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## When Divine Wisdom Reigns I Kings 4:1-34

**Intro:** The English language, and our common use of it, is filled with a wonderful treasure of idioms. An idiom is a phrase with a specific meaning that is established by its use but that meaning would never be deduced from those particular words. Some more common idioms would be: once in a blue moon, not playing with a full deck, out of left field. Some idioms are common throughout the English language – that’s the way the cookie crumbles; while some are regional and some are generational. “To infinity and beyond” is easily recognized by most kids today; but they would be clueless to “Hi, ho! Silver, away!” Only a certain age group would pick up on that.

The problem with English idioms is that they don’t translate well into other languages. I’ve been told by a native Spanish speaker that the ball doesn’t bounce and the cookie doesn’t crumble in Spanish. Now, other languages do have idioms and they are just as confusing to us as ours would be to them: stop ironing my head is the Turkish phrase for quit annoying me; walk around in hot porridge is the Czech equivalent of beat around the bush; and I have other cats to whip is the French way of saying, “I have other fish to fry.” The point is, even when translated, foreign idioms are often times just as confusing in English as when they are spoken in their original language.

The reason I bring this up is because of **ch4** and what it contains. If you have read ahead, you may have wondered what possibly can be gleaned from such a random hodge-podge of information. We have a list of Solomon’s cabinet officials, a list of district officers, a brief description of the happiness index of the population of that day, a 1 day grocery list of the dietary requirements of the royal table, along with reports of barley for horses and comments about hyssop bushes! Taken by itself, it really does look like a mess but, because we know this is God’s word, we know it’s not a mess; we just have a messy understanding of what is going on here.

**Ch4** is not an unconnected basket of literary fragments thrown together and shaken up; on the contrary! The overall theme of **ch3** was wisdom (divine wisdom) and the wisdom theme shows up again at the end of the chapter.

This allows us to assume that both chapters stand together under the thematic banner of divine wisdom and the last few verses of **ch4** are intended to wrap up the previous verses under this one theme. The confusion stems from the fact that the author uses terminology (idioms) that have great meaning to him but are difficult to pick up on from those unfamiliar with Israelite history or literature. We will point these out as we make our way through the chapter. The intention of this chapter is to show what it looks like when Divine Wisdom reigns in God's kingdom

**1-19** – This section contains 2 lists: those in cabinet positions in what would be Solomon's State Department (**1-6**) and district officers and the locations of their respective jurisdictions (**7-19**). The primary purpose of those on the 2<sup>nd</sup> list seems to be providing food for the king's table 1 month out of the year. These men were responsible to make sure that their districts could adequately stock the pantry of the royal court. While this is all well and good, the question still remains – what's the point? Why does it matter to me as a modern believer that Zabud was the king's friend (advisor) or that Geber was over in Gilead scrounging up groceries for Solomon's supper? Why these lists?

The author goes through the tedium of writing out these lists because they are yet another evidence of the wisdom that God gave to Solomon. Just as the story of the mothers arguing over the baby in **ch3** was proof of Solomon's wisdom, this chapter continues to provide further evidence of Solomon's wisdom. As we can see, Solomon's wisdom wasn't just limited to rendering excellent moral judgments but it extended to every area of his kingdom. What this passage is teaching us is that when divine wisdom reigns, it brings order!

Even though Solomon had great wisdom and authority, he knew he couldn't handle the affairs of the kingdom alone. As a wise leader, Solomon was able to see the great needs of his kingdom and then choose capable associates to meet those needs and then allow them to use their own God-given gifts to serve both the Lord and the people. Solomon's government was structured much like that of modern nations today. His officials served as ministers or secretaries over specific areas of responsibility. Our text reveals 3 characteristics of Solomon's leadership.

1) It was organized – Solomon knew that God is a God of design and

organization, and that things simply operate better and more efficiently when they are organized. What is true for Solomon's government is true from all of life. A mechanic with a messy tool box isn't going to get a lot of work done. The same applies for an office worker with a messy desktop – literal or digital. Biblical wisdom won't tell you how to organize your tools or your life but it does teach you that they need to be organized because it's an efficient and orderly structure that keeps chaos and waste from running your life.

