

Did Solomon's Wisdom Fail Him in the End?

By David DeWitt

The last word on Solomon is that of tragic moral failure. *Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded* (1 Kings 11:1-10).

- What exactly was his failure? Solomon did not fail because of wisdom. He failed because of women. He did not fail because he was unloving to those women. He failed because he *held fast to these in love*. And he did not fail because of adultery. He failed because of idolatry. The women who he followed to his destruction were his wives. **There is nothing in Solomon's failure that came from his wisdom.** He failed because he did not follow his own wisdom. Just because we know the right thing to do does not mean we will do the right thing. Solomon had a brilliant reign. He had the largest, most prosperous, most successful, most peaceful reign of any king of Israel. His construction in the land (including the chariot cities, the expansion of Jerusalem and the Temple) was without precedent, and his protection of his people with his military might was without parallel. And he was able to maintain it while avoiding war with all the nations of the world around him. It might be said that Solomon was more successful than any king ever (1 Kings 10:11-29).
- His personal wisdom was also without precedent. *So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon; to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart* (1 Kings 10:23-24). So it is simply not true that Solomon's wisdom failed. **Solomon failed because he was unable to distinguish between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.** Here's the problem: **As he got older, he forgot the fear of God.** Solomon obtained peace by marrying all those foreign wives. Nearly all of Solomon's potential enemies had daughters or granddaughters married to Solomon. That meant they soon also had grandchildren running around Jerusalem. They saw themselves as having a piece of the action. Why would they attack Solomon when they were a part of his success? It was brilliant, sheer genius—except for one thing. Those wives also wanted their gods in Jerusalem. In order to maintain the strategy, Solomon had to bring their idols into Jerusalem.
- It was idolatry that destroyed Solomon. Instead of going from wisdom to the maturity of seeking God, as his father David had done, he used his wisdom without the fear of God. When he did that, it became a worldly wisdom, which resulted in his ignoring the direct commands of God against idolatry. Solomon's wisdom didn't fail. Quite the contrary. He failed to follow his wisdom. He was so focused on his wisdom from God (2 Chronicles 1:1-11), he forgot the God of his wisdom.

Warning—The wisdom of Proverbs will help us live well, but living well is not all there is to do, nor is it the most important thing to do. Living in proverbial wisdom is a foundation. It is the way we are to grow up, avoid life's chaotic pitfalls, and become men and women. But it is not sufficient. It will not get you to God. It will not by itself secure a relationship with God, establish a love for God, or give you an eternal future with God. And if you become wise and forget God, you may end up apart from God, forgetting the heart of God, and feeling justified in your disobedience because you are wise.