

The Greatest Apostate

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T . H . E O . L . D T . E . S . T . A . M . E . N . T

A gentleman in his nineties who has read the Old Testament through four times said to me, “*In the Old Bible, all they did was fight!*” And I must admit it often seems that way. The thirty-nine Old Testament books form the record of a fleshly, unregenerate nation that was to play a major role in God’s plan of redemption. Jesus of Nazareth was to be a descendant of Abraham. Thus the inspired ledger from Genesis to Malachi is largely an account of one man’s family across twenty centuries of time.

It is important to recall that the writers record much of which they do not approve. The story of a race is told, warts and all, heroes and heels, saints and sinners. “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Did ever a mortal man climb so high to fall so low as King Solomon? “For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (1 Kings 11:4).

Clarence Macartney wrote: “An Italian artist painted a picture of Solomon in the Day of Resurrection. Solomon is looking doubtfully upon two processions of souls, some on the way to Life Eternal, some to darkness and condemnation. He is not sure to which group he belongs. Thus the artist has put into painting the doubts in men’s minds as to the final state and fate of Solomon, whether we are to number him among

the redeemed souls or think of him as finally apostate and rejected of God.”

Solomon’s name seems to be derived from the ancient greeting *Shalom*, meaning peaceable. Nathan referred to him as Jedidiah, the beloved of the Lord. His name appears three hundred times in the Old Testament and twelve times in the New Testament. He was the tenth son of King David, the second son of Bathsheba, and God’s choice as successor to his father.

And David said to Solomon, “My son, I had intended to build a house to the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood, and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me. Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever’” (1 Chronicles 22:7-10).

Solomon had the good fortune of being *born in the best of times and places*, in the palace of David during the “Golden Age” of Jewish history. Never before or after would Israel experience eighty such years as the combined rule of David and Solomon. Egypt had suffered a setback, while Assyria and Babylon had not yet reached their zenith of power. Thus did Jehovah bless His people with an empire that touched the banks of the Euphrates on the north and the Nile on the south, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the Arabian desert on the east.

Solomon, when first encountered, does not appear to have the excesses and glaring inconsistencies of his half-brothers Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah. *He was the gifted child of a gifted father, and "there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God" (Nehemiah 13:26). "And the Lord highly exalted Solomon in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed on him royal majesty which had not been on any king before him in Israel" (1 Chronicles 29:25). Even Jesus spoke of "Solomon in all his glory."*

On the pages of Scripture, Solomon is set forth in three lights. There is *the brightness of his morning, the brilliance of his noontime, and the blackness of his evening*. Let us look at each and be thereby warned.

THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS MORNING

Solomon very likely was not over twenty years old when he began to reign. All indications pointed upward and onward. "Now Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David" (1 Kings 3:3). At his coronation he offered up one thousand burnt offerings and that night was visited in a dream by God Himself, who said, "Ask what you wish me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Rightly Solomon asks only for "an understanding heart to judge Thy people" (1 Kings 3:9). God was pleased, promising the young king,

... Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days (1 Kings 3:11-13).

One word of caution was added, "And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days" (1 Kings 3:14).

This was the kind of beginning to a career that all men of ages yearn for and, to a lesser degree, all receive, for *each of us receives in youth more than we can ever use of talents, time, and strength*.

Solomon's career opened in a blaze of undiminished glory. There was no cloud in the sky, no blot or blemish on the horizon.

THE BRILLIANCE OF HIS NOONTIME

What words could properly describe the grandeur that surrounded Solomon almost three thousand years ago?

So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his gift, articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.

Now Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; and he had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. And the king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland (1 Kings 10:23-27).

He ransacked the world for treasures, trophies, and trinkets. His royal navy brought to Israel's ports the exotic goods of the East and Africa. Everywhere he undertook building projects, employing at one time seventy thousand burden bearers and eighty thousand stone cutters. For thirty years his palace was under construction.

Solomon brought from Egypt the finest chariots and horses. From Tyre he imported the best cedar and cypress wood. He mined the rich copper deposits of the desert and gathered "gold as tin and multiplied silver as lead."

His brilliant mind engaged in all types of research projects. "He spake of trees, . . . he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes" (1 Kings 4:33). He was an avid student of botany, zoology, and biology.

He wrote 3,000 proverbs, 1,005 songs, Psalms 72—127, and most of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

His crowning achievement was undoubtedly the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. The work began in the fourth year of his reign and continued seven years. It may have been the world's most beautiful building, overlaid with glittering gold.

The dedication of the temple was both elaborate and impressive, with the Ark of the Covenant reverently transferred from the tabernacle to the temple. God indicated His approval as a cloud of glory filled the house. Solomon's prayer on the occasion remains to this day as one of the most sublime petitions ever to fall from human lips. As he prayed, he knelt with his hands spread

upward. Accompanying his prayer was an offering of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

When the day of Dedication at last was done, the Lord appeared a second time to Solomon, saying, "I have heard thy prayer . . . I have hallowed this house which thou hast built."

