

Lessons from the Life of Solomon

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There is much to learn from Solomon's writings, but there is also much to be learned from his life, his decisions. In the early phase of his kingship, Solomon shows some of the best priorities and attitudes a person can have. When God asks the young Solomon what he wants, Solomon asks for wisdom to care for the nation of Israel because he knows he isn't up to that task on his own. His request shows both humility and an earnest concern for his people. It is a beautiful and encouraging chapter in his story. As the years pass, however, we encounter sobering lessons from his life.

God had told the Israelites not to intermarry with the people who served other gods because, He said, doing so would turn His people's hearts away from Him—not just their spare time or their spare energy, but their hearts. Solomon failed in this area of his life--and not just a little bit, but spectacularly so. He married 700 wives (and took to himself 300 concubines) many of whom (or perhaps most of whom) not only did not know Yahweh but very much did serve terrible gods--Chemosh, Molech, Baal, Ashtoreth, etc.—gods and goddesses whose worship required human sacrifice, including infant sacrifice. If it were not clearly written down in the scriptures that Solomon did this, we might not believe it of him. God truly had given Solomon incredible wisdom, and He appeared to Solomon clearly at least twice in his earthly life (most of us don't get even one such experience). It is extremely important to remember that if even the wisest man in the world can become an idiot, so can we. If a man who had been blessed with personal encounters with God, a man who had even seen the Shekinah glory with his own eyes, could've failed so greatly, so can we. It should make us realize how important it is to be on our guard against temptation, disobedience, foolish thoughts, and foolish decisions.

It is also important to realize that a gradual progression can lead to great apostacy. Solomon probably didn't wake up one day and say to himself, "You know, I think I'll go out and marry 1,000 wives and concubines who serve gods that aren't Yahweh." It was instead a gradual process. First, he married one pagan princess, then another and another, and so on. A series of small compromises can destroy us, and a downward spiral can become rapid and extensive. This is why in the illegal drug industry, the first "hit" is always free; it will likely lead quickly to an addiction so complete and lucrative that the first free hit is nothing in comparison. This is why we need to be on guard against the first attack, the first temptation to foolishness, the first thought justifying something that is not OK. The first bad thought is much easier to withstand and not yield to than the 500th thought is.

Another thing to notice is that Solomon appears to have had only "yes men" in his court and his life. We see no record of a prophet calling Solomon to task about his wives. Nathan called out David with regard to Bathsheba and Uriah, but Solomon seemed to have had no one who would speak to him

in that way. It is important to have people in our lives who will call us to task when we do clear or great wrong.

Solomon's motivation for marrying these women was likely political—they were princesses of neighboring and regional tribes and countries, yet the Bible says he clung to his wives and was led astray by his love for them. What kind of love is this? It is not the kind of love a man is supposed to give his wife and family. A man is to love his wife and their children in a way that requires his attention, time, and involvement. It would be completely impossible for Solomon to give 1,000 women (or even ten women) this type of love. Solomon's love seems to have been sensual pleasure. And it has been pointed out that if one wife will not satisfy a man, neither will 1,000.

We usually associate old age with wisdom, and generally they do go together. As we travel through life, we learn from our experiences. Solomon's path, however, shows that this pattern is not automatic. The pattern can be different. As a young man, his heart was truly and sincerely oriented towards God. It is in his later years, not in his youth, that Solomon becomes tainted, disobedient, and foolish. We should never assume that we are wise just because we are old or just because we've been Christians for many years. Assumptions like that invite unfruitfulness and sometimes disaster. We are to be diligently on guard at every age in our lives, and we need to ask for God's help in this area all our lives long. And if we have strayed from the path at any age, God can help us get back where we need to be because with God all things are possible (including overcoming addictions and ingrained thought patterns). And He is always willing to help and to heal. His mercies are new every morning.

--Sally (McKenney) Mahoney

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