

PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson Five, Solomon's Reign ***1 Kings 1 – 11, 1 Chronicles 22 – 2 Chronicles 9***

Subject: Solomon and the Israelites enjoyed a Golden Age until Solomon's many wives led him astray.

Main Idea: Prosperity is a gift of God and also a test.

Principles:

1. *Gratitude is the necessary response of every believer for God's many gifts.*
2. *Our hearts grow to love the things in which we invest.*
3. *God's good gifts will either point us to Him or lure us away from Him.*

Introduction

A common western practice to teach children to manage money involves an “allowance.” In some instances, the child earns a modest sum of money from his or her parents by completing weekly chores. In other cases, the allowance is received as a weekly or monthly gift. However, a test is inherent in it. Will the child spend the money frivolously and selfishly or will they use it wisely? The Lord blessed Solomon with great wisdom and prosperity, but inherent in these gifts was also a test, a test of Solomon's faithfulness. He was free to decide how he would use God's gifts. Would he apply his God-given wisdom to his own life? Would he use his great wealth to glorify God? Or would these gifts become a stumbling block? Ultimately, God's blessings reveal what is in our hearts.

It is important that we recognize that God's blessing on Israel in the days of David occurred in fulfillment of God's covenant promise. Before the Israelites entered Canaan, they were repeatedly told that obedience to God's law would result in an outpouring of God's blessing. Deuteronomy 28 details the extent of these blessings: their enemies would be defeated, their barns would be full, they would be established in the land and seen by all other peoples as God's representatives; they would experience great fruitfulness in their family, flocks, and fields; indeed, the Lord would give them superiority over other nations and all the works of their hands would be blessed.

Although David was imperfect and suffered greatly as a result, he was still an outstanding man of God. In fact, all subsequent kings were measured against the standard of righteousness he set. He loved God's word and obeyed His prophets. He taught his people to honor God. Therefore, God kept His promise and prospered David and his son Solomon. Solomon was further blessed for his humble attitude in asking God for discernment and, in the reign of both kings, Israel enjoyed a Golden Age.

David had received other special promises from God: the Messiah would be his descendant, his son Solomon would build the Temple, and he would have an enduring dynasty. Our study of 2 Samuel ended with David's reign nearly over, and therefore, as we turn to 1 Kings, we are anticipating the reign of Solomon and the building of the Temple. Most of the remaining lessons in *Promised Land 2* cover history recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Since we are beginning 1 Kings in this lesson, this is the appropriate time to introduce the books of Kings and Chronicles.

I. Introduction to the Books of Kings and Chronicles

A. The Books of Kings

- i. Time Period: The time period spanned by the books of Kings is roughly from 970 B.C. to 561 B.C., over 400 years. It begins with the reign of Solomon, describes the division of the country following his reign, the subsequent reigns of the kings of the north and the south, and mentions the exiles of the peoples of those two kingdoms. The northern Kingdom of Israel went into exile 136 years before the southern Kingdom of Judah did.
- ii. Author and Date of Writing: Just as with 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one single book. Christian scholars believe that it could have been assembled before, during, or after the exile. Since 1 and 2 Kings often refer to writings that offer additional details about certain incidents or individuals (none of which have yet been discovered), it appears that the author or editor compiled information from a variety of sources. Jewish thought is that this author/editor was the prophet Jeremiah.
- iii. Emphasis: One thing that is certain is the familiarity of the author/editor with the book of Deuteronomy and its often repeated principle: obedience to God's law would lead to blessing for Israel but disobedience would lead to cursing. On the basis of this principle, the author included a conclusion about each king that becomes a kind of formula throughout the book. Generally, the formula says something like, "(Name of king) did right in the eyes of the Lord, as his (fore)father David had done" or "(Name of king) did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat."

