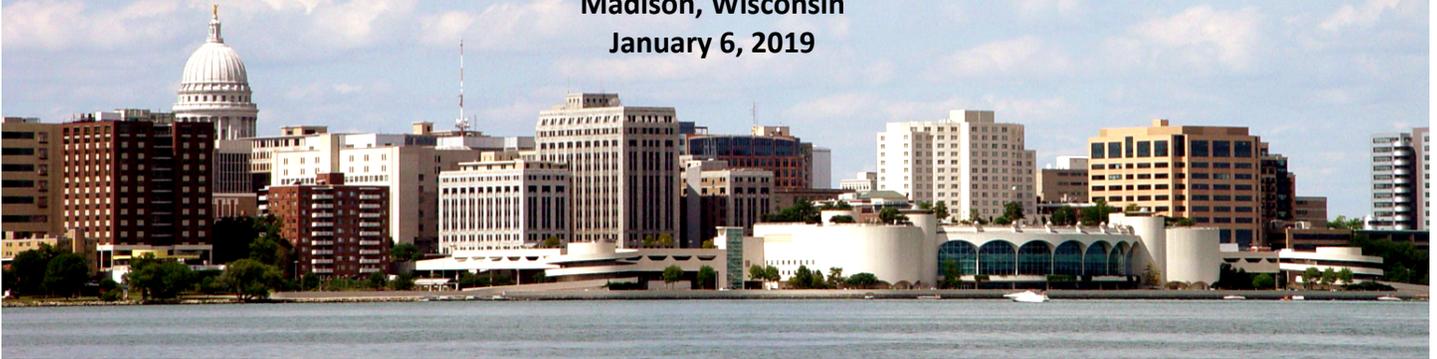


# King Solomon's Fall

1 KINGS 11:1-13

Baxter T. Exum (#1482)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
January 6, 2019



David Petraeus. Most of us recognize this man as one of the most well known, most successful, and most highly decorated and respected soldiers in the history of this nation. Having graduated in the top 5% of his class at West Point, he went on to serve 37 years in the United States Army. During that time, he continued to earn masters and PhD degrees and to serve as an assistant professor at the United States Military Academy. In many ways, his many accomplishments exceed my ability to explain them. We know that he served as Commander of the United States Central Command, which oversees military efforts in the Middle East. We know that he developed what is now known as the Petraeus Doctrine, a comprehensive plan for overcoming the kind of insurgency that we've seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also know that in 2011 Petraeus was nominated by President Obama to serve as Director of the CIA and was confirmed in the senate by an unheard-of unanimous vote of 94-0, reflecting the tremendous respect that this man had earned over a long and distinguished career.

However, we also know what happened next. In November 2012, after an FBI investigation, Petraeus resigned as head of the CIA, amid allegations of an extramarital affair and that he shared classified information with his official biographer, Paula Broadwell. This is a smart, courageous, respected, and highly educated man, and yet near the end of his life he apparently made some terribly unwise decisions. Most of us know people who have done something similar. Maybe you are in this situation - perhaps not to the extent that he is - but all of us know people who have lost nearly everything after making some terribly unwise decisions.

With this as background, I'd like for us to study a request that came in from one of you about a month ago. Someone was asking the question: If King Solomon was so wise, why did he turn away from God? After doing so well over so many years, why did King Solomon give it all up in his later years? Thankfully, the Bible is full of some very personal stories. And what we appreciate about the Bible is that even heroes are treated honestly. The Bible doesn't ignore sin, but instead, in Scripture, God explains the good and the bad, and there are lessons to learn. The passage I'd like for us to consider this morning is 1 Kings 11:1-13 (p. 564). Like so many other heroes in the Bible, King Solomon did a lot of good, but he also caused some terrible harm. And the record of his fall is found in 1 Kings 11.

This morning, I want us to learn from King Solomon's fall by making four observations. And this might be a bit unusual, but the first observation comes before the passage itself. And the reason is: We need to point out that before his fall...

