

SOLOMON

The Eternal Sophomore

I. Introduction to the Good Kings of Judah

A. "We want a king!"

Once settled in the land of promise, God's people were led by **judges** (Judges 2:16). These were Spirit-anointed men (heroes, saviors) raised up by God to deal with national emergencies. There was no government, no taxes, no bureaucracy, no standing army, no royal family, no dynasty. When needed, God raised up a leader (Gideon, Deborah, Samson, etc.). Once his work was done the judge disappeared.

However, Israel grew weary of this system of governance and demanded that God give them a king.

*⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a **king** to lead us, such as all the other nations have." ⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have **rejected me** as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but **warn them** solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." (1 Samuel 8:4-9. NIV).*

God gave them what they wanted but the consequences were tragic. Samuel told them specifically (1 Sam. 8:10-18) what kings would do:

- He will take your sons into his army.
- He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers.
- He will take your land.
- He will take your money through taxation.
- He will take your servants and your donkeys and put them to work.
- He will make you his slaves.

The moral of the story: **be careful what you ask for!**

B. The United Kingdom.

Israel's first king was Saul (1 Samuel 9-31). What a disaster his reign proved to be! Though **chosen** by God, Saul disqualified himself by his actions to such an extent that God ultimately **rejected** him and removed him (and his sons) from the throne.

¹⁰ The word of the LORD came to Samuel. ¹¹ "I regret (RSV-I repent. NIV-I am grieved. NLT-I am sorry.) that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. (1 Samuel 15:10-11).

Starting over, God chose David to be the next king, "a man **after his own heart**" (I Samuel 13:14). Although David had his own sins and shortcomings, the kingdom prospered under his godly influence. His life and reign became the benchmark, the standard by which all future kings would be evaluated.

David's son Solomon became the third king of Israel. In our study today we will see how the kingdom experienced unprecedented glory (wealth, power, international influence, the arts) during the "golden age" of his reign.

C. The Divided Kingdom

At Solomon's death, however, tragedy hit when the nation was divided. Ten tribes made up the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and two tribes the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

| JUDAH | ISRAEL |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Twenty kings... 350 years (930-587 BC). All were descendants of David. Only eight were considered "good" (bold print).</i></p> <p>Rehoboam (930-913) Abijah/Abijam (913-910) Asa (910-870) Jehoshaphat (870-848) Jehoram/Joram (848-841) Ahaziah/Jehoahaz ? (1) Athaliah (841-835) Joash/Jehoash (835-796) Amaziah (796-767) Uzziah/Azariah (767-740) Jotham (740-732) Ahaz (732-716) Hezekiah (716-687) Manasseh (687-642) Amon (642-640) Josiah (640-609) Jehoahaz/Joahaz (609) Jehoiakim/Eliakim (609-597) Jehoiakin (597) Zedekiah/Mattaniah (597-587)</p> <p>Fall of Jerusalem (587)</p> | <p><i>Nineteen kings... 200 years (930-722 BC). Various dynasties. All were evil.</i></p> <p>Jeroboam I (930-910) Nadab (910-908) Baasha (908-886) Elah (886-885) Zimri (885) Omri (885-874) Ahab (874-853) Ahaziah (853-852) Jehoram/Joram (852-841) Jehu (841-814) Jehoahaz (814-798) Joash/Jehoash (798-782) Jeroboam II (782-753) Zechariah (753-752) Shallum (752) Menahem (752-742) Pekahiah (742-740) Pekah (740-732) Hoshea (732-722)</p> <p>Fall of Samaria (722)</p> |

D. The "Good" Kings of Judah

Although there is much to learn from the bad kings of both Israel and Judah, our study will focus only on the "good" kings of Judah. We will include Solomon in our study though he served before the division of the nation. We have omitted Jotham because so little biblical material is devoted to his reign. Eight "good" kings, therefore, will comprise our study. We

will discover that each of these men had at least one **fatal flaw** in his character. And this flaw was his undoing. Each of these good kings ended badly.

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. Solomon | II Chronicles 1-9 (I Kings 1-11) | Lust |
| 2. Asa | II Chronicles 14-16 (I Kings 15:8-24) | Unbelief |
| 3. Jehoshaphat | II Chronicles 17-20 (I Kings 22:41-50) | Moral compromise |
| 4. Joash | II Chronicles 22-24 (II Kings 11:1-12:21) | Fickle faith |
| 5. Amaziah | II Chronicles 25 (II Kings 14:1-20) | Divided heart |
| 6. Uzziah | II Chronicles 26 (II Kings 15:1-7) | Presumptuous pride |
| 7. Hezekiah | II Chronicles 29-32 (II Kings 18-20) | Ungrateful pride |
| 8. Josiah | II Chronicles 34-35 (II Kings 22:1-23:30) | Spiritual deafness |

One fatal flaw! That's all it took to cast a dark shadow over a life that was otherwise marked by goodness and faithfulness. One leak can sink a boat. One night of sin can ruin a marriage. One moral failure can ruin decades of fruitful ministry.

