

## SOLOMON'S WEALTH AND BLESSING: PERSPECTIVE OF 2 CHRONICLES 1:7-12

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### 0. Introduction

There is always frantic effort to obtain God's blessing and favour in our time. Various means (spiritual and secular) are taken to achieve this. Occasionally, the efforts prove abortive. The text of 2 Chr 1:7-12 gives us a glimpse into how Solomon came to be blessed by God with unequalled spiritual and material gifts, thus standing out in biblical and secular history as one royalty who is very richly endowed. Actually, Solomon stumbled over his gifts, as it were; he didn't go headlong to ask for or acquire them. And he didn't even do the extraordinary to be blessed by God. Rather he did simply the cheapest within his capacity; he prayed, but prayed so fervently, sincerely and modestly that his prayer was heard. Thus Solomon received what he asked for, namely wisdom and knowledge, and even more. The "more" consists in what we can justifiably call Solomon's wealth and blessing – riches, possessions and honour (cf. 2 Chr 1:12). From the view of the Chronicler, they are free gifts, undesired, unexpected, unasked for, but not without underscoring the fact that Solomon has to face some challenges; he has to reject the bait to ask for the secondary (and not the primary) amongst a plethora of divine options. Today the issue of Solomon's wealth and blessings has become so legendary that many would wish themselves such divine favours.

This paper therefore sets out to examine the Chronicler's perspective on the text, precisely on why Solomon is so richly endowed and for what purpose in order to draw out a few lessons for our context in which the quest for divine favours – possessions, wealth, honour, longevity for oneself, and even destruction of the enemy – is very high. The text is of interest to us because of the model it offers to all leaders/rulers and, indeed, everyone who desires divine 'favours', particularly in an environment where all is tried out to obtain them.

### 1. Portrait of Solomon in 2 Chronicles 1

The first chapter of 2 Chronicles gives a portrait of Solomon which this paper considers important to the overall understanding of our subject matter. Unlike the earlier and parallel account in 1 Kings 3:4-15, the Chronicler gives a markedly different perspective of Solomon. He deletes earlier materials that tend to diminish the image of Solomon and depicts Solomon in models other than earlier ones. This does not only point to difference in the needs of the primary audience but also to a different theological framework. The Chronicler summarises his image of Solomon in two powerful introductory statements at the beginning of the chapter. Firstly, Solomon is presented as one of the few kings who enjoyed a nearness of God, a close relationship with the Lord as expressed in the phrase, "the Lord his God was with him" (v. 1b). Here Solomon is likened to his father David (1 Sam 16:18; 18:12, 14; 2 Sam 5:10; 1 Chr 11:9), and, indeed, to Samuel (1 Sam 3:19).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this explains why Solomon is said to have established himself (v. 1a) without resorting to vengeance against his father's enemy or eliminating threats to the throne as seen in 1 Kgs 2:5-46.

The second again flows from the first: because the Lord is with him, Solomon is (twice) said to be exalted by the Lord his God. He is made exceedingly great (v. 1c; cf. 1 Chr 29:25). The *piel* form of the verb *gdl* that conveys this idea is also employed two times in reference to Joshua (Josh 3:7; 4:14). Could it be that Solomon is likened to Joshua, the successor of Moses in this narrative? Williamson thinks that much.<sup>2</sup> The Chronicler therefore perceives Solomon as one of the few personalities said to be exalted in the biblical tradition.

<sup>1</sup> See King Asa in 2 Chr 15:9.

<sup>2</sup> H. Williams, "The Accession of Solomon in the Books of Chronicles", VT 26 (1976), 351-361 (355-356).

In 2 Chr 1:2-3, Solomon is presented as an ideal king who begins his career with an act of religious pilgrimage to Gibeon.<sup>3</sup> He ascends not as an individual or private devotee as depicted in 1 Kgs 3:4, but as one leading a national assembly. In this way, Solomon is portrayed as a model king who acts in close association with his people and who enjoys the goodwill of “all Israel” (v. 2), and of “all the assembly” (v. 3), including the various segments of his government, the military, the judiciary, the elders, and the political leaders. The motive for the pilgrimage to Gibeon is Solomon’s desire to visit the cultic objects; the tabernacle (v. 3) and the bronze altar made by Bezalel (vv.5-6), just as David, his father did to the ark (1 Chr 13:3), and for the singular purpose of seeking it/YHWH<sup>4</sup> (v. 5). Here again, Solomon is depicted by the Chronicler as a king whose primary preoccupation is seeking (*drš*) YHWH right from his accession to office.

