

“The Rise and Fall of a Wise Man” (Part 3 of 3)

1 Kings 10-11; 2 Chronicles 9

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February 18, 2018

That was *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*, by G. F. Handel, adapted for piano. It is a magnificent tribute to a magnificent woman who made a magnificent visit to behold the magnificence of Israel under the magnificent leadership of King Solomon, whose wealth and wisdom were legendary. The land of Sheba was at the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula, in what is now the country of Yemen; or perhaps it was in Ethiopia. Wherever Sheba was, its Queen wanted to behold the wealth and wisdom of Solomon that she had heard so much about. The temple, the palaces, the wall, the cities, the fleet of ships, the gold, the food supply, the organization of the government – the Bible says, “it took her breath away.” (1 Kings 10:5) A large ivory throne, covered in pure gold. 500 shields made of pure gold. All of Solomon’s drinking cups, made of pure gold. 12,000 horses (all imported) and 1,400 chariots. 25 tons of gold were being delivered to Jerusalem annually, as tribute. Solomon’s ships were importing gold, silver, ivory, precious gems, algum wood, monkeys, and peacocks from faraway lands. We’re told that in Jerusalem he made silver as common as stones, and cedar trees as common as sycamore. The Queen of Sheba beholds it all, and she beholds his wisdom, and she is amazed. She gives him gifts: more gold, gems, and a great quantity of spices. “Never again has so much spice come to Israel as when the Queen of Sheba gave this gift to King Solomon.” (1 Kings 10:10) “King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba everything she wanted, even more than she had brought the king.” (2 Chronicles 9:12)

I wonder if one of the things she asked him was if she could spend a night in his bed.

I read now from 1 Kings 11:1-8....

Did you catch those numbers? Seven hundred royal wives and three hundred secondary wives. That’s a *thousand* women, for one man. Can you even imagine? How is it possible to “cling in love” to a *thousand* people at the same time? Or did Solomon take them one by one? Did certain women get summoned to his bedchamber every night? What kind of a life did these women have? What did his *first* wife, that Egyptian princess for whom he had built an enormous palace, think of all this?

These women were, for the most part, foreigners; they worshiped other gods. Astarte, the goddess of the Sidonians. Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. Molech, the god of the Ammonites. These religions have all died out; nobody worships these gods anymore. But *Solomon* worshiped them. He built shrines for them. Some of those shrines were on “the

hill east of Jerusalem.” That’s the Mount of Olives. Yes, *that* hill, where a thousand years later Jesus Christ would pray in the garden of Gethsemane, Solomon built shrines to foreign gods.

“The Lord grew angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from being with the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. The Lord had commanded Solomon ... that he shouldn’t follow other gods. But Solomon didn’t do what the Lord commanded.” (1 Kings 11:9-10)

The book of Chronicles skips this part. Both Kings and Chronicles tell Solomon’s story, often word-for-word, but 1 Kings has 40 extra verses that 1 Chronicles doesn’t have, about those thousand wives, and those foreign gods, and God’s anger, and the consequences for both Solomon and his empire. “Because you have done all this,” says God to Solomon, “instead of keeping my covenant and my laws that I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom from you.” (1 Kings 11:11) There was a young Israelite, one of Solomon’s own officials, a “strong and honorable man” (1 Kings 11:28), by the name of Jeroboam. A prophet shows Jeroboam a garment, then tears it into twelve pieces. He says, “Take ten pieces, because ... the Lord has said, ‘Look, I am about to tear the kingdom from Solomon’s hand. I will give you ten tribes. But I will leave him one tribe on account of my servant David and on account of Jerusalem.... I am doing this because they have abandoned me.... They haven’t walked in my ways by doing what is right in my eyes – keeping my laws and judgments – as Solomon’s father David did.’” (1 Kings 11:31-33) Solomon’s empire will crumble into pieces ... because of Solomon’s sin.

That’s what happens, isn’t it, when a great man falls ... he doesn’t just destroy himself. He destroys the very institution he served, the very empire he may have built. Solomon’s sin had *vast* repercussions that impacted a huge *multitude* of people. When he dies, the empire fractures; it dissolves into two small kingdoms; Israel *never* recovers. 1 Kings says, *it’s because Solomon screwed up*.

