

In the Shadow of Adam

1 Kings 11

On February 26th of this year, legendary actor Gene Hackman was found dead in his Santa Fe home, along with his wife Betsy Arakawa and one of their dogs. When I first heard that bizarre account, I immediately assumed either that some tragic accident had occurred, such as a carbon monoxide leak, or that they had been murdered. But as it turned out, all three deaths were rightly attributed to natural causes. Autopsies revealed that Betsy, who was much younger and in much better health overall, had contracted the rare hantavirus normally transmitted by rodent droppings. Apparently, it progressed very quickly in her case and led to her death sometime on or around February 12th. Tragically, at 95 years old, Gene had advanced Alzheimer's disease, Betsy was his caregiver, and they didn't have people close to them who checked in on them regularly. So Gene likely survived for around a week after Betsy's death until sometime on or around February 18th, unaware of what had happened and unable to care for himself, until he died of natural causes. Sadly, one of their dogs was in a dog crate at the time of Betsy's death, and Gene apparently was unable to care for the dog as well, so it died of dehydration. What at first sounded like a terrible accident or a vicious murder was fully understandable as an event owing to natural causes once the autopsies were performed. An autopsy can often yield crucial information to help us interpret the past.

Now, imagine you are one of the first readers of the book of 1-2 Kings. You are an Israelite exile living in Babylon, and you have heard stories about the history of your nation: the glories of Solomon's kingdom and the wonders of the Jerusalem temple. But when you look around, all that is gone, and in its place is a pagan king ruling over your people and the Promised Land, while Solomon's temple lies in ruins. And you are left wondering, "What happened?" First and Second Kings is a kind of autopsy. It is a close examination of a once great kingdom that had died. Within the story of 1-2 Kings, this chapter is the turning point. This, the final chapter of the account of King Solomon, tells us where everything went wrong, leading first to a fracturing of the kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms, followed by generations of decline until both kingdoms were conquered by their enemies.

So let me invite you to join me in a kind of autopsy today, an examination that will give us insight into the fall of a once great kingdom. But as we do so, we are not neutral observers. Our purpose today is not to say, "Wow, look how bad Solomon failed. I'm glad we're not like him." Our purpose is to hold up the Scripture as a mirror of our own hearts. And as tragic as it is, the story of Solomon's fall is one that can strengthen our faith, because our God is a God who puts to death so that he might raise to life again. In a fallen world, the pathway to life must first run through death. So join me today in an autopsy, not just of Solomon's kingdom, but of our own hearts.

We see in the first section

1. The seductive power of sin.

Imagine a husband and wife who have been married for decades, and all of a sudden he discovers that she has been unfaithful to him. And I don't mean an isolated incident of weakness. I mean that he suddenly uncovers the fact that she has been with a dozen other men. That would be a shocking revelation of how she had essentially set their marriage covenant on fire. That's an

analogy for what Solomon did toward the end of his life. It was a shocking, egregious sin. Verse 5 says he “went after” Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites, meaning he bowed down to these false gods and offered sacrifice to them. But he didn’t stop there. Verse 7 says he built a high place for Chemosh the god of Moab and for Molech of the Ammonites on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Solomon was known as Israel’s great builder, but now the very man who built the holy temple in Jerusalem has become the builder of shrines to false gods, promoting their worship in Israel. Verse 8 tells us he didn’t stop there: “And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.”