Unlike in 1 Kgs 3:5, 15 where God communicates with Solomon in a dream (cf. Gen 26:24; 28:11; 31:11; 32:22ff; 46:2; Judg 7:13; 1 Sam 3; 28:6), Solomon in 2 Chr 1:7 receives revelation from God in a direct speech, a mode quite higher than dream. The *niphal* of the verb *r’h* indicates that the Lord appeared to Solomon to speak straight to and with him, perhaps predicated upon the fact of YHWH’s nearness. In fact, in this manner, Solomon is ranked among the prophets, furnished with the highest form of revelation.

In a similar way, the Chronicler portrays Solomon as a mature man (v. 8), in contrast to Solomon’s claim in 1 Kgs 13:7b that he is “only a little child”. Consequently, Solomon’s decisions and choices, in the mind of the Chronicler, have to be taken as stemming from mature and independent deliberation, characteristic of an adult. And they carry greater weight. By omitting 1 Kgs 3:14, which subtly suggests that Solomon might sin in future, the Chronicler sketches another interesting portrait of Solomon in 2 Chr 1:12 as the impeccable. This verse supposes that Solomon has imbibed the instruction of his father (1 Chr 28:9) and that David’s prayer to the Lord on behalf of his son (1 Chr 29:19) does not go unanswered.

The high point in the Chronicler’s portrait of Solomon is the total reframing of the mission of Solomon as defined in his prayer for wisdom and knowledge (v. 10). By asking for spiritual rather than material good, Solomon is depicted as one quite aware of what he needs most and his limitations at his accession to power. He asks for divine endowment to be enabled to lead the people and to build the temple. The purpose is quite different from the parallel passage in the book of Kings where the reason is legally oriented – to judge the people (1 Kgs 3:9). Solomon’s exercise of wisdom is extensively demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of First book of Kings. In all, the Chronicler presents Solomon as a king whose primary concern and interest in receiving divine gifts is service, service to God and to the people; and as a king who knows that he will not be able to accomplish the task of building the temple and of leadership without divine wisdom (2 Chr 1:9-19).<sup>5</sup>

It must be observed that Solomon’s preoccupation with spiritual gifts does not make him any poorer. Instead, the king is said to be endowed with tremendous material wealth. Besides his 1400 chariots and 12,000 horses (v. 14), Solomon is said to have “made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah” (v. 15). This is made possible through astute economic policy, trade and commerce (vv. 16-17), thanks to the gift of wisdom.

<sup>3</sup> See the first acts of David immediately after his accession; he makes a pilgrimage with all Israel to seek the ark (1 Chr 13:1-6).

<sup>4</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. pronominal suffix in *wayyidrašēh* (v. 5) is quite ambiguous.

<sup>5</sup> See Steven L. McKenzie, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 230.

With this portrait of Solomon in mind this paper will go on to find out the Chronicler's perspective of Solomon's wealth and blessing in the subsequent discussions.

## 2. 2 Chronicles 1:7-12: Its Context and Structure

Our text forms an important unit of the first chapter of 2 Chronicles, which functions as a preface, as it were, to 2 Chronicles 2-7, the first major section of the entire book. The section narrates of Solomon's building, furnishing and dedicating the temple and YHWH's consequent blessing and promise of dominion to Solomon.

Our text, 2 Chr 1:7-12, is properly bounded by the account of Solomon's leading a national pilgrimage to the high place at Gibeon after his accession to the throne (vv. 1-6) and the resultant benefits of that pilgrimage (vv. 13-18). The first unit narrates of the king's act of worship – visiting the cultic objects and seeking God there from. It is climaxed by lavish offerings (v. 6). The unit that follows our text gives a general idea of Solomon's wealth, indicating the volume of his international trade. A unit that begins with the departure (*bw'...l*) of the king from Gibeon (v. 13), as distinct from his going (*hlk*) there (v. 3), is concluded with exposing the intention of the king to pursue two key projects – building of the temple and the royal palace complex (2 Chr 1:18 [Eng. 2:1]).