B. Introduction to the Books of Chronicles

- i. Title and Date: In 538 B.C., the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed exiled peoples (including Jews) to return to their homelands. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 tells of this. It is only one of several passages that indicate that the writer of Chronicles was addressing an audience of Judeans who had recently returned from exile (1 Chronicles 5:17, 24-26, 9:1-2). The majority opinion is that Chronicles was composed between 450 and 400 B.C. The designation "Chronicles" was given to these books much later by Jerome (340-420 A.D.).
- ii. Author and His Purpose
 1. The books of Chronicles are all part of one scroll in Hebrew. Jewish tradition says Ezra was the author but since this is debated, the majority of scholars refer to the author/editor/compiler as "the Chronicler." The Chronicler used more sources than any writer in either Testament.

2. While some of the historical information in the books of Kings is repeated in Chronicles, what makes Chronicles unique is the fact that the Chronicler chose to ignore most kings of the north and focused instead on the kings of Judah, the Messianic line. He also emphasizes information about priests, Levites, temple worship and religious functions. Furthermore, the books of Kings emphasize God's just judgment in sending Israel and Judah into exile, while Chronicles emphasizes God's grace in preserving the line of David for the purpose of keeping His promises (ultimately, to send a Messianic, Davidic King). Why would the Chronicler have focused upon David, his descendants, and matters concerning the Temple? Apparently, his purpose was to remind the Jews, who returned from exile confused and discouraged, that God was not done working with them. While many of David's descendants had ruled over them, the Messiah, the ultimate Son of David, was still to come!
- iii. Incorporation of 1 Chronicles in *Promised Land 2*: As you discovered in completing the questions for this and the two previous lessons, the chapters of Chronicles are listed at the top of each of division alongside their counterparts in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. Sometimes, a quick glance at the Chronicles chapters will prove that the accounts are nearly identical. In other places, Chronicles offers additional information.

C. The Conclusion of David's Reign

i. The Golden Age of Israel

1. The last chapters of 1 Chronicles give us information about David's efforts to prepare for the building and the work of the Temple. In addition to gathering supplies, giving orders, and many organizational tasks, he organized the Levites who would assist the priests in their work.
2. The chapters at the end of 1 Chronicles also show how well organized was his government. He had appointed leaders over all the tribes and all the divisions of the army.
3. David worked hard to remove threats to Israel's spiritual and political stability. During his reign, the territory under Israel's control grew from approximately 6000 square miles to approximately 60,000 square miles, from Egypt to the Euphrates River! This was the scope of the land God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18).

4. 1 Chronicles 29:28 tells us that David died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth, and honor. While the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba followed him the rest of his life, the many chapters in 1 Chronicles that detail the preparations he made on Solomon's behalf show why God's word still characterizes him as a man after God's own heart. His repentance was sincere, and although he continued to be imperfect (as we see with regard to his failure to deal sooner with his son Adonijah), he spent the later years of his life faithfully investing in the plans and purposes of God, just as he had in the beginning.
5. 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles open with Solomon transitioning to the throne. Because all of David's accomplishments paved the way for the peace and prosperity of Solomon's reign. After we have read about the lives of both men, we must conclude that Solomon was a great king but that David was a greater king.

II. **Solomon's Throne Established** - 1 Kings 1-4; 2 Chronicles 1

A. Threats Removed – 1 Kings 1-2

i. Adonijah

1. *Adonijah's Position:* We open the book of 1 Kings aware that David's eldest son Amnon and his third born son Absalom had died. David's second born son Kileab (also known as Daniel [2 Samuel 3:2-3, 1 Chronicles 3:1]) is never again mentioned after his birth, and presumably, either died in childhood or was in some way unqualified to be king. Therefore, 1 Kings 1:5 tells us that in David's old age, his fourth born son, Adonijah, "put himself forward" to be king. The description of Adonijah that is given reminds us of 2 Samuel's description of Absalom. Both men were handsome, willful, self-centered, and tried to seize their father's throne.
2. *God's Choice of Solomon:* According to 1 Chronicles 22:9-10 and 28:6, the Lord had *named Solomon* before his birth (compare with 2 Samuel 7:4-17) as the son of David and man of peace who would be David's successor. Therefore, Nathan and Solomon's mother Bathsheba knew David intended for Solomon to succeed him. Furthermore, based on the events of 1 Kings 1-2, we can assume that Adonijah and David's other sons and cabinet members also knew that Solomon was to be the next king. Nevertheless, Adonijah and his supporters presumed on the basis of birth order.

