

# 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*

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*1 Kings 4:29-34*

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*1 Kings 10:23*

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*Matt. 12:42*

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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?**

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## *I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .*

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 12:47, 48*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** Our relationship with God needs to be ongoing.

**Feel:** Self-sufficiency causes moral and spiritual decline.

**Do:** Use God’s blessings to honor Him and to serve others.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

**I. Solomon’s Humble Beginnings** (*1 Kings 3:4-15*)

**A** God’s offer, “ ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you’ ” (*1 Kings 3:5, NIV*), is designed to reveal character and surely tests Solomon’s loyalties. What makes Solomon choose “a discerning heart” (*vs. 9*) over everything else he could have asked for? Why is it so hard to ask God to give us what is best for us rather than what we want?

**B** God’s response to Solomon’s request shows that He delights in doing “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (*Eph. 3:20, NIV*). In what ways has God given you more than you asked for?

**II. Solomon Glories in His Greatness, and God’s Discipline of Solomon** (*1 Kings 10:23–11:11, 14, 23, 26*)

**A** How does compromise come between God and us? How can we prevent it?

**B** Solomon finally receives word that God will take away his kingdom but “ ‘not . . . during your lifetime’ ” (*1 Kings 11:12, NIV*). In what way is this an appeal to repent? Explain.

▶ **Summary:** It is easy to be critical of Solomon’s mistakes and of his missed opportunities. But what are we doing with the talents and the gifts that God has entrusted to us?

## *Learning Cycle*

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate!**

**Just for Teachers:** **Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, Why is this lesson important to me?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

“So live that you will not have to spend the last half of your life regretting the first half.” Ironically, it was not a foolish, youthful first half that felled Solomon.

**Consider This:** Solomon had written, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches” (*Prov. 22:1*). Where, then, did he get his courage to go public in open shame, then write his tale for all Christendom to exclaim, “How stupid!” Would we thank and comfort Solomon?

**Example:** Solomon, you died assured that from the depths of your agony—with your kingly honor and good name cast at the cross—from your burned tongue, acid reflux, and broken heart, you cared enough to warn us, “Don’t do this! Don’t! Don’t! Don’t!”

**Consider This:** What does Solomon not want us to do?

## ► STEP 2—Explore!

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question: What do I need to know from God’s Word?

## Bible Commentary

### I. What Is Vanity?

Solomon’s key word, *vanity*, is introduced and repeated five times in Ecclesiastes 1:2. Solomon was indeed vain, but his intended meaning is not to be confused with pride. Instead, Solomon’s vanity means “to no avail,” as in “our labor was in vain.” Remember this important distinction throughout the quarter.

### II. A Blank Check?

Imagine being handed the blank check that Solomon had been given. Just fill in the amount. Invite a class member to read two texts: 1 Kings 3:5 (addressed to Solomon) and Matthew 7:7 (addressed to hearers of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount). This second text is addressed to a multitude (*see*

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## 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?

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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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

*Matt. 5:1*). That must include us! “The God whom we serve is no respecter of persons. He who gave to Solomon the spirit of wise discernment is willing to impart the *same* blessing to His children today.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 31, emphasis supplied.

Just like that? Well, there are a few conditions (which Solomon eventually failed to meet). At least four more invitations deserve contemplation. Distribute the following nine passages on slips to be read:

<i>Matthew 21:22</i>	<i>Ask believing</i>
<i>John 14:14</i>	<i>Ask in His name</i>
<i>John 15:7</i>	<i>Ask while abiding in Him</i>
<i>1 John 5:14</i>	<i>Ask according to His will</i>

Other passages explain why we do not receive:

<i>Psalms 66:18, 19</i>	<i>Cherished sins</i>
<i>Isaiah 1:13-17</i>	<i>Insincere worship</i>
<i>Mark 11:24-26</i>	<i>A nonforgiving spirit</i>
<i>James 4:3</i>	<i>Misuse of gifts</i>
<i>1 Peter 3:7</i>	<i>Dissension in the home</i>

**Consider This:** Is God enforcing “better be good” rules, or is He seeking responsible receivers?

■ *Discuss the cause of Solomon’s downfall with class members.*

From Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (pp. 53–68), we know that his downfall

- came about so gradually as to be imperceptible;
- stemmed from ambition to excel all other nations;
- came from entering heathen alliances and marriages;
- was influenced by his heathen wives in idolatry;
- eventually fell so low as to offer child sacrifices;
- was his inability to withstand flattery; he came to accept the phrase “Solomon’s Temple” rather than “God’s Temple.”

**III. Confession Time**

Little is known about Solomon’s confession, except that it was sincere and public. Solomon’s sins were “of a general kind that should be made known in the congregation of the people.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 639.

**Note:** For confessions not to be made public, see Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 645.

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## 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.*

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Utterly amazing! From being specifically chosen of the Lord to worshiping 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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

“In penitence [Solomon] began to trace his steps toward the exalted plane of purity and holiness from whence he had fallen so far.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 78.

But retracing his steps may have been, like his fall, at least somewhat gradual—for along the way he first tried to kill Jeroboam after realizing he was a God-chosen successor (*1 Kings 11:11, 40*).

**Consider This:** How does one reconcile Solomon’s last-hour turnaround, when he seemed cemented in sin, with the following passage:

“Let none flatter themselves that sins cherished for a time can easily be given up by and by. This is not so. . . . You may repent of the wrong you have done, and set your feet in right paths; but the mold of your mind and your familiarity with evil will make it difficult for you to distinguish between right and wrong.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 281.

### ► **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 How might I be making some gradual adaptations to this “under the sun” world? Have I somewhere “lowered the bar”? If so, where is grace now—between the original and present bar? Or do I not need grace, because I have reset the bar to my own ability?
- 2 Do I know someone still “under the sun”—this side of heaven—who longs for a “new name” now, a name like Friend?

#### Application Question:

We know nothing of Solomon’s confession, but instead of repenting as David did, who simply said, “I have sinned,” do we ever use the following rationalizations?

- The manipulation phrase: “I was Christian enough to confess. Now you must be Christian enough to forgive.”
- The buzzword phrase: “You have to forget what I did and move on.”
- The threat phrase: “Read these inspired quotations on what happens to people who don’t forgive.”

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## 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.

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

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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?

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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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- The blame phrase: “OK, so I’m wrong; but you started it.”

**Consider This:** Ask class members to prayerfully consider whether they have unresolved issues because of having used such phrases.

**Witnessing**

The message from God that quickened Solomon’s conscience came “through a prophet.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 77.

**Read to your class the following passage:** “Long had [*Solomon*] been harassed by the fear of utter ruin because of inability to turn from folly; but now he discerned in the message given him *a ray of hope*. God had not utterly cut him off, but stood ready to deliver him from a bondage more cruel than the grave, and from which he had had no power to free himself.”—Pages 77, 78, emphasis supplied.

A ray of hope! Solomon had given up, probably feeling that his feet were encased in hardened cement. But not so his heart, or at least not all of it.

We are not prophets. But how can God use us to give someone a ray of hope? Is someone we know longing to hear that he/she is not utterly cut off?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Visualize Solomon’s tombstone:

Solomon

\_?\_ B.C.–931 B.C.

A new name will I give you.

Between birth and death, life itself is a mere dash! For most of us, without a biblical record, God alone knows the life this dash represents.

Marriage counselors will often direct a spouse perceived as going nowhere, toward a goal in life by asking, “Upon retirement, what will you want to have accomplished? What will you want to be remembered for? Narrow your answer down to one line on your tombstone.”

**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:**

- 1** 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?
- 2** 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?
- 3** 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.