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As Solomon Grew Old

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Series: God's Living Legends II

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It was one of the highlights of Freddy's career as a farmer. For twelve years he had experimented with new ways to grow vegetables, and after seemingly unending failures and "almost" successes, at last he knew that this year would be different. As the giant machinery moved its way down the long rows of picture-perfect crops, a great celebration was being planned for that weekend. The barn was being decorated, the reporter for the county newspaper was being invited to attend, and nearly everyone in Slogro County was planning to turn out for the "at last we've made it celebration."

There was only one hitch. Freddy had been careless with a deadly chemical that had been used to work on his tractors; a chemical that was used to treat rust on the wheels and fenders, but which had to be hosed off carefully, or it would kill anything it touched. The harvester was successfully reaching out and taking in the beautiful vegetables, that was no problem. The problem was that, unknown to Freddy, even as he was harvesting a winner, he was sowing seeds of poison that would ultimately ruin next year's crop. For into the soil where the new seeds would be planted was flowing a steady measure of death. So even while he was celebrating success, he was destroying his future.

The principle involved in that story is the stark reality of how tiny compromises can take a time of apparent jubilation and *even while the celebration is going on*, unknowingly allow the seeds of death to form. What a tragedy to be celebrating life, while you are implementing death. Our Living Legend of the hour, a man named Solomon, falls into that dubious category as his life turns a major corner, and his moment of triumph leads him down a path that ultimately will turn victory into defeat.

When last we left our legend, it was celebration time. For twenty years, he had labored, first to build the temple, then to build his own palace. His life, characterized by affluence and accomplishment, had become preoccupied with achieving those

two worthy goals. He had been, so to speak, made chairman of the Board of Deacons during a building fund drive, and his one driving goal became to be the best and do the best at what he had to do. On the surface, he succeeded. But as our opening illustration indicated, even while he was celebrating, he was sowing seeds of poison that would ultimately destroy his entire kingdom. These kinds of lessons are neither pleasant to teach nor to hear. But the issue isn't whether or not it is pleasant.

The issue is whether it is truth. And God seems to have sprinkled the Scripture with warning after warning in the form of biographical sketches of his greats, depicting the truth that the highway to success is paved with subtle detours that, in essence, are nothing more than dead-ends. How to avoid those detours seems to be a major theme in Scripture. We certainly have such a theme today. We will conclude our study of Solomon, (and temporarily, our look at life's living legends) in our next study, with what will hopefully be a more positive look at life. But for now, we must take the Word where it is, as it is, and it is in I Kings, chapters 9,10, and 11, where Solomon, man of wealth, man of wisdom and success, tries to cope with all of his greatness. What we find, according to chapter eleven, verse 4, is that "As Solomon grew old" he laid aside *the reasons for his greatness in order to enjoy the temporal fruits of his greatness*. The results are sad. They always are.

I- ONE MORE WORD (That Will Not Fail)

In our last study we took what I pray was an encouraging look at one of the most basic principles in all of Scripture, the principle of the integrity of the Word of God. Our conclusion was delightful. It was this: *There hath not failed one word of all that He hath promised*. Not one time in all of history has God ever said anything that was not true. Not one time in all of history has God ever promised anything that He did not do. *There hath not failed one word*. The encouraging aspects of that promise came through, in great measure, because the promises were promises of God's blessings that were being claimed and named before the Throne of Grace. God had promised David that his son would rise to the throne, rise to greatness, and build the temple that David had so longed to see constructed. And the Word we so loved was Solomon's dynamic anthem of praise at the conclusion of the building of the temple when Solomon proudly proclaimed, *There hath not failed one word*.

So the message was and is God keeps His Word! Now I need not remind you that one of the cardinal dangers of the Christian movement is its tendency toward extremes. And in the case of the promises, the same thing holds true. I realize that those with certain spiritual gifts, for instance, are more likely to respond to the positive side of God's nature, while those with other gifts will respond more quickly to the negative side. *What we must always seek to do, I believe, is to keep the balance!* It will be your job to assist me in seeing that we do not drift off to either extreme. We must ever maintain that balanced portrait of God that is etched so indelibly in Scripture.

