

Solomon's Second Half

1 Kings 9-10

In one of my doctoral seminars in seminary, we were assigned a book on secularization entitled *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* by Steve Bruce. You can see a picture of that book's cover on the screens. I am not showing you the book because I am recommending it to you (although, if you want to study secularization, it's a fine book to help with learning one theory of it). I just wanted to point out the picture on the cover, a picture of a beautiful, historic church building that has now been repurposed as a carpet store. When I see a picture like this, two questions come to mind: (1) what was the past like, and (2) what happened to bring it all down? Looking at this picture, I wonder: how full of singing voices was this beautiful building in times past? What kinds of sermons were preached there? How many people over the years raised their families under the teachings of this church? How many people came to faith in this building and were baptized? How many wonderful, glorious things happened over how many decades? And why is it all gone now?

For the original readers of 1-2 Kings, there would have been a similar reaction reading about the glory days of Solomon's kingdom. The book was put into its final form sometime during the Babylonian exile, and so it was published for a generation of Israelites who had not lived through the glory of Solomon's reign. All they could see was the ruins of a once great temple, the remnants of a once great society, now ruled over by a pagan king, not the house of David. And I'm sure they often wondered, "What was it like to live in Solomon's kingdom? And what went so wrong that those days are now gone?" First Kings 9-10 goes a long way toward answering both of those questions as it gives us a summary account of roughly the second half of Solomon's reign.

As I have said several times before, Solomon's kingdom was the high point of the story of Israel. After Solomon, things go downhill quickly, first with a split of the kingdom of Israel into two, and then a decline of both kingdoms until they are both taken into exile. So today I want to answer those two questions of what Solomon's kingdom was like (particularly its latter half) and what went wrong. But I'm not raising these questions merely as intellectual curiosities. They have important meaning for our lives, for as Paul says, the stories of the Old Testament took place as an example, but they were written down for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:11). So what do we have to learn from Solomon's second half, as recorded in 1 Kings 9-10? We will answer that question in due course.

Our text begins with the event that kicks off the second half of Solomon's reign:

1. A prayer answered, a promise, and a warning (9:1-9)

God makes two special appearances to Solomon during his reign as king. The first was in chapter 3 at Gibeon, when Solomon was a young man, and he asked the Lord for wisdom to rule Israel well. God granted his prayer. The second is here in chapter 9 at Jerusalem when Solomon has been king for 24 years and is now a middle-aged man. We have seen in the intervening chapters that Solomon has brought Israel to a time of unrivaled prosperity and security and has built the temple in Jerusalem. The burning question at this point is: will Solomon finish well?

In this second appearance, the Lord speaks three messages to Solomon. The first is an answer to Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple in chapter 8. Verse 3 reads, "And the LORD said to him, 'I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.'" In his sovereign grace, the Lord has made Solomon's temple a place of mediation for the nation of Israel. His "name," his "eyes," his "heart" will be there in perpetuity. I'm sure many of you can quote 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land." It's often quoted at patriotic rallies in reference to America, but in its original context it is a parallel passage to this one, contained in the message God delivered to Solomon. It is referring to Israel turning to seek the Lord at the temple he has consecrated to his name and finding mercy, as Solomon prayed in 1 Kings 8. God has answered.

But in addition to answering Solomon's prayer for the temple, the Lord makes a promise in verses 4-5, that if Solomon is faithful to walk in the ways of the Lord, as David was, then the Lord will establish his throne forever. The house of David will continue to rule over a prosperous kingdom as long as the sons of David remain faithful to the Lord. Now you may be wondering: how can the Lord uphold David as the standard of faithfulness here? Wasn't David an adulterer and a murderer? Yes, he was, but two factors must be taken into account. First, David was a repentant man. He confessed his sins, sought the Lord's mercy, and turned from his wicked ways. Second, even though David failed terribly in the Bathsheba incident, one thing he never did was bow down to a false god. Resistance to idolatry is the main standard by which all future kings will be evaluated.

But the longest section of the Lord's message to David is a warning in verses 6-9, where he tells Solomon that if he or his sons turn aside from the Law of the Lord and worship other gods, then the whole nation will suffer for it. God will remove them from the land and destroy the very temple that the Lord consecrated to his name, and all the other nations will heap shame upon a decimated kingdom because of their utter failure to remain faithful to their God. Two main theological truths are contained in this warning. One is that God is not bound to the temple. Yes, he has consecrated it and made it his dwelling place, but Israel must not assume for a minute that merely having the Lord's temple in their midst makes them immune to his judgment. God is holy, and he will not compromise his holiness by tolerating his covenant people running around worshiping other gods. A second truth is that the fate of the nation now hangs on the actions of its king. In verses 4-5, the "you's" are singular in Hebrew, showing that God is addressing Solomon directly and individually. But starting in verse 6, the "you" is plural: "But if *you* [the nation] turn aside from following me..." The Lord sets up two possible futures: either the king will be faithful (and thus so will the nation), or the nation will be unfaithful because of the sins of the king. As goes the king, so goes the kingdom.

