Good morning. This is Pastor Soper and welcome to Week 39 of Know the Word. Today you read 1 Chronicles 22, 28 and 29:1-20. Nearly all of the material contained in the Book of I Chronicles is replicated in similar or even identical form some place else in the Scripture. You will remember that we briefly discussed this fact several days ago. It is for this reason that we have not read consecutively through this book of history. Just to refresh your memory, I will note again that 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the Babylonian exile, and constitute an effort to recite the whole history of Israel in a form that would be particularly relevant to post-exilic Israel. Most of what is contained in 1 Chronicles 1-21 is paralleled in the Books of Samuel, which recount the histories of Israel's last judge and first two kings. The long genealogies found in the first nine chapters, however, continue long past the death of David through the period of the kings of Israel and Judah, and even through several generations following the return from the Babylonian exile. Some of this material can also be found in other parts of Scripture, like the book of Nehemiah, and the genealogy of Christ found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The material found in 1 Chronicles 22 - 29, however, is unique to Chronicles and not found in the other historical parts of the Old Testament. Now, the first thing that I need to talk with you about is the part of this section (chapters 23 - 27) that I did not ask you to read today. If you will be digging deeper this morning, then you will read this section, but I think that in just a few words I can give you a quick summary of what those five chapters contain. David saw quite clearly that the establishment of the Ark in Jerusalem, and the building of a temple in which to permanently house the Ark, would both eliminate some of the traditional functions of the priests and Levites and create some new ones as well. In chapters 23-27, therefore, he divides the priests and Levites into groups -- some by family and some by function, and lays down an order for life in the temple that is about to be constructed. There will no longer be a need to dismantle, carry and re-assemble the tabernacle and the articles of Israel's worship, but there now will be a new need to clean, maintain and guard the magnificent new house of God that Solomon will build.

Less time in war and transit means more time for worship and adoration, and David (and curiously his generals) pick the musicians who will serve in this fashion.

The temple will have five gates and a storehouse. Six gatekeepers were posted at the main entrance of the east gate. There were four at each of the other gates and two at the storehouse. At all times these gatekeepers would be on duty. These chapters reinforce two major ideas. The first is that the life of Israel after David is, in his mind at least, going to revolve around worship, not warfare, and the temple will be the center of the national life of the whole nation. That is a very important idea.

Second, it is clear that David was very concerned that proper care be given to doing everything as carefully and as well as possible, precisely because it was the worship of God that was in view. I want to think with you about that for a moment or two, because I am very much afraid that we have lost something of the sense that God's people of old had about the importance of worship, and our attitude toward it.
In the days of Moses, and now here again as we stand on the threshold of the temple era of Israel, we have encountered a very detailed outline of how the Israelites are to proceed in their worship of God -- and the details come from God Himself. This all speaks against two attitudes that I have repeatedly encountered in the 21st century church.

One of the troubling attitudes that I have met from time to time in our churches is a kind of laissez-faire, "anything is good enough" approach that does not demand that we bring excellence, the very best that we have, to the service of the Lord. Near enough is good enough. Too many times, in too many places, we are willing to bring mediocrity to our worship of God. As I read the Old Testament, I am time and time again impressed by the fact that worship for them was serious business, and just as David said, ‘I will not offer to God a sacrifice that cost me nothing,’ so in worship they would be satisfied with nothing less than the very best that they had! The building had to be the best -- because it was for God. The music had to be the best -- it was offered to God. The best musicians were carefully trained and thoroughly prepared because this was for God. I do not find that attitude very often in our churches today.

The other idea that both perplexes and troubles me in our approach to worship is the idea that good worship is spontaneous worship and that which has been carefully planned ahead of time is less spiritual because it is less likely to be spirit-led and spirit-filled. That is an absurd idea, because it somehow presupposes that the Holy Spirit is more likely to "lead" five minutes before the event than five days or five months or five years. Friends, I will not deny that from time to time it may please the sovereign Spirit of God to change what we have planned on very short notice. He always has that right, but remember, He is the sovereign God and He knows five days, five months and five years ahead of time exactly what He wants to do and is just as capable of leading us in our planning as He is of leading us in spontaneous worship. More often than I would like to think, a desire for Spirit-led spontaneity has been nothing more than an excuse for a lack of planning and a slipshod approach to worship.

Well, I'd better get off my hobby-horse now and talk with you about chapters 22, 28 and 29.