He is perfect righteousness married to perfect grace. He desires to give us all of the grandeur of the heavenlies, but He has also made certain loving demands of us, so that we will not trample His Holiness under foot. He will never leave us or forsake us, that is true. But He will discipline us if we flagrantly abuse or presume upon His grace. These Old Testament portraits of disobedience, then, are not to cause us to tremble in fear that we live under the divine wrath of God as believers, God forbid. They do, however, serve as fit reminders that, even as God's beloved children, the laws of sowing and reaping still prevail.

In today's story, Solomon, fresh from reminding the people of the veracity of God's great promises, receives a long-distance call from Heaven and hears God whisper yet another promise...this time, a conditional promise, and Solomon should have realized that if God's promises of blessings *always* come true, should not His promises of judgment *always* come true, as well?

The passage begins where we left off in our last study, in I Kings. We will be reading from the New International Version.

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do,

the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared at Gibeon.

The LORD said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

"As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command

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and observe my decrees and laws,

I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'you shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'

People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.'"

(I Kings 9:1-9 NIV)

Now we have already established that *not one word of God's would ever fail*. It ought, therefore, to be perfectly clear that God was not playing games with Solomon. Let's look quickly at the key elements of this statement:

1- God appeared to Solomon at the most vulnerable time in his life to clarify the choices that were before him. It says,

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time,

(I Kings 9:1,2a NIV)

Solomon had done what Solomon had been called to do. After twenty long years of laboring and waiting, a gigantic celebration had marked the finishing of the task, and the whole nation returned to their homes filled with joy and gladness. What a dangerous time for the flesh to move in and take over. What a perfect time for Satan to whisper in Solomon's ear "welcome to the GNY Club." GNY stands for "God needs you". Beloved, the accomplishment of a great task in the Kingdom ought to be a time of great humility and awe at who God is; but beware, the enemy would like to translate it into a time of spiritual pride, or spiritual apathy. God knew about the problem, so *at this very vulnerable time, God spoke to Solomon again.*

2- God reminded Solomon that He had kept His Word. It is

appropriate whenever God has moved and a task is completed, to stop and remember that it is *the Word of God that hath not failed...* not the works of man.

3- God gives Solomon and the people of Israel a clear choice.

One of the most startling truths ever spoken about God is the truth that He never leaves us in doubt as to what He wants, and as to what the consequences are of our either obeying or disobeying. God is clear in His utterances, perfectly clear. In this case, the statement couldn't be misunderstood no matter who was reading or hearing, certainly not misunderstood by King Solomon. The statement was this:

Solomon, you and your people have a choice:

- 1- Obey me and walk in integrity as David did...or
- 2- Turn away from me and follow after the gods of this world.

Not only that, Solomon, but each of those choices have ensuing consequences.

If You Obey...

I will establish your throne over Israel forever.

If You Disobey...

- 1- I will cut off Israel from the land
- 2- I will reject this temple
- 3- Israel will become the laughingstock of the nations
- 4- When the scoffers ask, "why has God done such a thing to his people," they will answer: "because they have forsaken the LORD, embraced other gods, and are worshipping and serving them."

Now that is about as clear an admonition as God could give. Here are the choices; here are the consequences of the choices; and here is how those choices will affect not only you but the unbelieving world who looks at you as God's anointed. You say, "you ignorant Israelites; how could you miss such a clear warning?" I believe God would have us look at our own track record, lest we be overcome by the mote in our brother's eye. But the issue, at least in retrospect, was clear as a bell. So be it.

4- Finally, God was saying to Solomon...remember, not one Word I have spoken has ever failed. If these are God's alternatives, and these are the consequences of those choices, you had better

engrave it in concrete, God will keep his Word. He won't come to the day of reckoning and say, "Aw, gee, they meant well, they just happened to worship a few other gods." No, God warns clearly before, and waits patiently for repentance; but when the axe falls, it falls. *God will keep his word.*

II- SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY

So the issue is clear; God has spoken. Now we move into the section of the passage that pulls back the curtain of the palace to reveal a portrait of the kind of man Solomon had become, and the kind of life Solomon was living. We find that description in verses 10-28.

