

Ecclesiastes

The Rise and Fall of the House of Solomon

Lesson #1 for January 6, 2007

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 6:1-42; 7:1-4; 1 Kings 3:16-28; 11:1-43.

1. Solomon was a descendant of Shem and Ham, of Ham's son Canaan, of Lot and Abraham, of Judah and a Canaanite one-time prostitute (Tamar), of incestuous refugees from Sodom and cave dwellers (Lot and his daughters), of a Canaanite religious cult prostitute (Rahab), of a Moabite widow (Ruth), of a lot of wealthy people, of many polygamists, of refugees, of shepherds, of slaves, of a famous military family (David), of the adulterous wife (of an unsuspecting but loyal soldier) who betrayed her husband (Bathsheba), of fertility cult devotees (Canaanites like Rahab) and of baby burning worshipers of Molech—he became one himself! How much was his life affected by his ancestors? What did his parents tell him about his family tree?
2. Solomon may have been the wealthiest person in the world during his lifetime. He built one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. He is described as the wisest man who ever lived but he turned into a terrible fool.
3. Ecclesiastes is the painful story of someone who had everything and still was not satisfied. When it was all over, all he could say is “it is useless.” While many critical scholars are convinced that the book at least in its present form was not put together until the third century B.C., there is a lot of evidence, both internal and external, that the book was primarily written by Solomon. However, the name of Solomon is not specifically mentioned in Ecclesiastes.
4. Would God inspire a tired old king to write a book beginning, “It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless”? (Ecclesiastes 1:2, *GNB*) What do you think is the point of this introduction?
5. Do the musings and memories of a tired old king who has done many foolish things qualify as inspired material? Why would God ask Solomon to write such a book? Many of the passages in this book are clearly not intended to be taken by themselves as inspired guidance! So how do we separate out the memories of Solomon's foolishness from the inspired guidance of God?
6. Many books of the Bible begin with grand revelations of God as given to prophets. Why do you think this book was written and preserved?
7. Look at Ellen White's words:

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age, after he had fully proved that all the pleasures earth is able to give are empty and unsatisfying. He there shows how impossible it is for the vanities of the world to meet the longings of the soul. His conclusion is that it is wisdom to enjoy with gratitude the good gifts of God, and to do right; for all our works will be brought into judgment. *SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White comments volume 3, page 1164.6
8. Given what you know presently about this book, do you think Solomon was writing out of futility, bitterness, anger, depression or sadness?
9. How do you read such a book—in the context of all of scripture—when it is so different from other books in the Bible? Does this book tell us anything specifically about God? Does this

book tell us anything specifically about the great controversy? Does this book tell us anything specifically about the conflict going on here and now on planet Earth between Satan—with his accusations against God’s character and government—and God himself, as God is trying to teach truth and righteousness?

10. Do you think this book could be used to teach our children something? Is it appropriate material for young people to read?
11. Review the early events of the life of Solomon. He was the second son of the relationship between Bathsheba and David. Solomon had numerous older brothers from David’s other wives and in his early years, he probably had no notion that he would end up being king.
12. Who do you think Solomon’s instructors were? Were there special people employed to train the children of David?
13. One of the most important things that we need to learn from the experience and life of Solomon is what it was that led him away from God and what happened to bring him back to God. **To what extent was the life of Solomon and his experience responsible for the downfall of the kingdom of Israel?**
14. What examples and evidence are given in the Bible for Solomon’s wisdom? Read 1 Kings 4:29-34. One of the evidences of Solomon’s wisdom was his knowledge of the natural world. He was considered wiser than the wise men of his age. He composed 3000 proverbs and more than 1000 songs. We only have a small percentage of these proverbs and songs left. Does that mean that the others were not inspired? (Look at *The Wisdom of Solomon*) Solomon’s wisdom was shown by a decision he made about the living baby. (1 Kings 3:16-28) Solomon also set up very prosperous trading businesses with other countries. He established a large military with outposts manned by thousands of soldiers. He made silver and gold and precious stones very common in Jerusalem. Is this enough evidence to convince you that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived? What about God’s words in 1 Kings 3:10-14? And the Queen of Sheba’s words? (2Chronicles 9:1-8)
15. **How would you define wisdom?** What words would you use to describe it? The Bible speaks of the wisdom from God and the wisdom of this world. What is the difference between the two? Why is the wisdom of God superior to this world’s wisdom?
16. If Solomon were to reappear in our world, would he be considered wise today?
17. When Solomon was given the opportunity by God to ask for whatever he wanted, he asked for wisdom in leading and guiding God’s people. As a result, God promised him wealth, honor and long life if he was faithful and obedient. **If one is faithful and obedient to God’s directions for his life, does the long life come as a result of that obedience or as a special gift from God? Is the long life a reward from God for good works?**
18. Solomon apparently wrote this book as a warning to us and to all previous generations from his day until ours not to make the same mistakes that he made. Is this kind of advice ever successful? How often do human beings learn from history? What specifically would you say Solomon is warning us against?
19. Solomon was, in effect, given a blank check by God. What would you have asked for? Read Matthew 7:7. Doesn’t God offer us something similar? Could we be like Solomon if we followed God and his advice as closely as Solomon did in his early years?
20. One of the great success stories in the life of Solomon was his building of the magnificent temple to God in Jerusalem. His father David had wanted to build this temple very much.

