

ELDER HOWARD W. HUNTER

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

For forty years David had reigned over Israel, and as his life was drawing to a close, he appointed his son Solomon as his successor to the throne. Solomon inherited the great kingdom which had been conquered by the military genius of his father. The empire extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates and from the Syrian desert to the Red Sea. It became the task of this young man, then less than twenty years of age, to weld this great empire into a unity.

As his last will and testament, King David called Solomon to his side, and knowing the great task which would fall on the shoulders of this youth, he said to him:

"I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man;

"And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself": (1 Kings 2:2-3.)

After this, King David died and Solomon commenced the administration of the affairs of the kingdom, and the record makes this comment: "And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father: . . ." (*Ibid.*, 3:3.)

Not long after he became king he went to a nearby city to offer sacrifices, and while there an event occurred which had a significant effect upon his life and reign.

"In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee." (*Ibid.*, 3:5.)

What a grave and serious question this would present to one, to have the Lord say, "Ask what I shall give thee."

If you could have one wish, what would it be? There are so many things we wish for as we go through life. I presume nearly every child who has read the story of the *Arabian Nights* has

wished for a lamp like the one Aladdin had, which when rubbed would summon the genie who would do the bidding regardless of the request made of him. Wishing is not only the pastime of children. Most of us have made wishes. We have wished for health and wealth, success, happiness, wisdom, a better job, a new car, a diamond ring, a magic carpet, to be like someone else, to have that which is not within reach, to be given the easy way instead of the path of toil and hardship—and a thousand and one other things.

We might wonder what went through Solomon's mind when the Lord said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee." No doubt his mind traveled the same course as ours would travel if the question had been asked of us. Solomon had just ascended the throne, and although he had ambitions for the future, he must have had some fears and anxieties. The fact that he was a king would give him the right to most things a person would want, yet a king has many of the problems and the desires of those who are not of royalty. The question would be no less difficult for a king than it would be to one of a more lowly station.

Solomon must have had many thoughts cross his mind. We might assume he thought of asking for a long life. Others have done so when the question was put to them. A long life would have given him the opportunity to complete the ambitions of his father to build and extend the empire. We cling to life, we wish for more time to accomplish the many things opportunity places in our pathway. Time is usually all too short when we think of the things we want to do and the lessons we wish to learn before the time comes for us to return home. No doubt Solomon thought of these things as he viewed the extent of his great empire, yet this was not foremost in his mind.

He might have thought of riches and wealth. Another king before him had made such a wish. In mythology the Greek god Bacchus gave to King Midas any wish he could name because he had

rescued one of his followers. King Midas asked that all he touched should be turned into gold, but he soon learned its utter uselessness when food and drink became gold at the touch of his lips. Most of the early sovereigns of the ancient world have been known for their great accumulation of the treasures of the earth. Wealth has always been associated with power. One might assume that a king would have a desire for wealth in order to spread his influence and prestige and to extend the borders of his kingdom. But Solomon did not ask for riches or wealth.

The history of the reign of his father over Israel was one of wars with the Philistines and with the Syrians and many other campaigns. These conquests gave Israel the foremost place among the nations between the Euphrates and Egypt. To maintain this superiority, Solomon was challenged at the beginning of his reign to maintain a large standing army to provide for the defense of the empire. He organized a cavalry force of 12,000. He equipped the royal stables with 4,000 stalls to maintain the 1,400 royal chariots. He fortified Jerusalem and other cities for protection against invasion and to preserve the trade routes for commerce. Israel's fighting strength consisted of about 300,000 men. With all of these problems facing him, Solomon might have asked the Lord to give him power over his enemies, for he had enemies from without the empire, and he had personal enemies within.

The young king asked for none of these things. His answer to the Lord was simple and direct:

"And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

"And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

"And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

"Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" (*Ibid.*, 3:6-9.)

"Give therefore thy servant," said the young king, "an understanding heart." He did not ask for material things of the world, but a spiritual gift—an understanding heart.

