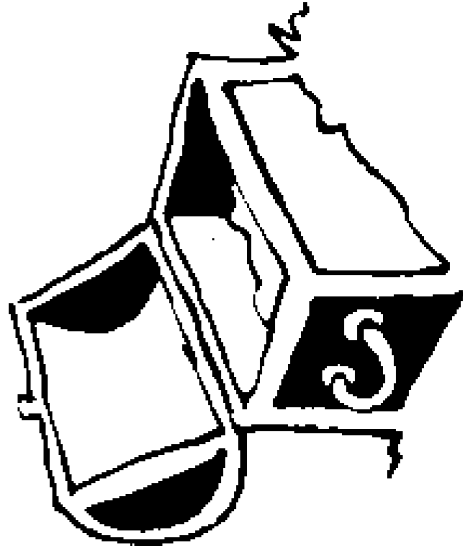
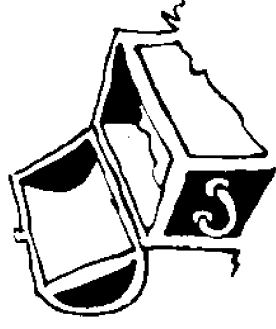


God's Treasure Box



God's Treasure Box

by Brian Johnston



1. A worshipping heart

My young daughter, Anna, has a simple plastic toy she really treasures. It's a model of a mobile home; a camper van. Its roof and one of its sides unfold to allow easy access to all the detailed features inside like seats and table. Because it opens and closes like this, Anna treats it like a storage box, and into it she places some of her best-loved toy figures and animals. We're amazed at how long she's kept this simple toy, and at how much enjoyment she's had from it. Of course, she ignores it for a while when new toys arrive on the scene, but it's the one toy above all others that she keeps going back to time and time again. Part of the secret of why Anna is so attached to it may be the fact it acts like a kind of treasure box for her small favourite playthings and any other small objects she values.

If we were to imagine God having a treasure box, I wonder what would be in it? In this booklet I'd like to make a few suggestions and invite you to check out the biblical support for each of them. We're going to try to identify from the Bible the kind of heart God treasures.

Today our search begins in the unlikely setting of a well in Samaria.

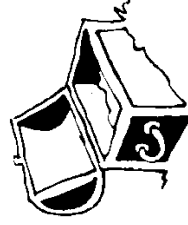
[Jesus] came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

She said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do you get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the



water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw."

He said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:5-24)

It's amazing to think of the Lord of all grace pursuing the worship of this woman of questionable reputation! It was a time when Jews had no dealings with Samaritans; and a time when Jewish Rabbis (or teachers) tended to avoid discussions with women. And this woman may have been one that even her own townfolk tried to avoid, but Jesus seems to have gone out of his way to meet this Samaritan woman so that he could have this conversation with her. And of all things to talk with her about the worship of God! We might have expected the Lord to talk about worship with Nicodemus, the high churchman of his day - but no, these profound truths about worship are shared with this hurting woman, someone who wasn't a Jew, and something of an outcast at that.

Jesus revealed to her that God the Father is searching for true worshippers, in other words people who worship the Father in spirit and in truth. It's here I suggest we discover that the heart that worships the Father in spirit and truth is something God really treasures - it's something he looks for and longs for, and it's precious to him.

Since this is something the Father values - something he might put in his treasure-box if you care to imagine it that way - then it's worth exploring what it might mean. Let's examine what this kind of worshipping heart is like. It's

significant that the Father is singled out here - the Father is seeking worshippers. Perhaps that seems to indicate worship that's specially directed to the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus himself can very appropriately be worshipped. In the Gospels we find people worshipping the Lord Jesus, like the blind man Jesus healed in John chapter nine.