1- Solomon had adopted the world's kind of political leverage. With all the affluence he possessed, he was still trying to get the best deal possible even at a friend's expense. We read in verses 10-14 that he made a deal with Hiram, the one whose bilateral treaty had made possible the building of the temple; and in exchange for part of that trade agreement, he gave Hiram ten cities. Hiram came over, looked the cities over, and said, "Hey, King Kong, what kind of deal is this?" These are the culls, the dregs. So we read in verse 13 that Hiram nicknamed the towns, "Cabul" meaning "good for nothing", and gave them back. It was a "thanks, but no thanks" kind of package.

2- We read in verses 20-22 that he had taken all the unbelievers who were left in the land and turned them into slaves, putting them to work at hard labor on the temple, on the palace, and on the wall.

3- He didn't make slaves of the Israelites, but he forced them into service, either in the military, the civil service, or the cavalry (verses 22-25).

4- He used Hiram's expertise to develop a navy, which he would use to sail the seas in search of treasures for the king, and which apparently gave him greater control over the coastlines of his kingdom (verses 26-28).

So Solomon had become the head of the most influential, most powerful, most affluent nation in the world. Kings and princes around the globe marveled at his greatness and coveted his wisdom. The very mention of his name spelled out a portrait of a man so wealthy, so powerful, so ostentatious in his appearance, that nothing short of the word "glory" could be used to describe

his majesty. Jesus, in Matthew, chapter six, speaking of the grandeur of God's provision, and using the lilies of the field and their beauty as a breathtaking example, reached back to the Old Testament for an illustration, and searching for the most glorious thing they could relate to, added, "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." *Solomon in all his glory...no other phrase could so capture the opulence, the magnificence, the worldliness of this man and his empire.*

III- WHAT TO DO WHEN A QUEEN COMES TO CALL!

With all of this background of the splendor and power that Solomon possessed, comes an interesting story that has, in the process of time, become somewhat of a legend of sorts, although fact has been mixed with fiction as the legend has evolved. The story is the tale of the visit to Solomon of the Queen of Sheba, and it unfolds for us in I Kings 10 like this,

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions.

Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.

Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.

When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built,

The food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true.

But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.

How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain

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justice and righteousness.”

And she gave the king 120 talents of gold (about 4½ tons), large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones.

The King used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the LORD and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.)

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country. (I Kings 10:1-13 NIV)

Now history has some interesting postscripts to this story, but whether or not any of them are true, remains to be seen. Without question, the Queen of Sheba has captured the imagination of men for 3,000 years. She lives on in literature, music, and art. Not just a little of her fame is linked to this Biblical account of her visit to Solomon, and many of the accounts include, to say the least, great questions about some hypothetical romantic involvement that supposedly took place between the King and the Queen.

As to where the kingdom of Sheba, from whence she came, was located, even that is shrouded with mystery, though most scholars seem to be satisfied that it was located somewhere in southwestern Arabia on the east shore of the Red Sea. As to the reason for her visit, most scholars seem to be satisfied that she came primarily with commerce on her mind, though not a little curiosity seemed to exist about this incredibly wise king and his affluent empire. Archaeological findings reveal the kingdom of Sheba to have had a highly-developed culture supported by a lucrative trade in frankincense and myrrh (gum resins extracted from the bark of trees).

Whatever the reason for the queen’s visit, the story seems to have been embellished through the years. She has been characterized as everything from an alluring temptress to an evil sorceress.

The Ethiopian version of the legend of Solomon and Sheba

can be traced to a compilation of a writing entitled “The Glory of the Kings”, done by a monk in the 14th century, and apparently designed to establish Ethiopia as the logical heir to Israel’s territory. This account has been depicted in sheepskin drawings, copies of which can be found even today. The story indicates that Solomon was so awed by the Queen’s beauty that he was determined that she bear his child, and further states that she agreed, with certain stipulations. Supposedly she returned to her country, later bore a son, whom she called “Menelik”, or “son of the wise man”. The story goes on that this son, when grown, visited Solomon, studied the Hebrew faith, and was later anointed King of Ethiopia. For centuries, Ethiopian royalty has boasted of this link. In fact, the 1955 revised constitution of Ethiopia specifically stated that “the royal line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik, the son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.” The mere timing of this story seems to be in direct contradiction to Scripture, however, and it appears to be more the figment of someone’s historical imagination, than an accurate account of an actual event.