I. ...King Solomon had **EVERY ADVANTAGE** (and really, this is covered in 1 Kings 1-10).

Sometimes today, we hear about "privilege." Privilege is often defined as some kind of power or advantage held by a small group of people. In every sense of the word, Solomon had privilege! Solomon had every possible advantage. His father, King David, was a popular and powerful king. His dad gave him some good advice (in 1 Kings 2). Solomon himself was also quite wise. We remember how God offered him anything he wanted, and instead of wealth or power, Solomon wanted wisdom. God gave it. Abundantly. And then he also went ahead and gave Solomon wealth and power as well (1 Kings 3). Solomon would go on to collect 12,000 horses, huge palaces, gold and silver, even to the point where silver wasn't even considered valuable anymore. He brought in 25 tons of gold each year. Solomon built the temple (1 Kings 6-8). He had a strong prayer life (we have his public prayer in 1 Kings 8). We also know that Solomon was a good writer, an inspired writer. Solomon wrote scripture! In terms of having a spiritual advantage, it's hard to be more privileged than that! Solomon, in a sense, had something of a hotline to God. We have God appearing to King Solomon twice. I don't think God ever appeared to King David directly (God worked through prophets like Nathan, with David), but God spoke to Solomon directly. Solomon, then, has every spiritual advantage.

And yet, even with all of this, somewhere along the way, King Solomon still manages to fall. Of all the people we might imagine falling into sin, we might think that someone like Solomon would be the least likely to leave God. What a warning that is to us! We think about what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:12, ***"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."*** When we are doing well, we need to be especially careful - always keeping God first in our lives - not just getting comfortable with our privilege, but using King Solomon as a reminder: Always keep God first. We cannot rely on the good that we have done in the past. So the first lesson we learn from Solomon this morning is that what we've done in the past is no guarantee that we will finish well. Your dad might have served as an elder, your mom might have been the most hospitable person on the planet, you might have attended a Christian university, but our past is no guarantee of future spiritual success. Instead, we learn from King Solomon that pride and tremendous success often goes before a terrible fall.

II. And this leads us to the passage in 1 Kings 11, where we find that King Solomon's fall actually starts with his **DISREGARD FOR GOD'S LAW**.

Let's all look together at the first few verses of today's passage - 1 Kings 11:1-3 - and let's notice how this starts - 1 Kings 11:1-3,

***<sup>1</sup> Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, <sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.***

So, we have this reminder that Solomon's fall starts as he decides to ignore a certain part of God's Law. And the author of 1 Kings cites the Law right in this passage! He gives us the quote from Exodus and Deuteronomy.

This is how the fall starts. God reveals his word to us, and for whatever reason, we make a decision not to follow it. Maybe we think we are above this. Maybe we think we can handle it. Maybe we think we will never get caught. Maybe we think the law doesn't apply to us. Maybe we think we know better than God on some issue.

And for Solomon, it starts with something that many people might consider rather minor as he decides to marry Pharaoh's daughter. He doesn't go from a God-fearing king to being an idol-worshiper overnight, but there is a progression. Early on in his reign, king Solomon forms an alliance with Egypt, and part of that deal is that he would marry Pharaoh's daughter. And at the time, it probably feels like the right thing to do. This is politics. This is the way things work. This is what all of the other kings are doing. But then, as he grows in power, other nations are wheeling and dealing, and he starts marrying the daughters of other kings in the area, and before too long, he's married to hundreds of these pagan women. But it starts with a decision to disregard God's Law. Notice, in verse 2, how the Bible tells us that Solomon **"held fast to these in love."** He is holding on to these women. Back in Deuteronomy 10:20, Moses had said, **"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him."** That word **"cling"** is the same word translated here in verse 2 as **"hold fast."** So, the command is to **"cling"** to God, but Solomon is **"clinging"** to his wives with the same kind of devotion that he should have had for God. So it's no surprise when we get to verse 3 and we learn that **"his wives turned his heart away."** Isn't that sad? As a young man, I doubt Solomon intended to leave God. But it started small. Somehow he rationalized disregarding one "little" thing, "This is what other kings are doing," "Surely God wants me to be happy," "I can do this and still be faithful," we don't know what he said, but despite having every possible advantage, Solomon decided to ignore a single command, and it grew. It got completely out of control. It's hard to even picture this. God says don't do it, and before long, Solomon has a thousand of these women in his life. So, not only did he marry one, but there were 999 others!

