



The Fall and Fall of Solomon

1 Kings 11

Solomon became the world's greatest monarch. He had a powerful empire which developed under David and then strengthened by his wealth and the political power that wielded. And the source – God. Last time we saw how he attracted other world powers of that time to him at the height of his empire. His empire was at peace, he was a great writer, philosopher and scientist. His wisdom was unparalleled.

How God had blessed him! You'd think that knowing this, Solomon would have remained faithful to the God who had done all this for him. But no.

The Bible is always brutally honest with its heroes. Solomon is remembered for his wisdom, but he is also remembered because of the way he threw it all away. How? He had a soft spot for the women.

Firstly we read how he took many wives:

Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides the daughter of the king of Egypt he married Hittite women and women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Sidon. 2 He married them even though the LORD had commanded the Israelites not to intermarry with these people, because they would cause the Israelites to give their loyalty to other gods. 3 Solomon married seven hundred princesses and also had three hundred concubines.

Why? We know that some of them were marriages of convenience as was quite normal in those days when developing alliances with other nations. But Solomon loved them. It wasn't even convenience. It was against God's Law to marry foreign wives and a harem that size was well beyond anything seen before. When the Israelites had sexual relations with Moabites when they were in the wilderness, it brought judgement upon the whole nation (Numbers 25:1-9, 1 Cor 10:8)). Intermarriage with foreign wives wasn't wrong *per se*. the reason why God banned it for Israel is given here: *because they would cause the Israelites to give their loyalty to other gods.* In fact, look in the genealogy of Jesus and you'll find at least two foreign women – both God-fearing (Rahab and Ruth). Actually, Moses had a Midianite wife – she was God-fearing too!

But worse – Solomon followed the pattern expected: *They made him turn away from God, 4 and by the time he was old they had led him into the worship of foreign gods. He was not faithful to the LORD his God, as his father David had*

been. 5 He worshipped Astarte, the goddess of Sidon, and Molech, the disgusting god of Ammon. 6 He sinned against the LORD and was not true to him as his father David had been. 7 On the mountain east of Jerusalem he built a place to worship Chemosh, the disgusting god of Moab, and a place to worship Molech, the disgusting god of Ammon. 8 He also built places of worship where all his foreign wives could burn incense and offer sacrifices to their own gods.

It all started even before he asked for wisdom, when he married Pharaoh's daughter (chapter 3). Now he was at his height he had lots of foreign wives and it wasn't long we find before he was worshipping their gods.

It all started with the thin end of the wedge. He may have argued that he needed to marry the wives because of politics, but he loved them and he started to please them by worshipping their gods.

Oh how many great men have fallen because their sexual desires took them beyond common sense and of course the laws of God. How many Christian leaders have fallen because of sexual sin. They are almost too many to count.

But this isn't just about sexual sin. Solomon sinned because he could. He was rich. He could have anything he wanted. Yet in having so much legitimate wealth, he wanted that which was illegitimate to satisfy his desires – because he was powerful and he could.

What is plainly obvious in our modern society is the prevalence of sexual sin. In one sense it's always been there. It may have been frowned on and even taboo to talk about it. But it's always been there. It's always been most common amongst the most rich and powerful. English monarchs always had their wives and lovers. Charles the second had many illegitimate sons, but never actually sired a legitimate one to succeed him!

And there are all the modern scandals of politicians, film stars and showbiz personalities, people whom others look up to, but who are so often anything but role models. The most horrific version of that recently is of course Jimmy Saville, renowned as a great philanthropist and Catholic Christian, honoured by Queen and Pope, yet he preyed on vulnerable young women. Worse, he did it in plain sight even openly speaking about it and on camera, and nobody stopped him because no-one believed that he could actually do such a thing!

Perhaps we don't think any of this sexual sin stuff applies to us. But it does. Modern society grades sin into serious and not so serious. So quite rightly society condemns paedophilia, it kind of condemns adultery, it doesn't condemn homosexuality any more, fornication amongst youths is OK as long as they are wearing protection. That's society's view.

What's God's view? It's all sin – it's all an offence against Him. He doesn't grade it and at the core of His law is the fact that sexual relations outside the context of marriage will harm us in some way, physically, socially or spiritually sooner or later. That happened to Solomon and we read of the way in which it harmed him, and harmed the nation.

Beware grading sin. Sin is sin and sin destroys. As God's people we can also be guilty of grading sin. Doing that makes one sin more important than another. Yet any sin destroys our relationship with God. [I heard a story recently of a church that demanded of a Town Pastor group that for continued support, that they declare their opposition to homosexuality. It was clearly an issue for that church. The response of the Town Pastor group was to decline. They help anyone irrespective of who they are. They also wondered why we should single out any sin for particular ire. All sin is wrong, whatever it is.]

And if that's the case then even though many/most/all of us may not be involved in sexual sin, there's plenty of others we may well be - unforgiveness, anger, back-biting, gossip, selfishness, not giving God the time He deserves and the rest of it. All sin destroys our relationship with God.

It's important to know that, because it should make us less critical of others, more sensitive for our need of repentance and personal holiness, and even more determined love others who struggle with sin that they find help, forgiveness and the power of God to lead a life that honours Him.

But there's one other point about sin we should reflect on. For Solomon it all started as a marriage of convenience to Pharaoh's daughter but was the thin end of a wedge. It ended up with a harem and the worship of foreign gods.

We sometimes excuse what we consider our minor sins. They don't matter to us, or we think God doesn't mind because we're only human after all aren't we. Thin end of wedge! *James 1:14:15 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.*

That was true of Solomon and it's true of us too. Sin always leads to death. I don't think Solomon was eternally damned for what he did - he was an object of grace like ourselves who willingly sought Him and accepted the gifts He gave. But death surely came. It meant the death of the empire (as Edom under Hadad rebelled), the death of the nation as Jeroboam rebelled), it meant the death of people as Solomon crushed rebellion. The Israelite Empire blossomed and died because one man who had been blessed of God disobeyed Him.

And it killed his relationship with God too. The man who wrote the profound Proverbs ended up writing the depressing Ecclesiastes - all is vanity, futile, pointless. Really? I don't think so. The Bible doesn't say so. His words were of a broken man - broken by his own sin.

It's a challenging lesson to learn. It's important to understand that if we accept Christ, we accept His promises, find forgiveness and the rest then we have an eternal hope. It can't be taken away. The NT is clear on that. But our sin brings death still. It might mean death of relationships, death of our way of life, the death of churches even the death of societies. Christian history is littered with death in the midst of life. And sin puts us there.

That's why we have Communion. Solomon was warned time and again as a consequence. God never gives warnings to condemn. They are all reminders

that we can repent. He ignored the lot and we got the lengthy description at the end of the chapter of the consequences of his stupidity. What a shame.

Communion is here not just as a reminded of what Jesus did, but a reminder of who we are and the sin we committed in the past. It's a reminder that sin brings death.

But the blood of Christ brings life, hope, freedom. As we come around the table this evening, we come realising that Jesus not only dealt with our sins past, but He deals with our sins present. He's still there to provide life, hope and freedom to rocky relationships, crumbling lifestyles, struggling churches. Salvation isn't just past, it's present, looking forward to that future when our salvation will be made complete when Christ returns.

So here's the opportunity. Jesus died so that we may be free from sin and that we may have the power by the Holy Spirit to deal with its consequences. It starts by realising the sin and the death that we are responsible for.

Prayers of Confession

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