

GOD WITH US
Part 4: The Life and Writings of Solomon
Wisdom and Wander – 1Kings 1-11

Message 3 – Solomon’s Rise and Fall
1Kings 10-11

Introduction

As we study these summary chapters of Solomon's life, the haunting question is: What went wrong and what can we learn from a man that had such *wisdom*, yet combined with a *wandering* heart? We've all seen modern examples of people who have, through poor choices, squandered tremendous potential and made a ruin of their lives. In Solomon's day, there was no one more richly blessed and gifted than he was. His father, David, handed him a massive, united kingdom; Solomon did not have to fight a single war. He was given a strong spiritual heritage, being the son of "the man after God's own heart." Further, at the beginning of his reign he was given the unusual opportunity to ask God for *any* one thing. He asked for *wisdom to rule well* since he was only around 20 years old. In response, God gave to Solomon a supernatural gift of wisdom covering *every* aspect of life. Solomon had unparalleled potential to glorify God through his life and to help Israel fulfill her unique national purpose to be a witness for God to the world. He began well, but sadly over the years his heart wandered and he squandered everything entrusted to him. ***"Above all else, guard your heart, for it determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:23).*** Solomon failed to guard his heart and, as a result, he squandered his great God-given potential.

A Responsive Heart Should Flow from Extravagant Love

"Since you have asked for wisdom... I will give it to you, and moreover I will give you riches and honor... 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" (1Kings 3:10-14).

The extravagant love of God was poured out on Solomon in the form of incredible wisdom, earthly fame and fortune of all kinds. God pours out such love, waiting to be loved in return. The greatest response of gratitude for Solomon was to constantly remember who had given him all of these privileges, and most

importantly to be vigilant to CULTIVATE HIS LOVE FOR GOD who had loved him first (2Samuel 12:24,25). Sadly, and subtly, Solomon used his position and power to acquire *wealth, possessions and women* far beyond what God had ordained. Although his life looked right on the outside, other loves in his heart were quietly driving him to disobey God's commands and warnings that he should have been learning and heeding with a holy fear of the consequences. (See **God's warnings through Moses – Deuteronomy 6:10-15.**)

During the first 20 years of his reign, Solomon specifically disobeyed commands God gave to Israel's kings (see *Deuteronomy 17:16-20*):

1. The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get them (Dt.17:16).

'Solomon accumulated... 12,000 horses... which were imported from EGYPT' (1Kgs 10:26-28).

2. He must not take many foreign wives, or his heart will be led astray (Dt.17:17). ***'He had 700 wives of royal birth...and his wives led him astray' (1Kgs 11:3).***

3. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold (Dt.17:17). ***'The weight of gold yearly was 666 talents-\$20,000,000...not including the revenue from the traders and foreign kings. He made 500 shields of gold...his throne was overlaid with gold...' 'the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones' (1Kgs 10:14-18,27).***

Solomon also disrespected King of Hiram who had lavishly provided much of the materials and skilled workers to fulfill the mandate to build the temple and palace the 1st 20 years. He gave to Hiram cities that were basically worthless.

"Solomon gave 20 towns to Hiram, King of Tyre, in Galilee, because he had supplied him with all the cedar and pine and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went to see the towns, he was not pleased with them. 'What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?' And he called them the Land of Cabul - good-for-nothing. Now Hiram had sent 120 talents (4 1/2 tons) of gold" (1Kgs 9:10-14).

When someone shows you extravagant love, what is your response? Do you take it for granted with an entitlement spirit? OR- Do you seek to love, honor and show gratitude to the giver, who has lavishly loved you without obligation? It is an insult to do otherwise. God's LOVE is free and extravagant, but our human heart is prone to selfishly feel that the blessings are ours to own. We often feel entitled to dictate the outcome, and stretch the boundaries. Are you personally abusing blessings that have been lovingly poured out on you? Ask those who know you well, if you want an honest answer.

The Queen of Sheba visits Solomon: 10:1-13

Earlier we were told that the kings of the earth were flocking to hear Solomon's wisdom, ranking him wiser even than Egypt:

"Solomon's wisdom was greater...than all the wisdom of Egypt (4:30). All the kings of the earth sought an audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart" (2Chron. 9:23; 1Kings 4:34;10:24).

The visit of the Queen of Sheba provides an example of one such visit of a foreign monarch, and the huge impact upon her heart.

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with difficult questions. So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones" (10:1,2).

The queen not only heard the *wisdom* of Solomon; she also observed the magnificence of his palaces, the manner in which his household operated, even "*the stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord.*" Seeing all of this glory, "*she was overwhelmed*" (10:5 – NIV).

Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and saw it with my own eyes." And indeed, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness" (10:6-9).

