

A Walk Thru the Life of
SOLOMON

Pursuing a Heart of Integrity

Walk Thru the Bible



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Introduction

It started with a man, then a family, then a clan, then an entire ethnic group. But the day the people of Israel walked out of Egypt and passed through a sea, they became a nation. They tried having God as their only king, but everyone did what was right in their own eyes and didn't serve him. Then, in a bad case of royal envy, they cried out for a human king, and they got what they asked for. Eventually, the kingdom was ripped out of the bad king's hands and given to a man after God's own heart—a passionate warrior/poet/musician/shepherd/king. And finally, the king with a heart built a kingdom with a heart—and a promise of everlasting glory.

Israel was a small country at the end of David's reign, but it was a country with an enormous purpose and a godly king. The twelve tribes had been united, the territory solidified, the military established, the enemies subdued, the priests assigned, the worship cultivated, and the temple imagined. And this was no ordinary kingdom; there were eternal promises associated with it and a global influence to come. This wasn't just a nation chosen to prosper. It was chosen to host the presence of God.

That's the remarkable legacy Solomon inherited—Israel was a jewel in God's crown and the delight of his eyes. During the

course of Solomon's reign, this unique treasure would rise to unprecedented heights and then, almost inexplicably, begin to fragment into tragic rivalries. While Solomon was king, the world saw both what it was like for a nation to be blessed by God and what it was like for a nation to betray that sacred trust. Sadly, the legacy he left was less righteous than the legacy he received, and the holy inheritance would slip through the grasp of generations to come.

Solomon the King

Solomon reigned over a united kingdom from 967 to 927 BC. He was the third king of Israel and, in many ways, a strange hybrid between the first two. The first king, Saul, had no heart for the Lord. The second, David, had a whole heart for the Lord. And the third, David's son, had a divided heart. He loved the Lord and followed in David's footsteps, but he hung onto his baser desires and eventually departed from his father's path.

Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba—the first died in infancy as God's judgment on David's sin of taking Bathsheba from her husband and having him killed in battle. But Bathsheba remained David's most beloved wife, and Solomon was his most beloved child. He grew up as a son of privilege and was taught by his father to love the Lord—an experience he wrote about in Proverbs 4:3–9:

When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is

supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.”

Those are words to live by, which is exactly what Solomon did for much of his life. But he wasn't consistent in following his own advice. He forgot those words, ignored them, or intentionally rebelled against them at times, and the consequences were painful. Late in life, he became bitter, disillusioned, lethargic, depressed, and apathetic.

The biblical information we have on Solomon comes from 1 Kings 1–11 (the primary narrative for this study); 2 Chronicles 1–9; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; and Song of Songs. The passages from Kings and Chronicles are written about him in the third person, while much of Proverbs was written and compiled by him. Ecclesiastes does not name its author, but internal evidence points to Solomon. And he is associated with the Song of Songs in its first verse.

Themes

The story of this king has a noticeable symmetry. With a humble heart, he inherited a great kingdom from his father, displayed remarkable wisdom from God, governed a glorious period of growth and prosperity, was recognized for his glory, was lavishly honored for his wisdom, and then left a broken kingdom to his son. It's the story of a rise and fall, of wisdom and foolishness, of God's kingdom and human kingdoms, and of power and weakness. Solomon is a complex character in whom the ups and downs common to all of us are magnified to epic proportions. He's a valuable case study in how to obey God and how

not to obey God; in one way or another, he represents the best and worst of who we are.

Important themes and lessons to watch for in Solomon's life include:

- priorities in prayer
- priorities in personal decisions
- knowing truth versus doing truth
- power, wealth, and ambition
- how God disciplines his people
- the conditional nature of many of God's promises
- the privileges and responsibilities of being chosen by God
- principles of leadership
- living by principles versus living from a changed heart
- integrity

How to Use This Guide

The questions in this guide are geared to elicit every participant's input, regardless of his or her level of preparation. Obviously, the more group members prepare by reading the biblical text and the background information in the study guide, the more they will get out of it. But even in busy weeks that afford no preparation time, everyone will be able to participate in a meaningful way.