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

"And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

"Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

"And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days." (*Ibid.*, 3:10-13.)

If the Lord was pleased because of that which Solomon had asked of him, surely he would be pleased with each of us if we had the desire to acquire an understanding heart. This must come from conscious effort coupled with faith and firm determination. An understanding heart results from the experiences we have in life if we keep the commandments of God. Jesus said: ". . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (*Matt.* 22:37-39.)

To love one's neighbor is noble and inspiring, whether the neighbor is one who lives close by, or in a broader sense, a fellow being of the human race. It stimulates the desire to promote happiness, comfort, interest, and the welfare of others. It creates understanding. The ills of the world would be cured by understanding. Wars would cease and crime disappear. The scientific

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knowledge now being wasted in the world because of the distrust of men and nations could be diverted to bless mankind. Atomic energy will destroy unless used for peaceful purposes by understanding hearts.

We need more understanding in our relationships with one another, in business and in industry, between management and labor, between government and the governed. We need understanding in that most important of all social units, the family; understanding between children and parents and between husband and wife. Marriage would bring happiness, and divorce would be unknown if there were understanding hearts. Hatred tears down, but understanding builds up.

Our prayer could well be as was Solomon's, "Lord, give me an understanding heart."

Surely God lives. I know he does. It is my witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of mankind. May his blessings continue to be with us, I pray in his name. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve has just concluded speaking. The Ricks College Choir will sing, "How Lovely Are The Messengers," conducted by Richard W. Robison. The benediction will be offered by Elder Lorin N. Pace, formerly president of the Argentine Mission, after which this Conference will be adjourned until seven o'clock this evening, when the general meeting of the Priesthood of the Church will be held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle and in other places set apart for that purpose. Persons not holding the Holy Priesthood will please refrain from attempting to enter any of the buildings set apart for this purpose. It will not be broadcast publicly, but in addition to the overflow meetings in the Assembly Hall and in Barratt Hall, the proceedings of this Priesthood Meeting will be relayed by closed circuit originating in the Tabernacle to members of the Priesthood assembled in 320 locations in all parts of the nation, in Canada, and elsewhere. It is estimated that 55,000 will participate in this meeting by direct

wire. This does not include those in the Tabernacle, in the Assembly Hall, and in Barratt Hall.

The general session tomorrow morning, Sunday, will be broadcast through the generous cooperation of owners and managers of radio and television stations over 50 television stations and 16 radio stations located from coast to coast. In addition, the proceedings of this session will be carried by short-wave stations in Europe, Africa, Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean area, and the South Pacific. We express appreciation to Brother Arch L. Madsen, president of KSL, and Elder Gordon B. Hinckley for the service rendered in arranging for these broadcasts. We are not unmindful of the friendship manifested by these owners of stations and their willingness to cooperate with us. That in itself tells a great story.

It is estimated that the potential audience in the United States and Canada capable of hearing and viewing some parts of the Conference will exceed sixty million and many thousands more in foreign countries will participate by means of short-wave broadcasts. Thus the sessions of this Conference will be heard and seen by the largest number of people in the history of the Church.

The Tabernacle Choir Broadcast will be from 9:35 to 10:00 a.m. Those desiring to attend this broadcast must be in their seats no later than 9:10 a.m. We have been requested to ask that those attending remain quiet during this national broadcast. There will be large crowds attending the services on Sunday and we ask you to be considerate and courteous one to another at all times. Please avoid pushing and crowding.

The singing for this session has been furnished, as I have already announced, by the Ricks College Choir, under the direction of Richard W. Robison, and Frank W. Asper at the organ. We appreciate not alone the singing, but the presence of these young people, and those who left their homes early this morning—at three o'clock—to attend this service, seminary students, and young people everywhere. We hear a great deal about the boys and girls of teen age who cause trouble, but we never hear much about the 95% of the young boys and girls in the Church who are living noble lives.