The unit of 2 Chronicles 1:7-12 itself, though modelled after 1 Kgs 3:4-15, has its own peculiar structure and form. It begins with the deity (*'ēlōhîm*) appearing and revealing himself to the king (v. 7a).<sup>6</sup> This is followed by a dialogue between God and Solomon (vv. 7b-12), which contrary to the format of normal prayer, is initiated by God himself. The literary structure of the text can truly be described as promise and fulfilment. The opening statement of God at the beginning of the dialogue: "Ask what I should give you" (v. 7b) is fulfilled when at the end God says: "Wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honour, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like" (v. 12).

After the narrator's comment (v. 7a), God introduces the dialogue by handing in a blank cheque to Solomon. Solomon is given the option to ask whatever he wishes (v. 7b). Solomon gives a preamble to his request (vv. 8-9) after which he makes concrete his request (v.10). In a similar way, God gives a preamble (v. 11) prior to his granting the request (v. 12). The entire dialogue can be sketched thus:

- v. 7a *Narrator's Comment*: That night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him,
- v. 7b *God's Invitation*: "Ask what I should give you."
- vv. 8-9 *Solomon's Preamble*: "You have shown great and steadfast love to my father David, and have made me succeed him as king. <sup>9</sup>O Lord God, let your promise to my father David now be fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.
- v. 10 *Solomon's Request*: Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of yours?"
- v. 11 *God's Preamble*: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honour, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king,
- v. 12 *God's Response to Request*: wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honour, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like."

<sup>6</sup> The appearance, according to the book of Kings, occurred in the dream of the night (1 Kgs 3:5).

It is important to remark that in granting Solomon's request God gives him more than he ever imagined. Thus, Solomon's manner of asking becomes a key to unlocking the treasure of divine wealth and blessing. A greater attention will now be paid to Solomon's request and God's gifts in response.

### 3. 2 Chronicles 1:7-12 and Its Content

The content of our pericope is very much determined by the divine option given to Solomon and expressed in the invitatory formula, "Ask what I should give you." This invitation gives Solomon a wide range of possibilities; he could particularly ask for possessions, wealth, honour, or the life of those who hate him, and even long life, as God's preamble in v. 11 indicates. Instead Solomon opted for spiritual gifts of *hokmāh maddāc* "wisdom and knowledge" (v.10a), which eventually frames the entire unit (cf. vv. 11, 12). The word pair is not a common one in the OT. In other instances, "wisdom and knowledge" are rendered by *hokmāh wada'at* (Prov 30:3; Eccl 1:12, 16; 2:21, 26; Isa 33:6). The shift is explained by the supposed late origin of the masculine noun *maddāc* which is dated to the post-exilic period. The Aramaic forms *maddāc* (Dan 4:1, 17) and *manda'c* (Dan 5:12) with the meaning "understanding" point to this fact. This is further evidenced in the parallel and older text, 1 Kgs 3:9, 11f, where *maddāc* is completely lacking and *bīn* and *nābn* are used instead.

Generally speaking, *hokmāh* and its cognates often stand for technical or artistic ability in the historical books. Hence it is defined as "cleverness and skill for the purpose of practical action." The fact that *hokmāh* is linked with *lēbē* in v. 11 suggests that Solomon's *hokmāh* in context is not just a quality; it is rather something that arises out of a feeling for the right thing and it is fostered by traditional knowledge, education and personal experience.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, J. Van Oosterzee distinguishes Solomon's wisdom from mere learning, and identifies it with "practical wisdom which qualifies in every case for the recognising, choosing, and accomplishing of the right, the true, and the good."<sup>8</sup>

The noun *maddāc* (vv. 10, 11, 12) simply means understanding (cf. Dan 1:4, 17; Eccl 10:20). Like wisdom it is a characteristic that candidates for high offices must exhibit, namely "comprehensive knowledge and intellectual flexibility". As Botterweck rightly observes, *maddāc* enables the possessor to conduct oneself judiciously and not act superior.<sup>9</sup>