The first thing we need to see about these chapters is that the building of the temple was a team effort between David the father and Solomon the son. God prevented David from building the temple because he was a man of war, with blood on his hands -- that task was to fall to Solomon. But Solomon was "young and inexperienced," so the task of planning the temple fell to David. There is no hint in the text that God's unwillingness to allow David to build His house is in anyway a repudiation of the king or a rebuke to him. What we do come away with is a sense that God raises up different people to accomplish different tasks. David was to conquer and plan; Solomon was to build. Both were part of God's purpose. Both were necessary. Both were used by God to achieve His ends.

One of the reasons for God's determination that the temple should not be built until the reign of Solomon is clearly connected to the long recognized goal of establishing the Israelites in the
Promised Land and giving them "rest." The key word is "rest." The theme of a "Sabbath rest" that provides opportunity for a special time of worship and enjoyment of the Lord is a very important one in Scripture. We discovered it in the creation account; we saw it in the Mosaic Law; we'll encounter it in the Book of Hebrews. In the reign of David, God brought the enemies of Israel into subjection and gave His people rest. In the reign of Solomon, the focus turned toward the temple and it should have also turned to worship.

It is quite clear from the Scripture we read this morning that Solomon was not only David's choice to succeed him, he was God's choice. You ought to know that after David and Solomon, not one of the kings of Judah or Israel is ever again identified as God's "choice."

The instructions to Solomon to build the temple were given to him privately by King David in chapter 22 and publicly in chapter 28. (When we read the Book of 1 Kings together we are going to read about an attempt to place a different son -- Adonijah -- on the throne. Since Chronicles does not mention this incident, it is difficult to know whether the public charge of chapter 28 happened before or after that rebellion. My belief is that it probably occurred afterward.

I'm sure you took note of David's charge, and his eloquent prayer. Verses 9 and 10 of chapter 28 capture my attention every time I read them. "Acknowledge the God of your father and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you for ever."

Did you see the enormous amount of wealth dedicated to the temple? It is almost overwhelming -- a hundred thousand talents of gold from the public treasury! The footnote in my Bible says that equals 3,750 tons of gold, with another 110 tons from David's private fortune and another 190 tons from the people -- that's over 4,000 tons of gold, and ten times as much silver. No wonder the splendor of Solomon's temple is legendary -- one more evidence that in the eyes of Israel nothing was too good for God!! Church buildings in our day tend to be rather utilitarian. We want to spend our money on ministry not buildings, but God showed no displeasure here with the desire of the people to honor Him with the very best they had!

This is Pastor Soper. You have a great day and I'll talk with you again tomorrow.
Good morning. This is Pastor Soper. Today we read the first two chapters of 1 Kings and finished the Book of 1 Chronicles. We have come to the end of David's life and seen the transition of power to Solomon.

1 and 2 Kings, like the books of Samuel and Chronicles, are actually one book. It was the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that first divided it into two books. Jewish tradition credits the authorship of these books to Jeremiah, but there is no textual evidence to support that view. In addition to drawing upon a knowledge of other Old Testament books, he had before him at least three books that we no longer have: The Book of the Annals of Solomon, The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel, and The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah.

Our plan this week will be to read the first few chapters of 1 Kings relating to the death of David and the beginning of Solomon's reign. Then we will break away to read some of the magnificent literature that Solomon has left us.

The passage that we read in 1 Kings today fills in some of the blank spots left by the Chronicles account we read yesterday. It tells us about Adonijah's attempt in David's last days to set himself up as king. Adonijah was the oldest surviving son of David. Amnon, the oldest son was slain by Absalom. David's second son died before that time probably of natural causes, and Absalom himself died in an ill-fated attempt to overthrow his father David. Adonijah was, in his mind, next in line to the throne, and he began, regardless of the plans of his father or the will of God, to move to secure that throne for himself. David was infirm, apparently very isolated and feeble, and Adonijah saw his chance.

Taking a leaf out of Absalom's book of self-exaltation, he got 50 men to run before his chariot. Just as we saw in the case of Absalom, David had never taken the necessary steps to stop him.

Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself shall be abased and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Well, Absalom and Adonijah, two sons who ‘would be kings,’ learned the truth of that spiritual law the hard way.

Joab and Abiathar -- two of David's closest confidants -- accepted the invitation of Adonijah to a banquet at which he has himself proclaimed king. They are drawn either wittingly or unwittingly into Adonijah's party. It is important to understand that there is no evidence to suggest that either man was ever disloyal to David himself, only that they guessed wrong about who would emerge from the potential power struggle between Adonijah and Solomon. It is easier to attach blame to Abiathar. He was a priest and presumably could have inquired of God or his prophet to determine the choice of God. He didn't, and he chose the wrong side. Because Abiathar is a priest he does not die, but is placed in a kind of exile, stripped of his power.
Nathan and Zadok choose the right side and remain in positions of authority under the reign of the new king.