The discussion questions also allow your group quite a bit of latitude. Some groups prefer to briefly discuss the questions in order to cover as many as possible, while others focus only on one or two of them in order to have more in-depth conversations. Since this study is designed for flexibility, feel

free to adapt it according to the personality and needs of your group.

Each session ends with a hypothetical situation that relates to the passage of the week. Discussion questions are provided, but group members may also want to consider role-playing the scenario or setting up a two-team debate over one or two of the questions. These exercises often cultivate insights that wouldn't come out of a typical discussion.

Regardless of how you use this material, the biblical text will always be the ultimate authority. Your discussions may take you to many places and cover many issues, but they will have the greatest impact when they begin and end with God's Word itself. And never forget that the Spirit who inspired the Word is in on the discussion too. May he guide it—and you—wherever he wishes.

A Fruitful Legacy

1 KINGS 1–2

On the surface, he had it all. He was high-profile royalty: wealthy, educated, influential, supported by powerful people, and very, very handsome. And he was the oldest among his brothers, a prince among princes. He thought his time had surely come.

But Adonijah's time hadn't come—at least not the time he had expected. No, he had assumed that since his father's health was failing, it would be expedient to go ahead and pursue both the throne and enough backing to make sure he could hold it. After conferring with a powerful general and a well-placed priest, it seemed the plan would work. The barely-coherent king would certainly appreciate and agree to a peaceful succession in which all the details had already been worked out.

Adonijah invited key members of his constituency—royal courtiers and tribal leaders of Judah and Benjamin, his father’s power base—to a nearby spring and made ceremonial sacrifices to ask God’s blessing on his kingship. The ensuing feast would solidify the new king’s alliances.

But someone forgot to tell the king—that is, until the prophet Nathan and the king’s beloved wife Bathsheba realized what was happening. They immediately hatched a plan to solicit David’s favor for Solomon, his son with Bathsheba. It was this son, not the oldest one, who had been called “beloved by God” (2 Sam. 12:24–25). It was this son to whom David had promised the throne. So the old king named Solomon his successor, ordered the ceremonial entry into Jerusalem on a mule, and invited Solomon to sit on his throne amid trumpet blasts and shouts of acclamation. The retinue would include the high priest, a high general, and foreign mercenary troops. The coronation would be much more official, if not more popular, than Adonijah’s feast at the spring.

LIKE FATHER, UNLIKE SON

Solomon’s rise to the throne of Israel was sudden. His father’s, however, took years. David was anointed king long before Saul died; their rivalry resulted in David’s exile and Saul’s relentless pursuit. David refused to force his way into his position, even when he had a golden opportunity to kill the reigning king. And the conflict extended beyond Saul’s death. “The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time” (2 Sam. 3:1), as the tribes of Israel wrestled with the decision of whether to follow David or a son of Saul. Eventually, of course, God established David as king. And as is often the case, a father’s long labor gives his son an advantage. Solomon only had to fight for the throne for a day.

SHALOM

When the Bible speaks of peace, it means more than simply the absence of conflict. The Hebrew word *shalom*—related to Solomon’s name (*Shelomoh*) and the name of Jerusalem (*Yerushalaim*)—also includes fulfillment, wholeness, completeness, safety, and abundance. It’s an “all is well” satisfaction with life—exactly what Solomon will describe in 5:4: “The LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster.” Under Solomon, the kingdom of Israel will experience *shalom* for the first and perhaps only time in its history.

In less than a day, Adonijah went from almost-king to almost-executed. Through the maneuverings of an inner circle of king’s allies, Israel made its first transition of power from a father to son. And the nation entered its golden age.

