

A FAST Biblical Portrait: Solomon

A Man of Great Wisdom— and Great Foolishness

John Kain, 2010

When we think of the leaders of the nation Israel, rich and wise King Solomon will always come to mind. Let's see what we can learn about godly servant leadership from his accomplishments as well as from his moral failures.

Solomon was the conceived-out-of-wedlock son of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24-25), and just as our own son experiences, his very human dad brought trouble as well as blessing into his life. Solomon was, for instance, raised in a family where polygamy was practiced, so home was the scene of much jealousy and strife. Solomon, however, had in David a father who was also a proven leader, athletic, artistic, musical, and, on the whole, a man “devoted to the LORD his God” (1 Kings 11:4).

Solomon's Rise and His Reign

His father David promised that Solomon would be his successor to the throne, and Solomon was anointed king before his father's death (1 Kings 1:17-39). Solomon began his reign reasonably well, but he made a foolish mistake when he chose a pagan king's daughter to be his wife (3:1).

Undoubtedly this marriage was an act of political expediency and, sadly, the first of several foreign alliances Solomon made, all of which contributed to his moral downfall.

The positives of Solomon's reign came only because of his wisdom, a special gift to him from God. Early in his reign Solomon had a vision: the Lord appeared to him at Gideon and told him to ask what he would have. Confessing his weakness and ignorance, Solomon said, “Give your servant a discerning heart” (see 1 Kings 3:4-15).

Appreciating the value of this choice, God granted the request and promised Solomon that he would be the wisest of men and have great riches and honor as well. God kept his promise, and Solomon's three thousand proverbs and 1,005 songs make his wisdom available to us today.

During his reign, Solomon's fame spread throughout the world (4:29-34). He also carried out the plans of his father, consolidating the kingdom and engaging in many commercial ventures. His greatest accomplishment was construction of the elaborate temple at Jerusalem, which took seven years (see 1 Kings 5-6).

Solomon's Moral Downfall

As Solomon's wealth and fame grew, so did his love of riches and pomp. He maintained a luxurious and extravagant lifestyle beyond what the resources of his people warranted (1 Kings 10:14-29). He also let himself fall into the sins of sensuality and, under the influence of his many foreign wives, introduced into Jerusalem the worship of false gods (1 Kings 11:1-8). The threefold consequences of Solomon's self-indulgent straying from God's ways were a strong rebuke from the Lord, social discontent, and, in the days of Solomon's son, the disruption of the kingdom (1 Kings 11:9–12:19).

So what can we learn from the life of King Solomon, the man who—given the opportunity for wealth, power, and fame—chose wisdom? We can see the importance of a father's godly influence and advice: despite his own sinfulness, David had modeled a heart for God. We can also see how crucial it is to heed our own father's godly advice and to effectively convey godly wisdom to our sons. Solomon did neither of these things, and we don't have to repeat his mistake.

Solomon is known for his wisdom, yet his wisdom did not teach him self-control. Furthermore, he taught others well, but he failed to live according to his own wise precepts. As he describes the fool in the book of Proverbs, he draws for us a vivid picture of his own failings. May we who seek to serve God in our homes take heed!