Solomon's policy with regard to his father's servants who followed Adonijah, and his father's enemies, like Shimei, seems to be to "give them enough rope and let them hang themselves." Adonijah and Shimei oblige him. Joab, probably because of his military connections, is treated more aggressively. He is executed by Benaiah. Did you notice that both Adonijah and Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar? There is an allusion to this practice as far back as Exodus 21 when God says, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death." While that is primarily a reference to the cities of refugee that were created, that last sentence about taking them away from the altar seems to be the origin of this practice of claiming sanctuary.

When someone grasped the horns of the altar, they were asking for the protection of God until the case was judged. This prevented excessive blood revenge. In the Middle Ages this practice was still being carried on, as suspected felons would often flee to a church to claim "sanctuary." Adonijah's ambition would not let him rest, and so he schemed to claim Abishag, the concubine of David, as his own. That move was probably calculated to strengthen a subsequent claim to the throne. Solomon certainly interpreted it that way and Adonijah's fate was sealed.

In my outside reading this week, I came upon a little classification system in a book on 1 Kings and Chronicles written by Irving Jensen. He writes that the history of Israel is easily divided into four periods, each of which can be remembered by a word beginning with the letter "C":

The **Camp** period covers over 600 years from the time of Abraham through the life of Moses, and takes the nation to the edge of the Promised Land. It is described in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses).

The **Commonwealth** period covers about 360 years and is described in the books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth.

The third period is the **Crown** period and it covers about 460 years and is described by Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. That of course is the period we are now studying.

Finally the **Captivity** period lasts 160 years and is described in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

If you can remember these four "C"s -- Camp, Commonwealth, Crown, and Captivity -- you will go a long way toward "organizing" your Old Testament knowledge.

Let's take the rest of our time this morning to see if we can recall some of the most significant people in the life of David, the king of Israel.
I'll try to classify them by type. See how many of these individuals, who played prominent roles in the life of David the King, you can remember. First, let's think about the prophets with whom David had so much to do. The first and most important of them is, of course, Samuel, who anointed David to be king after God removed his blessing from the life of Saul. Then later, after David was king and Samuel was dead, we meet Nathan the prophet, who shook his finger in the king's face and said, "You are the man." There is also Gad -- a prophet of God who occasionally brought the Word of the Lord to the great king of Israel.

There are two Philistines who play prominent roles in David's career. The first is Goliath who died at the hand of David in a climatic encounter on the battlefield. The other is Achish, the king of the Philistine city of Gath, where David on two occasions fled to avoid the wrath of Saul.

The family of Saul is important. There are six members of the royal family who are important in David's story: Saul himself; his son Jonathan - David's best friend; Saul's other son Ish-Bosheth, the rival king; Michal, the daughter of King Saul, who became David's first wife, and was reclaimed by David when he came to power over all of Israel; finally, there is Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan to whom kindness is extended out of respect for the memory of his father. Less important but significant enough to show up three times in the biblical accounts is Shimei, Saul's relative, who tried to curse David and was treated mercifully by the king.

In addition to Michal, David had many other wives, but only two of them play anything like a primary role in his life. They are Abigail, the widow of the fool Nabal, and Bathsheba, the "widow" of the Hittite warrior Uriah.

These wives produced many children. Five of them need to be remembered -- Amnon the oldest; Tamar the half-sister who he raped and because of whom he later died; Absalom, the vengeful brother of Tamar who later tried to usurp his father's throne; Adonijah, next in the line of succession, who, like Absalom, coveted the throne of Israel for himself and like his arrogant brother lost it. Finally, there is Solomon, the wise son whose story we will take up next.

The mighty men of David -- his military leaders are prominent from time to time, and always are lurking right behind the scenes, ready to do whatever is necessary to establish and maintain the Davidic kingdom. Of these, the most important is his guard Joab who is calculating, vengeful, decisive and loyal to David (if not to Solomon.) The "three" and the “thirty” are the two most celebrated groups of soldiers. (Uriah the Hittite was one of the thirty.) Abner was also a military man of note -- he was Saul's general. Joab killed him.

Two priests are prominent. First, Abiathar, who fled after the massacre of priests by Saul at Nob, bringing to David the ephod of God. Later there was Zadok, who followed David's wish, (and God's), and helped to establish Solomon in David's place.