This was a violation of the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Solomon, the federal head of the nation and thus the one whose actions have ramifications for all under his authority, took the covenant that the Lord had made with Israel and set it on fire. How could this have happened? It happened gradually, little-by-little, one compromise after another. Verse 4 mentions that it was when he was old, after he had built up a harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines (not something that could have happened quickly). Moreover, verse 1 seems to indicate an escalation in the process of taking foreign wives. It mentions first the daughter of Pharaoh, previously introduced to us in chapter 3. Then it mentions Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite wives. The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Lot, so they were at least relatives of the people of Israel. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, so they were in a similar boat. It was not absolutely forbidden that Israelite men could take wives from these other nations, *as long as they didn’t take their gods with them*. But then it mentions Solomon’s Sidonian wives, foreshadowing the Sidonian woman Jezebel, devoted worshiper of Baal and wife of the future King Ahab. And worst of all, verse 1 mentions Hittite women. The Hittites were among the Canaanite nations whom the Israelites were supposed to annihilate when they came into the land. Not only did Israel fail to annihilate them as commanded, but Israel’s king intermarried with them! Verse 1 suggests, then, that in his choice of wives, Solomon became more and more brazen about defying God’s law over time, and as he brought pagan influence into his kingdom and household, he normalized for himself the worship of false gods.

Why would any man want that many wives? What motivated Solomon to do such a thing? He was motivated by politics, status, and sexual desire. For a king, marriages often serve the purpose of building political alliances, so his wives were a means to increasing his power. More than that, for a king to have a large harem was a way of exalting his own status in the eyes of his people. And, of course, we can’t overlook the motive of having a large collection of women that he could “choose from,” so to speak, to gratify his own desires. His concerns were oriented to matters of this world, and he lost sight of the fear of the Lord. And I will add one more thought on this point: twice in this chapter we see enemies of Solomon taking refuge in Egypt. First, his enemy Hadad is mentioned fleeing to Egypt and even marrying the Pharaoh’s sister-in-law (v. 19). It is quite possible that this is the exact same Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon as a wife. In addition to that, Solomon’s enemy Jeroboam fled to Egypt at a later time and found refuge with another Pharaoh, Shishak (v. 40). My point here is that not only did Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter start him down a pathway of disobedience to the Lord, it also didn’t even give him the political payoff that he wanted. He was willing to sin to gain power, and

then he didn't even gain the power he sought. Wise Solomon looks like such a fool for pursuing earthly gain according to the wisdom of man rather than trusting in the Lord.

The bottom line with King Solomon can be seen in two statements in 1 Kings that serve as bookends on his reign and that tell a tragic story. The first statement speaks of the young Solomon in 1 Kings 3:3, and it says, "Solomon loved the LORD." Now contrast that with old Solomon in 1 Kings 11:1: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women." Little-by-little, compromise-by-compromise, King Solomon's heart turned away from the Lord and was gripped by a preoccupation with this world—power, status, sex—leading him to sin in such a way that struck at the very heart of the covenant the Lord had made with Israel. The band Casting Crowns has a song entitled "Slow Fade" that speaks of the seductive power of sin:

Be careful little eyes what you see.
It's the second glance that ties your hands, as darkness pulls the strings.
Be careful little feet where you go,
for it's the little feet behind you that are sure to follow.

It's a slow fade, when you give yourself away.
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to grey,
and thoughts invade, choices made, a price will be paid when you give yourself away.
People never crumble in a day; it's a slow fade.

Sin is a seductive power that overtook the wisest king in Israel's history. The very man who wrote most of the instruction book on wisdom, the book of Proverbs, was overtaken by the very folly that he warned against. May Solomon's own words from Proverbs 4:23 warn us against his example: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

But this story is not just about what Solomon did. It's really more about who he was, which gives us insight into who we are as well. So let's observe from this story, second:

2. The hopelessness of our sinful condition.

In response to Solomon's idolatry in verses 1-8, God speaks to him a word of judgment in verses 9-13 and then begins to enact judgment against him by raising up three adversaries against Solomon in verses 14-40: two external adversaries and one internal adversary. Two of these adversaries God raised up were leaders of nearby neighbors of Israel, Hadad the Edomite leader and Rezon the Syrian leader. Edom was to the south of Israel, and Syria was to the north, showing that Solomon's kingdom was being surrounded by enemies who started to chip away at his empire. The third adversary the Lord raised up was Jeroboam, an Israelite from the tribe of Ephraim, who will play a prominent role later when the northern kingdom breaks away.