The visit itself, however, is recorded in great detail in our Bibles, and so we cannot ignore those portions of the saga that are specifically inscribed in the written Word. Since *no Scripture is of any private interpretation*, what is told there is not only true, it is important. Therefore, in passing, we must consider it.

Perhaps the greatest meaning we can derive from its inclusion in the canon of Scripture can be summed up in these brief statements:

1- Even as the ruler of an unbelieving nation, she had heard so much about Solomon’s great wisdom, *she traveled miles just to pose some questions for the Monarch to answer* (verse 1).

2- *She came peacefully*, bearing large quantities of gold, precious stones, and the spices for which her nation was famous (verse 2).

3- *She came with hard questions*, that is, she did not pose simplistic hypothetical issues as a guise to get his attention. She seemed to have *real* questions that had been thought through (verses 1, 3).

4- *Solomon answered all of them to her satisfaction*; nothing she asked posed a problem for the wise man (verse 3).

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5- She was not only impressed with Solomon's wisdom, *she was impressed with the grandeur of his kingdom*; the obvious affluence was beyond her comprehension (verses 4-7).

6- *She assumed that living in that environment was tantamount to happiness*. In verse 8 she assumed that Solomon's men, his officials, and his cupbearers were happy just to be there.

7- *She gave the glory to God* (verse 9).

who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.

(I Kings 10:9 NIV)

8- *She unloaded on the king*...literally 4½ tons of gold, and an unknown quantity of other goods. Solomon, in turn, offered her anything she wanted that he had...and she took a bountiful supply and headed for home (verse 10).

One thing is for sure. She came, curious about Solomon and his God. She left convinced that Solomon's God had an answer for her every question, and that He indeed was the true King of Israel. That, in itself, is sufficient reason for recording the story.

IV- AS SOLOMON GREW OLD (Five steps to spiritual suicide)

Now the queen rides off into the sunset, and the next 30 or so verses speak volumes to us about the heart of God's man at this stage of his life. Here was a man destined by God for greatness, who had received more and achieved more in his young life than nearly any man who had ever lived. *Wiser than all men was he*. Richer than all men was he. More powerful than all men was he. He had everything a man could ever dream of, all of it a gift from God!

Now, in the ensuing passages of Scripture, God outlines for us what I believe can aptly be characterized as five steps to spiritual suicide. Solomon, at the height of his career, the applause of the masses still ringing in his ears, now proceeds to move with clocklike precision down the road to spiritual ruin. As the opening illustration indicated, even as he was celebrating victory, he was sowing the seeds of ultimate defeat.

In essence, it was Solomon's arithmetic that did him in. What he did was this: He multiplied treasures; he multiplied horses; he multiplied wives; and he multiplied gods, until ultimately, he

divided the kingdom. Make no mistake about it...that's satanic mathematics.

But while those were the overt steps he took, it was the principles behind those steps that we have cause to look at carefully in this lesson. Solomon violated five basic Biblical instructions in his zeal to perpetuate his hold on the kingdom, and to assure his continued prosperity and pleasure.

Now mind you, God had warned him. Maintain the integrity of your heart and success cannot help but be yours! Violate God's holiness and go after other gods...and you and your kingdom will disappear just as miraculously as it came into being. Look at what Solomon did to lose the favor of God:

Step 1- He became obsessed with that which was temporal.

Solomon invested his life in things, rather than in people. The end result was that he was literally consumed with that which he knew, according to his own writings, could not satisfy. Nonetheless, though he knew better, his insatiable hunger for possessions dominated his later years.

The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents,

not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land.

King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield.

He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.

The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them.

Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom.

All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days.

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The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea, along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned carrying gold, silver, ivory, and apes and baboons.