The visiting queen *gave GOD the glory* for all of Solomon's success. She herself had great insight into WHY Solomon was so blessed and successful (1Kings 10:9). His GOD had blessed him. We may wonder if comments like these, coming from foreign leaders, made any impact on Solomon's heart. Here, after 20+ years of his reign, God sent a foreign queen to *remind him of WHY* he had been so extravagantly blessed.

1. God had delighted in Solomon.
2. God had placed him on the throne of Israel.
3. God made Solomon king because of His eternal love for Israel.
4. Solomon was to maintain justice and righteousness.

God often uses unexpected messengers to remind us of His work in our lives and the blessings He has bestowed upon us. We so easily become forgetful, and may even take for granted all that He has done for us (or become bitter that He has not done more). Has God sent you an unexpected messenger to remind you of His great love for you? Or, maybe the opposite question should be asked: Can you be that unexpected messenger of God's love for someone else who has lost sight of God's great love for them?

The visits of these many kings and queens to Solomon fits in beautifully with the whole point of Israel's existence as a nation: to represent the character of Yahweh (God) to the world (Exodus 19:5,6). It was happening in Solomon's glory days. God was fulfilling His word to Solomon that HE had promised in his dream (1Kings 3:5-15). The world WAS seeing the character of God revealed in the wisdom and ways of Solomon and his people.

The queen exchanged an extraordinary amount of gifts with Solomon and then departed to her own country.

With PRIVILEGE comes RESPONSIBILITY. Jesus said: "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). We are held responsible for what we have been given. God expects that we use our privileges well to glorify Him and benefit others. What privileges have you been given? Education, athletics, music, artistry, gifts of leadership, wealth, opportunity to travel, spiritual gifts and natural talents, etc. When people praise you, try answering "Thank you, but I give GOD the glory for these talents and the opportunities I have had to develop them. I know that without Him I would not be where I am today".

(There is uncertainty as to the precise location of Sheba. Jesus referred to this woman simply as “the Queen of the South” [Matthew 12:42]. Many extra-Biblical sources support the theory that the Queen of Sheba was from Ethiopia. The long-standing Ethiopian legend goes well beyond the biblical account of the queen’s visit to Solomon by stating that she had a child from Solomon and, as a result, the entire dynasty of Ethiopian kings were ‘sons of Solomon’ and heirs to God’s blessings. They also believe that the sacred Ark of the Covenant was at some point taken to Ethiopia, and that it is still there today, in an unknown location. Many Ethiopian churches have symbolic “Arks” that are consecrated by church leaders, thus making the place of worship truly holy. In contrast to these Ethiopian legends, some scholars think that it is more likely that Sheba was located in Southwestern Arabia. The precise location of Sheba remains a mystery, and is not critical to our understanding and application of the biblical account of the queen’s visit).

Solomon’s unparalleled fame and glory: 10:23-29

“So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. The whole world sought audience with Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. Every man brought a gift- articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year” (10:23-25).

God is always seeking to make Himself known to the world. And His method is to use people to convey His message to other people. This is why Jesus called His followers “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Similarly, the apostle Paul described the early Christians as “ambassadors of Christ” and “stars shining in the world.” God wants to use YOU to represent HIM to the people in your sphere of influence. He WILL shine out through your life of integrity- your actions, your values, your responses, your words, your relationships, your character, your works . . . through ALL of you, if you desire it. Think about your own life right now, and your own sphere of influence. WHO is able to see and hear wise words and actions in your life that bring GLORY to GOD and put HIM on display?

Solomon's fall: 11:1-8

The 11th chapter of 1Kings opens with surprising and sad words concerning Solomon:

“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love” (11:1,2).

Solomon had not only been collecting wealth and wisdom . . . but somewhere along the way he began collecting women from every nation. The text specifies that he had 700 wives and princesses, along with another 300 concubines. The most telling line is the last one: *Solomon held fast to them in love*. Foreign women were the first love of Solomon's heart (starting with the Princess of Egypt - 1Kgs. 3:1). *Pleasing them* was his primary preoccupation.

“For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (11:4).

Solomon not only loved these women; but he caved in to the desires of their hearts to be able to worship their own idols in and around Jerusalem. Furthermore, Solomon *himself* joined his wives in the worship of these idols. He did not remain loyal to the Lord; rather, he built worship sites for these other gods and then participated in the pagan worship rituals.

God's judgment upon Solomon: 11:9-13

“Since you have not kept My covenant and have disobeyed My decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. And even so, I will not take away the entire kingdom; I will let him be king of one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, My chosen city” (11:11-13).

