# Lesson 2: The Grant of Wisdom – I Kings 3:3-15

Objectives:

1. Students will consider the difficulties Shelomo faced in ruling Israel, as someone lacking experience.
2. Students will develop their reading skills in extracting specific information from blocks of Biblical prose, in reading Shelomo’s speech to God in I Ki. 3:6-10.
3. Students will develop skills in understanding the precise nuance of certain key terms in Biblical Hebrew, including חסד and משפט by looking at their use in different contexts, and going beyond the basic question of “what does the translation say”.

## Part 1: Background

Begin the lesson by asking what special characteristics of Shelomo justified his appointment by David. Students should recall that no special characteristics of Shelomo are mentioned and that it appears that he was appointed because of David’s loyalty to Bathsheba.

Then ask what challenges Shelomo faces, based on what we saw in David’s last speech. Students should recall that the goal of David’s speech was for Shelomo’s kingdom to last, and that David gave specific instructions about how Shelomo should deal with specific people. But because David’s advice was person-specific, it will cease to be relevant, and at a certain point, Shelomo will be left on his own to deal with the challenges of ensuring that his kingship survives.

Ask students to describe Shelomo’s capabilities for the job, as though this were an employment interview for a job. Students should reflect about how Shelomo appears unqualified.

This is the challenge addressed in Shelomo’s conversation with God at Gibeon, narrated in chapter 3 vv 5-15. Note that vv 3-4 will be addressed in a different lesson, since they relate to the Temple.

## Part 2: The relationship with David and the meaning of חסד – verses 5-6.

Verse 5 should be taught frontally – God initiates the conversation

Verse 6 – Using slide 2, ask students to divide Shelomo’s statement in this verse into four parts and to explain who does the action in each part.

Then ask: What word repeats twice in this verse? What action is God said to do twice?   
Then ask: What חסד does God do to David when he rules? What חסד does God do to David after his rule is over?   
Students should understand that the first חסד relates to God allowing David to be king, and the second to God continuing to allow David’s descendants to rule after his death.

Students should be asked: Does Shelomo understand why he was chosen? Yes, he understands that it is because of God’s חסד to David.

Ask students what the word חסד means – write the answers on a separate section of the board.

Then explain to students that the word חסד tends to appear in discussions of continuity of God’s promise in Tanakh. State that one of the most famous examples of continuity of God’s promise is when God provides continuity to the promise he made to Abraham. Remind students of the famous scene of Rebecca at the well, and read with them Genesis 24:12, where the servant of Abraham asks God to do חסד to Abraham by sending Rebecca. Try to plug in some of the students’ definitions of חסד to Genesis 24:12 – if they said “kindness,” ask if sending a wife to Isaac is the clearest example of kindness to Abraham. Is this not really kindness to Isaac? Explain that חסד in Tanakh often means an action done to create, grow, and preserve a relationship. In Gen. 24:12, God is preserving His relationship and covenant with Abraham. In I Kings 3, God is preserving and continuing His relationship and covenant with David. Someone will no doubt ask “but does it mean kindness?" Answer: Yes, it can mean kindness but it specifically means actions done to grow and preserve a relationship, and kindness is one of the best ways to do this. Ask students about the examples they cited on the board – do the actions they cited involve a relationship? Students should realize that giving money to a poor person is an act of חסד partly because it creates a relationship between giver and recipient – they recognize that they are both part of the same family of humanity and care about each other. (No doubt there are some cases where there is no element of connection or relationship at all – these are not usually called חסד in Tanakh.)

Summarize the discussion (slide 3) by emphasizing that a) God allows David’s kingdom to continue because He has a relationship with David, b) David chose Shelomo to continue his kingdom because of his loyalty to Bathsheba, but Shelomo has no special characteristics that make him fit for the job.

## Part 3: Shelomo’s request of God I Ki 3:7-9

Explain that verses 7-9 contain Shelomo’s request of God. Explain that the word ועתה in Tanakh often indicates a transition from background to request (as in Deuteronomy 10:12). Then ask students to work on the worksheet in which they unpack these three verses, highlighting these points:

1. צאת ובא – leadership of the people – as in Num. 27:17 which Radak cites.
2. What characteristic of the people is highlighted in verse 8?
3. The emphasis on the word לשפוט in verse 9 and the meaning of this word. Read the very short story of Otniel in Judges 3:8-10. What does לשפוט mean? Students should realize that the word doesn’t only mean to judge, but also to lead.

In discussion after the worksheet, using slide 4, ask students:

\*What abilities Shelomo feels he lacks (question 1 above)

\*What about the people makes these abilities necessary (question 2 above). Let students point out that the nation is very large but note that we will revert to this point later.

\*What does it mean to lead the people? (question 3). This point should be developed into a discussion of leadership. Students will no doubt point out that leadership is inspiring, but the teacher should point out that inspiration must lead somewhere – people need to be inspired to do something. Teacher should point out that leadership means helping people achieve goals, to improve themselves and/or their lives.

But then teacher should revert to point about the size of the nation. With a very large group of people, there are many different goals, needs, and desires. How can the leader balance the needs, desires and goals of different groups? Use the map in slide 5 to illustrate this geographically with scarce resources - if two regions needs water for irrigation from a common canal, it may be the leader’s responsibility to decide who gets how much water. Then ask students for other examples of challenges of leading a very diverse population. For example, students may note that different people have different moral views. Leader must find a way for everyone to live together with these.

Assign homework: Read story of the two harlots (I Ki 3: 17-28) and ask students to explain how the \*challenge\* (not the solution) in this story indicates leadership. Students should appreciate that this is the ultimate story of a scare resource and competing interests, and while it’s only about two people, it’s a model of the larger challenges leaders face in leading a nation. Note that there are many video-presentations of Shelomo’s trial, and it’s a wonderful dramatic story, but the key aspect of the story, in terms of the flow of the narrative, is that it illustrates Shelomo’s ability to lead, and popular recognition of that ability(3:28).

## Part 4: Shelomo’s Grant of wisdom (I Ki 3:10-15)

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Verses 10-15 are best taught frontally, in keeping with the goals of the lesson. Slide 6 illustrates the points Shelomo does NOT request (v. 11). Ask students whether these points would help Shelomo lead the people. Would they help Shelomo overcome his lack of ability to ensure that the people support his kingship?

In teaching verse 12, emphasize that the לב חכם ונבון means “brain” and not “heart,” since לב throughout Tanakh is the organ used for thinking, which directs all actions. Shelomo is given wisdom to lead the people. Note also that the final words of verse 11, לשמוע משפט express the ability balance the different needs of different groups.

After teaching these verses, review the homework assignment. After doing so, ask students:

1. Do the people recognize that Shelomo has the wisdom to balance the needs of different groups? (Students should be able to adduce v. 28 in proof of this)
2. How will this popular recognition ensure that Shelomo’s kingdom will endure (the goal of David’s speech in chapter 2)?

## Part 4: Summary

In summarizing this chapter, compare Shelomo's beginning to David. Use slide 6 to highlight that

a. Shelomo begins his kingship with no abilities to lead in war, while David was a known warrior (Goliath)

1. Shelomo begins immediately to rule the whole people, while David had a chance to first rule only his own tribe.

What is the likely result of a + b above? Students should realize that Shelomo expects that his kingdom will collapse. What changes this expectation is the grant of wisdom, which leads the people to revere the king (3:28).