Last we ought to mention Ahithophel, David's counselor, who went over to Absalom, and Hushai.
David's friend who produced the advice that thwarted Ahithophel and led him to suicide. If you can remember those 23 people along with Jesse, David's father, you will have a fantastic "handle" on the life and times of David the King.

This is Pastor Soper. You have a great day and I'll talk with you again tomorrow.
Good morning. This is Pastor Soper. Today we read five more of David's Psalms (57, 6, 7, 9, 30). As we have come to the end of the life of King David, I wanted for us to listen again today to his own words, by reading a selection of Psalms written for different reasons, at different times of his life. As far as we can tell, David wrote at least 75 of the Psalms. (The Old Testament attaches his name to 73 and the New Testament to another two.) Of these 75, we have now read 43, and an additional 12 that are not connected to the name of David.

I asked you to read Psalm 57 first because it is an early Psalm of David, written in the period before the kingdom had passed to him, while he was hiding in a cave (probably Adullam -- perhaps the cave at En-Gedi). Like so many of David's Psalms from this period it is a prayer, a cry for deliverance out of the midst of a terribly dangerous position.

I'll spare you the singing today, but some of you at least found the origin of this Psalm in one of the choruses we often sing. "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth" (v. 5 and 11). That is repeated twice in this Psalm. Now when you sing that chorus you'll think of David hiding in a cave when he wrote it -- in fear of his life -- with the army of Saul perhaps very near the opening of the cave. He is praying for deliverance, but even more fervently he is asking for the glory of God to be made manifest.

I have said this before and I'm sure I'll say it again, but real godly leaders always have a passion for the glory of God right at the top of their working agendas. It's, "save me, O Lord," but even more it's, "Be exalted, O God -- save me so I can praise and bless your name." Lots of people want God to deliver them from the tough spots of life, so they can get on with their lives and their priorities. David wanted God to save him so that he could get on with God's priorities, and with David's top priority, that of glorifying the name of his God. When David was in trouble he knew that help could only come from God, and he could only ask for it if his motive was a right one.

Like so many other Psalms, this one has two distinct parts: the first stanza is a plea for help and the second is the song of praise for the help that God has sent.

The next Psalm we read, Psalm 6, is a very different kind of Psalm. It too is a plea for help, but the circumstances engendering it are very different. This is a prayer for healing from sickness, and it is possible, maybe even probable, that in David's mind the sickness is the result of sin. Hence he prays, "Do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath." It is by no means true that all sickness comes upon us because of sin. Jesus certainly did not believe that -- (the clearest indication of that will come when we see Him heal the blind man in John's Gospel.) But sickness can come because of sin and because of the connection that appears in this Psalm, it has been listed as one of the Penitential Psalms.

We spoke not long ago about the progress of revelation with regard to the Old Testament understanding of ‘life after death.’ Psalm 6 reflects the incomplete knowledge of the Old
Testament saints. "No one remembers you when he is dead," David writes, "Who praises you from the grave?" It is right to pray in times of trouble -- even when the cause of the trouble is my own sin -- and like Psalm 57, this Psalm ends on a note of confidence; God does answer the prayers of His people.

Psalm 7 gives us an historical introduction, but we have no other Scriptural reference to this Cush. Since he was a Benjaminite, it is reasonable to surmise that he was a supporter of Saul and for that reason persecuted David. Once again, an opening plea is followed by a confident assertion of faith. God will be the shield of the upright and that will evoke the joyful prayers of thanksgiving from the people of the Lord.

Psalm 9 is different than the others that we have read thus far today, in that it begins not with a plea for God's help, but a shout of praise, because God has given David victory over his enemies. There are just two things that I want you to notice with me about this Psalm. First, just as in the two Psalms we have already discussed, there is a strong appeal here for the Lord to mete out justice. David sees his cause as the one which is pure and upright. He attributes his victory to the rightness of his cause. The second thing I want you to notice is David's observation that "the nations have fallen into the pit they have dug" is becoming very, very familiar to us. We have seen that figure of speech four or five times now in the Psalms. It is one of David's favorite expressions.

Behind all of this, of course, is the unstated conviction that God is the righteous judge of all the earth. He keeps strict accounts; He doesn't miss a single thing; and He will right all wrongs in the end.

The last Psalm I asked you to read this morning was Psalm 30. It is a Psalm that David wrote at the end of his life and passed on to his son Solomon to be kept for use at the dedication of the temple, which Solomon was going to build. David gave Solomon all the building materials. He gave him the blueprints, and he even gave him the songs to sing. God wouldn't let David build the house, but no one could say that David didn't make a rather large contribution to the project.