3. *Adonijah's Conspiracy and Death*

- a. David's murderous army commander Joab and Abiathar (a priestly descendant of Aaron) gave their support to Adonijah. But Zadok (another priestly descendant of Aaron), Nathan the prophet, and a handful of David's other loyal friends were unsupportive of him.
 - b. Although David was old and frail in body, his mind was sharp, and when he learned of Adonijah's plans, he made arrangements for Solomon to be crowned his co-regent.
 - c. Later, Adonijah asked Bathsheba for assistance in marrying Abishag, the beautiful virgin who had attended David in his old age. As Walter Kaiser Jr. explains, "Possession of one or all of the wives of a reigning king was a virtual title to the throne. This custom can be seen not only in 2 Samuel 12:8, where the wives of Saul were said to have been passed on to David, but also in Absalom's coup, where he took possession of David's harem to indicate that he was now king (2 Samuel 16:21–22)."¹ Abishag may not have technically been David's wife, but Solomon saw Adonijah's scheme for what it was and had him put to death.
- ii. Other Threats: Before David's death, he charged Solomon to walk faithfully before the Lord. He also told him to deal with Joab (who had murdered Abner and Amasa) and Shimei (who had cursed David). Since both of these men had already proven themselves to have had divided loyalties (2 Samuel 16:5, 1 Kings 1:7), David may have believed that they would represent ongoing threats to the unity of Solomon's kingdom. One other man had to be dealt with: Abiathar the priest. In his younger years, he had been loyal to David (1 Samuel 22:20, 23:6, 9; 30:7, 1 Kings 2:26), but at the end of David's life, he had joined Adonijah's conspiracy (1 Kings 1:7). Solomon removed these threats to his reign of peace by putting Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei to death and removing Abiathar from the priesthood. Benaiah, son of Jehoida, replaced Joab, and in fulfillment of prophecy (1 Samuel 2:27-36), Zadok became Israel's high priest. Thus, Solomon's kingdom was firmly established (1 Kings 2:46).

B. Wisdom Requested – 1 Kings 3

i. Foreshadowing of Later Trouble

1. *Marriage*: Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Since ancient kings gave their daughters in marriage to kings of greater importance, the fact that the ruler of Egypt entered an alliance with Solomon and gave Solomon his daughter shows just how powerful Israel had become at this unique time in her history. However, the Israelites had been repeatedly warned against marrying foreigners, and thus, the statement of Solomon's marriage foreshadows trouble. Egypt is often a Biblical symbol of enslavement to sin.
2. *Worship*: Verse three also foreshadows the sin to which Solomon would fall prey later in his life. Although he generally walked according to David's example, he offered sacrifices and burnt incense at the "high places." Presumably, the sacrifices he offered were to the Lord. However, these "high places" where the Israelites had worshipped since the time of the judges, were the places where the Canaanites before them had performed their religious rites. The Lord had said that His people were *not* to worship wherever they pleased (Deuteronomy 12:11-13), as did the peoples of other nations, and certainly not to use the altars of pagan gods.

ii. Solomon at Gibeon

1. One day, Solomon went to Gibeon, the most important high place, to make sacrifices. Although David had moved the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the Tabernacle that had housed it, along with the bronze altar for sacrificing, had remained at Gibeon. Therefore, on this occasion, Solomon was presenting his sacrifices properly.
2. That night, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to request whatever he wanted. Solomon requested discernment with which to lead Israel, stating that he was merely a child (3:7). Since it is generally assumed that Solomon was born in the middle David's 40-year reign, he was only about 20 years old when he came to the throne. His unselfish request pleased the Lord so much that the Lord told him He would also grant him the gifts of wealth and honor, for which Solomon had not asked. The account reminds us of Matthew 6:33, where the Lord Jesus told His disciples to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
3. An example of Solomon's wisdom immediately follows this account that tells us of his judicial ruling between two prostitutes who both claimed they were the mothers of one child.

