

# TRACING SOLOMON'S FAILURE OF FAITH

## Ashby Camp

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### I. Introduction

A. Over the last few weeks, Jeff did a great job looking at some people of exemplary faith in the Old Testament: Daniel, Esther, and Moses. It is always inspiring, challenging, and humbling to consider such heroes of faith, people who demonstrate for us what it means to trust in God and to live for him *no matter what*. That kind of faith is what the church always needs.

B. The focus for the next section of lessons shifts to men who were *not* paragons of faith, men who *ceased* to be faithful at some point in their lives. More specifically, we're trying to see if we can learn anything from Scripture about how the parents of these examples of unfaithfulness failed to transmit their faith sufficiently and thus contributed to that person's loss of faith. In the final section of lessons, we'll look at some biblical examples of offspring that remained faithful and see if we can learn anything about how the parents in those cases successfully transmitted their faith.

C. Terry and I were asked to teach on the particular individuals we'll be looking at for the remainder of the quarter. Terry initially was scheduled to teach for the month of July and I was scheduled to teach for four weeks in the month of August, but we had to make some adjustments. I was set to fill in for Terry on July 4, but since we'll not be having the class that night, the July 4 class was moved up to tonight. Terry will be filling in for me on August 8.

### II. David and Solomon

A. Tonight we are going to look at Solomon. It may surprise some of you to hear him mentioned as an example of failed faith, but those of you who have spent more time in the Old Testament will recognize that the shoe definitely fits.

B. Solomon was, of course, the son of David and Bathsheba.

1. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and David committed adultery with her as reported in 2 Samuel 11. David thereafter tried to cover up his sin by calling Uriah back from the battlefield and trying to get him to sleep with his wife in the hope of preventing her pregnancy from being traced back to him. When that plan failed, David had Uriah killed in battle and then took Bathsheba as one of his wives.

2. David had eight wives who are named in Scripture. Six of these named wives each bore him a son during his seven years in Hebron (2 Sam. 3:2-5; 1 Chron. 3:1-4). Michal, Saul's daughter, is the only named wife who did not bear him any children. Bathsheba bore David four sons in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 3:5; Bath-shua being an alternate way of referring to Bathsheba and Ammiel being an alternate way of referring to her

father Eliam), and other unidentified wives bore him nine more sons during his thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Maacah, Absalom's mother, bore David a daughter, Tamar, during his years in Jerusalem, and David had additional unidentified sons and daughters by unidentified concubines (2 Sam. 5:13; 1 Chron. 3:9, 14:3).

3. Based on the prediction in 2 Sam. 12:11 that as punishment someone would lie with David's *wives* in plain view, the ten "concubines" mentioned in 2 Sam. 15:16, 16:21-22, 20:3 include at least some of David's wives, the word being broad enough to include wives other than an original first wife (*Flame of Yahweh*, p. 186, 206). Bathsheba apparently is not included among the ten, since she is mentioned as having continuing access to David's bedchamber (1 Ki. 1:11, 15, 16, 28, 31) in contrast to the ten who were secluded (2 Sam. 20:3). So at an absolute minimum, the sum of David's wives and concubines was twelve (the "ten" plus the first wife and Bathsheba), and he probably had many more. The most prominent of David's wives in terms of mention in Scripture are Abigail (1 Samuel 25) and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12).

4. David had nineteen sons and one daughter who are named in Scripture, all of whom were born to his various wives. Only four of the sons – Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon – and the daughter Tamar are known in any detail. Solomon is by far the most prominent of these since he succeeded David on the throne of Israel and his descendants carried on the family line as the kings of Judah.

5. As you can imagine, David's conduct involving Bathsheba greatly displeased the Lord, as the prophet Nathan made clear to him in 2 Samuel 12. The Lord said to David through Nathan in 2 Sam. 12:10-11 (ESV): <sup>10</sup> *Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.* <sup>11</sup> *Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.* He told David in v. 14 that the child born to him by Bathsheba would die, the happening of which is reported in v. 18.

6. 2 Samuel 12:24-25 states (NET): <sup>24</sup> *So David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went to her and had marital relations with her. She gave birth to a son, and David named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved the child* <sup>25</sup> *and sent word through Nathan the prophet that he should be named Jedidiah for the LORD's sake.*

a. This need not mean that Solomon was David's first child by Bathsheba after the death of their son. It could be that she had other sons by David who are not mentioned here because Solomon is the son who succeeds David to the throne.

b. That would fit with the fact 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), and in 1 Chron. 3:5 all four of those sons are said to have been Bath-shua's, which is an alternate way of referring to Bathsheba (and Ammiel an alternate way of referring to her father Eliam).

c. Perhaps it is possible that the listing of those sons is not in the order of their birth, in which case Solomon would be the seventh son rather than the tenth. But the six sons born in Hebron are given in their birth order (2 Sam. 3:2-5; 1 Chron. 3:1-4).