The first few verses are certainly reflective of one of David's own experiences of deliverance, but later on in Israel's history, this Psalm came to be used to remind Israel of their experience in exile. The basic message of this Psalm is very clear, and in some ways it provides us with an adequate summary of the entire life of the sweet singer of Israel. We could put it this way: "Lord, I owe everything to you. When I was down you lifted me up. Your presence and your pleasure are the only things that really matter. When I am conscious of your favor, Lord, I cannot be shaken, but when I do not have an awareness of that presence, then I cannot stand. Lord, you have turned my wailing into dancing."

David wrote many more Psalms, and before we have finished our pilgrimage through God's Word, we will have read them all. They are models for us, reminding us that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, the appropriate responses is prayer and praise. If we are in trouble, we ought to pray. If we need to repent, we must pray. If we are fearful, prayer is our very
best antidote. When we are confused, prayer is the path to clarity. When depressed, prayer can turn our wailing into dancing, and when victory is our lot, and we want to rejoice and worship, prayer is the highest form of worship and the worthiest method of praise. Paul wrote the words, but David lived the reality: "Pray without ceasing."

There is an old hymn that begins with these words, "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire. The Christian's native air..." David could have written that song too. One of the reasons that even after colossal failures his heart stayed tender and warm toward God is that David knew how to pray.

Because David is one of the three most important people in the Old Testament (Abraham and Moses are the other two), I want to make certain that I do as much as I can to fix the main outline of his life in our heads. That is why I concluded yesterday's talk with a review of the 24 most important people in David's story. I want to finish our time today by reviewing with you some of the most important places mentioned in the story of David. If you are digging deeper today, you will want to locate them on a map so that you can better visualize the events in the life of this great man of God.

Bethlehem, of course, is where it all begins. It is the birthplace of David -- the city of David. It was in Bethlehem that right about age 17 Samuel anointed David to be king over Israel in an act of prophecy.

The next important place in David's life was Gath, for that is the city from which Goliath came (and the city of the Philistines to which David would later flee on two occasions for safety from Saul). Gibeah was the capital of Saul, and the place to which David went to sing for the mad king. It is also the place from which he had to flee for his life after Jonathan's arrow overshot its mark. Nob is where David sought help from Ahimelech the high priest, who paid with his life for helping David. Adullam and En-Gedi are the locations of two caves that gave him shelter during his years of flight from Saul. The forest of Hereth and the wilderness of Ziph also gave him shelter during this time. He rescued the city of Keilah from the Philistines, but the inhabitants of that city would not protect him from Saul. It was at Carmel that he met the fool Nabal and the wise and beautiful Abigail. Ziklag was a refuge for David and his men, though on one occasion it was plundered by the Amalekites. Blaming David for their trouble, his own men almost stoned him there. Mt. Gilboa, all the way up north is important because that is where Saul died, and shortly thereafter, David was anointed king over Judah in Hebron in the south, where he reigned for seven years. The man of Jabesh Gilead rescued the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from across the Jordan River. After consolidating the nation, David took Jerusalem from the Jebusites and named it his capital. It is to Jerusalem that David finally brought the Ark from its temporary resting place at Kiriath-Jearim. I'm sure you have all those places down pat in your mind.

This is Pastor Soper. You have a great day and I'll talk with you again tomorrow.
Good morning. This is Pastor Soper. Today you read 1 Kings 3 and 4 and 2 Chronicles 1. I have some good news for you this morning. I sat down last night with my calculator and figured out that we have now finished reading a little more than 40% of the Bible. That is fantastic. When we began this exercise together almost 40 weeks ago, I wondered if you would stay with me, or if after just a few weeks you would quit because it was too hard and required too much discipline. To tell you the truth, there have been times through the 40 weeks when I have wondered if I would stay with us because preparing these recordings takes so much discipline. Well, here we are. You are still going strong and I am still going. I cannot tell you how proud I am of what you have done and how excited I am about what God is going to do in your life because you are beginning to really "Know the Word."

I had originally intended to take you back to the New Testament for a few days when we finished studying the life of David. We are going to postpone that just long enough to take a look first at the life of Solomon and some of his writings; then when we get to the point at which the kingdom divides, we'll move back into the New Testament for a while.

Now there are a number of items to which we need to direct our attention today. First of all, on the lighter side, I'll bet you never knew before today that Ben-Hur was a real Biblical character. Did you see his name in chapter 4? Of course it is not the same Ben-Hur that the movie is about. He was a charioteer during the days of Christ (and by the way a totally fictional character, though General Lew Wallace, his creator, became a Christian while writing the story). The Ben-Hur of 1 Kings 4 was a real District Governor under King Solomon. The "ben" of Ben-Hur means "son of." Ben-Hur is the son of Hur. "Benjamin" means son of my right hand. So much for biblical trivia...