What is puzzling about verses 14-25 is that you have a lengthy account of the backstory of these two external threats to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite and Rezon the Syrian, but after verse 25 neither figure is mentioned again. It feels like a big buildup with no resolution. But if you pay closer attention to the details of these backstories, I think you can see that the author is actually telling us something about Solomon in each case. Let's start with Hadad the Edomite (vv. 14-22). Look at how the story unfolds in verses 14-15: "And the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. He was of the royal house in Edom. For when David was in

Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he struck down every male in Edom.” Now verse 17: “But Hadad fled to Egypt, together with certain Edomites of his father's servants, Hadad still being a little child.” The story goes on to tell us that Hadad was raised in the Pharaoh's household in Egypt. So Hadad the Edomite belongs to a people whose males were put to death in the time of King David by David's general Joab, but he escaped as a child and was raised in the household of the Pharaoh. Who does this sound like? It sounds like the story of Moses. And the echoes of Moses only grow. Look at verses 21-22: “But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, ‘Let me depart, that I may go to my own country.’ But Pharaoh said to him, ‘What have you lacked with me that you are now seeking to go to your own country?’ And he said to him, ‘Only let me depart.’” Just as Moses said to Pharaoh, “Let my people go,” Hadad says, “Let me depart.” And he did depart, heading back to his ancestral land, just as Israel did in the days of Moses. Now, I say all that to bring us to this conclusion: if Hadad is the Edomite version of Moses and Israel coming out of Egypt, heading to his land, what role does King Solomon play in this retelling of the story? He represents the pagan Canaanite kings who ruled the Promised Land before Moses led Israel there. In a subtle way, the author is telling us that Solomon, by becoming an idolater, is no better than the Canaanites whom Israel was commanded to exterminate from the land.

There is a similar dynamic with the story of Rezon the Syrian. Note what verses 23-24 say about him: “God also raised up as an adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. And he gathered men about him and became leader of a marauding band, after the killing by David. And they went to Damascus and lived there and made him king in Damascus.” Where have we heard before a story about a man who fled from his king, gathered a band of misfits around him, and eventually became king himself? That's a recapitulation of David's story. So if Rezon is a kind of David and an enemy of Solomon, that puts Solomon in the place of King Saul. The King Saul echoes are also evident in other places as well. In his anger at Solomon's sin (v. 9), the Lord sent to King Solomon this word of judgment in verse 11: “Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.’” The use of the verb “tear” is interesting there. When King Saul failed to obey the Lord with reference to the Amalekites, and the prophet Samuel came to announce judgment to him, Saul took hold of Samuel's robe as Samuel was leaving, and the robe tore. In response, Samuel said, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (1 Sam. 15:28). And we're not done yet. The King Saul theme really continues in the story of the internal threat whom God raised up against Solomon, a man named Jeroboam. King Saul had an impressive servant named David whom he honored with a position in the kingdom, and then he tried to kill him, prompting David to flee from him. Similarly, King Solomon had an impressive servant named Jeroboam whom he honored with a position in the kingdom, but then he tried to kill him (v. 40), leading Jeroboam to flee to Egypt for refuge. Over and over again, we see that Solomon has become, not only like a pagan Canaanite king, but also like a new King Saul, a man rejected by the Lord for his arrogant presumption.

But there is a deeper reality to it all. Throughout 1 Kings 1-11, we have seen several links between Solomon and Adam, and in every case the links have been positive. In chapter 2

Solomon crushed the serpents who threatened his kingdom, unlike Adam who failed to protect his domain from the serpent. In chapter 3 he asked the Lord for wisdom to discern the knowledge of good and evil so that he might rule well, unlike Adam who tried to seize the knowledge of good and evil in his own way, apart from dependence on the Lord. In chapter 4 Solomon's dominion is portrayed as an Adam-like dominion, and just as Adam named the animals in the garden, Solomon investigated the natural world like a scientist seeking to understand and describe it. In chapter after chapter, the author has portrayed Solomon as a new Adam figure. Sadly, as this chapter now shows us, he is a new Adam figure in more ways than one. Just as Adam allowed his wife to lead him into sin, bringing down the curse of God upon us all, so does Solomon allow his wives to lead him into sin, bringing down the curse of God upon Israel in the imminent fracturing of his kingdom.