C. Nathan's prophecy to David following his sin involving Bathsheba foretold of troubles that would ensue, and from that point on things turn tragic for David and his family. In 2 Samuel 13 David's eldest son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister Tamar, and then David's third son, Absalom, conspires to kill Amnon in revenge. Absalom flees after the murder but later returns, only to lead a rebellion against David that forces David to flee Jerusalem. Absalom ends up being killed by David's general Joab.

D. In reconstructing events at the end of David's life, it seems that Solomon was made coregent with David around 973 BC (1 Chron. 23:1). This was the time he was charging Solomon regarding the building of the temple, a project for which David had made preparations. See Walter Kaiser's *A History of Israel* and Eugene Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests*.

E. This appointment did not sit well with Solomon's older brother Adonijah, who around 971 BC conspired with others to usurp the throne from Solomon. This is the story told in 1 Kings 1-2. Nathan informed Bathsheba that Adonijah was attempting to steal the throne. Together they moved David to action, who 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." David died shortly thereafter, having reigned for forty years.

F. There is no denying that Solomon was a man of faith and did many great things during his life.

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

2. Solomon's wisdom was, of course, legendary.

a. 1 Kings 4:29-34 states (ESV): <sup>29</sup> *And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore,* <sup>30</sup> *so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.* <sup>31</sup> *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.* <sup>32</sup> *He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.* <sup>33</sup> *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. <sup>34</sup> 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.*

b. Solomon is the author of many of the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, and his identification with wisdom is evident in the book of Ecclesiastes. In 1 Kings 10 the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with questions because she had heard of his fame, and he blew her away with his wisdom.

3. Solomon constructed the temple in Jerusalem over the course of seven years and placed the ark of the covenant within it (1 Ki. 6:38, 8:1-11). The building was filled with the cloud of Yahweh's presence. Solomon's faith and love for God is 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. He also completed numerous other construction projects.

4. God appeared to Solomon a second time on that occasion and told him in 1 Ki. 9:4-7 (ESV): <sup>4</sup> *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, <sup>5</sup> 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.'* <sup>6</sup> *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, <sup>7</sup> 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.*

G. In light of God's tremendous blessings to Solomon and Solomon's early faithfulness, 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 – <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. **And his wives turned away his heart. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. <sup>9</sup> 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 <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. <sup>11</sup> 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. When rebuking the Israelites for taking wives from the non-Israelite groups that presumably lived among them, Nehemiah appealed to the example of Solomon. He said in Neh. 13:26 (ESV): ***Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin.*** The spousal relationship has great potential for influence, and in Solomon's case that influence was evil.

3. Of course, many of Solomon's marriages to foreign wives were no doubt political arrangements intended to seal relationships between the two countries. For example, 1 Ki. 3:1 says that Solomon made a marriage alliance by marrying the daughter of pharaoh king of Egypt.

4. 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.

5. It is helpful to ask here what Solomon did wrong. Was it simply that he succumbed to the pressure of his idolatrous wives or was there also something wrong with his taking them to be his wives in the first place? It was the latter.

a. 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. At the very least, Deut. 17:17 forbids a king from engaging in *excessive* polygamy, and Solomon's was excessive by any standard.

c. And finally, a good case can be made that the Mosaic law prohibits polygamy altogether.

(1) The norm of heterosexual monogamous marriage is summarized in Gen. 2:24 and is assumed throughout the Old Testament.

(2) There are good reasons for understanding Lev. 18:18 as prohibiting polygamy generally rather than as prohibiting the more specific incestuous case of a man marrying his wife's sister. Indeed, this is how Qumran community interpreted it.

(a) There are clear indications of a literary break at v. 18 where the subject shifts from laws forbidding sexual relationships on the basis of bonds of kinship (vv. 6-17) to laws covering a broad range of forbidden sexual relationships not based on bonds of kinship (vv. 18-23). Verse 6 announces the subject of incest and then vv. 7-17 each specifies a close relationship with whom sex is forbidden with the opening formula: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of . . ." Verse 18 breaks that pattern.

(b) The phrase that is commonly translated "wife's sister" is literally "a woman to her sister," as it's translated in the English Revised Version, which in its eight other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible is used idiomatically in the sense of "one in addition to another." The masculine equivalent of the phrase, "a man to his brother," is used twelve times in the Hebrew Bible in the same idiomatic manner meaning "one to another" or "to one another."

(3) Deuteronomy 17:17 is best translated that the king shall not *increase* or *add* wives for himself, which can mean that he shall not engage in polygamy, not that he shall not engage in an *excessive level* of polygamy. Again, this is how the Qumran community interpreted it.

