

Series: "Old Testament Personalities"  
"Solomon: From God to Gold"

This summer, in this series of messages, we are looking at some of the women and men of the Old Testament. Last week we talked about Rahab. Today we'll look at Solomon.

Solomon was king of Israel in a time when Israel *truly was* a world power among the nations. Israel's splendor – begun under King David – reached its height when David's son Solomon ruled as king!

***Solomon began his reign with an attitude of humility and dependence on God.*** Remember how Solomon became king? He was named king by his aged father David after some plotting and maneuvering by Solomon's mother Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan. He didn't become king by popular demand. For one thing, he was young and inexperienced.

Early on God appears to the new young king in a dream and says, "Ask what I should give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Suppose God said to you, "I'll give you any one thing for which you ask." What would you ask for? (I've often thought, maybe my request would be, may I have 10 more requests, please)? But Solomon's response is a most worthy one: "I'm green, I'm in over my head here! Give me a wise and understanding heart that I may rule Your people" God is pleased with the young man's humble spirit, and not only promises wisdom, but riches and honor and long life – *if* Solomon walks in God's ways and obeys God.

Solomon also demonstrates a love for God by building a temple for the Lord. It takes seven years to complete, and it's magnificent! At the dedication of the temple Solomon prays a heartfelt, beautiful prayer, urging everyone to live by God's decrees and commands.

So Solomon's first days as king are marked with God's blessing. Israel flourishes under his leadership, and his achievements are spectacular: he builds a vast shipping empire, develops a genius for mining (especially copper), new cities are built, and his army boasts of 12,000 horses and 1400 chariots. Solomon gains fame throughout the whole world for his wealth and wisdom.

***But something happens.*** The end of Solomon's life is much different from those early years. 1 Kings 11:4 says, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God." Later in that chapter of 1 Kings there are these distressing words: "So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely (1 Kings 11:6). That statement is followed by these words: "The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord" (1 Kings 11:9). And finally this ugly note: "So the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you'" (1 Kings 11:11).

The picture the Bible gives of Solomon in the latter portion of his life is that of a man ***obsessed with pleasures and self-possessed by the wealth that surrounds him.*** We can't be exactly sure how this great man's demise came about; we can only guess by reading between the lines.

Near the beginning of his reign, Solomon marries a daughter of the king of Egypt, no doubt for political reasons. This was common back then. But the law of Moses (in Deuteronomy) forbid marrying foreign wives, for this very reason that they can turn one's heart towards pagan gods. Solomon didn't realize that one little turning from God can eventually snowball into a journey down the wrong path. And this *one* marriage alliance with a foreign wife led to more...and more "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter - Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray" (1 Kings 11:1-3).

Men – can you imagine 700 wives! Imagine the bills if they all decided to go shopping the same day! 700 pair of pantyhose hanging in the bathroom! In addition, he had 300 concubines (not “porcupines” as one little boy said). I once heard Billy Graham preach on this. He said, “You talk about sex!” So there were pregnancies...and children...and kids needed a place to live. So Solomon had to build more and more “palace additions” for his huge family. Perhaps the more he built, the more enamored he became with the magnificent buildings, elegant clothing, fine jewels and table delicacies. A telltale sign of his growing materialism is that it took 7 years to build the temple, but *13 years* to construct his own palace. In order to pay for his elaborate personal building projects he has to levy higher and higher taxes. He has to conscript about 160,000 laborers to do the work, so that his own Hebrew brothers are now his slaves. Gradually Solomon's personal ambition and love of the “good life” throws the nation into a mood of bitterness and hopelessness, seeds that lead to a revolt against his leadership.

So what does all this have to do with us? Well, perhaps more than we may think. No, we don't have Solomon's wealth or power. We're not multimillionaires; most of us men are 699 wives short of his 700 wives. *But the things that ate away at Solomon's soul can eat away at ours: sensual pleasure...materialism...selfish pursuits.*

***I doubt there has ever been a culture where so much sensual pleasure has been constantly promoted as a way of life!*** Advertisements, TV commercials continually lure us to a sensual lifestyle: liquor...luxury vehicles...expensive jewelry...exotic vacations. Cable television offers us a dimension of carnal living no society has ever known – whether it's round the clock sporting events, adult films, gourmet cooking, or TV shopping networks.