In studying these kings and their fatal flaws, we will discover a common character trait at the root of all their moral failings: **a divided heart**. This is why David's prayer is so important: *Give me an undivided heart.* (Psalm 86:11).

If time permits, we will add one final king to our list: Manasseh (II Chronicles 33; II Kings 21:1-18). He is of interest because of the contrast he brings. All the "good" kings ended up "bad." But evil Manasseh repented in the end, and finished well!

E. The Purpose of these studies

Studying the good kings of Judah will help us to understand godly character and Christian integrity. It will also help us to see how one moral flaw, left unaddressed, has the capacity to ultimately cast a shadow over an otherwise good life. At a personal level, these studies will enable us to answer the following questions:

- What are some things I need to be doing to become a man of character (godliness, holiness, Christian integrity).
- What are some strengths God has given me that He wants to utilize in the domain where I am "king."
- Is there a fatal flaw in my character? Where am I most vulnerable to moral failure? What can I do to prevent disaster from happening?

TABLE TALK

1. Define Christian character. What does a godly man look like?
2. Can a man be "good" and yet possess a moral flaw?
3. Describe someone you have known who was "good" and yet self-destructed because of a moral failure. What lessons did God teach you?
4. All of the "good" kings of Judah ended poorly. What lesson do you think God intends for us to learn from this?
5. What are we to make of Manasseh? At the end of a wicked life he repents... And God forgives him! Why does God include *this* story in the history of Judah?
6. How will your life end? Will you finish strong? How do you know?

II. Solomon: The Eternal Sophomore.

A. An overview of his life (II Chronicles 1-9).

1. Off to a great start! (II Chronicles 1).

Imagine yourself a young prince. God appears and says: *Ask what I shall give you* (1:7). What would you ask for? Solomon's response to God's offer remains one of the great illustrations of character formation in all of history.

¹⁰ *Give me now **wisdom and knowledge** to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?" (1:10).*

The account in I Kings gives a little more detail.

⁷ *And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a **little child**. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may **discern between good and evil** for who is able to govern this your great people?" (I Kings 3:7-9).*

God was immensely pleased with Solomon's request and gave him what he asked... and more.

¹¹ *God answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked long life, but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, ¹² wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. 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." (1:11-12).*

It would be difficult to find a better illustration of the truth Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount.

³¹ *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* ³² *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first **the kingdom of God** and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33).*

2. Solomon's Temple (II Chronicles 2-7).

To Solomon fell the privilege of building a house for God. Basically, doubling the dimensions of the moveable Tabernacle, Solomon constructed the Temple on Mount Moriah (or Mount Zion), the place where Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac (Genesis 22:2, 14). Solomon was a man serious about **worship** and committed to offering God only **the best**. *The house that I am to build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods (2:5).*

Chapters 2-5 contain many details about the building project: architecture, interior design, workforce, materials, etc.

Chapters 6-7 outline the Ceremony of Dedication. Sacrifices, music and worship were all part of this momentous occasion. Solomon's Dedicatory Prayer is of special importance. The climax of the entire event occurred when fire came down from heaven and consumed the offerings and sacrifices "and the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (5:14; 7:1).

God heard Solomon's prayer and promised that He would hear all sincere prayer offered from (or toward) this holy temple. Indeed, his eyes and heart would be on this place for all time (7:12-16). God's promise has been an encouragement to countless believers down through the ages.

*¹³ When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name **humble** themselves, and **pray** and **seek** my face and **turn** from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (7:13-14).*

Specifically, God said to Solomon:

*¹⁷ And as for you, if you will **walk before me as David** your father walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my rules, ¹⁸ then I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to rule Israel.'*

*¹⁹ "But if you **turn aside** and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ²¹ And at this house, which was exalted, everyone passing by will be astonished and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' ²² Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore he has brought all this disaster on them.' " (7:12-22).*

3. The half has never yet been told! (II Chronicles 8-9).

Beyond building the Temple, Solomon did many other remarkable deeds. We read about many of these things in chapters 8-9. King Solomon:

- Expanded the borders the Israel.
- Conducted numerous other building projects (palaces, chariot cities, etc.).
- Gathered chariots and horses buying them from Egypt.
- Concluded an alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter.
- Developed a merchant marine importing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.
- Led Israel into a period of unprecedented prosperity.
- Built a great ivory throne.
- Was the wisest and richest man in the world! (9:22).
- Authored books, including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

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

The Queen of Sheba came "from the ends of the earth (Ethiopia?) to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Matt. 12:42) and what she saw took her breath away!

⁵ And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, ⁶ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, half the greatness of your wisdom was not told me; you surpass the report that I heard. (9:5-6).

B. Character strengths.

Few men in history have excelled Solomon in the godly traits he modeled, most notably:

1. His prayer for **wisdom**.

Solomon's life gives us a visual illustration of what it means to pray James 1:5. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

2. His lavish and passionate **worship**.

Solomon would not think of coming into the presence of God empty-handed (Exodus 23:15) or of offering a sacrifice that cost him nothing (II Samuel 24:24). He loved to give lavishly to the God he served. He was worthy of the very best!

