

Part Three —The Kings: Solomon

There was no king of Israel who accomplished more for the prosperity of his people than Solomon. People who lived at that time were truly privileged to be a part of the nation of Israel. In spite of the fact that Solomon turned from God in his old age, his relationship with God for much of his life demonstrates that he did accomplish much of God's will. But because he turned from God toward the end of his life, his ranking as a great man can be considered only marginal. God manifested Himself to Solomon on more than one occasion. God directly worked with him, and he knew it. Like his father David, Solomon was very much aware of God's dealings and power. If there was ever a man who should have looked to God and trusted him his entire life, it was Solomon. And if there was ever a man who failed in this, it was Solomon.

Solomon-the son of David and Bathsheba-was loved by God from birth and selected by Him to succeed David as king (2 Sam. 12:24, 1 Chr. 22:9-10). David substantiated God's approval in this selection when he appointed Solomon to succeed him. But Solomon had an older brother who also aspired to the throne. His name was Adonijah, the fourth of David's sons. He created a problem at the beginning of Solomon's accession, as he was too presumptuous and did not consider David's wishes.

Because of age and poor health, David could not generate enough body heat to stay warm. Upon the advice of his servants, a young woman was selected as a nursemaid. Among other things she was required to sleep with him in order to keep him warm. This suggests that she was included in David's harem, though she was not a concubine.

Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not (1 Kings 1:1-4).

"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (1 Kings 1:5). A part of this behavioral pattern lies with David. "And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom" (v. 6). David certainly must have been aware of this proclivity, but had failed to correct it. Adonijah grew bolder and drew conspirators into his plans. "And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him" (v. 7). Adonijah needed the support of both the military and the priesthood to succeed. David had not selected Adonijah to take the throne, and his entire plan was contrary to God's will (1 Chr. 22: 9-10).

The plot was close to succeeding when it was brought to David's attention -so close that Solomon's life was in danger. Adonijah viewed Solomon as a threat to his plans. David acted immediately, and Solomon was crowned king. The plot came to an abrupt end. "And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar" (1 Kings 1:50). He was guilty of a capital offense, and he knew it. Solomon was fair and only warned Adonijah. "And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house" (1 Kings 1:52-53).

David spent some time instructing Solomon on what would be required of him as king. He said: "I go the

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way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself” (1 Kings 2:2-3). In effect, David told Solomon that if he wanted things to go sour, and have nothing work out right for him, all he had to do was to turn his back on God. David knew from experience. Also, David instructed Solomon to watch for an opportunity to give Joab the justice he deserved (vv. 5-6). In spite of the warning and mercy shown to him, Adonijah continued to plot.

And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife (1 Kings 2:13-17).

Protocol required that the harem of a king go to his successor. By this request Adonijah was setting the stage for a claim upon the throne. It would have given him a legal footing to pursue his goal. It was an “end run” attempt to gain the throne. Adonijah had not given up his plans to become the king even though he knew God had chosen Solomon as king. When Bathsheba relayed the request to the king, he immediately saw through the scheme. Solomon replied:

. . . And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruah. Then king Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. Now therefore, as the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died (1 Kings 2:22-25).

Joab was executed for his part in the plot (2 Kings 2:25). Abiathar was removed from the priesthood in fulfillment of the punishment God had pronounced upon the house of Eli for what Eli had allowed at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:31-32). Solomon carried out the will of God in these matters (1 Sam. 15:23).

There was another matter that needed attention. During Absalom's rebellion a man by the name of Shimei had cursed king David.

And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood (1 Kings 2:8-9).

How does God view this disrespect? “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people” (Ex. 22:28). This man deserved death, but Solomon dealt wisely with him. He gave Shimei enough rope to hang himself.

And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither. For it shall be, that on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head. And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy

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servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. And it came to pass at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants be in Gath. And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath. And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again. And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word that I have heard is good. Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with? The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head; And king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever. So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon (1 Kings 2:36-46).

