

The Rise and Fall of the House of Solomon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Chron. 6:1-48, 2 Chron. 7:1-4, 1 Kings 3:16-28, 11:1-43.

Memory Text: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

Richard Cory” is a poem about a rich man told from the perspective of a poor man—a poor man jealous of Richard Cory, of his money, of his looks, of everything Richard had that made others “wish that we were in his place.” The poem ends, though, when Richard Cory one fine night “went home and put a bullet through his head.”

Solomon, unlike Richard Cory, didn't kill himself, at least not physically. But spiritually, that's another matter. Solomon had all that the world could offer; even more so, he had the best that heaven could offer, as well: “And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly” (2 Chron. 1:1).

What happened? How could someone walking so close to God, and lavished with gifts from heaven and earth, end up so bitter, so cynical, and tortured?

It's easy, really. No matter who we are, what we have, or even how close to God we walk, in the end we are fallen creatures with natures so rotten that unless we daily surrender ourselves to God (Luke 9:23), we are in danger of allowing those natures to ruin us.

This week, before we study Ecclesiastes itself, we'll look at the *Sitz im Leben*, “the life situation,” of Solomon, which will help us understand why, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book as he did.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 6.

The Wisdom of Solomon

Look up the following texts. What do they tell us about the nature and character of Solomon, at least in his earlier years?

1 Kings 3:28

1 Kings 4:29-34

1 Kings 10:23

Matt. 12:42

Solomon, clearly, was a man of extraordinary intelligence and wisdom. Of course, intelligence and wisdom are not the same thing. Some of the world's most devilish people were very intelligent. What they lacked was "wisdom," the right kind, anyway.

According to the Bible there are at least two kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of the world (*1 Cor. 3:19*) and the wisdom that comes from God (*Job 28:28, Ps. 111:10*).

What do you think is the difference between these two kinds of wisdom?

Solomon was clearly a person who, whatever worldly wisdom he possessed, had the wisdom that came from God: "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore" (*1 Kings 4:29*).

If, however, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," then all wisdom and knowledge that arise after that "fear" must be based on the recognition of the reality, the power, and the goodness of God. God is the starting point of all true wisdom. Any truths not based on that foundation might be knowledge but not wisdom. How unfortunate that so many intelligent, educated, and knowledgeable people know nothing of this wisdom.

He was an educated, intelligent professional, regarded as brilliant. And yet, when told he was a sinner, he responded, "What sin? I'm not a sinner." How is this an example of knowledge without wisdom? What other examples can you think of, and what do they teach you about the difference between worldly knowledge and heavenly wisdom?

Solomon's Walk With the Lord

Whatever native intelligence Solomon possessed, that wasn't enough to give him the kind of wisdom he showed in those early years of his reign.

Read 1 Kings 3:16-28. What does that story tell us about what “the wisdom from God” includes?

Solomon's wisdom, His ability to judge rightly, came to him from God; it was a gift from above. But this didn't happen in a vacuum. Solomon walked with the Lord; he had a relationship with God, one in which his heart was surrendered to the Lord in faith and obedience. Only through such submission could the Lord give him the wisdom he needed to judge rightly in the land of Israel.

Read 1 Kings 3:3-14. What elements do you find in Solomon's words that show what His attitude toward God was?

In this encounter we can see what in many ways was the crucial element in Solomon's great success. Verse 9 says it all: Not only did he ask for the right thing (wisdom to be a good king); his whole attitude in asking showed that this young man, with all the world at his fingertips, understood his need of God. Solomon, the king of Israel, came before the Lord as a humble suppliant. There is no trace of self-sufficiency here. He saw his need of a greater power. As long as he had that attitude, there's no doubt that the Lord could work mighty things through him.

There's another element, too, that mustn't be missed. Read again Solomon's interaction with the Lord here. Obviously his words showed where his heart was. But words aren't enough. How else is Solomon to show the reality of a faith relationship with God? The answer, of course, is in verse 14: “If thou wilt walk in my ways . . .” Here's a great example of the closeness between faith and works. God can work through Solomon, and reward his faith, only as long as Solomon reveals that faith through obedience.