Power plays are almost always messy, even when they involve divinely chosen people and a sovereign God. Solomon’s birth itself came in the aftermath of a mess; he was the product of a marriage that only happened because David stole a man’s wife and had the man killed. It’s one of those examples of how God redeems our lives, even when we’ve done a royal job of messing them up. The years we’ve wasted aren’t actually a waste in his economy.

Conspiracies: 1 Kings 1

Focus: 1 Kings 1:24–31

The palace intrigue involved in Solomon’s ascent to the throne hints of two stories from Genesis: (1) the rivalry between Cain and Abel, in which only one brother could live; and (2) the ri-

valry between Jacob and Esau, in which only one brother could inherit the father's blessing. Between Solomon and Adonijah, only one brother can assume the throne and, as it turns out, survive the competition. For all of the posturing and oaths of protection, Adonijah's threat remains. He even flaunts it, requesting his father's consort in an attempt to hold on to some claim to the throne (2:13–25). So yet another of David's sons dies in the heat of a bitter rivalry, and only one is left standing in the bloody mess: Solomon the wise.

Though Solomon is lauded for most of the biblical account of his life, a dark side of his reign is foreshadowed early in the narrative. Neither a prophet of God nor the king's favorite wife nor the king's beloved son is immune from the seduction of power. The kingdom's welfare must be, of course, their primary concern; but just as prominent should be concern for survival and the influence they can have. Not only does Solomon gain the throne; he also eliminates those who threaten his right to it. The kingdom he acquires has come at a cost.

Discuss

- Which aspects of Solomon's ascension seem godly? Which seem ungodly? Do you think God would have established him on the throne without the power play? Why or why not?

- Solomon was the eventual fruit of David's worst moral failure—his relationship with Bathsheba—and a clear

indication that God can use our messes as integral aspects of his plan. Do you feel as if any part of your life has been wasted? If so, how might God redeem those parts for his purposes?

Promises: 1 Kings 2

Focus: 1 Kings 2:1–4

As David nears death, he gives his son a solemn charge: walk according to God’s commands as put forth in the books of Moses, and live with wholehearted faithfulness. Why? So that Solomon will prosper and so that God’s promises to David of a perpetual dynasty will be fulfilled.

God’s promises for a lasting dynasty had been given to David years before because of his undivided heart. But they were conditional on the behavior of his descendants. Even in his dying words, David seems to realize that. His legacy won’t be fulfilled if his children’s hearts don’t remain pure. And to this point in his parenting experience, things have not gone well. Sons have rebelled, brothers have killed brothers, and only one hope is still standing.

David’s last instructions for Solomon are the lens through which his reign will be assessed. When Solomon succeeds, it will be because he has lived up to his father’s words. And when Solomon fails, as the writer of 1 Kings will show us, it will be because he has abandoned them.

Discuss

- How would you feel if you knew the fulfillment of God’s promise to someone else depended entirely on you? Would the responsibility to fulfill someone else’s conditions be more likely to have a positive or negative effect on you? Why?

- Do you think it’s possible for parents to pass a pure heart down from one generation to the next? Why or why not? If so, how?

A CASE STUDY

Imagine: He was a young candidate, but after a long history of corrupt presidents, youth was an asset. It gave him the appearance of innocence. And in his case, it was more than an appearance. He was idealistic, visionary, optimistic, and unstained by the ugly effects of under-the-table deals and cutthroat politics. He was a new and promising face.

Naturally, he was elected, mainly because everyone loves a new face. And the first two years of his term went remarkably well. But in the third year, a scandal surfaced—the first of many. The honeymoon was over. Illegal fundraising, deceptive claims, and destroyed reputations would mark the rest of his presidency. Power, it seems, corrupted even the most promising of careers.

- Is it possible for a leader to increase in both power and faithfulness at the same time? Why or why not?
- Why do power and success seem to corrupt even pure hearts?
- Does this situation apply only to kings and presidents, or have you noticed the corrupting influence of authority in your circles of friends and associates? What can a person do to remain humble and pure in the midst of great or sudden success?