Now, it's just human nature to want to fly by the seat of your pants in every area of life and most of us deplore having to give our attention to administrative and organizational matters. At the same time, it's quite possible to so tightly structure your life that you squeeze all the joy out of it. But, if you've ever spent any amount of time in a household or workplace that lacked clear lines of authority then you know value and benefit of a well-structured organization. I've even heard people say that they don't believe in organized religion. What? Do you prefer disorganized religion? I've seen disorganized church services and they aren't pretty. (unstructured worship to promote Spirit moving)

2) It was creative – Solomon's choice of 12 district leaders follows with the general structure of Israel but these districts were not strictly set along traditional tribal lines. We don't know if this was a political move, like ancient Israelite jerrymandering to downplay long held tribal distinctions or if the district divisions were based on what regions could best meet the requirements of the royal table. Either way, Solomon was able to recognize that the old way of doing things wasn't necessarily the best way to do things now. He was willing to try new things.

Traditions aren't necessarily bad or good, they are just traditions. They're not sacrosanct or indispensable, they're just the way it's always been done, no more, no less. Religious traditions aren't any different. Someone found a good way to do ministry and it was successful so others repeated it. Too many people accept the tradition as being gospel and never look behind it or beyond it. They cling to it with all their might and some even choose to die on that hill. But, religious traditions were meant to be used as launching pads, not parking lots. The purpose of many a religious tradition is to learn from it, to build on it and then to improve your service to the Lord by it. Biblical wisdom is always open to finding new ways to spread the gospel.

The methods can change but the message never will.

3) It wasn't oppressive – Solomon's table required a good bit of food but if you spread that over 12 districts, it didn't seem that much. None of these 12 governors would feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of raising and collecting so much food, they would have 11 months to prepare for it. The old saying – many hands make light the work applies as much in ministry as it does anywhere else in life. This church, or any other for that matter, wouldn't continue to exist if it wasn't for the faithful support of everyone here. We all have our roles to play and through our collective faithfulness to God's call, God's word and God's people, we will continue to carry Christ's love to the world.

Organization may seem tedious and bothersome but disorganization has lost battles, ruined businesses and destroyed countries. The organization of Solomon's kingdom is a direct reflection of what divine wisdom brings.

**20-28** – Wow! Lots of information! But, this is where our discussion of idioms comes into play. The author is actually pitching us something important here and we're just not catching it. He's saying it as plainly as succinctly as he can and the English translation is correct. We're just not as familiar with the ancient Israelite terms he's using in the text. In fact, there are 2 things going on in the text that blocks our view of the author's original intention.

The first thing we need to realize is that it's possible for the Bible to report something clearly but if we fail to catch the author's intention, we may completely miss his point and misinterpret the passage. That's why it is important for us to look for the tone of the text, to discover the mood of the writer. In this section, we must latch on to the attitude of the author in order to properly understand him. Attitude, tone, mood: these intangibles are usually difficult to determine in written communication but they shouldn't be too hard to identify in this passage.

It would be hard to miss the unbridled joy of Israel described in **vs20** – eating, drinking and rejoicing. Sounds like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter dinner with a 4<sup>th</sup> of July block party thrown into the mix! There's joy in **v20** and then there's security and contentment clearly described in **v25**. You can sense the writer's exuberance over the scope of Solomon's kingdom

from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt, with peace on every side. After all the wars Israel had fought from the time of the Judges, through Saul and David's reigns, they are finally able to sit back and catch their breath awhile and enjoy the peace and quiet. Israel is experiencing the principle that when divine wisdom reigns it brings joy! He even seems excited by the amount of food it took to feed the court (from 4k - 36k mouths)!

But, it's not enough to just say that a wise ruler makes for a joyful people. We need to dig a little further beneath the author's joy to discover its true foundation: the fulfillment of Yahweh's covenant promises. The writer actually alludes to 3 components of God's promises to Israel in this section. The 1<sup>st</sup> component had to do with people (20). He said Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea. Granted, that's an inexact census figure that the U.S. Congress would not accept but it's also "Covenant Code," an idiom taken from the promise God gave to Abraham in [Gen 22:17](#). This is also called the seed-aspect of the promise.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> component involves place (21, 24a). The author's double assertion concerning size and scope of Solomon's kingdom is a direct reference to the land aspect of God's covenant with Abraham in [Gen 15:18-21](#). This was confirmed again under the Sinai covenant ([Ex 23:31](#); [Deut 11:24](#), [Josh 1:4](#)). To us, this all seem like just so much ancient geography but to Israelites, those who had been raised on Pentateuch, those who cut their teeth on Yahweh's promises to Israel, this is much more than geography – it is describing a promise fulfilled!