There is a principle contained in verses 4-9 that theologians have referred to as "federal headship." The word "federal" simply means "covenantal," and so federal headship means that a people are represented before God by one who stands as their covenant head. When God gave the Law to Israel through Moses, they did not have a king. They were a loose confederation of twelve tribes, and God promised them blessings in the land if they obeyed him, while also

threatening curses of his judgment if they disobeyed him. With the giving of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, God now established the king of Israel as the federal head of the nation. His actions will set the trajectory for the nation as a whole, either toward continued blessings or toward curses. As goes the king, so goes the kingdom. So the burning question we have before us after this second appearance of the Lord to Solomon is this: how will King Solomon finish? He had a very good first half, but will his faithfulness to the Lord, and the resulting blessings, hold strong to the end?

The rest of our passage begins to give us an answer to that question, and so we come now to the next section of our text:

2. A king's accomplishments, glory, and compromises (9:10-10:29)

The rest of chapters 9 and 10 seem to be a hodgepodge of royal records about building projects, trade endeavors, state visits, and accountings of annual revenue to the royal treasury. But looking at the whole, you can see that the author is telling us something important, namely, that the latter half of Solomon's reign was simply glorious. The author shows us that by telling us about Solomon's walls, worship, wisdom, and wealth. Let's begin with the account of Solomon's walls. I use that term to mean the defenses and fortifications he built, as chronicled in 9:15-25. Some version of the verb "build" is used nine times in chapter 9, giving us insight into the author's point: Solomon built a lot of things and greatly improved the security of the nation in doing so. We have mention not only of the temple and Solomon's own house but also the wall of Jerusalem and the Millo (a fortification for the city wall), as well as cities strategically located for defense. And yes, 9:15 begins by speaking of the "forced labor" Solomon employed to get these massive projects completed, but before that fills you with moral indignation, make sure you read the author's comments about the forced labor in verses 20-22: "All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel—their descendants who were left after them in the land, whom the people of Israel were unable to devote to destruction—these Solomon drafted to be slaves, and so they are to this day. But of the people of Israel Solomon made no slaves. They were the soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, his chariot commanders and his horsemen." Solomon used force labor, but he only made slaves of the Canaanites, the enemies of Israel, never his own people. With his administrative wisdom he built up the kingdom, making it stronger and more secure.

In addition to the walls, the author also tells us about Solomon's worship in 9:25: "Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the LORD, making offerings with it before the LORD. So he finished the house." Before Solomon built the temple, you see references to sacrifices being offered at various "high places." Gibeon was one such place where Solomon worshiped the Lord prior to the temple's construction. But now that the Lord has caused his name to rest at the temple, the high places are no longer suitable for the offering of sacrifices. So Solomon, by offering sacrifices three times a year—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths according to Deuteronomy 16:16—leads Israel in the pure worship of the Lord according to his Law. Because all blessings to Israel flow downstream from its worship, 1 Kings 9:25 is telling us something of great importance about Solomon's overall leadership during this time in his life.

In addition to the walls and the worship, the author also mentions Solomon's wisdom. In 10:1-13 we have the account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba. Sheba was located on the southern end of the Arabian peninsula, about 1,500 miles from Jerusalem. So why did the queen of Sheba devote at least half a year of her life to make this round trip through the desert with a camel caravan? Chapter 10 verse 1 tells us: "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon *concerning the name of the LORD*, she came to test him with questions." She heard, not only about the renowned wisdom of Solomon, but about the glory of Solomon's God, and she wanted to see and hear for herself. So how did her visit go? Note verses 2-3: "She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her." She was awed by Solomon's wisdom. I don't know what she asked him, but I imagine it was about deep mysteries of creation, human nature, ethics, and philosophy. Solomon, who had not only the truth of the Scriptures to guide him but also had devoted himself to studying creation, answered every single question she brought to him. Verses 4-5 tell us that when she took in the whole picture of Solomon's wisdom and the corresponding prosperity of his royal house, "there was no more breath in her." She could not believe such glory was to be found anywhere on earth.

And while she praised Solomon and honored him with a gift that showed her recognition of his superiority over her (v. 10), she also rightly traced the glory of Solomon back to its rightful source. Look at her words in verse 9: "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." The glory reflected in Solomon is the glory of the God of Israel, of whom Solomon is a son and a representative. Through Solomon's wisdom, the nations of the world are beginning to see the glory of the God of Israel.