Now began the golden age of Israel. During Solomon's 40-year reign, the achievements and acquisition of wealth accrued by the united tribes was prodigious. A non-aggression pact with Egypt was implemented. There was national security and peace from all the enemies of Israel. For the majority of this time Solomon was completely devoted to God. "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places" (1 Kings 3:3). The tabernacle was located in Gibeon, while the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem. The offering of sacrifices in locations other than Gibeon was tolerated before the Temple was built. At this point of time a central location for worship was in a stage of flux. So, Solomon went to the tabernacle at Gibeon to offer a large number of sacrifices. What happened at Gibeon?

In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants (1 Kings 3:5-15).

Solomon was given unsurpassed ability to discern right from wrong. But in his latter years he indulged himself to the point of no return. He lacked the character to apply the wisdom and knowledge he had been given. One who has wisdom does not necessarily have character. Character is the ability to discern right from wrong and then to always choose the right in opposition to the wrong. Solomon lacked character. In his old age he was unable to remain faithful to God. He started out with the correct orientation, but his great wealth eventually corrupted him.

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Here is an example of the wisdom given him—the ability to judge and discern.

Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear. And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king. Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Previously, Saul had reigned over a united Israel, but when he died in battle, the nation was divided between the Jews and the other tribes. The Jews chose David as their king and he ruled over them seven years in Hebron. After the death of Saul's son-Ishbosheth—the nation united again. David ruled over Israel for thirty-three years. Solomon inherited this kingdom (1 Kings 4:1). This was the golden age, the glorious time when Israel dominated the region, a time that was never repeated to the same degree.

Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon (1 Kings 4:20-21, 25).

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men . . . and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34).

Solomon was the example God used to display the blessings and benefits that come to a nation that obeys Him. David had instructed Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem, as God had revealed (1 Chr. 22:8-9). David made extensive preparations. "And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David" (1 Chr. 22:2-4). David had made a league with Hiram, king of Tyre, who supplied him with building materials and skilled labor.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king

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in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians (1 Kings 5:1-6).

Extensive trade took place between Israel and the people of Tyre. A commercial league was established between them. These Sidonians, the ancient Phoenicians, were great seafarers and traders. Actually, the name Phoenician was applied to a confederation of people involved in trading. These included the Sidonians, the Israelitish tribes of Dan, Asher, and probably Zebulun, along with assorted Canaanites who lived in the general area. Both Solomon and Hiram maintained western and eastern navies (1 Kings 9:26, 28; 10:11). This golden age of trade and prosperity came to an end when the Assyrians conquered the entire region, and the Israelites were deported.

Solomon completed the Temple after seven years. "In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the LORD laid, in the month Zif: And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it" (1 Kings 6:37-38). A great ceremony marked the dedication of the Temple, and the Ark of the Covenant was placed there.

There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD (1 Kings 8:9-11, 63).

God now appeared to Solomon the second time.

And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil (1 Kings 9:3-9).

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Solomon was given ample warning, but did he take heed? Obviously not. He allowed his vast wealth to ruin him.

And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem. And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance (1 Kings 10:21, 23-27).

He failed to heed the warning given many years before by Moses.

When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel (Deut. 17:14-20).

God proscribed the accumulation of horses, women, and money. Solomon paid no heed. His enormous wealth led to extravagance and corruption, and to his eventual downfall.

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; 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. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 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 (1 Kings 11:1-4).

Solomon became an idolater.

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice (1 Kings 11:5-9).

God carried out his promise to punish Solomon for his sins.

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Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen. And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king (1 Kings 11:11-14, 23, 26).

Solomon's failure led to the permanent break-up of the nation. The ten tribes of the north broke away and founded their own kingdom—the house of Israel—under Jeroboam. The Jews, Benjamites, and Levites remained loyal to the house of David, and according to God's promise, the kingdom was preserved as the kingdom of Judah. From that time on the history of both houses was one of backsliding. Both eventually went into national captivity and were removed from the land. Some of the Jews eventually returned, but not the house of Israel. These people lost their national identity and vanished from sight. There were a few righteous kings in the kingdom of Judah later, but none in the kingdom of Israel. Solomon had supreme wisdom, but lacked the character necessary to live up to God's Way of life. The misuse of his enormous wealth led to his downfall. This lack of character destroyed him in the end. He should be considered a great man in the sense that he did serve God for many years, and was the one who brought Israel to the greatest height of prestige and prosperity it would ever enjoy.