(4) It would take too long to develop this and to address the various texts that are often cited as indicating divine approval of polygamy, so let me just give you the conclusion of 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:

In the OT there are thirty-three reasonably clear historical cases of polygamy out of approximately three thousand men mentioned in the scriptural record. Most of these examples were the wealthy patriarchs or Israel's monarchs (the only clear case of a commoner having more than one wife in Elkanah, this likely from the motive of Hannah's infertility). In the narratives containing the practice of polygamy or concubinage, invariably the divinely inspired narrators include their tacit condemnation of these practices. Contrary to other ANE legislation, Mosaic legislation condemns all polygamy, both for the people and (at least implicitly) for

the king. Unlike in the other ANE law codes and practice, there is no exception for cases of infertility or illness of the wife or for royal diplomatic alliances. None of the pentateuchal legislation concerning marital forms commands or condones polygamous relationships, although remarriage after a man's first wife died is allowed.

H. Given that Scripture attributes the failure of Solomon's faith to the influence of his unconverted foreign wives and given that Solomon was wrong to have taken these wives, can we reasonably and fairly trace his disobedience in that regard back to any influence of his parents? After all, that is the focus of this section of the series; we are trying to glean instruction regarding transmitting our faith to our children.

1. Let me first say that I know of nothing that explicitly ties any conduct of David to Solomon's wife-influenced idolatry. In fact, David is considered a paragon of faithfulness in the area of idolatry. The eulogizing statements about David in 1 Ki. 14:8 and 15:5 should be seen in context as referring to David's remaining loyal to God and keeping his commandments *relating to idolatry* not as a general statement that he did no wrong. And even in 1 Ki. 11:1-11 Solomon's involvement in idolatry is twice *contrasted* with how David had conducted himself in that regard.

2. Moreover, when David was charging Solomon about the building of the temple, he exhorted him in 1 Ki. 2:3 to walk in God's ways and keep his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses. He said to him in 1 Chron. 22:12 (ESV) "may the LORD grant you discretion and understanding, that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the LORD your God," and he told him in 22:13 that he would prosper if he was careful to observe the statutes and rules that the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. He told him in 1 Chron. 28:9-10 to know the God of his father and to serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind. All of this is good and militates against tying Solomon's marriage-related failure of faith to David's conduct.

3. 1 Kings 1:6 reveals that David had spoiled Solomon's older brother Adonijah, but we are not told that he did likewise with Solomon. And even if he did, it would be speculative to connect that with the wife-induced idolatry of Solomon's old age.

4. On the other hand, if it is correct that polygamy is prohibited in the Mosaic law, then David paved the way to Solomon's neglect or disregard of God's marital regulations. Even if David, as part of his attitude of repentance during Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Sam. 15:30), returned to a monogamous state with Bathsheba for the rest of his life, which may well be the case – and would explain why the narrator emphasizes that David did not have sexual relations with Abishag the Shunammite who took care of him in his old age (1 Ki. 1:1-4) – he still modeled during Solomon's formative years a disrespect for God's will on marriage. It is easy to see how that ethical failure could have played into Solomon's marriage violations.

5. Also, we are told in 2 Sam. 3:3 and 1 Chron. 3:2 that David's wife Maacah, the mother of Absalom, was the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur. Geshur was a small kingdom east of the Sea of Galilee within the territory allotted to the half tribe of Manasseh; its inhabitants were Arameans. (ABD, II: 987; 2 Sam. 15:8). There were occasional hostilities between Israel and the Geshurites, and it is widely assumed that David's marriage to Maacah would have included some kind of treaty with the Geshurites.

(a) As I already noted, the prohibition in Deut. 7:1-4 involves marrying indigenous foreigners, women or men from established foreign communities within the Promise Land. That principle was later applied to the different foreign communities inhabiting Israel after the return from exile (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 13).

(b) Since Geshur was within the land given by God to Israel (Josh. 13:1-2, 13), though they were not specifically mentioned in Deut. 7:1, it seems the principle of not marrying resident foreigners would preclude marrying a Geshurite. In that case, David modeled for Solomon the very wrong that led to his downfall.

I. Finally, I should point out that there are indications earlier in Solomon's life that all was not well with him spiritually.

1. Deuteronomy 17:17 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."

a. The author of 1 Kings seems to be implying in 10:14-29 that Solomon's use of his wealth was self-indulgent. He decorates his palace with gold (v. 16), overlays the finest throne ever seen with it (vv. 18-20), and makes household items with it (v. 21) (Provan, 87). So even though given as a blessing of God, his self-indulgence would run afoul the prohibition in Deut. 17:17 about a king adding silver and gold in great quantity *for himself*.

b. I think it is relevant in this regard that in 1 Ki. 12:4 Jereboam says that Solomon had placed a heavy yoke of hard service on the northern tribes. That smacks of someone interested in wealth for himself at the expense of others.