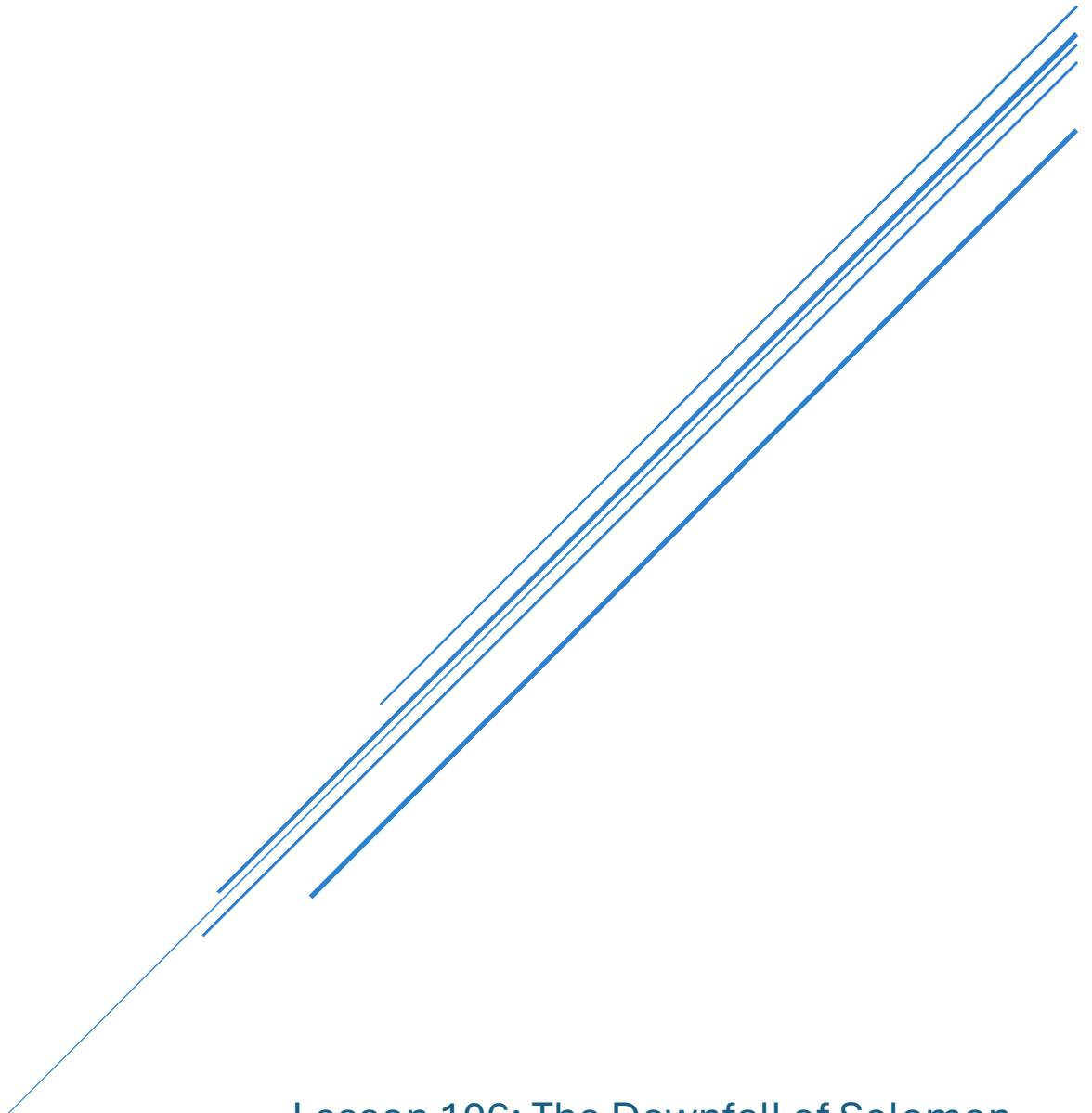


THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding God's story, Jesus' importance, and our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 106: The Downfall of Solomon
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Solomon's Glory Days

1 Kings 10

After the Temple was built and dedicated, Solomon reigned over Israel for many more years. His reign was one of expanding peace and prosperity for Israel. Chapter ten is the last pleasant chapter in Solomon's life, since in chapter eleven we turn a corner and read of his downfall.