The issue is that the two nouns are hardly distinguishable. Attempting a distinction T. Whitelaw underscores the fact that *hokmāh* deals with the general and *maddāc* with the particular, the former can be called the principle and the latter the application. Similarly, he sees *hokmāh*, as the soul's capacity for seeing truth and discerning its adaptations to the particular exigencies of life, and calls *maddāc* the truth as apprehended and possessed by the soul.<sup>10</sup> No wonder then Solomon's purpose for requesting this word pair *hokmāh* and *maddāc* vis-à-vis the expression "to go out (ys') and come in (bw') before...." is never clever legal judgements or the ability to judge as found in 1 Kgs 3:28, but an art proper to purposeful civil governance and leadership (v. 10). One must also recall that the word pair *ys'* and *bw'* is

<sup>7</sup> See "Sophia," in Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000, c1964).

<sup>8</sup> See "The Prayer for Wisdom" in [http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the\\_prayer\\_of\\_king\\_solomon\\_for\\_wisdom\\_to\\_govern\\_his\\_peopl.htm](http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the_prayer_of_king_solomon_for_wisdom_to_govern_his_peopl.htm). Accessed 06/09/12.

<sup>9</sup> See G.J. Botterweck, "yāda'" in G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) V* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 455-481 (480).

<sup>10</sup> See T. Whitelaw, "A Young King's Choice," in [http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the\\_prayer\\_of\\_king\\_solomon\\_for\\_wisdom\\_to\\_govern\\_his\\_peopl.htm](http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the_prayer_of_king_solomon_for_wisdom_to_govern_his_peopl.htm). Accessed 06/09/12.

often applied in a formal sense in relation to military leadership.<sup>11</sup> That distinguishes it from its peculiar application in our text.

As earlier observed the tenor of the pericope is set by the invitatory formula in verse 7b: *šə'al māh 'etten-lāk* "Ask what I should give you" (cf. 1 Kgs 3:5). The divine invitation to the king to ask is commonly observed in Israel's coronation ritual as reflected in the psalms (2:8; 21:2, 4; cf. 20:4).<sup>12</sup> Such an option is also reminiscent of certain NT passages, namely Jesus' invitation to Blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51; cf. Luke 18:41) and to James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Mark 10:36). One has to contrast the response of Solomon and Bartimaeus with that of James and John (Mark 10:37). In response Solomon makes a modest request for spiritual gifts (2 Chr 1:10; cf. 1 Kgs 3:9; Ps 119:34, 73; cf. James 1:5), which attracts divine blessing, as seen in the divine response (v. 12).

Surprisingly, the list of the five supposed gifts in God's preamble – possessions, wealth, honour, the life of those who hate you and long life – which Solomon refuses to request (v.11) are revised. The ordering of the gifts is altered and also the life of the enemy and long life (to which a condition is attached in 1 Kgs 3:13) are deleted. Consequently, God granted Solomon three gifts – riches, possessions, and honour – added to the gift of wisdom and knowledge (v. 12).<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that in all cases, the premier position of *hokmāh* (wisdom) and *maddā* (knowledge) is highlighted, showing that they are superior to other gifts, including the military might which checkmates the life of the enemy. The omission of long life among the actual gifts in v. 12 probably indicates that the Chronicler shares the Wisdom teaching that long life is not the true measure of a fulfilled life (cf. Wis 4:8-9).

The three gifts, *ōšer* (riches), *nākāsīm* (wealth), and *kābôd* (honour) used in verses 11 and 12 have complementary value in relation to the spiritual gifts of wisdom and knowledge that Solomon requested. Granted that they are temporal and transient gifts, they can be said to be Solomon's privileged endowment (cf. Eccl 6:2).<sup>14</sup> The fact that these extra gifts are associated with wisdom in our text, notwithstanding that there is ambivalent notion about them in the OT, means that they are employed in a positive sense.<sup>15</sup> They are meant to distinguish the status of Solomon from that of anyone else. For instance, the two closely related words, *ōšer* (riches) and *nākāsīm* (wealth) imply abundance in a superlative way and beyond the norm of a given society. While *ōšer* denotes riches or possession in terms of flocks, servants and precious stones, acquired by successful breeding, booty and dowries (cf. Gen 31:16; 14:23; 1 Sam 17:25), *nākāsīm* a plural absolute noun, refers to wealth in economic resources, abundance of assets and money often arising from warlike booty (Josh 22:8). *nākāsīm* may also signify something necessary. Both nouns are also regarded elsewhere as divine gifts (Eccl 5:18; 6:2). However, riches according to Wisdom come also