In addition to Solomon's walls, worship, and wisdom, the author wants us to know about his wealth. In two sections, 9:26-28 and 10:11-12, the author refers to a fleet of ships Solomon built to navigate the Red Sea on a trade route to Ophir to bring back gold and other items of wealth to Israel. The Israelites were not a seafaring people, so Solomon partnered with King Hiram of Tyre, previously mentioned in chapter 5 as the one who supplied materials for the temple. This joint venture between the Israelites and the Phoenicians brought tremendous wealth to Solomon's kingdom. In 10:14-22 we see that Solomon's annual revenue of gold was 666 talents, or about 25 tons. Gold was so plentiful that he made hundreds of decorative shields of gold to adorn the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the place for state events. He made an ornate throne of ivory, overlaid with gold, and the end of verse 20 notes, "the like of it was never made in any kingdom." He had so much gold that he used it to make drinking vessels. Verse 21 even tells us that silver was regarded as nothing in Solomon's day because it was so plentiful. In chapters 9-10 together, the word "gold" is used a total of 17 times, highlighting the stunning prosperity of Solomon's house and kingdom.

And so to conclude our reflection on Solomon's accomplishments and glory, the author wants us to know that the latter part of his reign was glorious. He built *walls*, regulated Israel's *worship*, displayed his *wisdom* before the nations, and accrued unrivaled *wealth*. The author's summary reflection on Solomon's reign is given in 10:23-25: "Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to

hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.” You can hear echoes of other passages in this account, such as Genesis 22:18, where the Lord said to Abraham, “and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Psalm 72:17 echoes that promise by saying of the Davidic King, the singular offspring of Abraham, “May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!” Is Solomon the long-awaited offspring of Abraham who will undo the curse of Adam and bring the blessing of God’s favor to the world? It’s starting to look that way.

But if you look more closely, you see some cracks in the Solomonic foundation. Solomon is a wise king whose accomplishments and glory are unrivaled, but we also see in these two chapters that he has been compromised by the world in significant ways. To see those compromises clearly, we need to ask: what is the main job of the king of Israel? According to Deuteronomy 17:18-20, the king’s main job is to know the Law of Moses (even to write a copy of it for himself), to live under it, and to rule according to it. With that in mind, there are two relevant passages from the Law of Moses that come into play with respect to Solomon’s reign.

The first passage is Leviticus 25:20. In the context of giving Israel the law about the Year of Jubilee, the Lord says, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.” God owns the land of Canaan, and it is his gift to his people. Consequently, it should be somewhat shocking to us that in 9:11, we read of Solomon’s gift of twenty cities of Galilee to King Hiram of Tyre. Solomon probably did this to pay off debts to Hiram. He may have thought he had no other recourse, but by giving away portions of the land to a Gentile king, Solomon acted like he owned God’s property. And the irony of it all is that Hiram wasn’t even impressed with the cities! Second Chronicles 8:2 seems to suggest that Hiram gave them back. Solomon reveals in this incident his willingness to violate the Law of God in a situation where he feels pressured to find a resolution.

Another passage in the Law of Moses for us to consider is back in Deuteronomy 17. In verses 16-17 of that chapter, the Lord said to Israel regarding their future king: “Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver or gold.” The Lord apparently has concern about multiplying horses, getting entangled with Egypt, multiplying wives, and multiplying silver and gold. Why? Are these things bad in themselves? Are horses inherently wicked animals? No, of course not. Is it bad to have gold and silver? No, wealth is a blessing of the Lord. Yes, I will grant that it’s bad to have more than one wife, but polygamy in and of itself is not really the Lord’s focus in Deuteronomy 17. So why did he warn Israel about these specific things? It’s because they could become the occasion for a king’s downfall. It’s not inherently bad to have horses and chariots, but having a strong military can lead a king to entrust his security to his military force. It’s not wrong to have political alliances, but they can easily become temptations for a king to compromise with evil so he can gain more power. It’s not sinful to be wealthy, but excessive wealth can tempt a king to trust in what he can accomplish through his wealth rather than by reliance on the Lord.

Deuteronomy 17:16-17 warns us that the blessings of God can become the very occasion of our downfall. When I use the phrase “celebrity pastor,” what do you think of? Many of you probably think of a prominent Christian leader whose ministry led to a large congregation and a wide reach for his sermons and books. And for so many celebrity pastors, far too many to count, the end result has been disgrace and shame owing to a great moral downfall, such as adultery, fraud, or embezzlement. Why? Because when they experience the blessings of God, they do not take care to guard their hearts. The very blessings they receive feed into their pride, which in turn makes them think they are above the rules. Ultimately, I believe pride lies at the root of every celebrity pastor downfall.

