

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-23 Solomon's Wisdom and Failure

No human being is completely good, except the Lord Jesus. No human being is completely bad, either. Every person is a mixture of good and bad thoughts, words, and actions. This is the story of Solomon, the third king of the united tribes of Israel. During his 40-year reign, Israel reached a high point in wealth, power, and fame. After his death, however, the one kingdom divided into two, never to be united again.

With the help of his mother, Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan, the commander Benaiah, and the priest Zadok, Solomon eliminated rivals to his position and secured his throne. He became Israel's first dynastic king. This means that he succeeded his father as king.

Early in his reign, he went to Gibeon, a little north of Jerusalem, to worship Yahweh by offering sacrifices. At Gibeon Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream. "Ask for whatever you want me to give you," God said.

Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David. You have also been kind to me by allowing me to succeed him as king. I am only a little child, however, and I do not know how to carry out my duties as king. Please give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to choose between right and wrong."

Yahweh was pleased that Solomon had asked for this, so he said to Solomon, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. I will also give you what you did not ask for, namely, wealth and honor and long life" (1Kings 3:4-14).

One example of Solomon's wisdom is the story of two prostitutes. They came before him with a sad story. One woman claimed that the second one's baby had died during the night. She then put her dead child next to the first woman, and took her healthy baby to lie beside her. "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours," claimed the second mother.

"No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine," insisted the first mother. They argued back and forth before King Solomon.

Solomon listened and then replied, "Bring me a sword." They did so. Then he ordered, "Cut the living baby in two and give half to one mother and half to the other."

The mother whose baby was alive cried out, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!"

But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"

Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the woman who wanted the child to live. Do not kill him; she is his mother." This story spread throughout Israel, and people were in awe at Solomon's wise ruling (1Kings 3:16-28).

Solomon ruled with great power and fame. He developed contacts with other nations. The wealth of the nation increased and the tribes enjoyed a period of peace. These factors promoted the writing and collecting of proverbs about human behavior. He is said to have collected and composed thousands of wise sayings and songs. Much of the Book of Proverbs was written by him. The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, as well as two psalms are attributed to Solomon. Outside the Bible, there are many stories in Jewish, Arabian, and Ethiopian culture about Solomon's amazing words and deeds.

Solomon developed a strong government with its center in Jerusalem. The country was organized into 12 tax districts. Each district funded the central government for one month each year. He forced non-Israelites in the country to work in his construction projects. Later he forced Israelites to work in these projects, too. This policy led to resentment.

Israel was located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Desert. This meant that all trade between north and south, and east and west, had to pass through its territory. During Solomon's time, this led to great power, fame, and wealth.

Solomon also developed trade and brought in enormous amounts of money. He controlled the roads which led from African nations to countries to the east. Traders had to pay tolls to use the roads. From a port city on the Red Sea, he sent out fleets of ships to sail up and down the east coast of Africa. These ships exported copper and imported gold, silver, spices, lumber, jewels, ivory, and animals. A queen from Sheba came to see Solomon. This visit was probably motivated by her desire to set up a trade agreement with the king.

The two pillars of Solomon's foreign policy were friendly ties with neighboring countries, and the maintenance of a strong military force. His ties were often sealed by marriage. This led to his having hundreds of wives and secondary wives. One special wife was the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh. This is the only time in history that a pharaoh gave his daughter to a foreign king. He built a special wing of his palace for this queen.

He enlarged the army to include a chariot force as well as infantry. Neither Saul nor David had a chariot force. He established a ring of fortified cities on his northern and eastern borders protected by chariot forces.

But, Solomon's foreign wives led him astray. These marriages may have been smart politically, but they were a disaster spiritually. To please his wives, he began to build shrines to their pagan gods. He also combined worship of Yahweh with worship of these gods. Yahweh voiced his displeasure with Solomon, "I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will do it when your son becomes king" (1Kings 11:9-13).

This story is **important** because it shows us the many ways that God blessed Solomon during the golden age of the united monarchy. The world wanted to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Even so, he disobeyed God's command not to follow other gods—over and over again. In the end, he loved his wives and their gods more than he loved Yahweh. He didn't keep his end of the covenant with God. He did not follow Yahweh completely as his father had done.

The **main truth** of this lesson is God continued to work in Solomon's life, especially in the first half of his reign and after the building of the temple. However, Solomon's political and economic ambitions led to hundreds of arranged marriages. These foreign wives brought with them

pagan religious practices, and Solomon took part in their pagan practices. He held fast to his wives in love, but he no longer loved Yahweh.

Let's **review** this lesson by answering these questions—

1. What was the reason for Solomon's great wisdom? [Pause]
A. If you said, "When God offered to give Solomon anything he asked for, Solomon asked for wisdom," you are correct.
2. Why is Solomon famous as a writer? [Pause]
A. If you said, "He wrote and collected thousands of proverbs and songs, and is believed to have written two psalms, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes," you are right.
3. What were the sources of Solomon's great power and wealth? [Pause]
A. If you said, "He controlled trade routes, established sea trade with Arabia and Africa, and entered into alliances with neighboring nations," you are correct.
4. Who turned Solomon's heart against Yahweh? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "His hundreds of foreign wives turned his heart toward their pagan gods," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times or as many times as you need to be able to retell it clearly. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly. Yahweh had committed himself to David and his successors. This did not mean, however, that ungodly actions would be overlooked by God.

Much later the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal 6:7-8). Satan deceives people into believing that as long as they are receiving blessings from God, he doesn't care about the sins they are committing.

Share the story of Solomon and his wives with one of your fellow leaders. Discuss with them these questions: "Can a person love someone or something too much? How does one know when that person or thing becomes a God-substitute in their life?" Pray with your friend about getting rid of the things in your lives that have become idols or God-substitutes. Ask God's forgiveness.

Together memorize this verse: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7).