

KING SOLOMON – HIS STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

John MacArthur wrote, “Solomon is known as the wisest man who ever lived, and he wrote a significant portion of the Old Testament ... and all are filled with his wisdom and insight. Yet behind those writings stood a flawed man, a man who was conflicted between deep wisdom and tragic folly.” As J.C. Ryle often quoted, “The best of men are men at best”.

While King Solomon was despondent at the end of his life, nonetheless, *this* wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ For he was wiser than all men (I Kings 4:30,31) ... He was unprecedented, exceptional, and unequalled! How then did he end up as he did?!

God appeared to him in a dream at the commencement of his forty-year reign and promised anything he asked (I Kings 3:5). He chose understanding and discernment to govern his people well and wisely. God was so pleased with his choice He granted his request, along with great riches, honour, and longevity (v.11-15). The borders of his kingdom extended from the river Euphrates to the Egyptian border. God also provided the king with many expert officials to assist him in government. The country was allocated into twelve major districts, with each region providing for the king’s court one month each year. By this means, the heavy tax burden was shared evenly among the entire country.

Solomon was also famous for his grand architecture which turned Israel into an imposing showcase among the nations. His most magnificent work was the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. It became one of the wonders of the ancient world and brought visitors from near and far. He also constructed a majestic palace, with beautiful gardens. He had twelve thousand top-pedigree horses, and fourteen hundred chariots. He had stalls for 450 of his horses in Megiddo. He secured peace with all his neighbours which produced prosperous trade agreements resulting in him becoming the wealthiest king of his time. The Queen of Sheba, on hearing about him, visited him and tested him with some of her own questions. Her report was, ¹ Kings 10:6 she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. ⁷ Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

On another occasion two women appeared before him. They lived in the same house, they both had children, but one of their children had died. The mother of the dead baby swapped bodies and claimed the other woman’s living child was hers. Solomon was to determine the true mother. To their astonishment, he

suggested the child be cut in half and both mothers have a piece each! At once, the real mother's identity was confirmed (I Kings 3:16-28).

With such exceptional success, what happened to bring about his downfall? His decline was emphasised in the latter part of his life, **I Kings 11:1** But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; ² Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. ³ And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. ⁴ For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

However, the seeds of his demise were sown from the beginning of his reign. That was when he strengthened his kingdom through marital alliances, ... and his women were the ruin of him! He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. For example, early on, he built an impressive palace for his pagan Egyptian wife, replete with her idols and shrines, **I Kings 3:1** And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David. ... ³ And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. Also in the formative years, as if the Lord had not blessed him with more than sufficient wealth, he heavily taxed his people, which made them bitter. He also had them work as soldiers, chief officers and commanders of his chariots and cavalry. Therefore, from the beginning his obedience was defective for surely with his wisdom he ought to have known better, but he tolerated compromise and idolatry among God's people, **I Kings 3:2** the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days.

A study of Solomon emphasises how discernment without obedience is a recipe for knowing the truth but abandoning it. Failure to obey does not demonstrate true discernment for it produces self-delusion which turns out to be destructive. Regardless of the measure of intellectual knowledge, disobedience results in failure, **James 4:17** Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. ... And that was the legacy King Solomon sadly entrusted to his son, Rehoboam. It pervaded into almost each succeeding reign, until in the prophecy of Amos, God's patience was 'wearing thin', and He promised, **Amos 8:11** Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.