

Lecture 31
Wealth . . . Wives . . . War . . . Wisdom
1 Kings 9:10 – 11:43

Well, we've come full circle in this year's study . . . from the birth of the prophet Samuel to the death of King Solomon . . . from a time when the enemies of Israel prevailed, and spiritually "everyone did what was right in his own eyes," to a time of peace and security in a United Kingdom with God's very presence dwelling in the beautiful temple built to His glory.

Twice already the Lord had spoken to Solomon: the first time at Gibeon to grant Solomon's request for a wise and discerning heart to govern God's great people (plus even more than he'd asked for . . . riches and honor); the second time here to admonish Solomon after the temple had been completed and dedicated that God required a heart of integrity and uprightness to establish his royal throne over Israel forever. "But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you, and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple." (1 Kings 9:6-7)

For twenty years Solomon flourished and expanded the kingdom – massive building projects were undertaken, wilderness areas developed, enemies suppressed and put to use, a seaside city developed into a trade center into which gold and other luxurious goods poured in great abundance. He was increasing in wealth and possessions, his reputation

growing, his accomplishments significant. You could truthfully say, “Israel was blessed.”

Perhaps no words are more frequently used by Christians than “bless, blessed and blessing.” It’s not hard to see why this should be the case since these words crop up constantly in Scripture. The word “bless” appears 132 times; the word “blessed” 285 times, and the word “blessing” 70 times. To be blessed, or to receive a blessing, means “to be in a state of happiness because of some good the Lord has bestowed.”

The option of blessing or cursing was constantly before the people of Israel. Remember during the Exodus when Moses placed half of the assembled tribes on Mt. Gerizim and the other half on Mt. Ebal? The former pronounced God’s blessing for obedience, while the latter pronounced God’s curse on those who disobeyed His laws.

Solomon had come to a defining time in his life. By that I mean, a time when decisions made affect the rest of your life. Defining moments don’t come often, but when they do they leave an indelible mark. **Only rarely do we get to choose our defining moments, but we always get to choose our response to them.** Solomon never made the shift from success to significance.

You know, I have ten grandchildren who have gone through those teenage years and with it the stage of – “It’s all about me.” I think one of them even had a tee shirt that said, “Yes, it is about me!” They have grown out of that stage for the most part, although there are some adults

I've known who've yet to get past it. We expect it and endure it in the maturing process of life, but if it's never outgrown, the carnal attitudes become defiance. Like a spiraling downward staircase – selfishness, “I want my own way” . . . becomes stubbornness, “I won't quit until I get it” . . . develops into resistance, “I don't care what you say” . . . and finally contempt, “I'm not concerned with the consequences.” Defiance leads to personal misery and inescapable bondage.

Proverbs 5:22 “The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.” The success of self-effort can't release the man caught in the trap of his own making.

Often over these past few lessons as we've studied the life of David with all his flaws and failures, we're asking . . . Why was he “a man after God's own heart?” I think it's because he made the choice in his heart for significance. Not that he was the king whose line would one day bring forth the Messiah (that would be pride), but knowing that he was significant in the eyes of his God (that was his position). God was God and he was not! He fumbled, he failed, his life had high points and low points, rejoicing and tragedy, but he never turned to idols. No other god ever replaced the Lord God Almighty.

We live in a country, and at a time, when so much of what is termed “success” is marked by either tangible material possessions or intangibles like power, fame or status. You may be one of the successful, many Christians are . . . but your defining moment, the day

you chose significance, was the day you gave your life to Christ. You are a child of the King, an ambassador for Christ, a co-heir of the Kingdom of God! The life you live for Christ, because Christ is in you, is the legacy that's important.

With good reason we consider Solomon a wise man. Wisdom is concerned with how we relate to people, to the world, and to God. The tragedy of Solomon is that he maintained the lesser kind of wisdom, mastery of information and people, but he had lost touch with the most important kind, skill in living an obedient life, because he had lost touch with God. Solomon became a wise fool.

Picture this little story in your mind:

Solomon never needed any encouragement to pull his royal chariot off to the side of the road. When you are the wisest man in the world, you're interested in almost everything. Bees, flowers, trees, lizards, ants – you name it. It was a wonder the king ever got anywhere, there were so many interesting things to see and investigate.