King Solomon knew the Lord’s blessings unlike anyone in Israel before him, and he too failed to guard his heart. Deuteronomy 17 warned that the king should not be entangled with Egypt. What do we read in 9:24 in the midst of Solomon’s building projects? “But Pharaoh’s daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her.” There’s a reminder to us that Solomon had married an Egyptian for political purposes. Now, 2 Chronicles 8:11 tells us that Solomon had a good motive for giving his wife her own house, and that was because he didn’t want her living in the same place where the ark of the Lord had once rested. He regarded the house of David as a holy place, and her presence there was not appropriate. But that just highlights all the more how unequally yoked he has become with a wife who does not worship the God of Israel. He is compromised through marriage and political entanglements with Egypt. I have already pointed out how much gold and silver Solomon accrued. And to see how our passage ends, look at 10:26: “And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen.” The remaining verses show how many he had and where he got them. So, to sum up: Deuteronomy 17:16-17 says the king of Israel must avoid getting entangled with Egypt, must not multiply silver or gold for himself, must not multiply horses for himself, and must not multiply wives for himself. First Kings 9-10 shows us, in the midst of all the glory of his kingdom, Solomon is entangled with Egypt, has multiplied gold for himself, and has multiplied horses for himself. Guess what the very next passage in chapter 11 is about: Solomon’s 700 wives and 300 concubines who lead him to worship other gods. Without coming out and saying it directly, the author is telling us that at the pinnacle of Israel’s story, King Solomon is compromised. He didn’t decide one day out of the blue that he wanted to worship other gods. That was just the end result of thousands of prior decisions, little by little, day by day, in which his heart shifted away from the Lord and toward the thought of building his own kingdom. Solomon allowed the pull of the world to corrupt him.

And that brings me to a word of application for us as we reflect on this passage, and I’m going to draw it straight from 1 John 2:15: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” What does John mean by that? He doesn’t mean we shouldn’t love creation. Of course, we should delight in the beauty of God’s world as a testimony to his creative power. Nor does John mean that we shouldn’t love our fellow human beings in the sense that we desire good for them. In both of these senses, we should indeed love the world. When John warns us not to love the world, he is warning us not to invest ourselves disproportionately in this present age. He is telling us not to direct our hopes toward earthly things. Why? Because if you do that, it will expel from your heart your love for God. “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father [meaning our love *for* God the Father] is not in him.” If

your heart is too tightly bound to this present age, you will compromise obedience to the Lord to gain more in this world or to avoid losing what you have.

David Wells once wrote that worldliness “makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange.”¹ From a worldly perspective, why wouldn’t a king want to build up as strong a military as he could, with all the horses and chariots he could find? Why wouldn’t a king want to hoard massive wealth for himself? Why wouldn’t a king want to forge political alliances with as many strategic marriages as possible, and why wouldn’t he want to keep a harem to satisfy the desires of his flesh whenever he wanted? Love of the world makes these actions seem normal, while the Word of God warned Solomon against them. It was the daily decision to keep grasping after more and more power, more and more of what this world has to offer, and against the Lord’s explicit warnings, that made possible for Solomon what was formerly unthinkable: the worship of idols.

Today, it may be a decision to sacrifice gathering for worship so that you can devote more time to work. In Satan’s hands, that decision can eventually turn you into a nominal Christian who maybe shows up to worship on Easter. Today, it may be a decision to keep all the money you make for yourself until you can get on better financial footing, and then you’ll start to give back to the Lord. In Satan’s hands, that decision can turn you into a lifelong hoarder who finds security in a pile of money that you never use to advance the gospel or to bless others. Today, it may be a decision to let yourself develop an emotional connection to that attractive coworker, getting into the kinds of conversations with him or her that you don’t share with anyone of the opposite sex, except possibly your spouse. In Satan’s hands, that decision can eventually lead to adultery and a wrecked marriage. What do all these examples, and thousands of others we might imagine, have in common? They all begin with an inordinate love for something in this present age. They all begin with resting your hopes on something in this world to give you joy and fulfillment: a successful career, a better lifestyle, the feeling of security from having more money, the feeling of approval from a man or a woman you find attractive. And so you set your mind on these things rather than on things above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1-2). Let Solomon’s compromise be to you a warning: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Guard your heart by resting your hopes on Christ. This world is passing away, and so investing yourself in it is not only wrong, but utterly foolish. Taking an honest look at your own heart, do you see in yourself compromises that pull you toward worldliness? Is there any desire you have that, if you followed it out far enough, you know is ultimately incompatible with love for God? If so, bring it before the Lord now, and kill it. Repent, and turn to Savior who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age (Gal. 1:4), so that we may inherit a kingdom to come that far surpasses even that of King of Solomon. Amen.

¹ David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4.