

1 Kings 11:1-43

Solomon's idolatry, rejection and death

1 Kings 11:1-2 - "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

"Strange" women just means foreign women. [Apparently Pharaoh's daughter was a true proselyte because no Egyptian gods are mentioned.]

This violated God's command:

- **Deuteronomy 7:1-4** - "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."

Instead:

- **Deuteronomy 7:5** - "But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire."

Solomon directly contradicted this command. He worshipped the idols and then built altars and erected images for their worship.

"Solomon clave unto these in love." - He had in fact left his first love.

For us, who in modern life have internalized the outward forms of the idols, idolatry can be the myriad of things that take our attention away from God, that we value more highly than Him, that we rely on instead of Him. Each of the different kinds of worship - pillars, groves, ashtorahs, molten and graven images - correspond to our opinions, our value systems engraved on us by society and our ancestors, our inner emotional responses, and on and on. We are spiritually either taking our place as a worshipper of the Lamb as shown in the Book of Revelation, or we're acting in various roles serving the multiple idols that we either fear or hope to placate with offerings.

We're either covered by the blood of the Lamb, or covered in the blood of the sacrifices

we constantly offer to our idols.

Ezekiel is told to dig at a hole that becomes a door, allowing him to see inside every man's imagination:

- **Ezekiel 8:10** - "So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about."

In fact, Freud confessed that his many sessions of analysis with patients had revealed an inner landscape populated by what seemed to be a world of pagan gods. We are all created to worship in one way or another.

Return to Your First Love

To understand this better, we need to go back to Solomon's birth:

- **2 Samuel 12:24-25** - "And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD."

"the Lord loved him" To emphasize this, it notes that he sent "by the hand of Nathan the prophet" a special name for Solomon - *Jedediah*, which means "beloved of the Lord" in Hebrew.

Solomon's sad story should be a cautionary tale for us.

The New Testament directs a warning to us in these same terms, when Jesus addresses the church at Ephesus.

- **Revelation 2:4-5** - "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works"

Solomon's fall from being a wise and righteous ruler to deluded, foolish, idolatrous doormat to his wives' demands is both puzzling and tragic.

No direct explanation is given. But it must be a combination of pride, complacency because of his success and riches, and just common self-seeking and lust.

One commentator pointed out that if he responded to one wife's demands, he would have then had to do the same for all 700 of them to keep the peace.

The Targum does offer one piece of evidence:

1 Kings 11:9 - "And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned

from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded."

The Targum says Solomon's heart was turned away from "*the fear* of the Lord God of Israel."

Solomon himself had written in **Proverbs 9:10**, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

i.e. Solomon no longer considered God as a factor, as Someone who could enter into history and carry out judgment and punish disobedience.

Jesus' message to the church at Laodicea is relevant:

- **Revelation 3:15-17, 19** - "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: ...As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Perhaps Solomon thought he could rest on his work in building the Temple.

- **Matthew 7:22-23** - "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Faith has to continue right up to the end. Old manna tends to breed worms and stink (**Exodus 16:20**).

The warning for us is clear. If this could happen to Solomon, the wisest of men, what about us?

Are we complacent? Have we left our first love? Has the sense of the vibrant presence of God in our life faded?

Some have compared Solomon's fall to the situation of Adam, who acquiesced to Eve's offer to taste the forbidden fruit. But neither Adam nor Solomon can really blame their wives for their own sin.

But at a deeper level, the question is how God maintains his eternal plan in the face of human weakness and tragic choices of his chosen leaders.

In Isaiah 63, the prophet cries out for God's mercy for Israel while acknowledging God's complete sovereignty over all that had happened.

- **Isaiah 63:17** - "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance."

God has been working in and through everything to bring us to the culmination of his plan of salvation at the cross. And even Solomon's tragic choices were somehow part of it.

This kind of understanding is definitely "above my pay grade."

A Personal Warning

Apparently God had previously warned Solomon about his slide into idolatry. Now He speaks to him again, not directly in a vision or dream but probably through the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, according to Seder Olam Rabba, c. 20. p. 53.

1 Kings 11:11 - "Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant."

This is the same phrase Samuel used with Saul (**1 Samuel 15:27**).

1 Kings 11:12-13 - "Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen."

Because of the promise God made to David (**2 Samuel 7:12**) he would not do this in Solomon's lifetime, but later when his son Rehoboam took over.

"I will give one tribe to thy son David" - the tribe of Benjamin would be joined with Judah, probably because both were connected to Jerusalem. The boundary went right through the Temple compound.

So 10 tribes would pull away with Jeroboam, an Ephraimite who Solomon chose to serve him as an officer but who would later turn in rebellion against him and his son Rehoboam.

1 Kings 11:27 - "And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father."

This is not a very clear "cause." Millo was either a terrace created between the Temple Mount and the City of David where the house for Pharaoh's daughter was built, or a fortification of some kind, possibly to protect the Gihon Spring. Jewish traditions say Jeroboam opposed the oppressive use of forced labor in these building projects. Since he was the officer over all the labor force, this tradition sort of makes sense.

The name Jeroboam means, "may the people be great." He perhaps was a populist leader.

The prophet Ahijah is then told by God to go to Jeroboam. He acts out a vivid depiction of his destiny. Ahijah takes his own new garment and rips it into 12 pieces.

1 Kings 11:31 - "And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee:"

1 Kings 11:36 - "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there."

"A light (or lamp) always before me" - a descendent of David, a prophetic reference to the Messiah.

A Strange Promise to Jeroboam

1 Kings 11:38-39 - "And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever."

God promises Jeroboam a dynasty like David's if he is faithful.

Spoiler: He wasn't faithful.

But Rashi notes that this passage still looks toward the Messiah from the tribe of Judah : "for in the days of the Messiah the kingdom shall return to it," meaning to the seed of David.

The rabbis refer this to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones:

- **Ezekiel 37:19** - "Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand."

That fulfillment was in Jesus:

- **Luke 1:32-33** - "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Solomon Hunts Jeroboam

1 Kings 11:40 - "Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon."

Even though God had told him what was going to happen, Solomon in his pride thinks he can supersede God's plan.

1 Kings 11:43 - "And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead."

There is no specific passage where Solomon is said to have repented from his idolatry. But I like to think that he wrote Ecclesiastes as his testament to seeing the vanity of everything and especially of his idol worship.

There are some hints.

In **2 Chronicles 11:17** it says the people still went to Jerusalem to worship for three years after the 10 tribes split off, "because they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon."

Several books of the Bible - Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes - were written by him, and scripture is always written by "holy men.":

- **1 Peter 1:20-21** - "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Ecclesiastes has been described as "a full acknowledgment of all his evils, a recantation of them, and repentance for them." - *John Gill*

Still, for hundreds of years to come, the Israelites were divided, led astray, afflicted and sent into exile because of Solomon's actions.

We inevitably reap what we sow, even when we repent.