<sup>11</sup> Num 27:17; 1 Chr 11: 2; 1 Sam 18:13, 16; cf. Deut 31:2; 2 Sam 5:2.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 50; E. Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige Kap. 1-16*, ATD (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 32; in G.H. Jones, *Kings 1 and 2*, NCBC (England: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 126. Also an Ugaritic text (Keret I.i:39ff) gives evidence of the deity (El) asking the king (Keret) what his need was.

<sup>13</sup> The two lists are to be contrasted with similar lists in 1 Kgs 3:11 and 1 Kgs 3:13 respectively. Each consists of three additional gifts, long life, riches and life of your enemies in the former and riches, honour, long life (conditional) in the latter.

<sup>14</sup> It is only riches and glory that are ascribed to David (1 Chr 29:28), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:5; 18:1), Hezekiah (2 Chr 32:27) and Ahasuerus (Esth 1:4).

<sup>15</sup> Negative notion about riches are also evident. Cf. Hos 12:9 (Eng 8); Jer 5:27; Ps 49:7 (Eng 6), 17-18 (16-17). The tension is summed up in Prov 30:8-9 thus: "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny you, and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God."

from being diligent and sharp (Prov 10:4), having knowledge and skill (Prov 24:4) and from industry (Sir 31:3). The role of the third noun *kābôd* is emphatic. The term may not be understood as purely ideal or abstract quality, for it could stand for wealth or for position of honour conferred by material substance (Gen 13:2; 31:1).<sup>16</sup> Here in context, it is applied as something “weighty”, that which gives “importance” and “status” (cf. Gen 45:13) and constitutes one’s place in society. Wisdom corpus classifies the two words *’ōšer* (riches) and *kābôd* (honour) among true wealth (Prov 3:16); as gift of wisdom (Prov 8:18) and as reward for humility and fear of the Lord (Prov 22:4).

In spite of the value of these gifts, Solomon opts for wisdom and knowledge, showing that the priceless value of wisdom and knowledge is the motif behind his request. Those gifts are to be preferred to silver (Prov 16:16), to gold and abundance of precious stones (Prov 20:15), and to other valuables (Prov 8:10). Thus Solomon does not ask for riches and possessions but for that which gives true standing and importance in life.

#### 4. Theological Reflection

The offer that God makes to Solomon, *šə’al māh ’etten-lāk* “Ask what I should give you” in v. 7b (cf. 1 Kgs 3:5) points to the fact that God is the ultimate Giver of all gifts. This is not only true of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge but also of the other unasked-for gifts. Thus, whatever Solomon is bequeathed with comes from God as his gift and blessing. One must understand and place all gifts in that context in order not to lose sight of the true source of spiritual and material gifts. By this special offer, God reveals the right way to obtain divine gifts and/or blessing. It is by asking properly for it. The text itself communicates to us that the right motif for asking aright is service to divine will and service to the people. On these two selfless motives is based Solomon’s request. He asks for divine wisdom and knowledge so that through him YHWH’s divine purpose in building the temple will be fulfilled —“Let your promise to my father David now be fulfilled” (v. 9).<sup>17</sup>

While making his request in v. 10 Solomon gives another reason for his requesting the gift of wisdom and knowledge: “to go out and come in before this people,” a people he has already described as “as numerous as the dust of the earth” (v. 9; cf. Gen 13:16; 28:14; also Gen 22:17; Num 23:10). Solomon’s attitude in this regard is crucial vis-à-vis obtaining divine blessing. For it is in applying wisdom and knowledge and employing his possessions and riches to promote the cause of the Lord’s temple that Solomon gained his own honour and reputation over all. Even the frightening and great number of people envisaged to be under Solomon’s rulership, invariably turned out later to be, together with his incomparable wealth, an asset in Solomon’s accomplishing the task of building the temple.