What makes it worse to contemplate is that Solomon was the recipient of unparalleled blessings and privileges from the Lord. He inherited a secure, intact kingdom from his father David that experienced unimaginable prosperity. He had wisdom from the Lord that enabled him to enact justice in the land and to attract the admiration of nations from all over. And verse 9 points out that the Lord had appeared to him twice, once in chapter 3 as a young man, and once in chapter 9 after the midpoint of his reign. Solomon had no excuse. Just like Adam and Eve, who were in Paradise, and yet they reached for the one thing God told them they couldn't have, Solomon lacked nothing, and yet he somehow coveted more. Sin is completely irrational. It is impossible to explain, other than a perverse delight in defiance of God. Consider this example: there are some married couples who engage in sexual intimacy with each other less than they did before they were married. But one of the central purposes of marriage is to bind them together in covenant so that sexual intimacy between them is holy and good, whereas before marriage it was sinful. Now why in the world would a couple delight more in sex *before* marriage than they do *after* marriage? It's because the real issue is not sex. It's the perverse delight we get from transgressing boundaries. Sin carries with it its own appeal, simply because we get a kick out of telling God that we don't take orders from him. It is utterly irrational. If we could explain it, we would almost justify it. But sin has no justification.

King Solomon showed so much promise, and yet in the end showed himself to be no better than a pagan Canaanite, and no better than King Saul. Why? Because the old Adam was in him. And if your response to this is, "Well, I'm glad I'm not like Solomon!" you're missing the point. That same old Adam is in you as well. Now, I have never bowed down to a statue, and it is likely that you haven't either. We are all beneficiaries of a Western society that largely cleansed itself from pagan practices. And yet, Paul writes in Colossians 3:5, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, *which is idolatry.*" Covetousness, the ungrateful desire for something you don't have, the lifting up of one's hand to the Lord to say, "I am not content with what you have given me!" Paul calls "*idolatry.*" And that makes perfect sense if you think about it. At its root, covetousness is discontentment with God, who has given himself to us. Even Paul, who never once bowed down to a statue in his life, said of himself in Romans 7:7-8: "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness." Covetousness is idolatry, and Paul

acknowledges that the very Law of God stirred up within him all kinds of covetousness. Why? Because the old Adam was in him, and the old Adam does not want to be told what not to do.

If your response to King Solomon's idolatry is to pat yourself on the back because you never offered sacrifice to Milcom, you have missed the point badly. The point is not that you are so much better than Solomon. It is that the same old Adam is in you, and if even Solomon, who had greater wisdom and privileges from the Lord than we can imagine, still set fire to the Lord's covenant by his wicked deeds, what hope do any of us have? As Paul progresses in his argument in Romans 7, describing sin's power over him, even using the very Law of God to enslave him, he comes to the climactic cry of distress in verse 23: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Let that be our response to the story of 1 Kings 11. We are all wretched men, every last one of us, for the same old Adam is in us all. Who will deliver us from this body of death?

Paul continues in Romans 7:24: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And 1 Kings 11 gives us the same answer. Let's go back to some key verses in the text and note, third,

3. The enduring hope of God's promise.

In one sense, King Solomon is a new King Saul. And yet in another, sense, he can never be a new King Saul. Why? Because he is a son of God, according to the promise God made to David. In 2 Samuel 7:14-15 God had said to David concerning his son, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you." God will discipline his son but never disown him. Because of God's promise, and *only* because of his promise, the house of David will endure the failures of Solomon.