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons, and spices, and horses and mules.
(I Kings 10:14-25 NIV)

In direct violation of Deuteronomy 17:17, which specifically states that no king over Israel shall ever “*greatly multiply to himself silver and gold,*” Solomon deliberately set about to accumulate wealth beyond comprehension. The reason for God’s warning was obvious. It was not that He deplored riches. It was God Himself who made both David and Solomon men of such untold wealth. It was not that. Nor was it that He did not want His leaders to be wise stewards over the physical possessions He had given them. Obviously not. What God did not want was for those He placed in authority to ever allow the making of money or the possessing of things to possess them; for He knew that once they became consumed with the accumulating of the things of this world, the things of the Spirit would cease to be paramount, and it would only be a matter of time until spiritual ruin would overtake the nation. It was God who made Solomon rich; but it was Solomon whose quest to multiply that wealth at the expense of higher priorities robbed God of the Glory those riches were intended to bring.

Step 2- Solomon demonstrated that gradually he had begun to put his confidence in the strength of the flesh.

Having multiplied and magnified his temporal possessions, Solomon began to multiply horses, and in the process, he demonstrated that gradually *he had begun to put his confidence in the strength of the flesh*. Verse 26 continues with Solomon’s second step to suicide. It says this:

Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

Solomon’s horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue,

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They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans. (I Kings 10:26,28,29 NIV)

Isn't it interesting how God in His mercy can take us in our state of utter weakness and helplessness and, in spite of us, give us the power to overcome the enemy? And isn't it interesting how subtly we then begin to put our confidence in the vessels God has used, rather than in God Himself? Once more, Solomon had violated the clear word of God. Now let's go back to Deuteronomy 17 again, where God, knowing the density of the human mind when operating in the flesh, spelled the issue out so clearly that anyone who dared to look would know His will. It says this:

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,'

be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.

The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD hath told you, "You are not to go back that way again." (Deuteronomy 17:14-16 NIV)

Or as the King James Version words it, "He shall not multiply horses to himself." Why? Because God knew that the end result of a king who has become obsessed with his natural power is that He will lose sight of his supernatural power. That's why some of us are more effective when our own strength is gone, because the greater our need, the greater our dependence. Solomon first of all determined to focus his eyes on that which was temporal, then he subtly began to trust in that which the flesh could do. Can you relate?

Step 3- He discarded Biblical absolutes as irrelevant.

Having taken his eyes off of spiritual values and having begun to place his confidence in the flesh, Solomon took the next step down the road to spiritual suicide. *He discarded Biblical absolutes as irrelevant.* And it happened in an area where compromise had been a way of life since early in his reign. In fact, it had become so commonplace, he apparently had forgotten it was sin.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides

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Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.

They were from the nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after other gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

(1 Kings 11:1,2 NIV)

Back to Deuteronomy 17 again, verse 17. God's specific steps of warning to kings-to-be: he must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.

As the New King James puts it:

Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away;

(Deuteronomy 17:17a)

Nehemiah 13 writes a sad epitaph for Solomon's grave. There the prophet, challenging boldly those who dared to defy God by marrying unbelieving mates, makes this arresting statement:

Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?

Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan [unbelieving] women?

(Nehemiah 13:26a, 27 NKJV)

God's warning against taking many wives, and God's warning against intermarrying with heathens were both couched in words of uncompromising candor. With God it was not a matter of "if they would lead the believer astray," it was a matter of when. It was a foredrawn conclusion from God's perspective that God's man or woman marry *only a believer*, or he or she would be flagrantly trampling underfoot the concept of unequal yoking and thus be dramatically denying the portrait God was painting on earth of life in heaven. So not only did God command His children never to do that, He specifically warned those who would rule over them that it would be to the ruin of their kingdom to violate that principle.

No king ever violated that precept with more fervor than Solomon. Sooner or later it had to catch up with him. Apparently, in his earlier years, when the building of the temple and his house were so paramount in his mind, Solomon was able to maintain a degree of devotion to God in spite of his heathen wives. Not so as the dust settled from his religious activity, and the hue and cry

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for compromise began to haunt him at every turn. For we read in the next verse,

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

(I Kings 11:4 NIV)

As Solomon grew old...what a tragic phrase. As Solomon grew old...in the years when the harvest of spiritual blessings sown in the years of his strength ought to have overtaken his life and given him the comfort and joy God's man or woman anticipates in the golden years of life...as Solomon grew old...instead, he reaped the bitterness of those drops of poison he had allowed to flow into the soil, even as the harvest of God's blessings was pouring into his storehouse.