The very first thing we are told about Solomon is that he married the daughter of Egypt's pharaoh, and by that act secured a military treaty, an alliance, with Egypt. Probably it was the daughter of Pharaoh Siamon, one of the last rulers of Egypt's 21st dynasty. Since we know from Egyptian history that it was highly unusual for an Egyptian princess to be married to anyone who was not Egyptian, there is evidence in this of how important Israel had become under David and continued to be under Solomon. Such an alliance with one of the most powerful nations in the world would have insured peace along the southern boundaries of Israel and allowed Solomon to focus his attention elsewhere.

What looked great from the human side, however, carried with it a terrible liability -- with Egypt's princess came Egypt's religion, and in order to accommodate his new wife, Solomon apparently left the door open for her to worship her own gods. In any case, he allowed the practice of using pagan altars on the high places, which were meant for the worship of the God of Israel. I want to stop here for a moment to try to clarify the worship situation before the building of the temple. The Canaanites, who the Israelites drove out, had worshipped Baal by placing altars on high hills. After the conquest, but before the temple was built, the Israelites took over at least some of those sites for the worship of Jehovah. This practice is not condoned, in fact, it is condemned by Scripture, but in
fact it happened. At other sites, the Israelites were allowed by God to build altars for true worship of God. The primary one was at Gibeon, where the tabernacle of the Lord was still located awaiting the construction of the temple. These places were also called "high places". That is why on the one hand chapter 3 says Solomon followed the Lord except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places, indicating God's disapproval of the practice, but in the next verse it tells us that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at one of the high places, apparently indicating God's pleasure with him. The apparent discrepancy disappears when you understand that some of the high places (including, and especially Gibeon) were approved by God, while others either had been originally used for pagan worship and were now being used by the Israelites for the worship of the Lord -- without God's approval -- OR possibly they were still being used for the worship of gods other than Jehovah. It is certainly true that Solomon both tolerated and even encouraged "syncretism" in the religion of Israel. "Syncretism," by the way, is what happens when you "mix" pure theology and practice with ideas and practices that come from other religions -- in this case, the religions of his many foreign wives.

In the fourth chapter there was another little statement that some of you may missed. It tells us that Solomon kept 12,000 horses. It caught my eye because of a verse in the Book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 17, in a fascinating passage which predicts that the Israelites will want to have a king like other nations, it says when you do have a king, "the king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself -- he must not take many wives. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." Remember that passage because Solomon in time will violate all three of those criteria and it will bring him great trouble. The reason for the divine prohibition -- Psalm 20.

At the beginning of his reign, however, Solomon does follow the Lord. He starts well and God is pleased with what He sees.

If God gave you one wish and said, ‘Take anything you want,’ I wonder what you would ask for. Solomon asked for a discerning spirit. He asked for wisdom. The "wisdom of Solomon" has become legendary. But just exactly what is wisdom? One author says that wisdom is the ability "to distinguish right and wrong and to decide and govern. It is based upon a heart and mind that listens to and obeys God."

The Book of Proverbs will have a great deal to say about the subject of wisdom, but for now it will suffice for us to remember that Solomon says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

The example that is given here of Solomon's wisdom in action is a well known one. When two prostitutes appear before him, each claiming that the one surviving child is her own, Solomon feigns an inability to decide and proposes cutting the child in two, eliciting a plea from the real mother to award the baby to her rival. Thus Solomon identifies the real mother by her love.

There is an important principle in evidence here. Because Solomon asks for that which is righteous and honors God, God is pleased not only to give him what he asks for, but other things as well -- honor and riches. This is the same principle in action that we find in Jesus' words, "Seek ye first the
kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you..." It happened to Solomon and it will happen to you as well. When our priorities are right, when we ask God for what He wants to give us, we often will find ourselves blessed beyond all measure in other areas of our life as well.

There is another sign that Solomon was indeed a very wise man. That is found in chapter 4 in his orders with regard to the delegation of authority in Israel. That too is a part of wisdom. Unwise men and unwise leaders sometimes attempt to do everything that needs to be done all by themselves. To that I will plead guilty over and over again. But wise leaders place a very high priority upon delegation. It's a way of working smarter, not harder, and it is God's way even, and maybe especially, within the kingdom!!