So when Solomon ordered the royal entourage to halt along a country road one afternoon, his attendants merely exchanged glances and did as they were told. What the king of Israel could possibly find to interest him along this forsaken stretch of highway defied the imagination.

Climbing out of the chariot, the king walked thoughtfully through the tall weeds at the edge of the roadway and started out across the field

and vineyard (neither of which seemed worthy of royal attention). The horses were beginning to paw the ground with impatience before Solomon turned and walked back to the company.

“Hmmm,” he said. And that was all. The little band resumed its journey to Jerusalem and the palace.

But late that night, as the king reclined on his couch and stared into the embers of a dying fire, he thought again about the farm he had seen by the side of the road. Taking up scroll and quill, he penned these words:

I went passed the field of the sluggard,
Past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment;
Thorns had come up everywhere,
The ground was covered with weeds,
And the stone wall was in ruins.
I applied my heart to what I observed
And learned a lesson from what I saw;
A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest
And poverty will come on you like a bandit
And scarcity like an armed man. (Prov. 24:30-34)

Little did the king know that he was writing a prophecy of himself. The characteristics of the sluggard’s farm became the characteristics of Solomon’s heart. By the time he’d reached his middle years, many of Solomon’s cherished values were broken down. The fine speeches and

prayers of his early years were like so much chaff, strewn on the sluggard's field. Worthless thistles and stinging nettles grew thick in the center of his life. It all started with just a few, small, hardly noticeable weeds.

As I read about Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre, my immediate reaction was here was a “weed” of cheating a friend. Matthew Henry's commentary on the Bible, however, takes the viewpoint that the parting of Solomon and Hiram was fair and friendly. Hiram made good his bargain to supply materials for the temple. Solomon made good his bargain to supply food and gave Hiram 20 cities in the land of Galilee. Hiram came to see them and didn't like them (vs.12), in fact, he called the country the Land of Cabul, a Phoenician word (says Josephus) which signifies “displeasing.” So he returned them to Solomon according to 2 Chronicles 8:2, who repaired them and then caused the children of Israel to inhabit them.

The country was truly valuable, and so were the cities in it, according to Matthew Henry, but not agreeable to Hiram's needs. Tyre was a land of merchants and trading men that lived in fine houses, and became rich by navigation, but didn't know what to do with rural cities that were only fit for crops and pasture. Hiram's desire was that Solomon would gratify him by becoming a partner in trade, as we find he did in chapter 9 verse 27.

Now I'll leave that for you to ponder . . . was he trying to cheat a friend or just guilty of giving an inappropriate gift?

But now the weeds begin to multiply; his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, for example. That kind of matrimonial arrangement was common in Solomon's days. So Solomon brought the Egyptian princess into the City of David as his queen and had a special palace built for her. However, there was a problem; it violated God's commands for Israelites not to intermarry with pagan people, so that they would not become ensnared by the worship of foreign gods. (Deuteronomy 7:3) The marriage was a weed in Solomon's life – one that would become a life-sapping vine.

In South America there is a plant called a matador vine. It slowly encircles the tree killing off the foundation and when it reaches the top, it sprouts a blooming flower to crown its' success.

Have you noticed there was no accountability in Solomon's life? We never read of a prophet confronting Solomon. No, he was without peer, the single greatest person in the land. People were accountable to the king, not the other way around.

The visit of the Queen of Sheba is a familiar story. You may recognize her name from the New Testament. Jesus names her in Matthew 12:42: "The Queen of Sheba will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here."

We read she came not for trade or commerce or to satisfy her curiosity, but to receive instruction (to hear the wisdom of Solomon) and thereby improve her own. She desired to be instructed in the things of God. Yes, she was impressed with wealth, but the first thing mentioned is his wisdom (vs.4) and the last thing mentioned, which crowned it all, was his piety demonstrated in the burnt offerings made at the temple of the Lord. She had a seeking heart.

Perhaps we can draw four parallels between the visit of the Queen of Sheba and the picture of a sinner coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The parallel of reported fame – Solomon's name was renowned.

Reports of what Jesus Christ has done usually comes through preaching of the gospel. His fame is encompassed in sharing the whole story of His life, death, burial, and resurrection. Fully God, fully man . . . the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Amazing!