There are, in fact, three main words used for 'worship' in the New Testament. One is concerned with a God-fearing attitude of mind; another is descriptive of bowing down; while the third emphasizes the actions by means of which our worship is expressed. This last idea seems to be the high watermark of worship as presented in the Bible. It was this kind of serving God with our actions that the Lord Jesus spoke about when he replied to Satan's temptation by saying: *... to him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"* (Luke 4:8)

Notice that: 'serve Him [the Father] only'. We never read in the Bible of this particular (word for) worship being directed to anyone but God the Father. But it is used to describe the collective service or worship of the people of God in Romans chapter 9, verse 4. And the collective worship of God's New Testament people is the theme of the Bible letter to the Hebrews. The Hebrews' letter explains why the worship of God's people is to be addressed to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus - as when Peter writes: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'* (1 Peter 1:3; Cp. Ephesians 1:3). It's because the people of God draw near to God through the ministry of the Lord Jesus in his office as High Priest. The Lord Jesus takes the spiritual sacrifices of God's worshipping people (1 Peter 2:5) and presents them to his Father (Hebrews 8:3). They're not directed to the Lord Jesus, but through him to the Father - the Father who longs for the worship of his people.

It's really impressive how the letter to the Hebrews keeps drawing on Old Testament picture language to make its points. The Holy Spirit is making it very clear in our Bibles that the worship of God's people today is the spiritual answer to all that happened in Jewish worship long ago - with its animal sacrifices, physically impressive robes, and as centred on a material temple known as God's house on earth.

Imagine someone walking towards you with the sun behind them. You first encounter their shadow as it projects out in front of them, then you meet the person belonging to the shadow. The Bible itself describes these Old Testament rituals as 'shadows' that were cast ahead of the coming of Christ. Jesus Christ, God's Son is the substance. We meet him personally in the New Testament, and the reality of Christian worship contrasts with the shadows of the Old Testament.

Now, in place of the material accessories and the mere shadows of Old Testament worship, the Father treasures the heart that will worship him in spirit and in truth. 'In spirit and in truth' means worship that's spiritual unlike the material worship of the Old Testament; and the fact that it's to be 'in truth' emphasizes that this is worship that's the genuine article, the real substance, contrasting with the mere shadows of former times.

Long before our heart ever seeks to worship God the Father, his heart has been searching for our worship - just like the Lord searched out the woman by the well. Yes, a worshipping heart is something he truly treasures!

2. A humble heart

Do you have a treasure box? Some people have safe deposit boxes where they keep their jewellery and other valuables. Maybe you don't, but perhaps you have a fire-proof box-file for important documents. Other things people keep safe are not necessarily valuable in terms of money, but hold a lot of sentimental value.

If we were to imagine God having a treasure box, I wonder what would be in it? In this booklet I'd like to make a few suggestions and invite you to check out the biblical support for each of them. We're going to try to identify from the Bible the kind of heart God treasures.

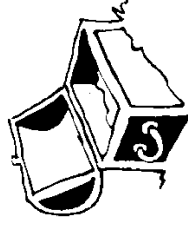
Through the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, God makes a very clear statement when he says:

*"This is the one I esteem:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2 NIV)*

The heart, or spirit, that's humble is one that God treasures. A person who has a humble heart takes God's Word seriously and is sensitive to its message. In the Bible we read about king Josiah and how when he had the words of the book of God's Law read to him he tore his clothes which was what they did in those days as an outward sign of affliction. It was a public demonstration that he'd humbled himself before God and was trembling at the judgements which God's Word declared he and his people were deserving of.

God valued, or esteemed - to use Isaiah's word - that reaction by king Josiah. For he went on to say to Josiah, *"because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and its inhabitants ... your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place"* (2 Kings 22:19,20). That's 'evil' in the sense of disaster, of course. Josiah, personally, would be spared God's judgements - and it was because of his attitude in taking God's Word to heart.

The reason why God values humility in us is because it's a quality of his own nature. That may at first seem strange to us, for if we were to think of or imagine some human being in a position of great power and authority over others, I doubt if the adjective 'humble' would be the first one to come to mind as we thought about



them. In our experience and observation perhaps greatness and power don't seem to be compatible with humility. In fact, society seems more and more to think of humility as a weakness - to the extent that employers might regularly put on training courses in self-assertiveness. To a point that can be helpful in business, but taken to extreme, in other areas, what the world says is: 'If you've got it, flaunt it'.

Naturally enough then, if we're conditioned by all that around us, it may seem strange to think of God as humble. After all, doesn't the Bible teach that God is sovereign? And all-powerful? Yes, it does! But it's only our wrong ideas that make us think this is incompatible with true, genuine humility. When that almighty God came into human experience in the person of Jesus Christ - miraculously combining in one person both divine and perfect human natures - he declared about himself: 'I am meek and lowly in heart'. And God is pleased when he sees a reflection of that in us.

