

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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Solomon's Idolatry and Death

Reading: 1 Kings 11:1-13

Have you ever been spoken to by your parents saying... "Do you ever listen?", when we have got ourselves into some sort of trouble or other? Well, I am sure I have had that said to me in the past. Many, many times we fail to take heed to sound advice and warning, and our lesson today is just like this.

Long before there was a king in Israel the Law of Moses carefully warned what should be done when a king came to the throne. He was commanded to write out his own copy of the law and keep it by his side reading it every day and using it for his guidance in life.

In this law the king was warned not to multiply horses, marry wives, or store up wealth as all these things can lead men from God. Solomon failed in all these. If only he had read God's word and obeyed it he would not have failed as he did. This applies so much to us today. If only we would remember to read our Bibles and listen to what God commands, our lives would be so much simpler.

Chapter 11 makes very sad reading and it begins with Solomon's greatest fault, his multiplication of wives and by doing this he was following the custom of the day. But gradually they led him away from the pure worship of the God of Israel who had done so much for him.

Solomon's chief wife, and his Queen was Pharaoh's daughter, this marriage united Egypt to Israel and it seemed that this wife may have worshipped Israel's God because we read that he built altars to his other brides and nothing is said of him setting up any form of Egyptian worship. Yet special honour was paid to the Queen by Solomon and a beautiful palace was built for her.

The loving of other strange wives was Solomon's downfall, he married them until eventually he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (or lesser wives). Many of these were not wives in the full sense of the word as we understand it today but were princesses of other places who were honoured by being connected with the glory of Solomon and the court of such a kingdom. Some probably acted as hostage for countries over which Solomon exercised power, their presence in his court was a guarantee of the good conduct of the people they represented. However some among them were wives in the fullest sense and they turned Solomon's heart so that he did not remain loyal to the true worship of God. How this brings home to us the command that the servants of God should only marry those who are of the same mind and worship, otherwise a partnership of husband and wife does not work, but united together, true happiness is found. Later the Apostle Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). As young people this is something you should bear in mind when you make friends and are intent on making lasting relationships with those outside the faith.

Coming back to chapter 11, verse 1 says that Solomon married many strange women. The word *strange* in the Hebrew is *nokree* and means "foreign". They were foreign in every sense not only by birth but also by religion, they came from the surrounding nations from Moab, Ammon, Edom and Zidon. The Israelites were

commanded not to marry any of these nations unless they left the worship of their gods and took on the faith of Israel. Can you think of an example of anyone who did this?

Solomon's downfall did not come all at once, it was gradual and he was led away to sin. He possibly at first reasoned that it was good for his wives to have some form of religion and so he allowed altars to be built and then perhaps he was curious to know all things and make enquiries and examined the different forms of worship until finally he was found going into the altars and places of worship to worship there himself. The steps that lead to sin are often gradual and not clearly defined. The slightest drift from ways of right can finally end in us leaving the worship of the true God. Solomon pleased his wives, but displeased God. What about us? Do we please ourselves and our friends, or do we displease God? One of the worst things he did was to allow the erection of altars to pagan gods on the Mount of Olives within the sight of the Temple itself. At least three of these shrines were effectively placed side by side with the great place of worship of the God of Israel, the creator of heaven and earth. How terrible this was and they remained there throughout the reigns of the various kings until the days of Josiah (2 Kings 23:13) causing rottenness in Israel and encouraging sin and wickedness so the Mount of Olives was renamed and called the Mount of Corruption (2 Kings 23:13) With all of this God was displeased.

The King of Earth had a message from the King_of heaven. Find this message and analyse the consequences by detailing them out as extra work.

Sin always has to be punished. God is just, the commandments to Solomon had been clear, God had appeared to him twice.

1. At Gideon he was promised blessings if he kept God's commands. (3:13-14)
2. At Jerusalem when the Temple was dedicated he was warned of judgement if he and the nation followed after other gods. (9:6-8)

The judgements on Solomon came through natural causes but God was behind them, firstly we are told that God raised up an adversary called Hadad the Edomite. Hadad had fled from an attack made on the Edomites by Joab into Egypt and there remained whilst David was king. However upon hearing that David and Joab were dead he returned to his country with the objective of persuading Edom to revolt against Solomon.

Josephus records that Hadad failed to persuade his nation to revolt and that instead he went to Syria and there joined with Rezon in invading Israel and causing great annoyance. Rezon is mentioned in verses 23-25 as another adversary stirred up by God to harass Solomon. Rezon ruled from Syria and raided Israel from Damascus, he hated all Israel stood for and became terrible enemy to Solomon.

And so little by little the peace and prosperity that Solomon had began to crumble. If God is not with us nothing will go well for us and we will have problems one after another. This certainly happened to Solomon and as a consequence to Israel.

The greatest judgement was yet to come when Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants, would rise up and incite 10 of the tribes to revolt but this is a lesson for next week.

What lessons can we take from today's chapter? Solomon had riches and honour such as no other man had, yet his life is a record of wasted opportunities. He started well but his keen enthusiasm for God soon faded and the luxury and ease of his Court led to spiritual apathy and sin. He permitted the cruel and vile worship of pagan gods to rear its evil head in Israel, he brought oppressive taxation upon the people and paved the way for civil war and division in Israel.

But all this has passed away and we are living in 2010. We can read how a glorious temple that was built was destroyed, the shrines to paganism have been broken down, the empire of Solomon has come to an end, indeed we see that the things of this world all fade away BUT THE THINGS OF GOD ENDURE FOREVER.

In the great library which we call the Bible there are volumes of all kinds. Some record the history of God's people, some outlined His purpose with man, some set before us His rules and some reveal great prophecies of the future. And right in the centre of the Bible there are a few books that are given over to divine poetry. This section comprises of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Proverbs is full of practical wisdom for life and has so many useful guides to how we should live our lives. In Ecclesiastes we are taught to set our affections on God not on things of this life, and the blessings felt for those who do. The Song of Solomon takes us into the future and sets before us the picture of Christ as the bridegroom and the true followers as the bride..... Solomon was well equipped to write these books. He had experienced all things in his life, but he found that the things of this life cannot find true happiness in the absence of God's ways, they are empty and vain. In Ecclesiastes he summed up his life's experience and shows it is all vanity, if the world promises us everything it is empty and useless without God. He looks at all the things man strives for and realising they can never bring happiness he calls them vanity or emptiness.

Solomon's experience in life finally led him to the right conclusion that service to God can transform the vanities of life into something really worthwhile. When Christ governs our lives and wisdom, labour purpose take on new meaning.

I think we can sum up today's lesson with the words of Ecclesiastes 12:1.

"Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth while the evil days come not nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them."

The lesson of Solomon is before us... are we going to allow the things of this world to crowd out the things of God? Do we allow the idols of hobbies, sports, reading to grow greater and greater in our lives? Do we allow them to crowd God out? The wise words of Solomon are an example to us, let us not fail as he did, but let us every day put God's works and word first in our lives, so that we do not displease God as he did.

Extra work

Why was it important that Solomon did not multiply horses?

Who forsook idol worship in the Bible and took on the faith of Israel when they married (or just before)?

What was God's message to Solomon when he outlined his punishment?

What idols do you think we can have in our lives today to cause God to be displeased with us as he was with Solomon?