2. The parallel of response – She spoke with Solomon about all that was on her heart, asked all her questions. Do we have questions for God? C. H. Spurgeon suggests a few: How can a man be just with God? How can God be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly? How can God, who sees all things, no longer seen any sin in me? How can a man's life be in heaven while he still lives on earth? These, and many others, are answered by Jesus. And He himself is the answer! Those who hear the report about Christ,

and refuse to go to Him, will find that they themselves will some day meet this Queen of Sheba and she will rise up in judgment and condemn them because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than he. (Matt 12:42.)

3. The parallel of praise – While the Queen of Sheba reflected how privileged the servants of Solomon were to serve and be so near him that they could benefit from his wisdom, similar thoughts fill the heads of those who come to Christ in faith. They experience the joy of knowing salvation and it far exceeds the grandest report they ever heard and how blessed are those to come to Christ and are occupied with serving Him.
4. The parallel of gratification – The story ends in verse 10:13 “King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty.” Ephesians 3:20 says Jesus is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. His royal bounty is limitless, we just need to ask in prayer with pure motives.

There were other weeds. Like the weed of wealth. Solomon amassed large hordes of gold and silver. He ignored God’s Word and incorporated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen into his army. In the course of his lengthy reign, Solomon violated almost every one of God’s

stipulations in Deuteronomy 17:14-17; he not only multiplied horses for himself, but went as far as Egypt to acquire them, and he multiplied gold and silver to himself as well as wives. The weeds were growing thicker, slowly blocking out the light.

God had said that the king of Israel should not rule in such a way that his head would become lifted in pride over his countrymen. Solomon fashioned for himself a gigantic throne of gold and ivory, adorned with 12 gold lions on its ascending steps. How distant and imposing and god-like Solomon must have looked seated on his great throne, robed in all his glory – how far above the common folk of Israel who worked in the fields and paid their taxes. Solomon’s pomp and pride were poisonous plants in his garden.

Funny thing about weeds, they have a stubborn streak built into their very essence. Weeds are as old as sin. They began plaguing man the moment he rebelled against his creator in the Garden of Eden. Once they’ve taken root, they want to take over.

Solomon had expensive tastes. His love of luxury was only matched by his desire for women – 300 wives and 700 concubines. Solomon proved the truth of the proverb, “there’s no fool like an old fool.” As he grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods.

Here was an external factor – foreign wives flattering him as being “enlightened” to allow worship of foreign gods. And aren’t we still being sold that line of “enlightened tolerance?” How dare anyone

suggest that there is only **one** way to get to heaven and all other ways are mistaken!

It may not have been effective with Solomon except for an internal factor – the condition of his heart. Seeds of rebellion always reside in our heart. He went after the Sidonian goddess Ashtoreth, the goddess of sex; and the Ammonite god of Milcom. He even went so far as to build high places for the Moabite god Chemosh and the Ammonite god Molech. It's especially shocking because human sacrifices were often included in the worship of these gods.

11:6 says, “So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord, he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.”

So, for a third time the Lord spoke to Solomon – this time with judgment for an apostate king who disobeyed God by marrying foreign wives, erecting high places for their gods and joining them in their idolatry. Twice it's stated that Solomon's heart was not completely true to Yahweh vs. 4, 6. And it's not until King Josiah's reign that we'll study in our Divided Kingdom series were high places that Solomon built broken down.

Because God is slow to anger and infinitely compassionate (Ps. 103:8), we could easily be lulled into believing that He is soft and tolerant of sin. But being slow to anger does not mean never angry. When warnings and reproofs are spurned, His judgment comes upon us like a whirlwind and his anger like a fire (Ps. 90:7). Yet because of

God's love for David and Jerusalem, He would mercifully hold back the turbulent times of civil war until after Solomon's death.

At first glance it seems that Solomon got off easy – all this would happen after his death. The guilt of bringing hardship and ruin to the future of God's people might have haunted someone whose heart was still soft toward God, but it would most likely fade into an unfeeling distance in a heart hardened by defiance. So to keep His judgment inescapably near to Solomon, God moved in on an area that the king had taken for granted . . . peace from his enemies.