In fact, the apostle Paul, when he was writing his Bible letter to the Church of God in Philippi, put it more strongly than that. He addressed the Christians in the Church of God in Philippi directly and commanded them:

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Paul had been calling upon them to put the needs of others ahead of their own needs. Our fallen human nature tends to rebel at the unreasonableness of that. Is this pathetic weakness? Not a bit of it! Let's put aside these warped notions - the reality is we're talking here about true godliness: about acting towards others in the same way as God in Christ has acted towards us. We pause to give thanks that the God of heaven, the God of eternity, is genuinely interested in us! And shown it to the extent he has done by coming to rescue us from our fallenness and sin and make possible our being re-created in his own image. These verses more than anywhere else in the Bible perhaps reveal the heart of God - lay it bare for us to see, and worship.

We need to be clear from Paul's words (which are God's words, of course) in

Philippians chapter 2: God the Son did not become humble when he entered into humanity as the baby born as Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. We're explicitly told that while the Lord existed in the form of God - while from all eternity he possessed the divine nature - this same attitude of humility resided in him. It was this attitude that produced the action of his coming to earth, even his planned, scheduled arrival at the cross to offer his life in death as payment for our sins. The truth is: no one ever cared for us like Jesus.

Paul goes on to talk about his young co-worker, Timothy, who showed a Christ-like spirit in that he had a genuine concern for the welfare of the Church of God at Philippi. This is how Paul introduces Timothy to them:

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:19-21)

'The interests of Jesus Christ' is an expression we can draw from this Philippians' letter. Paul was writing disappointingly of believers whose chief concern was their own interests, he says, not the interests of Jesus Christ. But, he tells us, Timothy was different. He had Christ's interests at heart. This was said to be demonstrated by his concern for the welfare of those in the church of God at Philippi (2:20,21). From this we can learn of the deep interest of Jesus Christ in churches of God as we find them biblically defined in New Testament times.

When, with a humble heart, we tremble at God's Word, would we not expect like Timothy to enter into the treasured interests of Jesus Christ in Churches of God?

3. A God-fearing heart

We're imagining God to have a treasure box, and wondering what might be in it. I'm making a few suggestions and inviting you to check out the biblical support for each of them. Basically, what we're doing is trying to identify from the Bible the kind of heart God treasures.

God speaks of something he treasures towards the close of the book of the prophet Malachi, right at the end of the Old Testament. By that time people were becoming a bit cynical. They were expressing their doubts as to whether serving God was all that it was cracked up to be. It was a case of the now all too familiar, 'What's in it for me?' mentality.

Malachi told the doubters then that even though there might be no apparent benefit in serving God right now, one day there would be shown to be great benefit. His message from God was:

"On [that] day ... you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD.

So what exactly would be the benefit of following God's way? It's as if God now turns to the other type of person among his people - to the God-fearing ones - and tells them. Of them we discover:

Those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." ...

To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; ... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:16-4:3 NKJ)

'A book of remembrance' - the king in the story of Esther had one of those (2:23). One night when he couldn't sleep he read it and discovered he hadn't rewarded a man who'd uncovered an attempt on his life. The king's determination to reward him reversed the fortunes of



the arch-enemy of God's people in those days - as you can remind yourself by reading the book of Esther again. But it's not as if the God of eternity, the King of the Ages needs reminding. So, why a book of remembrance? Surely, it's God's way of accommodating to our way of thinking. The language of the book of Revelation agrees that one day - in the day of final judgement - books will be opened before God. God's righteous judgement will be seen to be fair, according to what everyone has done in this life - with those actions making absolutely clear as to whether we really trusted in God and his salvation or not.

Do you remember what God said to those who respected him and served him humbly and overcame their doubts and thought and spoke together about the things of God?

I think it's lovely: *"They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels."*

It's obvious enough, I think, that the expression 'my jewels' means a very special treasure. And that's certainly confirmed if we check up on the Bible word that's used here. It was something the owner shut up securely and kept it closely to himself as his prized possession.

Solomon used the word when he wrote in Ecclesiastes (2:8) about silver and gold and the peculiar - or special - treasures of kings. His father, David the king, used the same word to describe his special royal treasure which he was dedicating for the building of God's temple (1 Chronicles 29:3).