A few minutes ago we talked about the fact that the Book of Deuteronomy prohibited Solomon, or any king of Israel for that matter, from the multiplication of horses and wives and I have just now had a thought that perhaps explains why horses and money at least are on that list of prohibitions. Remember the verse back in Psalm 20? "Some trust in horses and some trust in chariots but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." I think that verse may have the key to why God prohibited the kings of Israel from multiplying horses. Horses meant chariots and indeed the account here very explicitly tells us that the reason Solomon kept 12,000 horses was he kept 4,000 chariots. God didn't want Solomon to depend upon an army, to think that is what would keep him in power or make him strong in the eyes of the nations. God wanted Solomon to depend on God. "Some trust in horses and some trust in chariots but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God." The Psalm goes on to say, "They will fall down but we will rise up and stand firm."

There is just a little more that I want to share with you this morning. It is the tremendous extent of Solomon's kingdom. From the Euphrates River in the east and north, far to the north of Syria, to the border of Egypt in the south and west, Solomon reigned over an much as "50,000 square miles." If you look at a map of Israel at any other time in its history, that is truly amazing. God blessed David and the blessing and benediction continued through the reign of Solomon his son.

This is Pastor Soper. You have a great day and I'll talk with you again tomorrow.
Good morning. This is Pastor Soper. Today you read, as we conclude Week 39 of Know the Word, Proverbs chapters 1 - 4. Now the very first thing that I need to do is to explain why your reading today was a little longer than usual. Yesterday we read about the beginning of Solomon's reign and about the remarkable request he made of God for wisdom. God granted that request and the 'wisdom of Solomon' became known far and wide. In fact, if we want to describe a very wise person today, we say he has the ‘wisdom of Solomon,’ for Solomon was the wisest man in all the world, and apart from Jesus Christ Himself, the wisest man who ever lived.

According to the passage we read yesterday, Solomon wrote 3,000 Proverbs expressing that wisdom, over a very wide range of topics. Only a small percentage of those Proverbs are actually included in the Book of Proverbs, in fact; only 800 bearing his name appear here. These presumably are the best of those proverbs. You need to know that there are other Biblical proverbs that are not found in this Book. They are scattered throughout the Bible -- 1 Samuel 24:13 contains one; Ezekiel 18:1 and 2 another; Matthew 23:24; Luke 4:23; John 16:25; 2 Peter 2:2. See, a proverb is simply a short sentence drawn from long experience. It is a proper mixture of what someone has called "horse sense and "holy sense," characterized by shortness, sense and salt. It is the wisdom of many and the wit of one; in essence, the ability to see ourselves and the world in the way God sees, and in a way that will be very memorable.

Perhaps Solomon was the headmaster of a real school. We don't know about that. He certainly took the opportunity God gave him to learn about many, many things and to share that knowledge with people who came to listen to him lecture and talk. The reason, however, I asked you to read four chapters instead of a smaller amount today is because the first four chapters of the Book of Proverbs are devoted to one topic -- and that topic is the topic of wisdom.

The Book mentions the words knowledge and wisdom many times. In fact the word wisdom is used, I think, 61 different times in the Book of Proverbs. Knowledge is the ability to acquire facts; wisdom is the ability to rightly apply those facts to the business of living.

Now while the Proverbs are sometimes loosely strung together, and while, as you have already experienced in the few chapters of the Book of Proverbs we have already read, there is sometimes a jumping from one subject to another to another to yet another in the course of one chapter, there is one loose idea that ties the whole Book of Proverbs together. It's the picture of a young man starting out in life, and there are two choices that are constantly confronting him -- two paths that he can walk, two schools of wisdom and "unwisdom" bidding for his favor and sending him their literature, as it were. One is the 'school of wisdom' and the other is the 'school of unwisdom,' the school of fools.

Wisdom is enjoined upon this young man starting out, though we are told in the very first chapter that the Book of Proverbs is also good for wise old men, because it will give them the opportunity to become even wiser. Chapter 2, verse 8 tells us that wisdom will protect her students. Chapter 3,
verses 5 and 6, those memorable verses, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight," assures us that wisdom will direct her students. Chapter 4 helps us to understand, in verse 18, that wisdom will even perfect her students. The subject of wisdom then is the subject about which we are reading in these chapters today.