Imagine . . . if many years ago America had a president that so incurred the anger of the Lord that God decided to split the “United” States into two separate countries – north and south –

permanently. Imagine, further, that the majority of the states went with the north and formed an entirely different constitution, based on different principles. This is what happened to Israel as a result of Solomon's sin. Israel was permanently split into 10 northern tribes that went their own way politically, economically and spiritually . . . with just 2 southern tribes that remained loyal to the laws of Moses and the house of David (the little tribe of Benjamin was counted as one with the huge tribe of Judah). Israel's history was forever changed because of Solomon's unfaithfulness. Throughout the remainder of the O.T. narrative, "Israel" will refer to the wayward northern ten tribes that split off after Solomon. "Judah" will be the name for the remaining southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) that continued the Davidic royal lineage and sought to preserve the true worship of Yahweh.

We often fail to consider the long-term ramifications of our choices to disobey God. We fall for what the Bible calls "the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). We put the blinders on and dive headlong into the opportunity, only to suffer greatly for our choices in the end. Learn the skill of 'playing the tape forward' in your mind. When you are being tempted, stop and actually envision the future - the likely impact of your sin upon your own life and the lives of others; what you stand to lose if you continue down this path. At the same time, ponder what you will gain by saying NO to sin, and YES to God's way. A proverb that was repeated twice by Solomon (but he himself did not follow it): "There is a way that seems right to a man; but the outcome of that way is death" (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25).

God raises up adversaries to Solomon: 11:14-40

Up until this time, Solomon had enjoyed a peaceful rule. Then, toward the end of his life, chaos began to enter his kingdom. God tried to discipline him and get his attention with different men and pressures from the north and the south – first Hadad, then Rezon, and finally Jeroboam, who was actually *called by God* to take the northern tribes away from Solomon. But sadly, much like the 1st king of Israel, King Saul, who tried to kill David, Solomon did not repent of his sins; rather, he tried to kill the man Jeroboam, whom God sought after to replace him. Herein we find the key difference between Solomon and his father, David: When David was convicted of sin, he repented as a broken and humble man. When Solomon was convicted of sin, he used his wisdom to try to evade the consequences and gain control of his own life.

Solomon's death: 11:41-43

Finally, Solomon's death is recorded. He reigned over Israel for 40 years – such great glory and potential, ending with such sadness and tragedy. It is difficult to comprehend – that after all that GOD bestowed on Solomon, he could willfully turn his heart away from the God who had loved him so lavishly. His story is in the Bible to remind each of us that we are ALL capable of this.

HOW DO I KEEP MY HEART FROM
WANDERING AWAY FROM GOD?

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it determines the course of your life" (Solomon: Proverbs 4:23).

Solomon had the right answer. How tragic that he did not follow his own advice. To **"guard your heart"** is a **day-by-day choice** to seek to draw my heart near to God and learn how much He really lavishly loves me. And then act on the privilege of that love, by returning my love back to Him in the way that I live my life for His pleasure and His glory. **Following are some steps to ponder:**

1st- I must believe God's word when it says that *my heart is deceitful and dangerous*. This is precisely why the heart needs to be "guarded" so fiercely. ***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).*** Because I still possess a "fallen" sin nature, my heart will not always lead me in the right direction. It will regularly deceive me into thinking I am beyond certain beliefs, loves and behaviors. It will invite me to walk down the wrong path. The apostle Paul wrote: ***"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:18,19).*** It is wise to *recognize the severity of the sin problem that is within me*. Thus, the first step to "guarding my heart" is to *recognize that my heart is seriously in need of guarding!*

2nd- I must grow in understanding *how much God really loves me* and what it has cost Him to redeem me from my self-centered life. In other words, *the love of God for me must take deep root in my heart.* This takes intentional time soaking up His Word and filling my mind and heart with truth until it permeates my thinking. The apostle Paul prayed that his friends would ***"grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this***

love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:18,19). If my heart is truly *gripped by God’s love for me*, then I will more seriously count the cost of offending the great Lover of my soul.

3rd- As the roots of His love grow into the rich good soil, (note Jesus’ parable of the soils in Mark 4) *I must make choices every day to walk away from the temptations (the thorns and thistles in the parable) that pull on my heart and invite me away from God.* It is not always easy to make the right choices, thus, *accountability partners are critical*. Who helps to hold you accountable for your choices? Who do you turn to for help and prayer when you feel the tug of sin on your heart? Who have you given the right to speak firmly into your life, at any time, over any issue? As Solomon himself would write: “*Two are better than one, for they have a good return for their labor” (Ecclesiastes 4:9)*. Who is on your team in the fight to remain faithful to the ways of God?

4th- Finally, as was stated earlier, it is good to engage in sober-minded long-term thinking. *Play the tape forward.* Consider the outcomes of your choices, and the impact your life will have on others. If I may paraphrase the first 9 chapters of the book of Proverbs, it would go something like this: ***Choosing to walk in wisdom leads to life. Choosing to follow folly leads to destruction.***

Note: Next week, we being to explore the Book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon. Read through the first 9 chapters in preparation for our study. You will see the repeated themes of *wisdom and folly*. Looking forward to pondering Proverbs with you all!