How well do your works reflect your faith? What do your works say about your faith? What changes do you need to make?

Solomon in God's Temple

Perhaps, of all the privileges given Solomon, none was greater than to build the temple in Jerusalem, the chosen city (*2 Chron. 6:6*) of the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the earth (*Rev. 10:6*). However much David, Solomon's father, had wanted the job himself, it was left to Solomon to fulfill the task.

Read over Solomon's prayer of dedication in 2 Chronicles 6. What elements stand out in your mind as you read Solomon's words? What principles can you find from this prayer that can be applied in our experience with God today, both on a personal and a corporate level?

So many powerful truths come from these words. Notice, for instance, verse 18, Solomon's acknowledgment of the grandness and greatness of the God who created a universe whose size the king could barely comprehend.

Notice, too, all the way through the prayer, Solomon's realization that his people needed to remain obedient to God. None of the special covenant blessings given to Israel were unconditional.

Perhaps the most important point in this whole prayer is the promise of forgiveness. If Israel sinned, and were punished for those sins, God would hear from heaven, from His "dwelling place," "and forgive." Notice, though, how that forgiveness always was linked to their confession and repentance.

Read verse 36, focusing on the phrase "for there is no man which sinneth not." How do you understand this verse in the context of the gospel? What point was Solomon making?

What we see here in Solomon's prayer is a recognition of human weakness contrasted to the loving forgiveness of God. Second Chronicles 7:1-3 shows that God accepted Solomon's sacrifices, which were offered with his prayers.

If there is no person who "sinneth not," why is it so important for each of us to understand Christ's death in our own behalf? Why must our hope of eternal life rest only with Jesus?

The Fall of Solomon

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

However much he was favored of the Lord, however many blessings Solomon had, he started to lose his way. Ellen White makes it clear: “So gradual was Solomon’s apostasy that before he was aware of it, he had wandered far from God. Almost imperceptibly he began to trust less and less in divine guidance and blessing, and to put confidence in his own strength. Little by little he withheld from God that unswerving obedience which was to make Israel a peculiar people, and he conformed more and more closely to the customs of the surrounding nations. Yielding to the temptations incident to his success and his honored position, he forgot the Source of his prosperity.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 55.

What element in particular does the Bible point to as the source of Solomon’s moral and spiritual decline? See 1 Kings 11:1-4. What command were his actions specifically in violation of? See Deut. 17:17.

However wrong he was in taking numerous wives, especially foreign ones who didn’t know the Lord, the problem wasn’t so much that, in and of itself; it was where these marriages would lead him. The women, who were probably closer to him than anyone else in the nation, eventually led him away from the Lord. Notice that 1 Kings 11:4 says that when Solomon was “old,” his wives turned his heart away. In other words, as Ellen White wrote above, his apostasy didn’t happen all at once. It began with an infraction that, in and of itself, didn’t seem to be so bad. That “small” step, however, ended up as a grand leap into apostasy.

What did this apostasy on his part lead him into doing? 1 Kings 11:4-9.

Utterly amazing! From being specifically chosen of the Lord to worshipping and serving pagan gods? If it could happen to him, it could happen to anyone.

Are there some “strange women” in your life? Be brutally honest with yourself. And if the answer is yes, how do you get rid of them?

Solomon's Last Days

The Lord, of course, didn't sit by and do nothing while Solomon fell into apostasy. No doubt the God who is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) worked on the heart of His once-faithful servant.

What did the Lord say to Solomon regarding Solomon's actions? How, also, do we see in these verses the principle that our actions, for good or ill, impact others? Where, also, do we see God's mercy toward Solomon here? See 1 Kings 11:11-13.

What trials did the Lord bring on Solomon as a result of his sinful actions? 1 Kings 11:14-43.

Though Scripture itself doesn't say it, Ellen White makes it clear that, in the end, Solomon—no matter how hardened—eventually saw the folly of his ways and repented. Having learned much from this terrible experience, in his later years "the king recorded for after generations the history of his wasted years with their lessons of warning." —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 79. These words, at least part of them, are what we know today as the book of Ecclesiastes.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1, 16 and 2:4-10. How do these verses help us identify its writer as Solomon?

