



Solomon: The Tragedy of Wasted Potential

Lesson 4

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Few things are sadder than the bright student in high school who falls in with the wrong crowd and ends up an addict on the street. Or the athlete who allows his head to become filled with arrogance and thinks his actions have no consequence, only to see his career disintegrate because of personal choices. Or to see a good politician be removed from office or lose an election because a skeleton in their closet became known to the world.

All of those instances might be cases where there are great potential that is lost. Equally tragic, though often ignored, are the smaller failures and the slipping standards of God's children that come about because of decisions that didn't seem to matter. We fear the cataclysmic failures, but those failures often come about one small choice at a time.

Few characters in Scripture describe this fall so vividly as Solomon. In this lesson we will see Solomon's strong start, followed by his tragic fall, and we will end by asking how this could have happened, and how we can make sure it doesn't happen to us.

A Great Start

I. **Solomon had huge political advantages.**

When looking at Solomon from a strictly secular perspective, we find that he had a lot going for him. Many an ancient king would have loved to have the privileges that he did from the earliest days of his rule.

A. **His reign was firmly established (1 Kings 1:38-49).**

Under the guidance of his father David, Solomon was made king. His brother Adonijah had attempted, with the help of to take certain key figures, to take the throne for himself when his father was old but ultimately failed. Solomon never had any serious challenge to throne from then on, and his authority went unquestioned throughout his reign. This was a great blessing, and was the exception rather than the norm, as we will see later on this study.

B. **His wealth was enormous (1 Kings 10:14-23).**

These verses speak for themselves. Solomon had a lot of wealth! While this also somewhat problematic (see below), this was no doubt a huge advantage from a political perspective.

C. **He had favor with foreign leaders (1 Kings 5:1-11; 10:1-13).**

Solomon interacts favorably with two foreign rulers. These interactions show Solomon's wisdom and the

favor that God had given Solomon by allowing others to look on him with favor as well (Proverbs 16:7).

Why did God give Solomon such blessings knowing where Solomon would end up?

II. Solomon had huge spiritual advantages.

But Solomon was set up well, not just politically, but also spiritually. Having a man after God's own heart as your father aside, Solomon's reign began with Solomon making wise spiritual decisions that God blessed.

A. Solomon built the temple (1 Kings 5-8).

Four long chapters are dedicated to acquiring the materials for, building, and dedication of the Temple. While many of the minute details could be confusing to us today, this long section (173 verses!) is as long as it is because it is as important as it is. The temple was the place where God came to meet with his people, and the building of it was so significant that when it was built the visible presence of God came down and filled it (2 Chronicles 7:1-3).

B. Solomon led Israel to serve God (1 Kings 8:54-66).

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple calls on the people to follow God, a call they willingly embrace. He leads in extravagant sacrifices and the story ends with everyone returning home joyfully praising God for his goodness. As we mentioned in the first lesson, this is the ideal for a king: a king who leads the people of the nation in the right worship of God.

C. Solomon humbly asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-15).

One of the most famous stories of Solomon is the time he is offered a chance to ask anything from God, and he asks for wisdom. God is so pleased by this request that he promises to give him riches and honor in addition to the wisdom that he asked for.

One important lesson we learn from Solomon's life is that spiritual privileges do not guarantee spiritual success. Many start well, and have much going for them, only to end up in outright rebellion and apostasy.

“Spiritual privileges do not guarantee spiritual success.” Why not? In what ways can spiritual privileges be harmful? How can they be good? How should we think about spiritual privilege?

A Tragic End

I. Solomon's spiritual failure

Solomon ended his reign a spiritual disgrace, so far from God it's hard to imagine someone who started the way he did ending the way he did. Specifically...

A. Solomon worshipped idols (1 Kings 11:4-8).

Solomon's heart is led astray in his old age away from the God of Israel and toward the gods of the pagan nation around him. Ashtoreth was a pagan goddess of fertility and war. Molech was a god who was worshipped with human sacrifice of infants (2 Kings 23:10). Chemosh was

another idol about whom we know very little. Three separate deities worshipped by the king of Israel likely within sight of the temple. How the king who had called on Israel to remain faithful to God had fallen so hard is difficult to grasp.

B. Solomon led Israel in worshipping idols (2 Kings 23:13).

Solomon's legacy didn't stop with his death, however. When we get to the reign of the godly king Josiah roughly 300 years later we find that high places Solomon put up for pagan gods were still being used! 300 years of idolatry was the legacy of Solomon's apostasy. Don't think your sin will just affect you. There are numerous people who are watching you who will be very much impacted by the sins you commit, possibly for years to come.

If you fail like Solomon did, who would be impacted by your failure?

II. God's righteous judgment

God refuses to ignore Solomon's sin. Rather, he makes sure that there is a high price for rebellion.

