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LIVING WISELY

Most people want to be successful. Some dream of being great or being recognized as the best. You can buy books and attend training seminars on the subject of "How to Be Successful." Most of us know, in general terms, what actions result in success. We could summarize it as "Do the right things in the right ways at the right time and the right place." If we could accomplish what this statement says, then we would be successful. The challenge is in knowing the right thing to do, the right way in which to do it, when, and where. We characterize those who "get it right" as wise. Most people take little or no action and miss opportunities. Then there are those who consistently find either the wrong thing, the wrong way, the wrong time or the wrong place and we characterize them as foolish.

When we speak of wisdom or wise people, one person comes to mind. Solomon was famous for being a wise person. We recall the story of how God had appeared to Solomon in a dream and invited him "to ask for whatever you want Me to give you." Solomon showed humility. He recognized the enormity of the job of being king and asked for "a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong." People will tell you that Solomon asked for wisdom. This really is the definition of *wisdom*. For those of us who are not in the governing business, we might restate the definition as, *a discerning heart in dealing with people and to distinguish between right and wrong*. God was pleased with Solomon's choice and also gave him what he didn't ask for: riches and honor.

God appeared to Solomon in a dream. Should we be sleeping a lot hoping to have such an experience? I don't think so. There is no need for us to wait since God has invited us to take the initiative in this matter. In James 1:5 we are told "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

Wisdom should manifest itself in a person's life. Just as Jesus told His disciples they were the light of the world, those who are wise should also shine forth as light in the darkness. "Those who are wise will shine as the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." (Dan 12:3) How did Solomon manifest the wisdom he had? One way was that he built things to make the world around him a better place.

1 KINGS 9:1-3 Solomon initiated a long-term, massive building program in Israel. The most famous of these was the Temple in Jerusalem. It was such an impressive structure it has been called one of the Seven Wonders of the World. During the dedication of the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the building and put in its place. After the priests left the Holy Place, a cloud filled the Temple. This was a manifestation of the presence of God. The account in 1 Kings 8 tells us that the priests could not carry out their duties because of the presence of the cloud.

Solomon offered up a prayer to God and acknowledged that God was so great that even such a magnificent Temple could not contain Him. Solomon also asked God to keep His promises to David and to bless the nation, and to forgive them when they sinned. Later, God appeared to Solomon in a dream to let him know his prayers had been heard. In God's message to Solomon, He reminded him of His approval of the Temple since He had hallowed it with His presence.

In the rest of the message, God promised continuity of Solomon's kingdom but a warning was given regarding the actions of those who followed after him. If his sons did not follow the Lord in obedience, then He would cut the nation off from the land and would reject the Temple built for God.

Part of the promise God made to Solomon in the first vision was that he would have riches and honor. Solomon had honor from his people and they told others about his wisdom. How different that was from our situation today in which people have only critical things to say about those who govern them. If our present leaders exhibited more wisdom, then perhaps there would be more praise and less criticism. Everywhere the Israelites went they told of the greatness of Solomon.

1 KINGS 10:1-7 Apparently, as Solomon's fame spread, his success was linked to his relationship to God. The Queen of Sheba had heard the reports and wanted to see for herself if all these reports were true about the wisdom and wealth of Solomon. Sheba was located in southwestern Arabia about 1500 miles from Jerusalem. That area today is Yemen. It was quite an undertaking to travel that distance. She came bringing many gifts as was the custom of that day. The queen came to ask questions that would reveal Solomon's wisdom. She came to see all the magnificent buildings and the Temple.

According to the account, Solomon was able to answer any question she had and when she saw the food, the servants, the clothing, the government officials, the sacrifices offered to God and the Temple of God she was overwhelmed. I suspect she thought that the reports had been overstated and that what was happening in Israel was mostly show and no real substance. She was probably acting out of her own pride and wanted to disprove the reports as a means to bolster her own esteem. The KJV says that when she had seen and heard for herself, "there was no more spirit in her." As we might say, it took the wind out of her sails. What she found was far more than she had been told.

If we are invited to seek wisdom from God, then that wisdom should manifest itself as did Solomon's wisdom. We may not be building a physical temple, but we are to be about the business of building up the spiritual house of God which is the Church. This activity is linked to the definition of "those who are wise" mentioned in Daniel as "those who lead many to righteousness."

If we have a discerning heart and distinguish between right and wrong, then people will seek us out as they did Solomon. It may be for the purpose of testing us because they want to prove that they are right in their relationship (or lack of relationship) to God. If we claim to be followers of God and have no more wisdom than the rest of the world, then what is the attraction for other to trust in our God? Others may seek us out for wisdom because they need help. It would surprise you to know how many people are participating in some type of counseling. Much of that counseling is done by professional counselors. Some of these are Christian based but many others are based on popular psychology or the so-called wisdom of the day. All too often the world looks at Christians and does not see wisdom nor wise behavior.

1 KINGS 10:23-24 True wisdom comes from knowing and reverencing God. In all his greatness, Solomon always saw himself as small and insignificant as compared to the greatness of God. When we have a sense of God's greatness, then we will be more likely to follow His word and obey His voice and, in doing so, all who see us will recognize the wisdom that is in us. If it is displayed in purity and gentleness, then other will seek to know Him as we do.