C. An Age of Prosperity – 1 Kings 4

- i. A Time of Peace: 1 Kings 4 shows how the Lord kept His promise to give Solomon wealth and honor. After his key officials and district governors are named, verse 20 summarizes, “The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.” All the people of Solomon’s vast kingdom lived in safety and at peace.
- ii. A World-Renowned King: The wisdom the Lord gave Solomon resulted in opportunities for him to instruct people from all nations. He was not only wise in making judicial rulings but was also a man of encyclopedic scientific knowledge. He observed and drew conclusions about plant and animal life. The book of Ecclesiastes and large portions of the Proverbs indicate that he also taught directly about God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Proverbs 1:7, 2:6-8, 3:5-6, etc). The Lord had told Abraham that his seed would bless all nations and had told Moses that He had chosen the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests who represented Him to all nations. Solomon’s life and reign partially fulfilled this prophecy.
- iii. Heavy Taxation: 1 Kings 4 hints at another source of future trouble. The burden that the extravagant lifestyle Solomon adopted was supported by a system of heavy taxation (4:20-28). No doubt, this system helped sow the seeds of discontentment that led to the later division of the kingdom during the reign of Solomon’s son.

Summary Statement: Although a few signs of future trouble are mentioned early on in the account of Solomon’s reign, the theme of blessing and prosperity dominates. The Lord gifted Solomon with wisdom, wealth, and honor, and the people enjoyed the benefits.

A thousand years later, James wrote to Christians, reminding us that *all* good gifts (material and spiritual) are from God (James 1:5-17). Every good and perfect gift is from above.

In response to God’s promise of wisdom, wealth, and honor, Solomon returned to Jerusalem and sacrificed Burnt Offerings and Fellowship Offerings. The Burnt Offering is the only sacrifice in which the entire animal was burnt on the altar. Although it was for atonement (Leviticus 1:4), the entire burning of it indicates its special emphasis was dedication. The implication is that Solomon responded to God’s gifts by dedicating his entire person to the Lord and His service. Fellowship Offerings were of three specific types: “Thank Offerings” for specific blessings (Leviticus 7:12-15), “Freewill Offerings” for general expressions of gratitude (Leviticus 7:16), and “Votive Offerings” for vows (Leviticus 7:16). The worshippers ate the Fellowship Offerings, along with the priests, as part of a celebratory and sacred meal in which God was perceived to be the honored guest.ⁱⁱ This is why 1 Kings 3:15 says that Solomon’s sacrifices were accompanied by a feast for all his court. Solomon’s sacrifices indicate that he was grateful to the Lord for His good gifts.

Principle: *Gratitude is the necessary response of every believer for God's many gifts.*

Gratitude is sometimes called the mother of all virtues. Those who have grateful hearts are rarely, among other vices, proud. In Romans 1, Paul speaks very harshly of those who neither glorify God nor give thanks to Him. He calls them fools (1:21-22). The world's happiest people are grateful people, whether their material possessions are many or few.

Application: Is expressing gratitude consistently part of your daily life?

Transition: Early in Solomon's reign, the Lord granted him many good gifts, not the least of which was wisdom. Solomon needed wisdom for the specific duty with which his father David had charged him: the responsibility of building the Lord's Temple. Solomon began construction in the fourth year of his reign (6:37). Although his palace complex and presumably most of his other building projects were not completed until later, we will discuss the Temple last because of its immeasurably greater significance.

III. Solomon's Temple - 1 Kings 5-9, 2 Chronicles 2-7

A. Solomon the Builder

- i. Solomon's Fortresses: 1 Kings 9 tells of the fortifications Solomon constructed for the land's defense in four strategic locations: Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Archaeologists have uncovered gateways at the latter three. Among many other building projects, Solomon built special store cities and towns to house his chariots and horses (9:18-19).
- ii. Solomon's Palace Complex: After Solomon spent seven years constructing the Temple, he spent thirteen years building his palace complex. It is unclear whether this complex was comprised of five separate buildings (the "Palace of the Forest of Lebanon," the Hall of Justice, a hall of pillars, a palace for Solomon's dwelling and another for Pharaoh's daughter) or whether the latter four were merely located within the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon (compare 7:1-12 with 9:10). Regardless, Solomon spent nearly twice as much time on these as on the Temple (6:38-7:1). Undoubtedly, this was at least in part because of the greater size of the palace complex, but Biblical writer seems to make the comparison as a negative commentary on Solomon's growing secular interests.