***Now please, don't get me wrong...***enjoying life is not a bad thing at all; sexual pleasure (if it's within the bounds of marriage) is not sinful. In fact, many husbands and wives aren't sensual enough with each other! Eating a delicious meal or taking a fun vacation is not a bad thing at all. ***But it's when sensual pleasures become more important than our spiritual pursuits that it becomes evil and destructive!*** When pleasure, having fun, become the main goals of life, and become more important than God, then we are missing the purpose for living that God intended.

Solomon – immersed in sensuality and materialism – drifted away from God. ***Sensuality and***

***materialism often go hand in hand.*** We live in a very materialistic culture, where many judge the value of our lives on the basis of how many material things we can accumulate. Now again, the advertising industry bombards us daily with the temptation to want what we don't need, and buy what we often can't afford: the nicest home appliances, that new car or truck, the fashionable shoes or clothing, the latest electronic device. And for many the goal of life becomes: get as much of this world's stuff as I can. And the advertising industry tells us we will be *happy* and *satisfied* if we can only get more "stuff". Truthfully, there's probably not one of us here who isn't to some degree lured by this.

The credit card has become the symbol of our culture and its quest for material things. 38% of people in the U.S. have credit card debt. The average debt of adults with a credit card is \$5284. One figure I saw said that, of those households with credit card debt, the average amount of debt is \$16,048. And as you know, the interest rates on credit cards are notoriously high. There are all types of credit cards, with vastly different rates. But one piece of information I read says that the average interest rate of all credit cards is 12.41%, and a variable credit card carries an average interest rate of 16 and 1/2%! (Any of us getting that return on our CD's or savings accounts? Just for example, if you have just \$1,000 in credit card debt, at 18% interest, and pay the minimum each month, it will take 12 years to pay off that \$1,000 initial debt.

Do you ever get solicitations in the mail to sign up for a credit card? One year alone there were 3 billion credit card solicitations offered (I think I got half of them). Although, with the economic tailspin of 2008, the feds put clamps on banks and lending institutions offering easy availability to credit. Still, credit cards are being offered to people who can't afford them – like people without jobs, or students earning little income.

Larry Burkett was a noted Christian financial leader, author, and radio show personality. He once commented that among churchgoers, only about 3% tithe, while 23% buy lottery tickets. And, he noted, Christians pay about 5 times more in interest on loans than they give to all charitable sources.

Again, my point is not that it's wrong in itself to have a nice car, a home we can take pride in, or to be dressed in an attractive way. But when, like Solomon, material things become more important than God, then we have lost our way.

***Jesus had some things to say about all of this.*** Look at Jesus' words found in Luke 12:15: "Take care! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then there are these words of Christ: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...no one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:19-21, 24).

Jesus Himself modeled a life free from the love of possessions: a simple lifestyle – where our Lord found meaning in life *in relationships, not things* – His relationship with God and doing the Father’s will, and His loving relationships with people.

King Solomon...a man who drifted from God to gold. John Claypool has a book on Bible characters. He titles his chapter on Solomon, “Solomon: Lessons for the Second Half of Life.” Bible says, “*As Solomon grew old* his wives turned his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon started out great as a young man, but he lost his way later in life. Sometimes we think all of our life-forming decisions are made when we’re young, but that’s not true. All through life we’re making choices that affect our soul and destiny. The habits Solomon formed in the second-half of his life took him further and further from God. *It isn’t how we start out in life that measures our life; it’s how we finish!*

I still remember a young wife and mother in a church I served a number of years ago, telling Nancy and me how her father had been a successful pastor of a large church. But he burned himself out and left pastoral ministry. He and his wife opened up a gift shop. Our friend told us how her father and mother in their middle and later years became consumed with running the business, making money, and enjoying a host of country club contacts and socialite activities. Their daughter, the lady in our church, had very serious back problems. She was laid up for several lengthy periods of time following surgeries. And I still remember as we talked the pain and puzzlement this young lady expressed that her dad and mom didn’t even come to visit her in the hospital or at home afterwards because they were too busy with their business and social commitments.

***According to Jesus, meaning in life is not found in the number of things we accumulate and possess, but in a life commitment to Him and loving service to others.***

An Amish woman from Minnesota was killed when a truck hit her horse-drawn buggy. Her husband, a 43 year-old carpenter, was left with 11 children to raise. An insurance company offered him \$212,000 as a wrongful-death settlement, but he turned it down. He said he was concerned that money would threaten his family’s way of life, would cause more problems than it was worth, and that other members of the Amish community “would feel bad” if he took the money.

There is a way of life different from our credit card, consumption-driven culture. This Amish man had found it. Jesus lived it.

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July 23, 2017*

