

The Story (11) – King Solomon

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I. Introduction and Background

A. As we saw last week, David committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. When she informed him she was pregnant, he tried to cover up his sin by calling Uriah back from the battlefield and getting him to sleep with his wife. When that plan failed, David had Uriah killed in battle and then took Bathsheba as one of his wives.

B. God was greatly displeased with what David had done, and he told him through the prophet Nathan that the child conceived through his adultery with Bathsheba would die. That death is reported in 2 Sam. 12:18.

1. Though it is commonly assumed that the child died early in infancy, nothing is said about how old the child was when he died. It simply describes him as a child, so possibly other sons were born before that son died and Solomon was the first son born *after* his death, the others not being mentioned because the focus is on Solomon as the successor to David's throne and the one who brought peace after the first son's death. (Solomon was called Jedidiah by the prophet Nathan because he was loved by God - 2 Sam. 12:24-25.)

2. That would explain why Solomon is listed fourth in the three listings of David's sons born in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:13-16; 1 Chron. 3:5-9; 1 Chron. 14:3-7), the first four of whom are said in 1 Chron. 3:5 to have been Bath-shua's (Bath-shua being an alternate way of referring to Bathsheba and Ammiel being an alternate way of referring to her father Eliam).

3. Another possibility is that the listings of Bathsheba's four sons are for some reason not in chronological order. In that case, Solomon could have been Bathsheba's second son, the first being the unnamed one who died. But it should be noted that the six sons born in Hebron *are* given in their birth order (2 Sam. 3:2-5; 1 Chron. 3:1-4), so one might expect the same to be true of the sons born in Jerusalem.

II. Transfer of the Kingship to Solomon

A. As I said at the end of the class last week, it seems that Solomon was designated David's successor around 973 BC (1 Chron. 23:1). This was the time when David was charging Solomon regarding the building of the temple, a project for which David had made preparations.

B. This appointment did not sit well with Solomon's older brother Adonijah. Being an older brother, perhaps the oldest surviving brother, he apparently thought the kingship should pass to him.

1. As told in 1 Kings 1, Adonijah got Joab and Abiathar the priest on board with his plan and declared himself king in an attempt to circumvent David's intention that Solomon succeed him on the throne. When David was alerted to the plan, he arranged for Solomon to be brought before the people so that his prior appointment might be ratified by a formal public coronation. That is why 1 Chron. 29:22b refers to Solomon being acknowledged as king "a second time."

2. When Adonijah and his supporters realized that they had been beaten to the punch and that the people were celebrating Solomon's appointment as king, the supporters at his gathering scattered. Adonijah feared that Solomon would kill him, but Solomon let him live on the condition he not again manifest disloyalty to Solomon as king.

III. Securing His Rule

A. In 1 Kings 2 David, at the end of his life, instructed Solomon to be courageous and to be faithful and obedient to the Lord. He also told him to deal according to his wisdom with Joab, who had murdered both Abner and Amasa, and with Shimei who had cursed David when he fled from Absalom. David died shortly thereafter, in 971 B.C., having reigned for forty years.

B. Adonijah soon asked Bathsheba to secure Solomon's permission for him to have Abishag the Shunammite as his wife. Abishag was the young woman who had kept David warm in his old age (but with whom he did not have sexual relations). Solomon saw this for what it was – an attempt by Adonijah to draw support for himself as the rightful king – and had Adonijah put to death.

C. He followed this by dealing with Adonijah's influential supporters: Abiathar the priest and Joab the military man. He expelled Abiathar from Jerusalem and had Joab put to death.

D. Solomon told Shimei, the man who had cursed David and thus would be a danger to work against David's chosen successor, that he would allow him to live on the condition that he not leave Jerusalem. Shimei agreed and lived in Jerusalem, but after three years he journeyed to Gath looking for two runaway servants. When he returned, Solomon had him killed. The last sentence of 2 Kings 2 is "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

IV. The Glory Years

A. At the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 1), Solomon gathered the people at Gibeon. The Lord appeared to him there and told him to ask for what he wanted the Lord to give him. Instead of asking for riches, long life, or victory over his enemies, Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge to govern the people over whom the Lord had made him king. This request pleased the Lord, who gave him wisdom and knowledge and also promised him great riches, possessions, and honor.

B. Solomon's wisdom was promptly demonstrated before the people in his handling of the dispute between two prostitutes over the identity of a newborn. They each had newborn baby only three days apart in age. The allegation was that the one prostitute's newborn had died in the

night and that she switched the dead baby for the living one and claimed that the living one was hers. It is a classic "she said, she said," which makes it very difficult to get at the truth. Solomon ordered the baby cut in half so they could each have part of the child, and then was able to tell from the prostitutes' reactions who was the real mother. This is wisdom in the administration of justice.

C. Solomon was renowned for his wisdom.

1. 1 Kings 4:29-34 states (ESV): ²⁹ *And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore,* ³⁰ *so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.* ³¹ *For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.* ³² *He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.* ³³ *He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish.* ³⁴ *And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.*

2. Indeed, his wisdom is evident in the fact he was the author of many of the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, and he is closely associated with wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes. You see his wisdom displayed in chapter 4 in the efficient organization of his government and in chapter 5 in his diplomacy with Hiram king of Tyre who supplied artisans and material for his building projects.

D. Solomon constructed in Jerusalem a magnificent temple of the Lord, including its furnishings, over the course of seven years. He then placed the ark of the covenant in the temple (1 Ki. 6:38, 8:1-11). Solomon's faith and love for God were evident in his prayer of dedication for the temple in 1 Ki. 8:22-53 and in his benediction in 1 Ki. 8:54-61. During that moving ceremony, the new temple was filled with the glory of the Lord, the cloud of Yahweh's presence.