B. Temple Construction – 1 Kings 5-7 and 2 Chronicles 2-4

- i. Preparation for the Temple: Just as the Lord had given Moses a specific pattern for constructing the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8), He gave David

specific, detailed instructions for building the Temple (1 Chronicles 28:12, 19), instructions David passed on to Solomon.

1. *The Site:* The site of the Temple was the place known by tradition as Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah was the place where Abraham intended to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It was also the tract of land David purchased from Araunah the Jebusite (2 Chronicles 3:1) in order to build an altar, after the plague against Israel ended.
2. *The Help:* Solomon found his father's friend Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Samuel 5:11), to be a helpful supporter of the project. Solomon paid Hiram to provide cedar, pine, juniper, gold (5:10, 9:11), and algumwood (1 Kings 10:11; 2 Chronicles 9:11) for the Temple. 2 Chronicles adds that Solomon also asked for Hiram's help in locating a master builder to help him oversee the work. Hiram was chosen, a man from Tyre of mixed Israelite descent who was filled with wisdom, understanding and knowledge (7:13). His involvement alongside Solomon is reminiscent of that of Bezalel and Oholiab, who had overseen the Tabernacle construction together with Moses. 2 Chronicles 4:11 says, "So Hiram finished the work he had undertaken for King Solomon in the temple of God." Hiram, Bezalel and Oholiab represent the many little known but faithful individuals in God's service throughout history. Just as He saw fit to record their names in His book, we can be assured that He sees and records the little-known sacrifices we make for Him as well.
3. *The Process:* Enormous limestone blocks were cut and dressed at stone quarries so that no hammer or iron tool was ever heard at the holy Temple site. The task of preparing these stones was so great that Solomon established a system of forced labor among the Israelites. The Israelites were not slaves (9:22) but were nevertheless required to spend one of every three months away from home, working on the project (5:13-14). Apparently, this practice of forced labor continued throughout Solomon's reign (9:21-23), and along with high taxation, became a reason for growing resentment among the northern Israelite tribes (1 Kings 12:4).

ii. Features of the Temple

1. *Size:* The Temple was loaded with gold and valuable materials. The cost of its construction in today's market is estimated to be many trillions of dollars. Although it was twice the size of the Tabernacle, at 90 feet in length, 30 feet in width, and 45 feet in height, it still was not a large building.

2. *Rooms and Furnishings*: The key rooms and furnishings were essentially the same as those in the Tabernacle: a large water reservoir in which the priests could wash and a large altar on which sacrifices were made were stationed in a courtyard; golden lampstands and tables that held the Bread of Presence were positioned in the main room; a curtain partitioned off a perfectly square inner sanctuary, known as the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place), within which was the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was not rebuilt but was transferred into Solomon's Temple. The many cherubim, palm trees and flowers with which the Temple was decorated were reminders of the Garden of Eden and all that was lost because of sin.

iii. The Meaning of the Temple

1. *God's Symbolic Dwelling Place*: Formerly, the Tabernacle had been the place of the Lord's dwelling among His people. It was a temporary and portable structure used by the Israelites while they journeyed from Mount Sinai to Canaan, until the more permanent Temple could be built. The presence of the Lord within the Tabernacle and Temple was *symbolic* since the Lord is too great to ever be contained within any building (1 Kings 8:27).
2. *The Person and Work of Christ*: The Temple's furnishings and the priestly work and sacrifices pointed to the atonement necessary for mankind's broken relationship with his Creator to be restored, and ultimately, to the person and work of the Messiah. Jesus declared Himself to be "the Bread of Life" (John 6:41, 48) and the "Light of the World" (John 1:4, 9:5). He is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) and also the final sacrifice, which all previous sacrifices anticipated (Hebrews 10:1-10). Therefore, to repeat, everything about the Temple was intended to illustrate what God required, so that what was lost in Eden might be restored, and to prepare God's people for the coming of the Messiah.
3. *New Testament Fulfillment*: The book of Hebrews emphasizes that, because the Temple and the Tabernacle were symbols of the person and work of Christ, there is no longer a need for a physical Temple now that He resides in Heaven, the true tabernacle (Hebrews 8:1-2, 5). Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit now indwells us, the New Testament also speaks of the bodies of believers as His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19).