In verse 11, *God’s preamble* in a subtle manner explains further the correlation between the content of request and the granting of it. The opening phrase, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for ....” (v. 11a), suggests apparently that God has granted Solomon’s request because it met the basic condition —sincerity of purpose or rather expression of genuine need. The preamble gives additional reason why the king’s divine gifts must be employed for the service of the people. The people under the king’s (Solomon’s) rule are “**my** people over whom **I** have made you king” (v. 11b). In other words, the text envisages a theocratic ideal, in which both throne and kingdom belong to God and not the king. For the king is only a vice-regent.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it matters much how requests or prayers are made, for, in the mind of the Chronicler the manner in which a request is made and the purpose for

<sup>16</sup> See “*kābôd*” in Kittel & Friedrich, *TDNT*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 8:19; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6, 10; also 1 Kgs 5:19(Eng 5); Zech 6:13.

<sup>18</sup> See 1 Chr 17:14; 28:5-6; 29:23; 2 Chr 9:8; 13:4-8. This ideal is completely omitted in 1 Kgs 3:11.

which it is made could affect the decision of the giver (God) either ways; to grant or reject the request.

From God's response to Solomon's request (v. 12), one can adduce that in addition to fulfilling the request of Solomon there is another theological cliché, namely the blessing of the Lord makes rich and bestows honour. This is quite evident in both the wisdom and knowledge that Solomon requested and the additional, unasked-for gifts. All the gifts are entirely out of God's gratuitous favour —“wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honour, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like.” Because Solomon's spiritual and material gifts are of divine origin, the Chronicler portrays them in a positive light. In fact, they are truly Solomon's distinguishing marks. This view permeates our text regardless of other inherent dangers that may accompany or be associated with wealth (cf. Prov 18:11; 28:6, 11; also 11:28) and the fact that wealth is considered a relative good, inferior to many other gifts, such as good name (Prov 22:1), wisdom (Wis 7:8), health (Sir 30:14-16) and is transitory (cf. Job 27:19; Ps 49:17-18).

The message of the text is: both spiritual gifts (wisdom and knowledge) and material gifts (riches, possessions and honour) are good in themselves, and must be employed to advance the service of God, good leadership and the welfare of the people.

## **5. Lessons for Our Context**

For many reasons our text has much to communicate to the Nigerian situation. This is because ours is an environment where there is an overriding drive to acquire material wealth, most of the time to the total neglect of spiritual values. This is visible in the way many do their jobs and conduct their businesses, without ethical principles, i.e., without justice and honesty. The excessive desire for material wealth and the paraphernalia of honour associated with it is one of the major causes of the ills bedevilling our society. Indeed, people do not hesitate in the slightest opportunity to exhibit their personal endowments and the accolades thereof. Unfortunately, the situation is not even better among some spiritual leaders (men and women of God). Their prosperity evangelism propagates the idea that wealth is a sign of divine favour and blessing, while lack of it a curse. This has become for most of their adherents a great stimulus to be insistent in the pursuit of material wealth. Consequently, many churches and spiritual houses/homes are springing up in every nook and cranny of our towns and villages. What a booming industry!

This hydra-headed demon, pursuit of material wealth, has given rise to all kinds of crimes - bribery and corruption, stealing and looting of public funds, armed banditry, robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, etc. Moreover, it is very much connected with factors responsible for the oppression and suppression of the poor, the weak and the minorities of society, and with the alarming gap between the rich and the poor. Fundamentally, the rich build at the cost of the “blood” of or total neglect of the poor and the “nobodies” of society (cf. Jer 22:13-15; Mic 3:10; Hab 2:12). Hence there is an overall gross deficit in infrastructural and human development in the country. Blind pursuit of material wealth is not just an adult “dosage” in our society; even today many children abandon primary and secondary school education; young adults refuse to acquire any meaningful skill and become “area boys” all in the bid to become rich in material possession.

Such a scramble for and short cut to wealth is tacitly encouraged by the life-style of many people, even when it is devoid of all wisdom and knowledge. The belief is: all that militates against wealth, possession and honour is an attack against abundant, undisturbed and secure

life; it is a curse that must be quickly reversed. Therefore, every means must be employed to check it, including renouncing one's Christian faith,<sup>19</sup> becoming member of an occult or secret society, or involving oneself in criminal act. All this contrasts greatly with the manner Solomon came to his wealth and blessing; he humbly and earnestly asked for it. The way he ordered his needs, I suppose, should also instil in the reader the urgency to prioritise his or her values. Solomon's scale of endowments reminds one that it is the higher spiritual gifts that in fact attract subsequently the temporal gifts and not the reverse.

