

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF KING SOLOMON OF ISRAEL

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with Pastor Dan Betzer

The third king of Israel, after Saul and David, was Solomon. One has to be very careful studying his life (outside the Bible) because there are so many “rabbit trails” offered about him. The Biblical saga of Solomon gives us the most comprehensive view of Solomon’s life, but it is one that parallels most historical thought on his life.

Solomon’s 40-year reign over Jerusalem ran from 970 BC to 931. Just after he died, his son Rehoboam became King and apparently wanted to make happy the youth of his nation and so made taxes outrageous, virtually impossible to pay. And so there was a revolution in Israel which saw a civil split in the nation. Advisors begged Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, to reduce taxes, but he increased them instead:

I Kings 12:13-17

And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; [14] And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. [15] Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

[16] So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. [17] But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

Rehoboam was not the brightest bulb in the chandelier, but, we must remember, though the people had been warned by the old prophet Samuel what would happen if they demanded a king, they still clamored for one. Now they would pay a heavy price for their decision. Rehoboam would quickly destroy what had taken David and Solomon 80 years of rule to build. The Kingdom was now split in two, north and south. The southern kingdom of Judah would outlast the other by 150 years or so.

THE BEGINNING OF SOLOMON'S RULE

Someone has observed that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It was certainly true in the case of Solomon. For the first few years of his 40-year reign, Solomon's leadership could be characterized by wisdom, loyalty and efficiency. But his love of women and other gods corrupted all of that and his monarchy became a rule of licentiousness, pride and paganism. This once wisest man of his time would moan at the last of his life, "Vanity, vanity; all is vanity."

He did not need all those expensive buildings. The shields of his warriors were made of beaten gold. His great throne was made of ivory and overlaid with gold. Silver in Jerusalem became common. All of his drinking vessels were of gold.

One of his chief resorts was Etham where, when the mornings were beautiful, he often rode in stately ways, *"dressed in snow white raiment, riding in his chariot of state which was made of the finest cedar, decked with gold and silver and purple, and carpeted with the costliest tapestry and attended by a bodyguard of sixty valiant men in the tallest and handsomest of the of the young men in Israel, with their long black hair sprinkled with gold dust every day, glittering in the sun."*

ABRAHAM TO THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS / OWEN / EERMAN PUBLISHING / PAGE 56

Somehow, it is never enough. We want more and more and more. I have sadly watched churches disappear that overbuilt in attempt to outdo the church down the street. I have observed folks buy cars that were not affordable to them and then they struggled for months or years to shrug off that heavy load. For what conceivable purpose? I suppose it's to keep up with the Joneses.

"Wine, women and song," are often leveled as the cause for fallen leaders. Certainly the case for Solomon – at least the women part. His love for a thousand women (yes, you read that right – a thousand!) caused him to marry 700 of them and take under his robes 300 mistresses (concubines, as Scripture names them.)

Those women brought with them their foreign gods. And Solomon, while not openly endorsing them all perhaps, flirted with them to the extent that they influenced badly his relationship with the God Who made him great. His love for the women and their paganism caused his terrible down fall.

As a result of Solomon's dalliance with foreign gods, the nation paid a terrible price. Israel followed its leader for the most part and it resulted with the people overburdened with debt and the people wracked with confusion. Solomon became debauched, and cynic, so satiated with the sensual that he became skeptical of all good and sadly termed it all "vanity and vexation of spirit."

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During his construction days, Solomon hired a young man named Jeroboam – never dreaming that this fellow would take the northern half of his kingdom – not Rehoboam, Solomon’s son.

One day, quite unexpected and unannounced, Solomon was approached by a brave young prophet of God. The prophet, named Ahijah, hurried up to the king and removed his garment and tore it into twelve pieces. He gave those pieces not to Solomon but to Jeroboam, and proclaimed this message from God:

I Kings 11:34-38

Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: [35] But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. [36] And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. [37] And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. [38] And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.

The news of this dramatic episode reached the palace and Solomon sought to have the young prophet killed. But Jeroboam fled into Egypt where he was protected by Pharaoh Shishak. Solomon died soon after and his son Rehoboam took the throne.

In harmony with a well-established custom of the day, Rehoboam journeyed to Shechem, where Israel gathered to ratify his succession. But the crowning was delayed when Jeroboam arrived and entered into negotiations with the leaders. He promised Rehoboam his support if the new king would ease the heavy economic burden of the people. Jehoboam was wise in that he listened carefully to the advice of older leaders, but Rehoboam did not. After receiving counsel with his young admirers, he snapped:

I Kings 12:14

And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

Talk about a quick reaction. No sooner had Rehoboam’s arrogant answer been heard, than the shout was heard! “To your tents, O Israel!” The king’s representative was

1 stoned to death. King Rehoboam fled the scene and covered the forty miles from
2 Shechem to Jerusalem.

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4 The rout was on! The name Jeroboam was heralded from tent to tent until all Israel
5 was calling his name. The ten pieces of the rent garment passed into the hands of
6 Rehoboam, just as the prophet had said.