

“The Fall of Solomon”
1 Kings 11
March 5, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Though Solomon’s life started well, it does not end well. It was said of him at the beginning of his reign, “Solomon loved the Lord” (1 Kings 3:3). Now, toward the end of his life we read that he “loved many foreign women” and that when he “was old his wives (700 of them) turned away his heart after other gods” (11:1, 4). I consider this to be one of those terrifying texts in the Bible. If the wisest man of the Old Testament can fall like this, then falling away from the Lord is a very real danger to us all. This story reminds me of Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12 – “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Sadly, Solomon is not unique. We all know of people who once walked with the Lord but now show little interest in spiritual things. Some have even become vocal opponents of Christianity. How does this happen? More importantly, how can we guard against it happening to us or to those we love? The first thing we need to accept is the reality of this warning. “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” In other words, if you think this is a danger only for others, you are in grave danger yourself. Let us take heed of this warning today by considering exactly how Solomon fell, that we might avoid such a thing ourselves.

I. His Fall Was Gradual

Solomon did not simply wake up one morning and decide that he wanted to worship other gods in addition to Jehovah. As we’ve already pointed out, he started well, loving the Lord. And when God appeared to him, he asked for something that pleased God—wisdom instead of something more self-centered, like money. But making one good decision doesn’t prevent someone from falling into serious sin. Many people today make the mistake of thinking that if they pray to receive Christ at some point in their lives, everything else will automatically take care of itself. But it doesn’t work that way. It is necessary to follow up one good decision, such as praying to receive Christ, with daily good decisions. There is a need to commit ourselves afresh every day to follow Christ.

Solomon failed to follow the Lord fully, choosing instead to make little compromises. There have been hints about this throughout the story of his life, the first one occurring at the outset. Solomon took Pharaoh’s daughter as his wife (3:1), even though God had explicitly forbidden such a practice. The Bible

is not opposed to racially mixed marriages, but it is opposed to religiously mixed marriages. Solomon apparently didn't stop with Pharaoh's daughter, but took wives from other nations around Israel (11:1). The result was not a happy one. Instead of these wives being converted to the worship of Jehovah, Solomon experienced a type of conversion to the worship of their gods. His mistake was in tolerating a practice in his life (entering into forbidden marriages) that in time led to more serious problems. The Puritans used to describe this vividly in terms of tolerating little snakes, while forgetting that little snakes grow up to become big snakes that can do real harm.

Have you ever played that game called "Jenga?" It is a simple game that utilizes a stack of blocks, three in each row with eighteen rows total, and each row perpendicular to the one above it and below it. The idea is that each person takes a turn pulling a block out and putting it on the top of the stack without causing the whole tower to crumble. If all the players have a steady hand, the stack can get very high before it finally crumbles. But it will also have a lot of holes in it that make it progressively less stable. That's a good metaphor for Solomon's life and for all who lose their whole-hearted commitment and trust in the Lord.

Notice some other holes in Solomon's life. In addition to his taking of foreign wives, there is also his practice of accumulating large numbers of horses and chariots from Egypt. Again, this is something God had explicitly forbidden. He wanted Israel to trust in his help of them rather than in their own military might.

Yet another hole in Solomon's life was his trust in his own political alliances. It seems clear that this was one of his goals in accumulating these wives. We know that because verse 3 tells us that among his 700 wives were "princesses." A princess is a daughter of a king. Solomon's practice of marrying such princesses was probably an effort to secure peace with a neighboring king, knowing that such a marriage would make it far less likely for that king to attack a nation over which his daughter served as queen. But God was the one who promised to give Israel peace with their potential enemies. Solomon's practice amounted to a failure to trust in God.

Sin is not static. If we do not repent of it, it grows. The baby snake becomes a large and dangerous snake. We can see the growth of sin in Solomon's life. God sent a prophet with a word of judgment against Solomon, a word intended as a disciplinary measure to call Solomon to repentance. The prophet, named Abijah, said that God's judgment was to tear the kingdom from Solomon and give ten tribes to one of his servants, a man named Jeroboam. How would Solomon respond to this word of judgment? Would he receive it, humble himself and repent? Or would he reject God's word? Verse 40 tells us. **"Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam."** He had formerly used his power to avoid having to trust in God, but now things take a much more

serious turn. He attempts to use his power not just in place of God's power but against God and his word. It is futile to do so. It is like trying to break a concrete wall by hitting it as hard as you can with your fist. A break will indeed occur, but it will be a breaking of your fist, not of the wall. As Solomon attempted to break God's word through the prophet by killing Jeroboam, a death did in fact occur. **"Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father"** (v. 43).

Let's pause for an application before moving on. Have you been guilty of tolerating sin in your life? Perhaps you are thinking that your life is still mostly working, so what harm could a few little sins do anyway? To return to the Jenga metaphor, the tower is still standing. But it could be that there are many holes in it, and you are only one move from the whole thing coming crashing down, as happened with Solomon. Instead of tolerating such sin, the Bible calls us to make a different response. We are called to repent of it, which we are going to consider in just a moment.

II. His Fall Was Heart-Centered

Though Americans commonly believe that all sin is the same, the Bible doesn't see things that way. One of the distinctions the Bible makes is between heart sins and the outward sins that flow from them. This becomes an important matter when you try to deal with sin in your life, suggesting that the key is to go first after the root sins, the sins of the heart. It is like weeding your vegetable garden. Cutting a weed off at the surface will make it disappear for a time. But if you leave the root intact, it is only a matter of time before it will grow back again. Sin works that same way.