As we have earlier pointed out, Solomon had a good purpose for his request. He wanted to render useful service to God and humanity. This gives rise to a soul-searching question on what our leaders have been doing with the immense human and natural resources (wealth) of this nation; and on what many wealthy individuals and conglomerates operating in Nigeria have done with the riches with which they are blessed. It is yet to be ascertained how many of them truly employ their resources for the service of God and the good of all. Our text strongly underscores the fact that any use of one's gifts (material or spiritual) other than the purpose for which they should serve is tantamount to abuse of divine blessing.

In highlighting some of Solomon's characteristics, the Chronicler presents the new king as one who does not allow himself to be bloated by his father's wealth, fame and intimate relationship with God. Rather than anchor his success on his father's existing wealth and blessing, Solomon asked God for spiritual gifts, wisdom and knowledge, on assumption of office. Again this challenges the attitude of many Nigerians who put on airs of royalty because they believe they have inherited wealth and divine blessing by virtue (or rather accident) of their birth. Solomon's humble request on assumption of power agrees completely with Jesus' teaching: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31). This is an eternal truth that is valid even in our own time. It proposes to Nigerians an attitude that is unrivalled in the quest for wealth and divine blessing; for it curbs excessive ambition for spiritual and material gifts.

## 6. Conclusion

One can rightly conclude this paper by asserting that the Chronicler presents "wisdom and knowledge" as "midwife" of other resources, while material gifts —possessions, riches, and honour are given as the "handmaid" of wisdom and knowledge. In the case of Solomon, both are necessary for effective leadership and service to God and humanity. Therefore, wisdom and knowledge as well as other material goods could be obtained so long as they are truly of God. Ordinarily, however, the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge must precede that of other gifts. For wisdom and knowledge are essential for proper management of other resources/possessions. In fact, without them every system collapses, all possessions are lost; life becomes the prey of poverty and misery, even amidst plenty. The superiority of wisdom and knowledge to other material possessions is non-negotiable. This is succinctly couched in the Letter of Miss Willard's mother to her children when they were quite small:

The dearest wish of my heart, except that my children shall be Christians, is that they shall be well-educated. A good education will open the world to you as a knife opens an oyster. Riches will not do this, because riches have no power to brighten the intellect. An ox and a philosopher look out on the same world, and perhaps the ox has the stronger and handsomer eyes of the two, but the difference

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<sup>19</sup> Cases of double allegiance abound whereby some Christians consult traditional specialists and/or offer sacrifices to placate the gods, spirits and ancestors who are allegedly said to be responsible for lack of success in order to remove all hindrances to wealth and honour. See Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, *The Man of God in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications, 2007), 103,112,128.



between the brains behind the eyes makes a difference between the two beings that is wider than all the seas. I want my children's brains to be full of the best thoughts that great minds have had in all centuries; I want stored away in your little heads the story of what the world was doing before you came — who were its poets, its painters and philosophers, its inventors and law-givers. I want you to know what is in its noblest books, and what its men of science say about their study of the earth, the ocean, and the stars. I want you taught to be careful, and exact by your knowledge of figures; and, most of all, I want you to learn how to speak and write your own noble English [native] tongue, for without the power of expression you are like an aeolian harp when there is no breeze.<sup>20</sup>

This paper therefore recommends to Nigerians, particularly the younger generation to pursue and acquire good education (wisdom and knowledge) rather than engage in inordinate pursuit of material wealth. Like Solomon the people and the country will be better and richer for it.

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<sup>20</sup> This is taken from an unnamed Biblical Instructor writing on "Importance of Knowledge," See [http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the\\_prayer\\_of\\_king\\_solomon\\_for\\_wisdom\\_to\\_govern\\_his\\_peopl.htm](http://ibiblestudies.com/auth/hamilton/the_prayer_of_king_solomon_for_wisdom_to_govern_his_peopl.htm) Accessed 06/09/12.