And that's why the judgment God pronounces against Solomon's kingdom is not total. It is tempered with mercy. Look at verses 12-13: "Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it [split the kingdom] in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen." God will tear the kingdom from Solomon, but he will not do it in Solomon's lifetime, and he will not tear it totally away from David's house. He will give to Jeroboam ten tribes and leave one tribe (Judah and presumably Benjamin, which seems to have been largely absorbed into Judah) for the house of David to continue to rule. Why allow David's house to continue ruling over a diminished kingdom? It's because of what the prophet Ahijah said to Jeroboam in verse 39: "And I will afflict the offspring of David for this, but not forever." The remnant of a Davidic kingdom in the aftermath of Solomon's fall is God's downpayment on a future restoration of the house of David. One day, a new Son of David will arise, and his kingdom will far surpass even that of Solomon. When Jesus came on the scene, he called Israel to repentance, proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Why is the phrase "of heaven" so important? Because it indicates the origin of his rule. Jesus Christ came to rule a kingdom that invades this present age from above. Solomon's kingdom was from below, and thus ultimately belonged to this present age. It was shot through with the old Adam, and that is why it had to die. But in God's providence, it pointed beyond itself to a kingdom that would come from above, and kingdom that would stand forever.

Why was our Lord born of a virgin? For the same reason God brought Abraham's son Isaac from his barren, post-menopausal wife Sarah: to show that God alone can fulfill his promises. Humanity could not produce the Messiah. Mary and Joseph had no power to raise up God's anointed one by their own efforts. Strangely, Roman Catholic teaching has built up over the centuries the idea that because Mary was the virgin mother of Jesus, she must have been specially qualified for that role. So now the Catholic Church teaches that she was immaculately conceived, preserved from the effects of sin, that she lived a sinless life, that she remained a perpetual virgin her whole life, that she was assumed into Heaven bodily, and that she is now Mother of the Church and Queen of Heaven. Catholics use the biblical teaching of the virgin birth to say, "Look how special Mary is!" But the Bible presents the virgin birth to tell us, "Mary brought nothing to the table." It was not by her unique achievement that Jesus came into the world. It was the work of God, and of God alone. That is the meaning of the virgin birth.

God alone can build his kingdom. With the old Adam in us, we can't do it. All we can do is die to ourselves, die to our covetousness for things of this age, and be raised to new life so that we may enter the kingdom. This awful story with awful consequences has been written to show us that our hope rests on the enduring promise of God alone. Solomon's kingdom had to fall so that the kingdom of God could come after it. The autopsy reveals that we are so ruined in our sin that mere moral improvement can never save us. We must die and be raised with Christ.

In Romans 5, Paul compares Adam and Christ, showing that just as under Adam's federal headship we are all guilty and condemned to death, so also under Christ's federal headship, we are righteous before God and granted eternal life. Between the time of Adam and Christ, God raised up the nation of Israel and gave them his Law. In Romans 5:20, Paul makes a remarkable statement about that event: "Now the Law came in to increase the trespass." Wait, what? You would expect him to say, "Now the Law came in to *restrain* trespasses." But no, he says God gave the Law to Israel to *increase the trespass*, that is, to make the nature of sin stand out all the more clearly as open, high-handed defiance of God. And in the story of Solomon's kingdom, that is exactly what happened. In spite of all the privileges he had been blessed with, Solomon raised his fist to Heaven and told the God of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, that he would do things his way, thank you very much. But in God's providence, that was his plan to expose to us all how thoroughly ruined we are in the shadow of Adam.

And that is why our only hope is Christ, that we die to ourselves so that we might be raised with him. Paul goes on to say in Romans 5:20, "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." The Greek reads like this: "Where sin abounded, grace *superabounded*." The new Adam has overcome the old, if only we will look to him in faith. On his deathbed, the great John Newton, former slave trader turned preacher and author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," spoke these memorable words: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour." When it's your turn to die, or when it's my turn, if we remember only those two things, it will be enough. Amen.