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When Wise People Make Foolish Decisions

1 Kings 11:1-6

As we continue our studies on the pursuit of true wisdom, we come to one of the most tragic accounts in scripture. Solomon was considered to be the wisest man who ever lived, yet he made some foolish choices that led to his own personal downfall and the division of his kingdom.

*Paul reminds us of the purpose of the Old Testament accounts in **1 Corinthians 10:11-12**: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” As we study the tragic fall of Solomon, let us indeed take note of the warnings for our own lives.*

SOLOMON’S ASCENT TO SUCCESS AND PROMINENCE

Solomon’s Wisdom, Wealth and Honor

In response to Solomon’s humble request for wisdom, we find God granted him not only wisdom, but also wealth and honor as well. In **1 Kings 4:29-30** we find that **“God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.”** As you read on you find a detailed description of the wealth and splendor of Solomon’s kingdom.

Solomon’s Building and Dedication of the Temple

1 Kings 6-8 details Solomon’s construction of the temple, the place of worship of the true God. In **8:10-11** we find that God honors Solomon’s efforts with the visible manifestation of His presence as **“the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”** This most certainly was the high point of Solomon’s life and reign.

Solomon’s Visit from the Queen of Sheba

As reports of Solomon’s wisdom and wealth spread, the account tells us **“men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom”.** (**1 Kings 4:34**). One of those visitors was the Queen of Sheba, ruler of

the Sabeans in the southern part of Arabia. Her response is telling: **“However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.”** (**1 Kings 10:7**)

SOLOMON’S DESENT INTO FAILURE AND DISGRACE

After describing his meteoric rise, scripture gives us the account of Solomon’s calamitous downfall:

1 Kings 11:1-6

¹But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— ²from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines¹; and his wives turned away his heart. ⁴For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. ⁵For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David.

Notice the words used to describe the deterioration of his relationship with God:

“**Turn away**” is used literally to turn aside, turn away, or divert from a path. Here in a spiritual sense it means to turn away or be swayed from God and His ways. The passage says “His heart was not **loyal**”. The general meaning behind the root of this word is of completion and fulfillment—a state of wholeness and unity. Solomon was to have a heart that was complete or unified in its devotion to God. Instead, his heart became divided in its allegiance.

Scriptural Carelessness

Solomon’s most glaring failures were in areas specifically addressed in the scriptures. God laid down clear mandates for the king in Deuteronomy 17:16-17: **But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’** ¹⁷ **Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.**

Two times, God appeared to Solomon and challenged him to remain faithful to the Scriptures. **1 Kings 3:14** “**...If you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.**” God appears to him again after the dedication of the temple and exhorts Solomon, “**Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever...**” (**1 Kings 9:4-5**) Notice Solomon’s own challenge to the people of Israel in **8:58**, “**that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers.**

Even in the face of his own challenge Solomon became careless in his observance of God’s Word.

Political Expedience

Most of Solomon’s decisions were based on his desire to solidify and strengthen his kingdom. His marriages to Pharaoh’s daughter and other foreign women were intended to establish treaty relationships with those countries. His amassing of horses and chariots was to ensure their military strength. His trust was in his alliances and his military, not in God!

Material Pursuit

We are astounded by the descriptions of Solomon’s wealth and splendor. His daily provisions were staggering (**1 Kings 4:22-23**). His palace took thirteen

years to build and was a work of astonishing opulence. As we read through the account, we find that he depleted the nation’s resources, abused his citizens, and made damaging alliances in order to maintain his lavish lifestyle.

Solomon was brought up in a life of comfort and luxury, and he merely expanded upon that as king. His father David knew suffering, struggle, and deprivation. Not Solomon! Perhaps it was his life of ease and comfort that led him to become self-indulgent and sinful.

Sensual Desire

Apparently the greatest contributor to the decline of Solomon’s life was his love of women (**Vs 1-2**). What may have begun as marriages carried out for political purposes, soon became a quest to fulfill his fleshly desires. “Solomon **clung** to these (women) in love” Here “cling” carries the idea of bonding with or staying close to another in affection and loyalty. We are commanded to “cling to the Lord” (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh 22:5; 23:8) but Solomon clung to his foreign wives instead. He set up altars and places of worship for their false gods and eventually participated in their worship himself. What may have begun as **accommodation** of their sinful ways eventually became **participation** as he completed his fall into idolatry and disobedience.

WHAT ABOUT US?

As we consider the tragic fall of Solomon, we should make a careful appraisal of our own lives. Are we careless in our study and application of God’s Word? Are we making choices out of political or pragmatic expedience? Are we pursuing material things? In this immoral culture in which we live are we allowing sensual desires to sway our lives?

It is key to note that Solomon’s father David fell into terrible sin, but when confronted, he confessed and repented. (**Psalm 32, 51**). We never see that from Solomon. Perhaps today we need to confess and repent of one or more of these areas that so easily distract us from having a heart that is wholly devoted to God.

Solomon’s greatest failure was in losing his fear of the Lord. Though he wrote that the fear of Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge, he lost that fear. It is both our fear of the Lord and our love for Christ that will keep us from making foolish decisions.

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

MCMANUS (House) CONFERENCE ROOM

(252-M Located by minority offices near House chamber)