

FROM PHYSICAL RICHES TO SPIRITUAL RAGS: THE SAD SAGA OF SOLOMON

Presented by

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If I asked you today, “Who were the only two people to leave this Earth without dying?,” what would be your answer? If you said, “Enoch and Elijah,” you would be correct. If I asked you, “Who was the strongest person ever to have lived?,” how would you respond? If you answered, “Samson,” you would be right. If I asked you, “Who was the most righteous person ever to have lived?,” whose name would you choose? If you said, “Jesus Christ,” that would be the proper reply. If I asked you, “Other than Jesus, who was the smartest man ever to have lived?,” what name would spring to mind? If you said “Solomon,” you would have answered the question correctly.

Have you ever heard an individual say of someone else, “That person **has it all!**”? Well, Solomon did indeed “have it all.” His father David was the king of Israel. His home while he was growing up was the royal palace. And eventually his father chose him over his elder brother Adonijah to be the Jews’ next monarch. Plus, as if that was not enough, God Himself was on Solomon’s side. Shortly after Solomon’s coronation as Israel’s third king, God appeared to him in a vision and said to him, “What shall I give you?” Solomon humbly said to God, “Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:5,9). God was pleased with Solomon’s response, and told the king,

“Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words. I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you” (1 Kings 3:11-12).

But that is not all that God had to say to the young king. The Lord then said to Solomon, “I also have given you what you have **not** asked—both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days” (1 Kings 3:13). Yes, it truly can be said of Solomon that “he had it all.”

For example, Solomon was **the smartest man** ever to have lived. The Bible gives us a hint of the extent of Solomon’s wisdom when it tells us that the Queen of Sheba “came to visit Solomon to test him with hard questions,” and that “Solomon answered all her questions, and there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her” (1 Kings 10:1,3). In fact, the queen was **so** impressed that she admitted to Solomon, “It was a true report that I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. **Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard**” (1 Kings 10:6-7). We know the queen was not exaggerating because the Bible tells us that “all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart” (1 Kings 10:24).

But did you notice that the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, “Your wisdom **and prosperity** exceed the fame of which I heard”? Solomon was not just the **smartest** man who ever lived; he also was **the richest!** Exactly how rich was Solomon? From 1 Kings 10:14-15 we get a clue as to the extent of Solomon’s incredible wealth: “The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was **six hundred and sixty-six talents**, besides that from the traveling merchants, from the income of traders, from all the kings of Arabia, and from the governors of the country.” Solomon’s yearly income **just from gold alone** was **666 talents**. Here is what that means in today’s figures.

- One talent was equal to 3,000 shekels
- Solomon’s annual income was 666 talents
- 666 multiplied by 3,000 = 1,998,000 shekels
- Each shekel was equal to 11.4 grams
- 1,998,000 shekels multiplied by 11.4 grams = 22,772,200 grams
- It takes 454 grams to make a pound; so 22,772,200 grams divided by 454 = 50,170 pounds
- One pound contains 16 ounces; so 50,170 pounds multiplied by 16 ounces = 802,720 ounces
- Gold recently sold for \$250 per ounce
- 802,720 ounces multiplied by \$250/ounce = **\$200,680,000**

Thus, Solomon’s yearly income **just from gold alone**—not counting the revenue he received from “traveling merchants, traders, the kings of Arabia, and the governors of the country”—approached a **quarter of a billion dollars**. In Solomon’s palace (which took 13 years to build) he ruled from **an ivory throne covered with pure gold**. We are informed in 1 Kings 10:21-23 that “King Solomon’s drinking vessels were gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. **Not one was silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon.... *King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches.***” Further proof of Solomon’s wealth can be seen in the fact that when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the cost in just gold and silver alone (using today’s prices)—not counting other items such as bronze, iron, cedar wood, cypress wood, salaries for 183,000 workers for 7½ years, etc.—was **\$61,497,005,152!** Little wonder the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, “Your **prosperity** exceeds the fame of which I heard.”

But with all of that said, there is one more thing I would like you to consider. If I asked you today, “For what do you remember Solomon **the most?**,” how would you answer such a question? Would you say that you remember Solomon mainly for his riches? Probably not. Would you say that you remember the king primarily for his wisdom? Probably not. Truth be told, wouldn’t it be correct to say that most of us today remember Solomon **more for his spiritual failures than we do for his earthly successes?** When God told Solomon that He would give him both wisdom and wealth, there was an important condition attached to that promise—as 1 Kings 3:14 points out when it records God’s saying to Solomon, “If you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”

Did Solomon **keep** God’s commandments and **obey** God’s statutes? Hardly! The text of 1 Kings 11:11 informs us that Solomon’s “heart turned from the Lord God of Israel.” In the verses prior to that statement we find clear and compelling evidence of Solomon’s slow-but-sure slide from the presence of the Lord.

“King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’” Solomon clung to these in love. **He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.** For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods” (1 Kings 11:1-8).

The king to whom God had personally appeared—not once, but **twice!**—flagrantly disobeyed God. And in the end, would you like to know how Solomon assessed his own life and actions? In Ecclesiastes 2 he wrote,

“I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.... I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces.... **But I hated life**, because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me; **all is vanity and grasping for the wind**” (vss. 3-8,17).

More important, would you like to know how **God** assessed Solomon’s life and actions? In 1 Kings 11:9-11 we find the answer to such an inquiry.

“The Lord became angry with Solomon...and said, ‘Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.’”

The sad saga of Solomon is that the king whom God had initially blessed, ended up going **from physical riches to spiritual rags**. Respected Bible scholar Henry Halley, best known for his widely used *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, said that “the besotted apostasy of Solomon’s old age is one of the most pitiful spectacles in the Bible.” Did you hear that?—Solomon’s departure from the Lord is “**one of the most pitiful spectacles in the Bible!**” How sad. And how true! As a direct result of Solomon’s disregard for, and disobedience of, God’s commandments, his kingdom was ripped in two. The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell into calf worship—just as the Israelites had done at the base of Mt. Sinai during the days of Moses and Aaron—and eventually was carried away in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians, never to be heard from

again. The Southern Kingdom of Judah fell into Baal worship, and in 586 B.C. was carried away into Babylonian captivity—from which, after seventy long years, only a tiny remnant would return to Jerusalem.

All of these tragic consequences could have been completely avoided if one man—“the smartest man on Earth”—had just been smart enough to listen to God. This, in fact, was the very point God was making when He said through the prophet Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Compared to God’s wisdom, human wisdom is.... Well, let’s just be honest: **there is no comparison!** In fact, that was exactly the point the apostle Paul was making when he wrote on God’s behalf, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent...because **the foolishness of God is wiser than men**” (1 Corinthians 1:19,25).

The prophet Jeremiah—who was able to look back in retrospect upon the terrible tragedies caused by Solomon’s poor choices and sinful actions—wrote, “It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Solomon learned that lesson the hard way, did he not? And so did the people who followed in his footsteps.

I began this sermon by asking you a question. I now would like to end it by asking another: What have you learned from the sad saga of Saul?