iv. History of the Temple

1. *First Temple*: The Temple took seven years to build (6:38). According to 6:1, the work began in the 480th year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, the fourth year of Solomon's reign. By using extra-Biblical ancient sources, the dates of Solomon's reign can be firmly established at 971 to 931 B.C., and thus we can determine that the Temple began being built in 966 B.C. Apparently, the Exodus occurred 480 years earlier in 1446 B.C. Using these dates as starting points, Bible scholars have been able to fix rough dates for other important Old Testament events as well.
2. *Second Temple*: Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 587 B.C. when the Babylonians were destroying Jerusalem and carrying the people of Judah into captivity. Seventy years later, it was rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel. This second temple paled in comparison to the glory of Solomon's temple, in terms of its physical appearance, but its glory was greater in that it was the Temple in which the Lord Jesus stood several hundred years later (Haggai 2:3-9). One generation before Jesus lived, Herod the Great restored and greatly enlarged Zerubbabel's Temple. Within a generation of Jesus' ascension, in 70 A.D., the Temple was destroyed and has never been rebuilt.

C. Temple Dedication – 1 Kings 8:1-9:9 and 2 Chronicles 5-7

- i. The Festivities and the Cloud: Once the Temple construction was complete, Solomon held a ceremony of dedication that coincided with the annual celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (8:2). On this special occasion, the celebration was extended from one to two weeks (8:65). The culmination of the festivities occurred when Ark of the Covenant was carried into its place in the Most Holy Place. When the priests withdrew, the cloud of the glory of the Lord descended and filled the Temple (as it did when the Tabernacle was dedicated [Exodus 40:34-35]).
- ii. Solomon's Prayer and Fire from Heaven: Solomon prayed a prayer in which he repeatedly asked God to hear and forgive His people when they truly repent, regardless of their circumstances or location. Following this, Solomon offered an enormous number of sacrifices. According to 2 Chronicles 7:1, after Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices. This had also happened at the Tabernacle dedication in Moses' day (Leviticus 9:23-24).

- iii. The Lord's Warning to Solomon: After the ceremony, the Lord appeared again to Solomon. On this occasion, He acknowledged that He had heard and would answer Solomon's prayer, but He also issued a stern warning to Solomon that reiterated the Deuteronomic principle: enjoyment of the land and its blessings was contingent on obedience to the Lord's commands. Solomon was warned that if he and his descendants turned from the Lord and worshipped other gods, the Temple he had just dedicated and prayed over would "become a heap of rubble" (9:8). This warning foreshadowed what was to come.

Summary Statement: The description of Solomon's many building projects shows how Solomon's prosperity was not only a gift but also a test. Solomon was free to choose how he would invest his vast resources. As it turns out, the Temple, the only building of eternal significance, was *not* the project to which he devoted the greater portion of his time and possibly not even the greater portion of his wealth.

Jesus told His followers, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also" (Luke 12:32-34).

Although it is often true that we give to the things that we value, the thrust of this verse is that the things to which we give *will determine* what we value.

Principle: *Our hearts grow to love the things in which we invest.*

Have you found this to be true?

Illustration: When I turned 50, my dear parents gave me a gift of money. It was not a staggering sum but was certainly greater than any other single gift I had personally ever received at one time. I took some time to think about how I would spend it and decided that I would receive the greatest joy by giving it to someone with greater need. I began praying about where or to whom the money should go. Not long after, I heard of an organization that helped supply Bibles to those who wanted them in China. At the time, I had no particular connection with the Chinese, but since I had devoted many years of my life to teaching the Bible, giving to this organization seemed to me like the right decision. After I gave the money, I noticed that my interest in the Chinese church began to grow. Now, some years later, praying for the people of China and sending them Bible study materials has become a major focus of my life! I take no credit for this. My heart has simply grown to deeply love this people in whom I invested, just as God's word says it would.