The hounds began nipping at the heels of his royal sandals. Years before, a young Edomite prince named Hadad had narrowly escaped a massacre at the hands of David's army. He fled to Egypt and found favor before pharaoh. Later he married pharaoh's sister-in-law, who bore him a son who grew up with the ruler's own children. In the years that followed, however, neither the pleasures, nor the power, of pharaoh's palace could erase the scars Hadad had suffered from David. He said to pharaoh, "Send me away, that I may go to my own country." Clearly, Hadad was hot on the trail of revenge.

Meanwhile Rezon, a Syrian, was a wild dog from a different pack who was also picking up Solomon's scent. Having also suffered conquest by David, he turned guerrilla leader and gathered a marauding band to work from the city of Damascus and was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon.

Both adversaries were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, and God made use of them to serve His design of correcting Solomon.

Hadad and Rezon were external threats to the kingdom; however, internal unrest also began to gnaw at Solomon's reign in the form of one of Solomon's most trusted men – Jeroboam. Here is the first mention of the name Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He was from the tribe of Ephraim, next in honor to Judah. He was overseer of the tribute and so trusted by Solomon that only an intervention of God could drive a wedge between them, which was exactly what happened.

Ahijah, the prophet from Shiloh, met Jeroboam out in the country one day and informed him of God's plan to divide the kingdom. He took his new cloak and tore it into 12 pieces and gave ten of those pieces to Jeroboam saying the kingdom was being torn out of the hands of Solomon and ten tribes would be given to Jeroboam. It was not for his good character, or because he deserves it, but because of Solomon's apostasy. Jeroboam was also warned that he must not try to dethrone Solomon because of God's promise to David.

Well, Solomon found out and sought to put Jeroboam to death, but he fled to Egypt and the protection of Shishak the king.

The "Book of the Acts of Solomon" was probably a summary of his years of reign. We don't have that record, but we do have Chronicles in our Bible. Chronicles presents Solomon, like David, as king by divine choice. Chronicles is the priestly view of their reigns and

it presents only the positives of Solomon's life . . . Israel was united when Solomon came to the throne, no opposition as found in 1 Kings. Chronicles ignores his marriage to foreign women, establishment of idolatrous high places and therefore the blame for the divided kingdom. Indeed it concludes Solomon's life with accounts of his glory and the years of decline are overlooked.

Solomon died about 932 B.C. after a reign of 40 years. He was buried in the city of David and his son, Rehoboam, became king.

Ever wonder why God did not just wipe Solomon off the map? God remains merciful to His children. You remember Nathan the prophet came to David and said, "David, you're going to have son and he will build the temple. And if he disobeys me I will punish him with the rod of men." Then he added, "but my love will never be taken away from him" (2 Sam 7:15).

What could have been Solomon's headstone epitaph? "His wives turned away his heart." And if we push away the grass, we might read in fine print, "but the lovingkindness of God was with him."

We might hope that God's message of judgment awakened his conscience and brought him to repentance. We have reason to hope that he humbled himself before God, confessed his sin, begged pardon and returned to his duty then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes. The end of that book has an indication of a heart broken for sin and turned from it just as many of David's penitential psalms.

Though God may suffer those whom he loves to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it.

Scripture affirms that God accepts on the basis of faith not works. Let every wandering soul who has turned away from the pious dreams of his youth, every one who has been led into transgression, remember that God has said he will not take His mercy from us. Busy running the affairs of an empire, Solomon neglected the affairs of his own soul. He took his relationship with God for granted and let the little weeds grow into big ones.

How does a Christian keep the garden of his soul free from weeds? Answer: you can't. We live in a weed infested world. You can't keep weeds from coming in but you can control them from taking over. It doesn't take much such as apathy or carelessness or prayerlessness to destroy potential fruit. We must be diligent to fully develop the fruit of the Spirit.

Our last question asked, "What application can you draw for yourself from the public or private life of the men we've studied? These were my answers:

Samuel – don't give up praying for wayward people (remember how he prayed for Saul).

Saul – jealousy, pride and insecurity leads to one's downfall.

David – in times of weakness, sin and danger turn to God, not away from Him.

Solomon – wealth doesn't bring happiness and a good beginning doesn't guarantee a good finish.