Talk of diamonds in the rough! Can you imagine God - the Great King - making a wretch like me - and like you - into treasure for himself: his very own prized and unique treasure. It should thrill us to think of it!

More than that, it's exactly the word God used when he gave his people the Law through Moses and promised that if they obeyed him they would be a very special treasure to him. Three times in the book of Deuteronomy (7:6; 14:2; 26:18) God repeats that this is what he wanted his people to be to him - his own special treasure. In the time of the prophet Malachi, a thousand years later, it was only a small proportion of the people that were then living up to God's aspiration. But he really valued them for doing so! I don't think we could overestimate the value God places on a God-fearing heart.

By a God-fearing person, of course, we mean someone who has respect for God, someone whose lifestyle reverences God. The main way in which this will be seen will be in that person's attitude to the Word of God, the Bible. After all, it was if his people long ago obeyed his Word, that God said he'd then make them his treasured possession.

The New Testament makes it clear that God's still looking for the same thing. There's really a very close parallel between the language God used in Exodus chapter 19 and the things he says to us through the apostle Peter's writing in the New Testament. Let's refresh our memory of Exodus 19 first, God said:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6 NIV)

Now compare that with its New Testament equivalent, spoken to Christian believers in New Testament churches of God, spoken through Peter in his first letter, chapter two:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

In place of 'a people for God's own possession' another version (NKJ) says 'His own special people'. Both of these correspond to 'my treasured possession' which is the Old Testament wording. God-fearing Israelites long ago obeyed the Law and so were viewed by God as featuring among his treasured possession; and so today God-fearing believers who obey the biblical commands of the Christian Faith are assured of the same great blessing - being among God's treasures! The prophet Isaiah tells us 'the fear of the LORD is his treasure' (33:6). Isn't that wonderful!

4. An obedient heart

Do you remember the description of my daughter's treasure box in the first chapter?

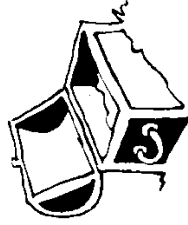
Now what we're doing is imagining God to have a treasure box. And we're making a few suggestions as to what might be in it if that were the case - thinking in terms of the kind of heart that God treasures. So far, the candidates for the treasure box have been a worshipping heart, a humble heart and a God-fearing heart. I invite you to check out the biblical support for each of that list of suggestions. Next we're going to suggest that an obedient heart is another kind of heart God treasures.

To help us see that, please consider with me an incident from the career of Israel's first king, King Saul. One day:

Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"

So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim - two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. ... Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs - everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night. Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honour and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."



When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

"Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul replied.

Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"

"But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." (1 Samuel 15:1-23 NIV)

Rejected! What a fearful sentence for a man who had been on a mission for the Lord. More than that, he felt sure it had been a successful mission in every area that mattered. How could anyone find fault with this brainwave of using some of the cattle for worshipping the LORD rather than unnecessarily killing them all? Whether it truly was the soldiers' initiative or not, Saul had at least adopted the idea, and authorized the action. But, the end result is worshipping God, so surely that makes everything all right?

How wrong could Saul be! He soon learnt from Samuel - in uncompromising terms. The king who'd proudly been building himself a congratulatory monument was now confronted by the prophet who had spent the time humbly consulting God. The bottom line of Samuel's denunciation of Saul's actions was this: *'to obey is better than sacrifice'*. Saul's intention to offer

sacrifices to God was at the expense of obeying God fully in terms of the Lord's carefully worded mission statement. Saul had been asked to wipe everything out and so not to retain any plunder – for whatever purpose. Good intentions, even the sincerest, cannot compensate or excuse disobedience.

The Lord has sent us on a mission too:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Saul for his part had not observed all that he'd been commanded to do, and the Lord held him accountable for that. Dare we presume his attitude will be any different in our case?

A lady was telling me the other day about a sales manager refusing to honour an offer coupon she'd cut from her newspaper and taken into the store. He'd actually taken a magnifying glass to show her in the small print - so small that it needed a magnifying glass to be legible it seems - to show her that the offer was invalid on the particular type of item she wanted to purchase. God doesn't do that to us. His commands were clear and bold to Saul - as are all his commands to us in the New Testament - but he will hold us to the precise terms of his commands. To presume this and that doesn't apply to us any more is to fail to respect God's Word, and so fail to honour God.