What was missing in Solomon’s life that might have prevented all this? What could or should he have done differently? (I mean, aside from the obvious.) What if we were to compare him to his father David? David had royally screwed up, but he – and the country – recovered. Solomon royally screwed up, but he – and the country – did not. What made the difference between father and son?

First: David *cared* about God’s will. That did not prevent him from doing wrong. But when he realized he had done wrong in the eyes of the Lord, it made his heart *sick*. When Solomon did wrong, there’s no indication that he *cared*. He must have known he was being rebellious against God. *But it didn’t matter to him*. If you want to be a David and not a Solomon, you need to *care* about God’s will.

Second: David repented. He needed to get down on his knees, confessing what he had done wrong, asking for forgiveness. He also needed to *not engage* in that behavior again. He had one affair – *but only one*. He committed one act of murder – *but only one*. He did not keep on sinning. If you want to be a David and not a Solomon, you need to know when and how to repent.

Third: David had a prophet in his life who helped him know the mind of the Lord, a prophet named Nathan. David was wise enough to know that he needed to listen to Nathan’s counsel, *even when Nathan was telling him things he didn’t necessarily want to hear*. Solomon, for all his wisdom, seems not to have had a prophet a like that. There is no indication from either Kings or Chronicles that

anybody was speaking the Word of the Lord to Solomon. Solomon had appointed all sorts of people to all sorts of positions; why hadn't he appointed a *prophet* in his throne room? If you want to be a David and not a Solomon, you need to have *someone* in your life who will help you know the mind of the Lord.

Fourth: David had a good friend who was a good man, Jonathan, who became a confidant, a true *brother*. There's no indication in either Kings or Chronicles that Solomon had any friends. Subjects, a plenty. Wives, in abundance. But friends? I can't find one. We need people in our lives whom we can be honest with about our feelings, our desires, our struggles, our sin. Guys – you need *guy friends* that you can talk with about the tough issues you're facing and the choices you're making. Ladies, you need girl friends for the same reason. I think women tend to know that, and seek that out, more actively than men do; guys have a tendency of trying to tackle life on their own ... which often doesn't work out very well. Who are your friends? I mean, *real friends*, people you can truly confide in? Who's the *Jonathan* in your life? Who will be there to keep you in check when you start to go astray? If you want to be a David and not a Solomon, I think you need at least *one good friend* in your life.

Fifth, and finally: David had humility. Go back and re-read Psalm 51. It's David's prayer of confession. "Have mercy on me, God ... I know my wrongdoings; my sin is ever before me ... create in me a clean heart, O God; put a new, right spirit within me ... a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." This man is on his knees, looking at his sin and looking towards God. Solomon is sitting on his gilded ivory throne, in that palace that's as tall as the temple, looking at the empire that he's built and the wealth that is flowing to him from all around. David humbles himself; Solomon exalts himself. If you want to be a David and not a Solomon, you need to be on your knees, not on your throne.

What if you're neither a David nor a Solomon, but you're someone *near* them? You know a man (or a woman) in a significant position of leadership and responsibility, and *you know something that's going on* under the surface, behind the curtain – something that could destroy both *them* and the institution they serve or the empire they have built, and you can tell they're more like Solomon than like David. There's no *burning desire to be faithful to God*; no *repentance*; no *prophet* telling them the mind of the Lord; no *friend* holding them in check; no *humility*. Surely lots of people knew of Solomon's sin – but *nobody did anything about it*, and the result was *terrible* for Israel. What if *somebody* had spoken up? What if *somebody* had the guts to say, "this ain't right"? Granted, it was an absolute monarchy. Solomon had all the power. There was no division of government into executive, legislative, and judicial branches. There was just a *king*. In a situation like that, it's very hard to speak out. But we don't live in that world. We live in a world where people are elected, appointed, hired; we live in a world where there are – or should be – checks and balances in *every* organization. If somebody has been elected, they don't have to be *re-elected*. If somebody has been appointed, they can be *un-appointed*. If somebody has been hired, *they can be fired*. We have a *LOT* more say – in *every* organization, institution, business, and government – than the Israelites did. If there's wrongdoing, malfeasance, criminal activity; if somebody's a liar, or a crook, or just plain incompetent; if irrationality has taken over; if there is potential for serious harm to individual people or the whole institution, *we have power to act*.

Let us learn from Solomon's wisdom ... *and* from his folly.

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