Solomon's fall was due to a heart defect. The word heart appears six times in the first nine verses of our chapter. What was the heart sin in Solomon's life that led to his downfall? It was idolatry. Solomon's heart was turned toward other gods. He **"went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites"** (v. 5). Ashtoreth was the sex goddess of the Canaanites. Milcom is usually thought to be another name for Molech, who was worshiped with child sacrifices. Solomon even built houses of worship for these false gods, just as he had built a house of worship for Jehovah. One of them was even on the **"mountain east of Jerusalem"** (v. 7), which would be the Mount of Olives, within sight of the temple.

Why is God so concerned about idolatry, the worship of other gods? Secular people read this and think that God is being selfishly narrow-minded. Why can't he be big enough to share the limelight with other gods, they wonder? If worshipping God were like rooting for a sports team, they would be right. But it's not. The greater the commitment in a relationship, the greater the loyalty that is required. God has made a complete commitment to his people, and he is

right to require the same from us. It is more like marriage than like choosing a sports team to root for. No one would have reason to find fault with you if you rooted for two different college teams, but the same could not be said if you decided to have intimate relations with two people, one of whom is a spouse and the other not. Idolatry is in the category of spiritual adultery.

If you fall spiritually, it will be because your heart has gone after an idol. What are the idols your heart is drawn to? How can you know? I see two tests in the text that help us answer this question, the tests of insatiability and that of desperation. Let's look first at the insatiability test. Solomon had an insatiable appetite for wives. How else would you manage to accumulate 700 of them? The reason he kept accumulating them is that none of them ever did for him what he was looking to them to do. But this is where idolatry comes in. Solomon was looking for his wives to do for him what only God could do. His lack of finding that in a wife was not a deficiency within his wives, but one within himself. They had become idols to him. Is there an insatiable, idolatrous appetite in your life? Maybe it's money. When John D. Rockefeller was asked how much money is enough, he famously replied, "Just a little bit more." Why? Because the last dollar earned didn't do for him what he thought it would, so he thought maybe the next one would. Whether it's acceptance, beauty or accomplishments, when we make those things ultimate in our lives, we are never satisfied with them no matter how much of them we might have.

The second test is the desperation test, indicated by the word "clung" in verse 2 when it says of Solomon's wives that he "**clung to these in love.**" It is a word that is used in Deuteronomy 30:20 of holding to God by faith. You cling to something you don't want to lose. Let me give an illustration. Suppose you are in a hot air balloon that needs to gain altitude quickly to avoid crashing into the side of a mountain toward which the wind is rapidly pushing you. Your burner is on, but it's not enough, and you must start losing weight. Imagine all your most valuable possessions have been taken on that balloon with you, and now it's either throw them overboard or crash into the mountain. You're not sure that you need to get rid of them all, so you start with the items that are not so precious to you. The first to go is that nice set of China you received as a wedding gift but only rarely used because they had to be hand-washed. Then go the golf clubs you spent a fortune to buy but find now that you're not playing so much. But then it gets more difficult. There's all that camera equipment you use frequently because you love photography. Here's the test. What's the last thing you throw overboard? Would you be willing to part with it? If not, it's an idol. What you are clinging to might also be indicated by where you look for comfort when everything seems to be going wrong. You say, "At least I still have this one thing." It could be a job, the accomplishments of a child, or anything you cling to for comfort.

A relationship with the true God is the end of insatiability and the end of desperation. When we know and love Jesus, we are satisfied in him,

considering ourselves to be rich. We also stop clinging to other things because we have learned that he is all we need. So we cling to him instead.

III. His Fall Was Devastating in Effect

Solomon's fall affected more than just him, and that's always the case. His fall ruined a nation. Enemies multiplied. God allowed a man named Hadad to be raised up in Edom, a nation to the south of Israel. And he allowed Rezon to be raised up in Damascus. Where God had previously given peace to Israel on all sides, now they have enemies all around and from within. Hadad was the enemy from the south and Rezon from the north. Jeroboam becomes the challenge to Solomon from within the kingdom. Jeroboam had been promoted by Solomon himself, and he was the one who would cause the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death. Solomon's divided heart would lead to a divided kingdom.

How about Solomon himself? Will we see him in heaven? I don't know for sure. Thankfully, it's God's decision, and he will always do the right thing. I think it's likely that we will see him in heaven because of a promise God made to his father, David. God had told David that if his son sins, he would be disciplined but not forsaken, saying, **"My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul"** (2 Sam. 7:15).

CONCLUSION:

If you were called upon to speak at Solomon's funeral, what would you say? I would remind people that a person can fall into much grievous sin and be forgiven. The mercy of God is great. I like what Ruth Bell Graham said she wanted written on her tombstone when she died. Using words she had seen on a highway road sign, she said she wanted her epitaph to be: "End of Construction—Thank you for your patience."

But I would also remind people that part of God's great mercy is seen in the opportunity he holds out to us at any time to repent of our sins and turn again to him. If a plane flying across the ocean is only one degree off course, the plane will be far from its intended destination after flying for several thousand miles. Our lives work the same way too. If we are off course, time is not our friend. But the good news is that there is always opportunity for a course correction. It is called repentance, by which we turn from the heart idols to which we have been clinging and turn back to God in faith. We hold on to his mercy. Perhaps Solomon will be singing the words of that gospel hymn Billy Graham's soloist, George Beverly Shea, used to sing at Graham's crusades. "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold...I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand than to be the king of a vast domain."