Through the apostle Paul, God signalled to Timothy that the standard of teaching given to the first generation of Christian believers to uphold was binding on the next and subsequent generations. Timothy was to obey the original pattern of Christian teaching as Paul had done without leaving any bits out. Paul made it so clear:

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

And so there's our word 'treasure'. A reminder to us that God treasures our obedience. God prizes an obedient heart!

5. A wise understanding heart

Do you have a treasure box? Perhaps you have a fire-proof box-file for important documents. Other things people keep safe are things that have sentimental value.

If we were to imagine God having a treasure box, I wonder what would be in it? In this booklet we're checking out a few suggestions as to the kind of heart God treasures.

King Solomon in the Old Testament illustrates another kind of heart, another quality that God prizes. It's easy to identify it from the charming story in which the Lord invites Solomon to ask for anything he wants. This is what happened:

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon answered, ... "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties ... So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for - both riches and honour - so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." (1 Kings 3:5-14 NIV)

The pleasure God expressed when Solomon asked for a wise and discerning heart shows to us how much God treasures discernment. Solomon later wrote proverbs about wisdom being more valuable than rubies and silver. In saying what he did he was reflecting God's own set of values.



Solomon is described in the Bible as the man to whom God appeared twice. I imagine these two appearances were among the greatest highlights of his life. It seems natural to link them both together. Following that first time when the Lord appeared to Solomon, Solomon had acted wisely - especially in things to do with the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. In fact, it was:

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, [that] the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there for ever. My eyes and my heart will always be there." (1 Kings 9:1-3 NIV)

What prayer was God answering? Well, earlier Solomon had said:

"The LORD has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. I have provided a place there for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our fathers when he brought them out of Egypt."

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands towards heaven and said: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below - you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it - as it is today. Now LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons are careful in all they do to walk before me as you have done.' And now, O God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true. But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open towards this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays towards this place ..."

I'm really struck by those words: *'My Name shall be there'*. In his prayer Solomon was quoting back God's own words. Concerning the splendid Temple Solomon had built for God at Jerusalem, God had promised: *'My Name shall be there'*.

Solomon's God-given discernment is shown by his grasp of this awesome reality that God's Name was identified with the place where the Temple was. He seemed to have been gripped by the wonder of that thought - and I've been gripped by it too just through reading about it again. Solomon's prayer displays his wonderful God-given wisdom because of its focus on the place God had chosen to establish his name for a dwelling - just as he'd promised to choose such a place back in the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 12:5). But what did this mean? What did it mean that God was going to place his name in a particular place? For God's Name to be in a place signified that his presence was there. It's also true in the New Testament that a person's name stood for the actual presence of that person. One place we see this is at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. After the disciples had seen Jesus ascend back into heaven:

... they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty) (Acts 1:12-15 NKJ).

The first New Testament churches that were formed from these original disciples very soon afterwards were 'of God': they were actually called in the Bible churches of God. What's in a name, we ask? Plenty, if that name is God's Name! We, too, will be wise - and it will give God pleasure - if we discern that as far as our Christian testimony is concerned we, too, should put our names where God has put his own.

All Scripture quotes are taken from the New American Standard Version,
unless otherwise stated.

Search for Truth Radio Broadcasts International Schedule

Trans World Radio

Every **Saturday** to **Europe**; 8.15 a.m. British Time
31m band Short Wave (approx. 9870 kHz.)
49m band Short Wave (6045 kHz.)

HCJB, Kununurra, Western Australia

Every **Sunday** to **South Pacific** at 19.45 UTC
19m band Short Wave (11765 kHz.)
Every **Wednesday** to **South Asia** at 13.30 UTC
25m band Short Wave (15390 kHz.)

SKY Digital Channel 888 in the **UK**

Every **Saturday** at 8.15 a.m. and 7.45 p.m.

'Search for Truth',

P.O.Box 246, BOLTON, England

P.O.Box 748, Ringwood, Victoria 3134, Australia

web site: www.searchfortruth.net

e-mail: sft@ChurchesOfGod.info