The Queen of Sheba's Visit

1 Kings 10:1-13

Solomon's fame had spread to far reaching countries. Sometimes perhaps some could not believe what they heard. The queen of Sheba decided to journey to Solomon and see for herself. She traveled approximately 1,500 miles to visit Solomon. Verse 1 says she wanted to put Solomon's wisdom to the test with riddles of her own.

Upon meeting Solomon, she spoke with him about everything she had on her mind. Verse 3 says Solomon answered all her questions, "nothing was concealed from the king which he did not explain to her." Verses 4 through 5 says the queen took in Solomon's wisdom, the vastness of his palace, the greatness of his wealth and treasures, all of his food, and even all of his servants. The result for her was, "she was breathless."

In verses 6-7 she admits that she did not believe the stories she heard about Solomon, but now she realizes that the stories were not even half true about the greatness of Solomon's kingdom and his wisdom. She pays tribute and speaks blessings over Solomon and the Lord in verses 8-10. Solomon granted the queen everything she desired, then she left for her own land.

This scene shows us another example of the pinnacle of Solomon's kingdom reign. God said that nations would come to Israel to see who their God is, if Israel would follow Him faithfully according to the Law. It reminds us of Moses' charge to Israel in Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you are to do these things in the land where you are entering to take possession of it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God

whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole Law which I am setting before you today?

Solomon's Immense Prosperity & Peace

1 Kings 10:14-29

The author gives us a summary snapshot of Solomon's immense wealth, wisdom, and prestige. Solomon's kingdom received 666 talents of gold each year (approximately 25 tons). Traders and other countries engaged in much commerce with Israel. Solomon had so much gold he made various furniture and artifacts of pure gold. He made two large shields of gold using 600 shekels for each shield.

He made a large throne of ivory overlaid with fine gold. Six steps led up to the throne with armrests having two lions standing beside them. Twelve lions were standing on the six steps, one on each side. The author comments, "nothing like it was made for any other kingdom." Solomon's drinking utensils were made of gold, and all his other utensils in his house were of gold. The economy of Solomon's reign was so prosperous, we read in verse 21 that silver was not used for decorative items because silver was essentially worthless in Solomon's days because gold was so abundant and more valuable.

Verse 23 says Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in wealth and wisdom. Verse 24 says all the earth sought the attention of Solomon, to hear his wisdom that God gave him. Nations brought gifts to Solomon and kept his kingdom well supplied each year. Solomon also engaged in strategic trade relations with the surrounding nations. The abundance of silver let Israel purchase many items and animals from foreign nations in abundance.

This section highlights for us the immense prosperity and fame of Solomon. His kingdom was perhaps the most glorious time in Israel's history. Israel had no wars, since God promised to keep them at peace. Israel had wealth like they had never known. Solomon reigned on the throne as the promised son of David to shepherd God's people into glory. However, this is not where the story ends unfortunately.

Solomon's Downfall

1 Kings 11

Solomon Turns from the Lord

1 Kings 11:1-13

Verse 1 shares the primary reason for Solomon's downfall spiritually. Solomon loved many foreign women, including the daughter of the Pharaoh. Then, the author lists a few people groups, which are Canaanite groups. Verse 2 points out that Solomon loved many women who were from the nations which the Lord directly commanded Israel to never intermarry with nor have dealings with. If Israel did not listen to this warning, then these foreign pagan women would turn the hearts of Israel away from the Lord and to follow their gods.

Despite Solomon's vast wisdom, he had a major spiritual blind spot. He loved these women to the degree he intermarried hundreds of them. The narrator says Solomon had 700 wives where were princesses of pagan kings. He furthermore had 300 concubines. "And his wives turned his heart away" (v. 3). Verse 4 is key: "For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away to follow other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of his father David had been."

It is interesting that the narrator points out that Solomon was partially devoted but not wholly devoted to God. Also, the narrator compares him to David and claims David was wholly devoted to the Lord. We know David was not a perfect man, but it is safe to say that David's story shows a man of total devotion to the Lord, not perfection, but loyalty. Solomon lacks loyalty to God.

Solomon violated Exodus 34:15-16 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4 concerning marrying the pagan women. Furthermore, he violated Deuteronomy 17:17 concerning the law that a king should not amass many wives for himself.

Then, Solomon engaged in full blown idolatry. Verses 5-8 explain his many idolatrous actions. He built idols, statutes, and even personally worshipped foreign deities. He also built high places of worship to some of these foreign gods. Solomon's heart turned away, just as God warned. Solomon was directly violating the First and Second Commandments.