“Tithe” is an old English term derived from “tenth.” In the Old Testament, God’s people were instructed to set aside one tenth of all they had for the sanctuary (Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-29). Every third year, it was given as charity to the poor (Deuteronomy 26:12). The New Testament names no such amount, but considering God’s generosity toward us, we might consider one-tenth as only a starting place for our giving. Where our treasure is, our hearts will also be.

Application: In what work of eternal value does the Lord want you to invest a greater portion of your resources?

Transition: The first 24 years of Solomon’s reign (6:1, 9:10) were marked by peace and prosperity. During these, he completed the Temple and the palace complex, but the palace received far more of Solomon’s attention. His growing interest in secular ventures is one of several clues that he was failing to apply the wisdom God gave him. 1 Kings 9-11 appear to summarize Solomon’s reign, especially the last part of it.

IV. Solomon’s Greatness and Downfall – 1 Kings 9-11, 2 Chronicles 8-9

A. Commerce and Trade

- i. Hiram’s Disappointment: Solomon continued to expand his importing and exporting ventures. It seems that the value of the gold Hiram sent him exceeded the value of the wheat and oil with which Solomon had repaid him. To make up the difference, Solomon gave Hiram twenty Galilean towns, which Hiram found to be worthless. Despite Hiram’s disappointment, the relationship between the men continued, but the incident shows a self-serving and miserly side of Solomon.
- ii. Conscripted Labor for Ongoing Construction: As previously stated, the system of forced labor instituted for the Temple construction continued thereafter, and the Israelites were forced to help build the palace complex, defenses around Jerusalem and around three other strategic cities, and store cities and towns for Solomon’s chariots and horses. Solomon also built an enormous and elaborate throne for himself, such as had never been seen in his day (10:18-20). Apparently, the Canaanites that remained in the land became permanent workers (slaves), while the Israelites were considered temporary workers. Nevertheless, since the Israelites had no choice, this became a sore spot (12:4).
- iii. Solomon’s Shipping Fleet: In Ezion Geber (a coastal port along the Red Sea), Solomon built ships. Hiram’s men were experienced sailors and they assisted Solomon in a very profitable import and export shipping trade. Solomon imported gold (9:28), silver, ivory, and exotic animals, such as apes and baboons (10:22).

- iv. Other Commerce: Solomon also imported and exported horses and chariots (10:26-29). He received revenues from foreign kings and his own governors by controlling the trade routes (10:14-15) and gifts of silver, gold, robes, weapons, spices, horses and mules from those who sought an audience with him (10:15, 25-26).

B. Solomon's Temple Worship – 9:25: In accordance with the requirement of the Mosaic Law, all Israelite men were to appear at the Temple for three annual feasts (Exodus 23:14). Solomon faithfully adhered to this requirement. However, from what we learn about Solomon's idolatrous practices in chapter 11, one wonders whether his Temple worship eventually became a merely rote and perfunctory obligation that he fulfilled.

C. Entertaining Audiences

- i. Writings: In chapter four, we are told that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1005 songs. A few of these are included in the Biblical books of Song of Songs and Proverbs. No doubt, he continued writing throughout his life. The book of Ecclesiastes is traditionally considered to be one of the later works of Solomon's life. Since there is much to learn from and about these works, our next lesson will be devoted entirely to the subject of Old Testament wisdom literature.
- ii. Live Audiences, Including the Queen of Sheba: Solomon's wisdom and wealth were not only great by the standards of Israel but also by the standards of foreigners. 10:24 states that "the whole world" sought audience with him. Obviously, this is hyperbolic language, to be understood in the limited sense of Solomon's Near Eastern world. Of the many who came to listen to Solomon, the Queen of Sheba's audience with him is detailed. Sheba was in southwest Arabia, present day Yemen. Since Solomon controlled the trade routes through Arabia, the Queen of Sheba had good reason to be interested in visiting him, but according to the Biblical text, she was primarily curious about Solomon's reputation and relationship to the Lord (10:1). She concluded that only a great God could endow a man with wealth and wisdom such as Solomon had (10:9).