Numerous lessons can be learned from the sad story of Solomon. First, no matter how exalted we are, none of us are immune from the follies of sin and apostasy. Second, Solomon's fall brought suffering not just upon himself but upon others, as well, a common principle that many of us know all too well. Finally, as we study the book of Ecclesiastes, we can see the bitterness and suffering that Solomon faced because of his wrong choices.

No matter how far Solomon's fall, God didn't give up on him. What good news do you find in that for yourself, you who have surely stumbled and fallen, as well?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 25–46, for the story of Solomon. See also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, introduction to Ecclesiastes.

“For many years Solomon’s life was marked with devotion to God, with uprightness and firm principle, and with strict obedience to God’s commands. He directed in every important enterprise and managed wisely the business matters connected with the kingdom. His wealth and wisdom, the magnificent buildings and public works that he constructed during the early years of his reign, the energy, piety, justice, and magnanimity that he revealed in word and deed, won the loyalty of his subjects and the admiration and homage of the rulers of many lands.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 32.

“But Solomon had begun to lose sight of the Source of his power and glory. As inclination gained the ascendancy over reason, self-confidence increased, and he sought to carry out the Lord’s purpose in his own way. He reasoned that political and commercial alliances with the surrounding nations would bring these nations to a knowledge of the true God; and he entered into unholy alliance with nation after nation. Often these alliances were sealed by marriages with heathen princesses. The commands of Jehovah were set aside for the customs of surrounding peoples.”—Page 54.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about other great leaders who made horrible mistakes that shouldn’t have been made. What parallels can you see between them and Solomon? What lessons can you learn for yourselves from these mistakes?
- ❷ Though we are not all Solomons, in what subtle ways do we face the same danger of slowly losing our dependency upon God? Also, what are our responsibilities to someone who is starting to fall away? How do we help without appearing judgmental?
- ❸ Do you, as a class, know someone who has fallen away from the Lord? What can you, as a class, do to try to bring this person back to the Lord? What are the first steps you could take to show this person that God still loves him or her? Perhaps the first thing you could do is invite that person to some social gathering outside a church setting.

The Chain of Truth

by KAMALANATHAN KATHIRAMAN

My wife and I live in Sri Lanka. One day she returned from visiting friends to say that an Adventist pastor had come to study the Bible with her friends. She told me many things she had learned—things I had never heard before. She urged me to meet this pastor, but I found reasons not to go.

I had grown up in an idol-worshipping home. But when I was in middle school, a friend gave me a Bible, and I began reading it. I lost interest in worshipping my family's idols and began worshipping God. However, some things about my friend's church bothered me—the loud music and people shouting during worship. But I knew of no other Christian church, so I attended my friend's church for years.

When my wife told me about the Adventist pastor, I was interested. But it took several weeks before I made time to meet him. Finally I agreed to go with my wife to the pastor's house one Saturday morning. I did not know that the pastor held worship services in his home on Saturday. I was surprised to find other people there ready to study the Bible. But as we studied, I became eager to know more about God. We decided to stay for the morning worship service.

What a difference! We sang songs with reverence, and we read the Bible together. The pastor really knew his Bible. This group truly worshiped God in spirit and in truth, and I wanted to worship with them.

That afternoon we studied the Bible some more. Time flew as we dug into God's Word together. When I asked a question, the pastor answered with Bible texts. I liked that!

After this, I was sure to be home when the pastor came to study the Bible. No more excuses. I had found truth, and I wanted it.

Three weeks later we decided to become part of this body of Christ. We were baptized a few months ago. People notice the changes in our lives and ask us what has happened. We gladly share our new faith with others, especially our families, who ask questions about our beliefs.

We invite people to study the Bible with us; but since we are still new Christians, we ask the pastor to teach them. Already some of my family members are turning from their idols and studying the Bible to learn about the living God. God is helping me teach them what I've learned.

Your Mission offerings helped bring my wife and me to Jesus.

KAMALANATHAN KATHIRAMAN quit his job in forestry to become a literature evangelist. He lives in northern Sri Lanka.