3. His gift of **administration**.

Solomon knew how to get things done! Whether it was building a Temple, organizing an army, conducting foreign diplomacy, running the economy, classifying plants and animals, or writing a book... he had an amazing gift for administering the resources God had entrusted to him.

C. The fatal flaw.

One has to look beyond II Chronicles to fully understand Solomon's fatal flaw. Two passages will help us to better understand.

1. I Kings 11:1-8.

*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,² 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.³ He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.⁴ 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.⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.*

As a result of his sin, God tore the kingdom away from Solomon, leaving only the tribe of Judah for his descendants to rule over (see I Kings 11:9-13).

How to explain Solomon's womanizing ways?

- a. Perhaps his **parents** are to blame. He was the son of David and Bathsheba! Their adulterous affair was public knowledge. Born after the marriage, Solomon was surely marked by Bathsheba-gate!
- b. Perhaps these marriages were simply (!) part of his **foreign policy**. Marrying daughters of foreign kings had real political advantages. Yet, God insisted that his people were never to marry outside the faith.
- c. Maybe he was **bored** and looked to women for entertainment. None of his accomplishments (wealth, power, the arts, etc.) had filled the emptiness of his soul (Ecclesiastes). Maybe a harem of 1,000 females would!
- d. Perhaps he struggled with (?) a **sexual addiction**. Maybe he got hooked on sex and just couldn't get enough.

Whatever the reason, these women turned his heart away from the Lord, to other gods. The consequences were disastrous both for him personally, for his family, and for the nation.

2. Deuteronomy 17:14-17.

Though the kingship was contrary to God's original ideal for his people, the law of Moses anticipated the time when Israel would reject God's plan and ask for a king. Thus Moses gave guidance concerning how kings should behave.

¹⁴ "When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' ¹⁵ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. ¹⁶ Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' ¹⁷ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold." (Deut. 17:14-17).

Solomon should have known better! He did precisely what the Law forbade him to do:

- He acquired horses from Egypt (II Chron. 8:6; 9:25, 28).
- He acquired many wives (I Kings 11:1-13).
- He acquired excessive silver and gold (II Chron. 9:13-28).

Why would he do such a thing? After so many years of faithful obedience to God, why would he flagrantly disregard such clear commands?

- a. Perhaps he justified his disobedience as an act of **political expediency**. After all, these moves (horses, women, wealth) enhanced his foreign policy dramatically.
- b. Perhaps he felt he was **above the law**. In light of the many ways God had blessed him and how God had used him, maybe Solomon felt he was somehow exempt from some of God's requirement.
- c. Perhaps he didn't feel he was being disobedient. Maybe he felt his actions were only a little **compromise** with worldliness, an accommodation to the evil world he lived in.
- d. Maybe he felt that his involvement in these activities would make him a more effective **witness for God** to the nations.
- e. Maybe he felt he was **immune** to the temptations inherent in these choices. Perhaps he felt his own heart, after so many years of faithful obedience, was so devoted to God that it was incapable of falling away into idolatry.

Whatever the motivation, Solomon's actions were in flagrant disobedience to God's will. Regardless of how he may have evaluated these actions, God saw it as treasonous. The consequences for Solomon, his family and his nation were devastating.

3. Solomon's flaw.

What then shall we call Solomon's basic fatal flaw? I've chosen to call it **lust** (greed, desire, avarice, cupidity, voracity, covetousness, insatiable appetites). Lust for **women**. Lust for **money**. Lust for **power**. Lust for **fame**. Lust for **knowledge**. Lust for **reputation**. Lust for **culture**. Lust for **the arts**. Lust for **more**! Solomon was never content. He never had enough.

Solomon allowed his desires and appetites to consume him. Rather than controlling his desires he became controlled by them!

*²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, **self-control**: against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its **passions and desires**. (Galatians 5:22-23).*

4. The eternal sophomore.

I've chosen to call Solomon the "eternal sophomore." I don't mean to imply that he is forever stuck in his second year of college and will never graduate. Only God knows if he ever "graduated." Rather, I take the word sophomore in its most basic meaning: *sophia* = **wise**, *moros* = **stupid, fool**. Solomon has gone down in history as a wise fool... or a stupid wise man. Both realities are manifest in his life... and legacy.

Solomon fits very well the man Jesus described in one of his parables.

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21).

TABLE TALK

1. What is the main lesson you have learned from the life of Solomon?
2. Can you identify with Solomon's "fatal flaw" in your own life? How?
3. What could Solomon have done to prevent his flaw from destroying him?
4. Is illicit desire the cause of turning away from the Lord? Or the result of turning away? Which comes first? The chicken or the egg?
5. Share one area where your desires (lust, greed, etc.) threaten your spiritual well-being. Ask your brothers to pray for you.