D. Solomon's Downfall

- i. Wives, Weapons, and Wealth: Ultimately, Solomon's prosperity led to his downfall. As he grew old, his heart was no longer fully devoted to the Lord as David's had been (11:2-5). The Law of Moses forbade Israel's kings from accumulating three specific things, all of which would tempt the king away from trust in God alone (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). Nevertheless, according to 1 Kings 10 and 11, Solomon accumulated all three: wives, weapons and wealth. David had taken too many wives (more than one was too many), but Solomon far exceeded the sin of his father by taking 700 wives and 300 concubines (11:3)! Additionally, he accumulated great numbers of chariots and horses (10:26) for military defense (9:19), and amassed such riches that silver was no longer of much value (10:21). To make matters worse, Solomon took many *foreign* wives, who continued worshipping the gods of their lands and eventually convinced Solomon to join them. He even worshipped the detestable Molech, a god to whom human sacrifices were offered (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5, 2 Kings 23:10).
- ii. Solomon's Adversaries
 1. The Lord told Solomon that His blessings were contingent on Solomon's obedience. Because of Solomon's unfaithfulness, the Lord decreed that his kingdom would be torn in two. His descendants would keep ruling over one portion of the land but the rest would be ruled by one of Solomon's subordinates (11:11-13). Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials, became the voice of the discontented and overtaxed northern tribes. The prophet Ahijah rent his robe in Jeroboam's presence and prophesied that the Lord was planning to tear the ten northern tribes away from Solomon and give them to Jeroboam to rule (11:31). Late in Solomon's reign, a new king named Shishak came to power in Egypt (11:40) who did not feel the same obligation to Solomon as his predecessor. When Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, he fled to Shishak, who gave him refuge.
 2. The Lord raised up two other men who also gave Solomon trouble, Hadad and Rezon. Hadad was an Edomite and Rezon an Aramean. This meant that, in addition to no longer having the respect of Egypt and having unhappy northern Israelites who were sympathetic to Jeroboam within his land, Solomon also had enemies outside the country to the northeast and the southeast.

Summary Statement: Solomon died and was buried in Jerusalem where David had been buried. Because he had abused God’s good gifts, the land was not as strong at the time of his death as it was in his early reign. In addition to instituting several unwise policies, he was guilty of loving God’s gifts more than he loved God Himself. Worshipping idols was just one short next step.

Principle: *God’s good gifts will either point us to Him or lure us away from Him.*

God’s gives many good gifts. A few are entrusted with financial wealth but all human beings enjoy the gift of life, the blessings of sunlight and human relationships, and other universal gifts of grace. God’s children not only enjoy the gifts of salvation, eternal life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, but we are also entrusted with spiritual gifts.

Application: Inherent in all these gifts is the test of our response. Will we be grateful or ungrateful? With regard to our personal blessings and spiritual gifts, will we give God the credit He is due or will we become proud and take the credit ourselves?

An especially insidious temptation is to worship *the gift* instead of the Giver. What evidence is there in our lives that we love God more than we love the gifts He has given us? If the wisest man who ever lived succumbed to that temptation, how much more at risk are we?

Conclusion

Solomon’s story forms an important bridge between the Deuteronomic covenant and the events that culminate in Israel’s removal from the land.ⁱⁱⁱ God kept His promise and blessed Israel greatly as a result of David’s heart for God and his (albeit imperfect) life of obedience. But God’s gifts tested Solomon’s faithfulness and, at the height of Israel’s prosperity, he failed to apply the wisdom God gave him. He failed the test and became a fool.

The test of prosperity is one that subsequent empires have also failed. It is one that is seriously threatening the western world today. Psalm 52 says, “The righteous will see and fear... saying, ‘Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!’ But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God’s unfailing love forever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done.” Brothers and sisters, may future generations say that we were among those who received God’s gifts with thanksgiving and remained faithful!

ⁱ Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 228). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

ⁱⁱ Levine, B. A. (1989). *Leviticus* (p. 14). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

ⁱⁱⁱ House, P. R. (1995). *1, 2 Kings* (Vol. 8, p. 174). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.