A. God made life difficult for Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-25).

God raises up political adversaries for Solomon who give him trouble near the end of his reign.

Why is God's judgment in this instance actually a sign of his grace?

B. God took much of the kingdom from Solomon (1 Kings 11:9-13).

Although he didn't lose all of the kingdom, Solomon's son did lose the majority of it. Sadly, we find later that much like Saul, Solomon refused to accept this and when he found out who was going to be given the land of the north he sought to kill him (1 Kings 11:40). God's punishment of Solomon left a major division in the nation of Israel and caused a whole lot of problems.

A Little Leaven

There are certain moments in the first few chapters of Solomon's life that will make the careful reader pause and scratch their head. Wait, did Solomon do that? Was that okay? In the midst of descriptions of Solomon's success and obedience are little hints that some things were not right. Solomon loved God and wanted to please him, but he allowed himself a little disobedience along the way.

The Bible calls this being a double-minded man (James 1:8). The person who both wants to serve God and live for himself. What one will soon find is that you cannot continue in both "minds" very long. One mind will win out in the end, and for Solomon that took a tragic toll. What were the compromises Solomon made, and how can we learn from them?

I. Solomon worshipped in high places (1 Kings 3:3; cf Deuteronomy 12:1-14 [2-6, 13-14]).

God had told Israel even before they entered the promised land that he wanted them worshipping from one central location. Why? God was concerned that everyone would worship however they saw fit (v 8). He feared that if worship took place in people's backyard, with no priests or Levites to oversee, that worship would drift from what he had decreed. And so God outlawed worshipping anywhere other than the one central location of the land, which began in Gilgal and then moved to Shiloh and later Jerusalem.

But what if they really worshipped God in the high places? After all, if God put this law into place to make sure the people worshipped him, is it OK to worship him if they don't drift? Like the children who want to know why the rule exists, and then decide that the rule shouldn't have to apply to them, Israel chose to worship God in the high places.

Why is this line of thinking dangerous? In what ways might we make the same mistake today?

II. Solomon disobeyed the commands given to kings (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

In Deuteronomy we are given several specific commands of what Israel was and was not supposed to do. Solomon broke all 3 of those prohibitions! Many of them may not have sounded like a big deal, and Solomon wasn't immediately struck down by God. But compounding disobedience took its toll in the long run. No one, not even Solomon, can disobey God's rules and get away with it forever.

A. Solomon hoarded wealth (1 Kings 10:14-23).

This command is one that requires a heart of obedience to God, because God allowed there to be some wiggle room. No exact amount is given for how much a king could have, probably for two reasons. 1) As soon as you start giving specifics, you have to get *very* specific. Given human nature, if you tried to limit how much “wealth” a king would have you would end up with a million loopholes that allowed a lot more wealth than God intended. But 2) it is likely that God wanted the king to limit his own wealth out of a desire to obey God.

Why do you think God forbade the kings from amassing wealth? How should a king have done this?

Whatever a reasonable limit would have been, Solomon exploded past this line. No doubt there would be some kings where you could argue whether or not they had amassed too much wealth, but if there’s a line anywhere Solomon crossed it!

How do we reconcile this with the fact that God promised Solomon wealth? How does this impact our thinking about God’s blessings?

- B. Solomon acquired many horses (1 Kings 10:26, 28-29).** Horses were the tanks of ancient warfare. A strong cavalry was a formidable force. Yet God wanted his people to trust in him for military might, not in horses (cf Psalm 20:7). An overly powerful military leaves no room for the protection of an almighty God. Solomon built up

his army and by going to the exact place that God said he shouldn't go – Egypt!

How do you think Solomon might have been able to justify multiplying horses from Egypt when God's Word said not to? How do we sometimes get around very specific commands of God?

C. Solomon married foreign women (1 Kings 3:1; 11:1-4).

What finally brought much of this crashing down was Solomon's obsession with foreign women. It begins with a political alliance with Egypt, a powerful ally. But it ends with 700 wives and 300 concubines! Solomon's insatiable appetite for carnal pleasure, mixed with his desire for political power, led to incredible excess that finally pulled him into outright rebellion against God by worshipping idols. It took a while, after all God's Word points out that it was in Solomon's old age that his sinful choices reached a critical mass that brought his spiritual life crashing down.

In a monogamous culture, how can we take the warnings of Solomon's life to heart in this regard? What are ways in which we might fall prey to similar temptations?

A preacher once made the observation that Solomon said the right things, but his feet were pointed in the wrong direction. Sadly, many believers openly proclaim their love and loyalty for God while allowing small compromises in their lives. It's great to start well, but it's equally important to finish well. Solomon

reminds all of us that potential, success, and spiritual privilege aren't enough. Faithful, humble obedience is what God is looking for in the end.