"Now 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, and had commanded him regarding this thing, that he was not to follow other gods; but he did not comply with what the Lord had commanded" (vv. 9-10).

How would you describe what led to Solomon's downfall into sin?

There is a warning for each of us as Christians. When we stop being “wholly” devoted to the Lord, whatever thing(s) we begin to let take the place of priority in our lives, in the place of God; those things pose a high chance of leading us far away from faithfulness to the Lord.

How do you think Solomon could fall into deep sin while at the same time he was the wisest man on earth?

God shifted his disposition towards Solomon from one of unmatched blessings and favor to anger. God had previously warned Solomon not to do this, but he did anyways. God called Solomon out for his abandonment of faithfulness to the Lord. Verses 11-13 are worth examining in detail:

So the Lord said to Solomon, “Since you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will certainly tear the kingdom away from you, and will give it to your servant. However, I will not do it in your days, only for the sake of your father David; but I will tear it away from the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.”

God told Solomon that judgment was coming. God would tear away the kingdom from Solomon and give it to someone else. But God would not fail his covenant to David. He said these events would not happen during Solomon’s lifetime, after he dies, it will happen to his son. Even so, God will not totally tear away the kingdom from Solomon’s offspring, to honor the Davidic Covenant. God decreed that Israel will be split after Solomon dies. No longer will there be a united kingdom in Israel that knows peace, prosperity, and righteous leadership. From this point on, Israel will be split and endure conflict upon conflict.

God Raises Adversaries

We are given backstories to a few key characters starting in verse 14. These show us how God began to stir up adversaries to come against Solomon's kingdom. Hadad the Edomite is stirred up from Egypt. Rezon was stirred up and became the leader of a group of bandits and eventually the leader of Damascus. He became a strong adversary against Israel during Solomon's final days.

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim is brought into the story (v. 26). He rebelled against Solomon. Initially, Solomon had appointed Jeroboam as the supervisor over the forced labor. Jeroboam was a mighty warrior. One day he encountered the prophet Ahijah along the road (v. 29).

Ahijah wore a new cloak. Ahijah took off his new cloak and tore it into 12 pieces. He gave 10 pieces to Jeroboam. "And he said to Jeroboam, 'Take for yourself ten pieces; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'Behold, I am going to tear the kingdom away from the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel)'" (vv. 31-32)

God declared that the primary reason was because Israel (not just Solomon) had abandoned Him and sought after false gods (v. 33). Despite this prophecy of judgment, God said He will not tear the whole kingdom from Solomon so as to keep His word to David. Ahijah said God would deliver 10 tribes in Israel over to Jeroboam, but keep one for Solomon's son.

God restates the same promise to Jeroboam that He made to David and Solomon. "Then it shall be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by keeping My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you" (v. 38).

Somehow Solomon found out about this prophecy, and he sought to kill Jeroboam. However, Jeroboam escaped to Egypt. He lived there in exile until Solomon died.

Why do you think God chose to divide the kingdom of Israel as a form of discipline?

Solomon's Death

1 Kings 11:41-43

Solomon dies and his reign of 40 years comes to an end. They buried him with his fathers in Jerusalem. Solomon's son Rehoboam reigned in Solomon's place. We will pick up with Rehoboam's story in the next lesson. From this point on in the Old Testament, Israel is divided and never knows this era of peace and prosperity again.

Conclusion

Solomon began spiritually well off. He was given a special gift of wisdom. He was wise beyond human comprehension. He led Israel into glory years of immense prosperity and peace. He truly had it all in an earthly sense. Yet, that is also the issue. Solomon was wiser than anyone, yet he was still a sinner just the same as anyone. He had a weakness for foreign women, and he had an immense level of wealth. His gaze turned from God and towards the things of this life.

This reminds us that while it is not wrong to have "things" in this life on earth, we must always be on guard that our "things" don't take the place of God in our hearts.

Solomon led Israel into its most glorious era. After Solomon's downfall, Israel is never the same again. The Jews might have even wondered if Solomon was the true fulfillment of the Coming One. He had shepherded God's people into green pastures and brought them great prosperity. However, Solomon was not the savior, he needed a savior too.

We learn from Solomon's story that while he was very significant, he was not the Christ. The Jews still looked to a Coming One to overthrow the curse of Adam and bring Israel into the glory of the kingdom God promised.