The 3<sup>rd</sup> component is peace (24b, 25). Oddly enough, Solomon wasn't a warrior king or a general. All this territory was really conquered by his father David but it was conquered by conflict. You could say that it was through David's efforts that this peace was achieved but it wasn't until divine wisdom reigned under Solomon that this peace was finally enjoyed. This isn't just a cessation of hostilities with surrounding nations but a realization of the security and stability God designed for Israel under the Davidic covenant in [II Sam 7:10-11](#). It's like the '50s without the Korean Conflict! What the author is telling us here is that, under Solomon's regime; Yahweh has heaped up fulfillment after fulfillment of His promises to Israel!

This is what explains the joy that oozes out of this text. Joy grips God's people whenever they see how firm His Word truly is! The certainty of God's

grace makes us glad! Faith can't help but laugh when it sees fulfillment of God's Word, when it is re-assured through experience of God's assurances. This passage is literally ecstatic over the faithfulness of Yahweh to Israel and it should stir up our joy as well because this initial fulfillment under Solomon's reign is just a sample of God's faithfulness to all His other yet-to-be-fulfilled promises! Everything He has promised us will come to pass – we see it happening in our lives, we know the ultimate fulfillment is not far off. This shouldn't cause us to fear but to rejoice in anticipation and resolve to be faithful in our service until they are unnecessary.

**29-34** – This final section teaches us that when divine wisdom reigns, it brings excellence! The author continues his theme of wisdom using the noun form 6xs and the verb form once and synonyms for it twice (29). But, this could hardly be called king worship because the author's careful to insist that Solomon's wisdom is only excellent because of its source (29) – God gave! God is the one providing the wisdom, equipping and empowering Solomon to reign in wisdom. When this realization is held, it keeps wisdom from deteriorating into pride. There is no secret here to Solomon's wisdom: God gave! Grace explains wisdom.

Having established the necessary foundation of Solomon's wisdom, the writer goes on to insist that his wisdom was also excellent in its superiority (30-31). It was far superior than anything those bastions of human wisdom had ever produced: Mesopotamia and Egypt. Solomon was even wiser than all the celebrity egg-heads that were believed to have a monopoly on wisdom at that time. In the glory years of his reign, Solomon used the great wisdom God had given him and he became a prominent and famous man even among the prominent and famous royalty of his day.

Finally, the author reveals that Solomon's wisdom was excellent in its scope (32-34). 3000 proverbs (less than 600 in Proverbs); 1005 songs; the study and understanding of nature - the sheer extent of Solomon's wisdom and range of interests is even more impressive than his proverbs and songs. He appreciates the stately cedar of Lebanon but also takes notice of the trivial hyssop bush sprouting out of the wall. His interests cover what lives in the barn, what swims in the lake, what glides through the sky and what scurries across the kitchen floor. Wisdom is incurably and rightly curious and it ranges over the entire dominion of God's creation, joyfully investigating and describing all of God's work. Nothing is hidden from the interest of wisdom.

Since God has left the fingerprints of His wisdom everywhere around us and since there is no place in this universe where God does not provide us with raw materials for godly thinking, we as His children should be gripped by a desire, a curiosity, to consider His creative works, both the majestic and the mundane. It's no surprise that many of the most famous and most important scientific discoveries have been made by Christians who were just interested in discovering God's designs in nature. Sir Isaac Newton; Sir Francis Bacon, Galileo, Carl Gauss, Michael Faraday, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), George Washington Carver, Samuel Morse... all of these Christian men and so many other Christian men and women of science were simply following God's command to Adam to go forth...and have dominion over His creation.

This command was not for man to control, deplete and eventually destroy God's creation, nor was it to be used to consume it upon man's lust. It was a command for stewardship over creation and before you can properly care for something, you must learn what it is and how it operates. The job of wisdom is to joyfully investigate and describe all of God's work. This includes the sciences but also theology. While we may excel in many studies, if we as believers fail to come to know our God better, then we will have truly missed the blessing of wisdom and we will have followed Solomon's sad example. For all his wisdom, Solomon failed to use it to draw closer to God so in his later years, he began to trust in and follow his own wisdom and he lost sight of the gracious God who had given him wisdom those many years before.

Are you a Christian? Do you know God as you should, as He has revealed Himself to you in His Word? We can all say no to that but, if that is true, then what is your solution to remedy that? The only real solution is to familiarize yourself with God by becoming more familiar with His Word. He has given us everything there is for us to know about Him in the pages of this book. We might not always grasped the meaning of every passage but we should know that every passage has meaning, and they are given so that we may know Him better and through that better knowledge, be compelled to draw closer to Him. His grace sustains us, His faithfulness encourages us – His loves draws us closer into His presence! 😊