

Rise and Fall of Nations 3

We can already see in our short survey of the nation of Israel under her first two kings that safety and peril, prosperity and poverty, blessings and cursing, rose and fell largely on the obedience and faithfulness to God's commands and purposes of those divinely appointed leaders. We saw how during the times when Saul or David chose to live publicly, politically and privately in submission to God's commands that they prospered and all Israel was blessed with prosperity and security. But, we also saw how even one act of disobedience, publicly or privately, led to heartache, destruction, and loss, not only in the personal lives of those two kings, but worst of all, the whole nation suffered because of Saul and David's disobedience.

I believe, or at least hope, that we have all come to an agreement that all people in positions of authority whether in the church, local government, state government, or national government are accountable to us and more importantly to God for how they live and carry out their duties both publicly and privately. We have a right and duty to expect righteousness from our elected officials and we must demand that they adhere to biblical commands and principles in their platforms, policies and in the laws they initiate and support. If we don't, it seems quite obvious that we should forfeit our privilege of asking God's blessings on our country.

Today we will remain in the chronological order of the kings of Israel as we examine the rise and fall of Israel under the reign of her third king, Solomon. Saul had reigned 40 years. David reigned 40 years and then Solomon, the second son born to

David and Bathsheba, took the throne of the great and powerful nation of Israel. He also reigned for 40 years.

There is a great example here of the wonderful patience and mercy of God in that Solomon was born out of the illicit relationship David had with Bathsheba resulting in the murder of her husband and the death of their first born. And, Solomon managed to escape all the perils of hatred and violence among the half-siblings conceived by David and his several wives that were also part of God's judgment against David for his sin. . . . Most of Israel expected Adonijah to become king upon David's death but Solomon was given the throne by his father David while he was still alive. Solomon was probably around 16-18 years old when he began to reign.

¹ Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon brought her to the city of David until he finished building his palace, the LORD's temple, and the wall surrounding Jerusalem. ² However, the people were sacrificing on the high places, because until that time a temple for the LORD's name had not been built. ³ Solomon loved the LORD by walking in the statutes of his father David, but he also sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there because it was the most famous high place. He offered 1,000 burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask. What should I give you?"

⁶ And Solomon replied, "You have shown great and faithful love to Your servant, my father David, because he walked before You in faithfulness, righteousness, and integrity. You have

continued this great and faithful love for him by giving him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today. ⁷ “LORD my God, You have now made Your servant king in my father David’s place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership. ⁸ Your servant is among Your people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted. ⁹ So give Your servant an obedient heart to judge Your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

¹⁰ Now it pleased the Lord that Solomon had requested this. ¹¹ So God said to him, “Because you have requested this and did not ask for long life or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies, but you asked discernment for yourself to understand justice, ¹² I will therefore do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again. ¹³ In addition, I will give you what you did not ask for: both riches and honor, so that no man in any kingdom will be your equal during your entire life. ¹⁴ If you walk in My ways and keep My statutes and commandments just as your father David did, I will give you a long life.”

¹⁵ Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant, and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he held a feast for all his servants. **1**Kings 3:1-15 (HCSB)

Solomon’s trip to Gibeon early in his life and reign as king of Israel was transformational. One might reasonably compare Solomon’s journey to Gibeon to that of a youth camp or retreat where a young man or young lady had an encounter with God

that truly transformed their entire direction and purpose in life. It may have happened that way with some of you. The only difference is Solomon didn't go with the youth group. He went alone but the outcome was similarly powerful and dramatic.

This was a great way to start out his tenure as king of Israel- seeking an obedient heart and discernment. God not only honored Solomon's request. He promised him also riches and honor if he would continue to keep the Lord's statutes and commandments.

We should take note in this passage of a couple of things that didn't seem to have significant consequences at the time but later probably had a part in Solomon's downfall: (1) Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. Was she a worshipper of the one true God Jehova? Not likely. (2) Solomon had gone to Gibeon to offer sacrifices to God. That was a common practice but it was actually forbidden. Sacrifices to false gods were commonly offered at "high places." And, probably because of that, Israelites were to only make sacrifices at the one altar before the ark of the Lord's covenant which had been brought to Jerusalem by David. Let's observe some of success that grew out of Solomon's wisdom and God's blessings.

20 Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; [they were] eating, drinking, and rejoicing. ²¹ Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt. They offered tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. ²² Solomon's provisions for one day were 150 bushels of fine flour and 300 bushels of meal, ²³ 10 fattened oxen, 20 range oxen, and 100 sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and pen-fed poultry, ²⁴

for he had dominion over everything west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza and over all the kings west of the Euphrates. He had peace on all his surrounding borders. ²⁵ Throughout Solomon's [reign], Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan to Beer-sheba, each man under his own vine and his own fig tree. ²⁶ Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. ²⁷ Each of those deputies for a month in turn provided food for King Solomon and for everyone who came to King Solomon's table. They neglected nothing. ²⁸ Each man brought the barley and the straw for the chariot teams and the other horses to the required place according to his assignment.

