened we are, we should recognize our human limitations and humbly tap into the infinite wisdom of God.

The Lord Takes the Initiative

The inspired writer sums up the first day of creation by saying, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (Genesis 1:5). That same phrase is repeated for each of the six days of creation. It sounds backwards to us, because we assume morning comes first. Why does evening come before morning in the Genesis narrative? Maybe, in part, to remind us that God is always a step ahead.

We go to bed at night thinking our day’s work is done, but that’s when the Lord is just getting started. He stays busy through the night while we rest. We get up in the morning thinking, “Let’s make something happen,” but God already has been at work for half a day! Our job is to join in the work he already has begun.

Our Inventions Reflect God’s Creations

“There is nothing new under the sun,” wise Solomon observed long ago (Ecclesiastes 1:9). What we call inventions are imitations of God’s handiwork.

We build swimming pools; God made oceans. We make light bulbs; God made the moon and stars. We make ice cubes; God makes glaciers. We use air fresheners; he perfumes the atmosphere with roses and pine needles. We invent dimmer switches to turn down the lights; God makes the sun set slowly on summer evenings, painting the sky with shades of pink and gold.

We plug in fans and air conditioners; God made the desert wind and the ocean breeze. We make furnaces and fireplaces; the Creator uses the sun to warm the earth from above and magma to heat it from beneath. We create photos and videos; God created eyes to behold and minds to remember what we see.

We cover floors with tiles and rugs; God carpets valleys with prairie grass and wildflowers. We gulp down bottled drinks; he provides aquifers beneath

the crust of the earth and pours water from the clouds. We listen to music; God designed sound waves and eardrums, and he gave us fingers to strum and toes to tap. We carve statues; God crafts sculptures in sandstone canyons.

We build zoos. “God made the wild animals . . . the livestock . . . and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:25). For centuries, scientists and adventurers tried to discover how to fly, but flight was a simple invention for the Creator of cardinals and blue jays, eagles and hawks, mosquitoes and bumblebees, butterflies and bats, herons and hummingbirds, swans and doves.

God wasn’t surprised when we discovered electricity, split atoms, built X-ray machines, and labeled chromosomes. Our scientific discoveries don’t startle him. He has been waiting patiently for us to uncover them! We send messages swiftly around the world by email or phone, but since the dawn of time, prayers have traveled instantaneously to the throne room of Heaven.

It’s good to pursue wisdom—to develop our minds and expand our knowledge. But instead of stirring intellectual pride, the best education leads us to insist, “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:27).

Personal Challenge: The queen of Sheba came to Solomon “to test him with hard questions” (2 Chronicles 9:1), and his explanations satisfied her curious mind. What are the top three or four questions you would like to resolve about God and the Bible? Write them down and develop a plan to address them. Here are some options to consider:

- Read books or articles on apologetics that deal with your questions.
- Talk about your questions with a trusted counselor or Bible teacher.
- Watch videos featuring Christian apologists who tackle the issues that have been bothering you. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you serve God last week?
2. What new challenge or opportunity did you experience last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 9:1-8, 22-24** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the story from these passages in a minute or less.

3. What do you find most intriguing about these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What can you infer about Solomon's character traits from these passages?
 - How would you describe his lifestyle?
 - What biblical themes do you see in these passages.
 - What truths are revealed (whether they come from godly or pagan sources)?
 - What example(s) to follow do you see in these passages?
5. What do you learn about God and his character from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do these passages teach you about the value of obedience?
8. What do you learn about how to serve God well, whatever your position?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge do you anticipate facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15; 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **■**