Let me give you just a little more general information about the Book of Proverbs. There are eight main sections. There is a general introduction on wisdom, chapters 1 - 9. There are six collections of sayings in chapters 10 – 31 -- the beginning of 31 -- and then there is an acrostic poem on the perfect wife that we hear read every Mother's Day in chapter 31, verses 10-31. It is pretty well agreed that the contents of the Proverbs belong to the days of Israel's first kings and Solomon is the author of a good bit of the Book, but not all of it. King Hezekiah organized some of the editorial work according to chapter 25. He reigned about 250 years after Solomon. The Book, as we have it now, was finalized, at the latest, according to tradition, by a man named Ben-Seriah, the son of Seriah, about 180 B.C. A great bit of the vast storehouse of knowledge that Solomon acquired comes through as we read the Book of Proverbs. He talks about plants and about animals and about birds and about insects. He spends some time studying ants, you will remember, and reptiles and fish. It is all here, little pithy epigrams drawn from his observations on nature, meant to teach us about spiritual truth. Men of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. They were sent by all the kings of the earth who heard about his great wisdom.

Interestingly enough, we learned yesterday that Solomon married one of the daughters of the Pharaoh. There is a collection of Proverbs in Egypt called the teaching of Amanomopay, (sp) which closely parallels Proverbs chapters 22 and 23, and Solomon was almost certainly aware of that. He even drew then from the wisdom of other nations. He worked under the inspiration of God so that we are guaranteed that what he wrote is true and it is what God wants written. But he, like Luke and so many others, had other sources before him when he did his work. Everything that is here, however, focuses on the importance of gaining wisdom, and living by wisdom, so that we can have and experience the blessing of God.

Remember what I said one time not very long ago about the Book of Proverbs? We need to understand that the Book of Proverbs is dealing with precepts -- not promises. That is to say, that when we read the Proverbs, we need to keep in mind that they are generalizations; they state what is generally, but not necessarily invariably, true. They do not deny there are exceptions, but exceptions are not within the scope of proverbial sayings. For instance, the Book of Proverbs says that those who live by God's standards will prosper in the world and live a long life. That is generally true. But it is not an unqualified promise. Job and Jesus show that we do not always prosper, at least not in all points in our life, and Jesus did not live a long life. The precept, however, remains totally accurate and totally true – precepts, not promises. Remembering that will save you from a good deal of confusion when things in your life don't seem to match the teaching of the Book of Proverbs.

According to the prologue, Proverbs was written to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and
discretion to the young, to make wise men wiser -- but over and over again there are references to "my son," and I wonder if Solomon might not have been writing this as a primer for one or for many of his own physical sons. He emphasizes instructing the young and guiding them into a happy and prosperous life. Indeed, I can think of no better Book in the Bible to give to a young man who is beginning on his way than the Book of Proverbs. Acquiring wisdom and knowing how to deal with the pitfalls of folly will lead to health and success. Throughout this Book of practical advice in the art of living, however, there is this constant undercurrent of teaching us to rely upon a fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; that is reverential fear, not the sort of terror that makes us quake in the corner of the room and shake. Reverence for God is the path to life and security. People have to trust the Lord, not trust themselves.

There was a reference in chapter 3 to the ‘tree of life.’ It calls to mind the Garden of Eden, and basically says that the wisdom that is given here, if applied, will bring us to a place in which we are greatly blessed by God. Right after that allusion to the Garden of Eden, Solomon says, “By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations. By understanding, He set the heavens in place. By His knowledge the deeps were divided and the clouds let drop the dew.” Wisdom governed all the actions of the Lord in creating the world, in creating us, and in establishing the way in which we ought to live our lives. By paying attention to that same wisdom, we line ourselves up with the God who created us and with His purpose and plan for our lives.

I am going to leave you to gather your own pearls from the first four chapters of the Book of Proverbs. I am going to ask you to discover two or three verses that are especially meaningful to you and if you are digging deeper this morning to memorize those verses.

I simply want to make one more statement and then we are going to close out Week 39 of Know the Word. That last statement is to recognize that according to the Book of Proverbs, the chief preoccupation of the life of a young person ought to be not the securing of financial resources that will make possible an easy and comfortable life here on earth, but the acquisition of wisdom. Get wisdom; get understanding. Don't forsake wisdom; she will protect you. Love her and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme. Therefore get wisdom though it costs all you have; get understanding. Esteem her and she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you. Wisdom is understanding what God says about life and then obeying it. The getting of wisdom is the most important thing that we can do in our lives. I cringe when I see the way that many people, especially young people, spend their lives, and the priorities they establish for themselves. According to the wisdom of the wisest man who ever lived on the face of the earth, the highest priority we can have is the getting of wisdom, and understanding and an obedience of what God says about our lives. Make that the priority and Solomon says you will never ever live to regret it.

This is Pastor Soper. You have a great weekend and I'll talk with you again next Monday.