²⁹ God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as [vast] as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ He was wiser than anyone—wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. His reputation extended to all the surrounding nations. ³² Solomon composed 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005. ³³ He described trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing out of the wall. He also taught about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. ³⁴ People came from everywhere, [sent] by every king on earth who had heard of his wisdom, to listen to Solomon's wisdom. **1**
Kings 4:20-34 (HCSB)

Solomon fulfilled the vision of his father David by constructing the magnificent temple for the Lord to dwell in among his people. He conducted several other major construction projects during his reign. It seems the highlight of Solomon's success

and obedience and closeness to God was at the time of the dedication of temple....

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire congregation of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. **23** He said: LORD God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below, keeping the gracious covenant with Your servants who walk before You with their whole heart. **1** Kings 8:22-23 (HCSB)

Solomon was obviously at this time a very committed, obedient, godly leader. Solomon's wealth, influence, power and fame continued to grow. The queen of Sheba made the long perilous journey all the way to Jerusalem just to hear Solomon's journey. But.....

1 King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women **2** from the nations that the LORD had told the Israelites about, "Do not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because they will turn you away [from Me] to their gods." Solomon was deeply attached to these women and loved [them]. **3** He had 700 wives who were princesses and 300 concubines, and they turned his heart away [from the LORD]. **4** When Solomon was old, his wives seduced him [to follow] other gods. His heart was not completely with the LORD his God, as his father David's heart had been. **5** Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites. **6** Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight, and unlike his father David, he did not completely follow the LORD. **7** At that time, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, and

for Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites on the hill across from Jerusalem. ⁸ He did the same for all his foreign wives, who were burning incense and offering sacrifices to their gods. ⁹ The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰ He had commanded him about this, so that he would not follow other gods, but Solomon did not do what the LORD had commanded. ¹¹ Then the LORD said to Solomon, “Since you have done this and did not keep My covenant and My statutes, which I commanded you, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. ¹² However, I will not do it during your lifetime because of your father David; I will tear it out of your son’s hand. ¹³ Yet, I will not tear the entire kingdom away from him. I will give one tribe to your son because of my servant David and because of Jerusalem that I chose.” **1** Kings 11:1-13 (HCSB)

Saul disobeyed God in one thing in his political life. This cost him his fellowship with God, peace and respect, kingship, invasion of Israel, the death of his sons, and his own life....David disobeyed God in one thing in his personal life that led to other sins, death of his child, hatred, rape, violence and murder among his children, and the humiliation of being run out of Jerusalem by his own son. Solomon disobeyed God in a thousand things. He brought foreign women into the palace. 1,000 too many. One, Pharaoh’s daughter, was disobedient. But he continued to bring more and more women into the palace. That was disobedient to God in two respects. One, God has always intended since the garden for marriage to be between one man and one woman for life, and, God has always required that

His children marry among His own children, believers marrying believers. This is reaffirmed in the New Testament.

14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? **15** What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? **16** And what agreement does God's sanctuary have with idols? For we are the sanctuary of the living God ... **2** Cor 6:14-16 (HCSB)

After Solomon's death, because of his disobedience, allowing foreign women with their false gods in the palace and the nation, God did what He said He would do-divide the nation. The northern tribes separated from Judah and they became a divided nation, two nations, often fighting against each other, falling farther and farther away from God until they finally fell to the Assyrians and Babylonians. This has led to nearly 3,000 years of Israel divided, conquered, scattered, and in bondage to other nations. Until 1948. The consequences of Solomon's sins lasted for nearly three thousand years!

Lesson: One man, one leader, king Solomon was primarily and almost solely responsible for the division and fall of Israel from the largest and most powerful nation on earth to that of weakness, chaos, division, and defeat. It was his fault because he, while serving as king, considered his own fleshly desires more important than honoring and obeying God and serving His people. It is clear that the quantity and severity of Solomon's sins directly impacted the extent of God's judgment against him and Israel.

It is quite reasonable to expect that our nation under the right leadership could rise to new greatness, prosperity, and respect among the nations of the world, or under the wrong leadership could be at least primarily responsible for the great fall of

America resulting in economic chaos, defeat and humiliation before our enemies.

Our primary responsibility, as Christians and citizens, as each of us goes to vote November 6 is to pray for discernment that God would help us know which candidate in each race is most likely to live privately and serve publicly in righteousness, honoring and obeying God in all His commands. Let's pray and fast.