

Annual income	666 talents of gold
Palace decoration	500 shields of beaten gold
Throne	ivory overlaid with gold
Goblets and pitchers	gold
Horse stalls	4,000
Wives and princesses	700
Concubines	300



ONE WISH

3

HE HAD IT ALL. WEALTH, POWER, WISDOM, WOMEN... Whatever he wanted, he either went out and got it, or it was handed to him. He did not know physical want, nor did he lack for acclaim.

King Solomon, third king of Israel and son of David and Bathsheba, was given an extraordinary gift by the Lord God.

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you."

1 Kings 3:5

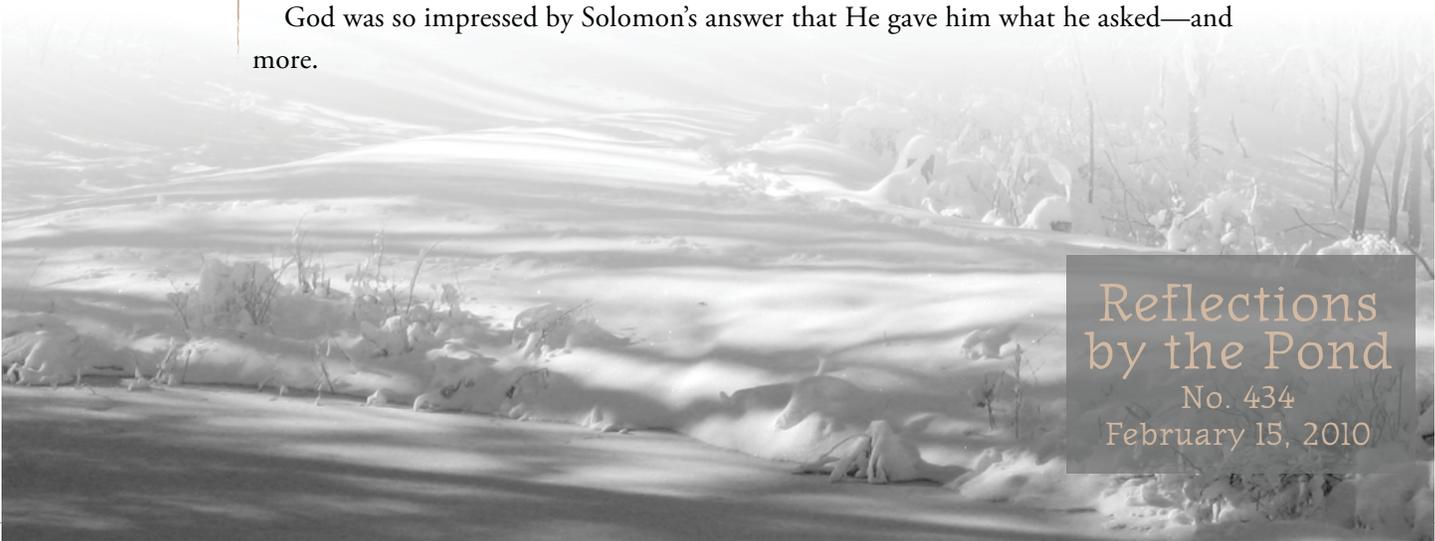
That's about as good as it gets. Even Aladdin's genie with his three wishes could not compete with one wish offered by the Lord God Almighty, creator of all the universe. Surprisingly for a human, given the opportunity to have whatever he desired, he asked not for riches but for wisdom—demonstrating that he already had it in generous measure.

"Now, 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. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 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?"

1 Kings 3:7-9

God was so impressed by Solomon's answer that He gave him what he asked—and more.

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God 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, behold, 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. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days."

1 Kings 3:11-13

And that is precisely how it played out. Solomon came to be a powerful king both wise and insanely wealthy. And how did this work out for him? Did it bring satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment? Was he, upon his deathbed, at peace with his life? Not really.

Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11,17

THAT WHICH IS DEAR

The apostle Paul had a rather pithy term—a word he used only once, and a word used by no one else in Scripture—he applied to the wealth and pleasure and accomplishments pursued by himself and others—all those things society considers valuable and worthwhile. The word?

Dung.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ...

Philippians 3:8

Most translations later than the venerable King James Version clean up the word ("rubbish"), but here is how J. I. Packer describes the meaning of the original Greek word.

In secular Greek this depressing word means rubbish and muck of many kinds: excrement, rotten food, bits left at a meal as not worth eating, a rotting corpse. Nastiness

and decay are the constant elements of its meaning; it is a coarse, ugly, violent word implying worthlessness, uselessness, and repulsiveness.

King Solomon learned the lesson the hard way, and the apostle Paul counsels us that there is nothing—*nothing*—in this world to compare to gaining Christ. Lean back in your chair and think about all your possessions. Aside from children or spouse, which would you consider the most valuable? Which is the very last thing you would want to lose? For me it would be my library. If our house burned to the ground I would grieve the loss of all my books first and longest. My books are precious to me.

Yet God tells me that all of those books, lovingly gathered for a half century and dear to my heart, are nothing but worthless stinking garbage compared to gathering to myself Christ. Not just knowing about Him, not even accepting Him as my Savior, but *gaining* Him.

King Solomon asked for wisdom, and he had it in abundance. But even heaven-sent wisdom becomes something better left on the stable floor when one's heart has turned cold to God. Though his request for wisdom was far more noble than wishing for material wealth, the wisdom he was granted could not stand up against the weakness of self-centered flesh, and Solomon finished his life bitter, cynical, disillusioned.

How much better things might have turned out had he asked, instead, "Lord God, my one wish is to know you—as fully and completely as is possible for someone still on earth. My desire is that Your life would pervade and possess mine—totally. Give me not a wisdom of my own, but let me be filled to overflowing with Yours."

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