As Solomon grew old his wives turned away his heart and he was not fully devoted to God.

Step 4- He denies the Holiness of a Jealous God.

So now comes step four down the road to spiritual suicide. Solomon, having turned his eyes toward the temporal, having begun to trust in his own strength, having discarded Biblical absolutes as though he were immune to the consequences, now enters the enemy camp. He denies the Holiness of a Jealous God, and determines that it is not *either Jehovah or the gods of this world, it can not be Jehovah and...*

Once you have reached that stage, it's all over. He did things he would have sworn in a court of law years before he would never do. You see compromise blinds us to consequences.

He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites.

So Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.

He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

(I Kings 11:5-8 NIV)

Solomon now overtly shakes his fist in the face of a holy God who has been his very life, who has rescued him from nothingness and exalted him to greatness, who has taken an average mind

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and infused it with godly wisdom until kings and queens the world over traveled to tiny Israel just to see what the God of the Jews could do through His king.

Step 5- God had to do two things:

He had to remove the mantle of authority from Solomon's shoulders, and He had to allow his enemies to triumph over him. Jehovah had no choice. He had given His word...and there hath not failed one word...remember? So begins the tragic postscript to the story.

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

Although He had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD'S command.

So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.

Nevertheless, for the sake of David, your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

Then the LORD raised up against Solomon an adversary,
(I Kings 11:9-14a NIV)

What a sad ending to a story that had such great promise. Just when it seemed Solomon was enjoying the fruits of his years of labor, there began to appear in the garden of his life evidence of deadly weeds that had sprung up, weeds that were the result of little grains of poisonous compromises that he had sown along the way. When all of life should have begun to make sense; when the accolades of the world and the blessings of God seemed to all be falling in Solomon's camp, "as Solomon grew old," he missed it.

Mind you, he didn't set out to defy God. But in the midst of his prosperity, his values changed. In the midst of his success, his confidence shifted; and at the time when his miraculous wisdom seemed to indicate that spiritually he had arrived, he took liberties with the Word of God. Having taken liberties and

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tasted no immediate consequences, he quietly began to wrongly assume that either a Holy God had a special set of rules for him, or the Word of God, not *one word of which had ever failed*, had somehow become null and void.

It was not a singular, spontaneous choice. It was a gradual drifting away from the basics. It was a subtle discarding of his first love. It was the gradual merging of the concepts of the world with the precepts of the Word. It was one long, continual act of self-justification that suddenly found him actually worshipping in the enemy camp as though it were the normal thing to do.

At this point, a loving, caring, patient God had had enough. And there arose from out of nowhere in this kingdom known for its peace, evil adversaries whose singular objective it was to destroy that kingdom. A weeping, grieving God withdrew His hand of protection, the hand that had sustained that peace, and allowed the enemy to have his way. Now Solomon could rely on his riches. Now Solomon could trust in his horses. Now Solomon could find solace in his wives. Now Solomon could call on the pagan gods to whom he had erected those abominable altars. Now Solomon could rely on the things he had deliberately substituted for the power of God. In fact, now Solomon *had* to!

As Solomon grew old, he had to live with the choices he had made.

And so will we!

As Solomon Grew Old

For Additional Study

1- Compare what God said to Solomon in! Kings 9:6 with what He said to Moses in Deuteronomy 4:23-28. What has been the common thread throughout all of Scripture where God's "jealousy" has been concerned? Why were the consequences always so devastating? Can you think of a modern parallel to this violation of "serving other gods"?

2- Did God, in fact, divide the kingdom? When?

3- Did god, in fact, make Israel to become a reproach among the nations? When?

4- Read Jeremiah 22:5-9. Does the question in verse 8 ring a familiar sound? Does the answer in verse 9 follow the same pattern?

5- Is the time just after a great victory a vulnerable time for a Christian? Why? Can you think of a time in Elijah's life that parallels this time in Solomon's?

6- Why do you think the queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon? What do you think impressed her the most? How did it affect her concept of Solomon's God?

7- Can you name the five steps to spiritual suicide? What modern day attitudes and activities parallel these steps?

8- Examine your own life for any seeds you may be sowing that could one day reap a harvest of bitterness as you grow old? And take the appropriate steps to deal with those compromises now.

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