E. Solomon built a palace complex consisting of five associated structures, including a separate residence for his Egyptian wife (1 Kings 7:1-8), that took thirteen years to complete. He also undertook numerous other construction projects throughout Israel. He built a fleet of ships (9:26-28), fortified or rebuilt the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Beth Horon, Gibeon, and Baalath (1 Kings 9:15, 18), and built stables for his many horses (9:19).

F. This was really a golden age for Israel. There was peace and great prosperity, and under his reign Israel became a major player in the arena of international trade and politics.

1. The abundance of the times is evident in the quantity of royal rations reported in 4:22-28. 1 Kings 4:20-21 states: ²⁰ *Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.* ²¹ *Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.*

2. 1 Kings 4:25 says: *And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.*

3. In 1 Kings 10 the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with questions because she had heard of his fame. "Sheba" is probably the Hebrew reference to "Saba," an area on the southwest coast of the Arabian peninsula. Solomon blew her away with the wisdom of his responses and the splendor of his court. Jesus refers to this event in Mat. 12:42 (Lk. 11:31): *The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

4. In terms of wealth and trade, 1 Kings 10:26-29 paints the picture. Verse 27 says *And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah.*

G. God appeared to Solomon a second time and told him in 1 Ki. 9:4-7 (ESV): ⁴ *And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules,* ⁵ *then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'* ⁶ *But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them,* ⁷ *then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.*

V. Solomon's Tragic End

A. In light of God's tremendous blessings to Solomon, Solomon's early faithfulness, and God's warning to him, it is heartbreaking to read 1 Kings 11:1-11 (ESV modified): *Now King Solomon loved many foreign women – along with the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women –* ² *from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love.* ³ *He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. **And his wives turned away his heart.*** ⁴ ***For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.*** ⁵ *For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.* ⁶ ***So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done.*** ⁷ *Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.* ⁸ *And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.* ⁹ ***And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice*** ¹⁰ *and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded.* ¹¹ *Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.*

1. The meaning of vv. 1-2 seems to be that Solomon loved many foreign women from the nations identified in Deut. 7:1 *along with* foreign women from other nations. In other words, the listing of foreign women from the nations in v. 1 is parenthetical. (The "Hittites" of 11:1 are not the same group as the "Hittites" of Ex. 34:11 and Deut. 7:1, so the distinction between the nations in 1 Kings 11:1 and Deut. 7:1 is complete.)

2. The text shows that all unconverted foreign wives, even from nations other than those listed in Deut. 7:1-4, pose a danger to faith. The text states specifically that when he was old *his wives* turned his heart away from God and after other gods. The spousal relationship has great potential for influence, which is why Paul in 1 Cor. 7:39 instructs Christians to marry in the Lord, and in Solomon's case that influence was evil.

3. It ought to be sobering to everyone to recognize that faith is always in the here and now. Years of faithfulness, years marked by true wisdom that navigates life successfully in the fear of God, does not make faithfulness tomorrow a certainty. The enemy is patient and works on us throughout our lives and in different ways at different points in our journey. That is why we must be vigilant always.

4. Solomon's sin was not simply that he succumbed to the pressure of his idolatrous wives. He was wrong to have taken them as his wives in the first place.

a. First, 1 Kings 11:1-2 states explicitly that Solomon married foreign wives from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them." This is a reference to the prohibition in Deut. 7:1-4 against marrying indigenous foreigners, women or men from established foreign communities within the Promise Land. That principle was later applied to the foreign communities within Israel after the return from exile (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 13).

b. Second, at the very least, Deut. 17:17 forbids a king from engaging in *excessive* polygamy, and Solomon's was excessive by any standard. But a good case can be made that the Mosaic law prohibits polygamy altogether. Obviously I cannot now develop this and address the various texts that are often cited as indicating divine approval of polygamy, so I will refer you to Old Testament scholar Richard Davidson's study of this topic in his monumental tome *The Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* published in 2007.

B. It should be noted that there were other indications in Solomon's life that all was not well with him spiritually.

1. Deuteronomy 17:16 forbids an Israelite king from increasing or adding horses for himself or causing people to return to Egypt to acquire horses. This was to keep the king from trusting in horses and chariots for their security rather than in God (e.g., Isa. 31:1; Ps. 33:17). Solomon flagrantly violated this command (1 Ki. 4:26, 10:26-29; 2 Chron. 1:14-17, 9:25-28).

2. Deuteronomy 17:17 also forbids an Israelite king from adding silver and gold in great quantity for himself, and Solomon surpassed all kings in terms of riches (1 Ki. 10:23; 2

Chron. 9:20-22). But whether Solomon did anything wrong in amassing such a vast fortune is complicated by the fact the Lord promised him in 2 Chron. 1:12, "I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like." There are indications that Solomon became self-indulgent in his use of wealth, which would run afoul of the prohibition in Deut. 17:17 about a king adding silver and gold in great quantity *for himself*.

C. God tells Solomon in 1 Kings 11:9-13 that as a result of his disobedience the kingdom would be divided in the days of his son, leaving his successor to rule only a fragment of it. We will discuss this next week.

D. God also raised up enemies against Solomon. Specifically, he raised up Hadad the Edomite and Rezon king of Syria.

E. Moreover, the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, that God was going to make him king over Israel, the ten northern tribes he was going to take from Solomon's son. For that reason, Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt until Solomon's death.

F. Solomon died in 931/930 B.C. after reigning for forty years. That's where we'll pick up the story next week.