THE BLACKNESS OF HIS EVENING

Were it not so openly and evidently set forth on the pages of Scripture, we could not believe the rest of the story! With the same frankness and impartiality, the inspired writer describes the evil and the good. Thus it is written,

For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kings 11:4-8).

He Outlived His Popularity

He imposed upon the people heavy, oppressive taxes, subjecting them to forced labor, and alienating thousands. They cried out because of "the heavy yoke placed upon their necks" and were ripe for rebellion.

He Outlived His Love for God

Twice did Jehovah appear personally to him. Again and again did the Lord signally bless him above all men in the earth. Nothing good did God withhold from His servant. Yet *Solomon fell from the highest heights of human happiness to the deepest depths of human depravity!* The brightest and best of an entire generation, he lived to become the greatest apostate on the other side of Calvary, even leading his people into gross idolatry. For all this he has been called "*the wisest man and greatest fool in the history of mankind.*"

Following a reign of forty years, Solomon is dismissed with this brief notice: "*Solomon slept with his fathers.*" No word of praise or syllable of appreciation was uttered. No outpouring of grief or sorrow was heard. He seemingly died in a

night of apostasy so totally dark that one wonders if indeed it shall have a dawn! We hope that his closing statement in Ecclesiastes amounts to an old-age public confession: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). It appears that the pagan idols and temples were not torn down by Solomon, as might be expected of a penitent king. Nor did his attitude toward Jeroboam, whose life he sought to take, change.

SOLOMON'S GREAT FALL

How may we, ninety generations later, possibly understand so great a fall as that seen in the life of Solomon? To begin with, *worldly pride and vain ambition played a part:* "I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, . . . I planted vineyards for myself, . . . I made ponds of water for myself . . . I provided for myself male and female singers . . . and all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. . . ." (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10).

How difficult, if not impossible, it is to spend your days and nights thirsting after things without losing sight of the One who bestows those things. *Where there is too much gold, there is usually too little God.* Jesus described a rich farmer who had "many goods laid up for many years," yet was a fool in God's sight (Luke 12). Paul warned Timothy:

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. . . .

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (1 Timothy 6:9, 10, 17-19).

The Consequences of Sin

"The shipwreck of Solomon is surely the most terrible tragedy in all the world. Everyday sensuality made him in the end a castaway."

Alexander Whyte

It is not uncommon in the modern church to find Christians spending more on recreation than religion, more on one summer vacation than is contributed to God in an entire year. How we need to be warned by the example of Solomon, the greatest apostate in the Old Testament!

Solomon was led astray by evil, idolatrous association.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel. "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been (1 Kings 11:1-4).

Polygamy was a popular pastime three thousand years ago, and it was common for kings to keep a royal harem. Some reasoned that so great a man as a king was honor-bound to contribute to his nation as many offspring as possible. In addition, the giving and receiving of wives was a means of sealing and securing alliances. It was hoped that a king would not be as likely to make war with his neighbor if that neighbor was his father-in-law! Of course, there was the ever-present lure of temptation, the lust of the flesh. In keeping with the times, Solomon added one beautiful body to the next, women of Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the Hittite nation, until at last he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.

These foreigners were permitted to pursue their native religions and worship their chosen idols. Solomon even joined them, as he "went after" Ashtoreth and Milcom, building "high places" for Chemosh and Molech on "the mountain which is east of Jerusalem," in sight of the temple. "His wives turned his heart away after other gods." Centuries later, Nehemiah observed of him: "... and God made him king over all Israel, nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin" (Nehemiah 13:26). At the last Solomon seems to be a sensual middle-aged man, blind to all that is spiritual and sacred.

A WORD OF WARNING

If Solomon, who was greatly blessed and greatly loved by God, could fall, who can be sure of standing? If on two occasions he could converse with God and be exalted as no other mortal of his generation, only to be turned aside by evil associates, who is exempt from temptation? If he could live long years in the service of God, even building a glorious temple, only to fall away in his old age, no man is safe until the end of life.

The brightness of his morning, the brilliance of his noontime, the blackness of his evening—that was the pattern and progression of Solomon's life. May it not be so of us. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever" (Jude 24, 25).

—Paul Rogers

QUOTATIONS

"I refuse to be lazy" wrote a noted university professor. "I refuse to be the slave of ease. I will so command my body that I shall, even at a great sacrifice, complete my plans. I cannot afford an hour of lassitude. I will study most carefully how to rest and refresh myself, but I arise to declare that I am not a slave. 'Father, teach me the power of self-mastery. Help me to train my body to serve perfectly Thy high purpose!'"

"I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day."

Abraham Lincoln

"Youth without faith is a day without sun."

"I could live three weeks on a compliment."

Mark Twain

"It is impossible to be a hero in anything unless one is first a hero in faith."