Why was David told not to build the temple? In what ways was Solomon better qualified to do the building? Read the story of David's preparations for building this temple in 1 Chronicles 28 and 29. Notice specifically the following words in 1 Chronicles 28:2:

David stood before them and addressed them: "My friends, listen to me. I wanted to build a permanent home for the Covenant Box, the footstool of the Lord our God. I have made preparations for building a temple to honor him, but he has forbidden me to do it, because I am a soldier and have shed too much blood."

After seven years of intense building activity, the temple was completed and dedicated. Look at the story of the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:1-66 and 2 Chronicles 5-7.

21. Try to imagine what the temple dedication was like. Who do you think was in attendance? Were there kings from other countries? Were there any kings present who considered themselves to be "gods"? What would such people think as they watched Solomon, the most powerful king of his time, bowing on his knees in front of everyone before the Lord God of heaven? How many fertility cult worshipers do you think were present? What would they have thought of this ceremony?
22. Look carefully at Solomon's prayer repeated twice in scripture in detail. (1 Kings 8:22-53; 2 Chronicles 6:12-42) Do you think Solomon's statements about God and his reactions to human events are inspired or merely his own thoughts? If we misbehave in one way or another, does God send famine, sword or even death?
23. Look at 2 Chronicles 6:36 and 1 Kings 8:46. We usually quote from Romans 3:23 for the idea that all human beings are sinners, but the idea is expressed in the Old Testament. And what about Ecclesiastes 7:20? What kind of theology would you develop based on Solomon's prayer? Would you be inclined to think that sinners needed changing, healing, or substitution?
24. Ellen G. White makes a very interesting statement in *Prophets and Kings* page 31:

The God whom we serve is no respecter of persons. **He who gave to Solomon the spirit of wise discernment is willing to impart the same blessing to His children today.** "If any of you lack wisdom," His word declares, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James 1:5. When a burden bearer desires wisdom more than he desires wealth, power, or fame, he will not be disappointed. Such a one will learn from the Great Teacher not only what to do, but how to do it in a way that will meet with the divine approval.

Is this an unconditional promise? If there are conditions, what are the conditions? Read Matthew 21:22; John 14:14; 15:7; and 1 John 5:14. Are there reasons why we do not receive the blessings that we want from God? Read Psalm 66:18, 19; Isaiah 1:13-17; Mark 11:24-26; James 4:3; 1 Peter 3:7. What do we learn from these statements about God's gifts and the conditions under which he gives them?

25. Focus on the reasons for Solomon's apostasy. (Read *Prophets and Kings* 53-68) It was described by Ellen White in the following terms:
 - a. it came about so gradually as to be imperceptible;
 - b. it stemmed from ambition to excel above all other nations;
 - c. it came from entering heathen alliances and marriages;
 - d. it was influenced by his heathen wives and idolatry;

- e. it was his inability to withstand flattery;
- f. he eventually fell so low as to offer child sacrifices;
- g. he came to accept the phrase “Solomon’s Temple” rather than “God’s Temple.” (*Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 11)

26. **But if we look further back in the story, we discover that one of the major reasons for all of the problems was that when building the temple, he agreed to pay the workers whatever wages they asked! That started with the foreign workers and the seeking out of foreign help to guide in the building. Was that God’s plan?**
27. Solomon at first married the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt. For a number of years, apparently she was his only wife. Why do you think he married that foreign princess?
28. Read about Solomon’s demise and downfall in 1 Kings 11:1-4. How different would the life of Solomon have been if he had followed the advice given so long before by Moses in Deuteronomy 7 and 17, especially 7:3,4 and 17:17? Solomon ended up marrying many wives and had many concubines. He became “filthy rich.” Eventually he built places of worship for many of his foreign wives. He was led, finally, to sacrifice his own children in worship to Molech, the Ammonite god.
29. What finally led to Solomon’s turnaround? Did Solomon began to realize the folly into which he had fallen? Or did he not wake up until God spoke to him directly? Does God ever speak directly to people in our day? How easy was it for Solomon to change his life? Did he have to divorce some of his many wives? How did he explain the changes to those gathered around him?
30. Solomon was told by God that his descendants would not lose the entire kingdom but a portion would be kept for them because of his father David. But Solomon experienced conflict with enemies from various sides—Hadad, Jereboam, and even Rezon from Syria. At some point near the end of his life, Solomon decided that it was necessary for him to write down a record, for future generations, of the history of his life. The book of Ecclesiastes is at least partly a result of that attempt.
31. If you had known Solomon personally and lived under him in the city of Jerusalem, would you consider these musings from his old age to be wisdom? Or would you be so disgusted by Solomon’s behavior and the results—high taxes and hard work—that you wouldn’t want to hear what he had to say?!
32. Do we have any idea who the prophet was who came and spoke to Solomon? Was he taking his life in his hands by doing this? Certainly we could summarize briefly by saying Solomon teaches us that none of us are immune from the follies of sin and apostasy. Furthermore, Solomon’s evil ways led to the downfall of an entire nation, some of whom must have been innocent servants of God. We also learn that turning back to God—although always the right thing to do—can be a path of bitterness and suffering.
33. If you were to write a book like Ecclesiastes summarizing what you have learned during your life, what would it be like? Are we wise enough to learn from Solomon’s mistakes?

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