We need to look at ourselves very carefully here, don't we? Before we condemn Solomon too harshly, we need to be careful ourselves that we are not following in his footsteps. And we need to ask ourselves: Is there some aspect of God's law that we are disregarding? Is there something we are doing, thinking we can hide it from God, thinking that we can handle it, thinking we can get away with it? And it might not be some pagan idol-worshipping woman who pulls us away from God! It might be school, or a job, a hobby, good food, alcohol of some kind, a cabin up north, a car - it might be anything. And it might not be some big, huge frontal attack on our faith. It might be something that tries to slip in unnoticed. In the computing world, we think of a "backdoor," where some programs or systems have a vulnerability that's often hidden or unknown by most users. Satan will often use the back door. It might not always a full-blown frontal attack, but it's often something seemingly small, he gets his foot in the door, and he worms his way in. Yesterday, a friend posted a meme online that said, "The devil doesn't come to you with his ugly, red face and scary horns. He comes to you disguised as everything you've ever wanted." Satan will take advantage of every weakness.

Solomon's weakness was his love for these foreign women. Perhaps he thought that he was immune from this particular sin. Maybe he thought that this law just applied to other people (kind of the way some of us might think about the rules of the road). I think about driving in the mountains out by my sister's place. Coming down those mountain roads, sometimes there's a sign that warns about a series of curves up ahead: Caution, 35 MPH! But we might rationalize: That's for average drivers. I'm much better than average, so that caution doesn't apply to me! It's easy to do the same thing with scripture. I know how the Bible warns about alcohol, but that doesn't apply to me. I know how the Bible warns about being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but I am stronger than that. I know what the Bible teaches about the sin of gossip, but I really need to share this I just heard. But in hindsight, Solomon would remind us that pride goes before destruction.

- III. As we continue with this passage from 1 Kings 11, there is another step in King Solomon's fall: He started with every advantage, he decides to disregard one part of God's law, and starting in verse 4, we find that by the time Solomon is an old man, his HEART IS DIVIDED.

Let's notice 1 Kings 11:4-8,

***<sup>4</sup> For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. <sup>7</sup> Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. <sup>8</sup> Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.***

So we notice here that some time goes by. He marries Pharaoh's daughter very early on, perhaps in his early 20's, then he goes on to marry hundreds more, and then we come to verse 4, where we are told that Solomon is now **"old."** And by the time he gets to be old, his many wives had **"turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God."** And then we find that he actually follows the other Gods! He **"went after"** these other gods, and he **"did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,"** and he **"did not follow the Lord fully"** as David his father had done. And even beyond this, he actually builds altars for these gods.

So he starts out as king with the blueprints of God's temple on his desk, but by the time he is an old man, he now has these other blueprints spread out on his desk. So he's not just tolerating what his wives are doing at this point, but now he is supporting them in this; he is now actively pursuing these gods. Solomon has now bought in to this idea that we see around us today that one religion is just as good as any other, and his heart is now divided. The worship of Ashtoreth involves the use of temple prostitutes. The worship of Milcom involves child sacrifice - burning children alive on these altars to appease this particular god. Solomon built those altars! And notice (in verse 7) that he builds at least one of these pagan temples on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem. As I understand it, that is the Mount of Olives. So we have the temple of God and the temple of Molech facing each other, as if they are equal!

I hope we see the progression here. He starts well, but then he disregards God's law in one area, and by the time he is old, King Solomon's heart is divided. Did you notice how many times the word **"heart"** is used in this passage? I think I counted five times. His heart turned away from God. His heart was divided. By the time he's old, he is now violating the first and most important commandment, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"** (Deuteronomy 6:5). How did this happen? How did one of the most privileged kings in Israel's history end up not loving God with all his heart? It started small. It started when he decided to disregard one commandment. And the trajectory of that decision, over time, led him farther and farther away from God. Last week, I overheard two of my fellow elders discussing the magnetic declination here in Madison. I tried to stay out of it, because it was way over my head, but as I understand it, it's the idea that north on your compass is not necessarily north, because magnetic north moves around over time. The compass will always point north, but north isn't always north. Most maps, then, indicate this in some way. Here in Wisconsin, we are very close to where north is actually north. I believe that line where the compass matches our maps is somewhere over near Eau Claire and basically follows the Mississippi River. Out by my sister's place in Washington State, though, their north is nearly 20 degrees off.

Here in Madison, I think we're roughly 2 degrees off. But how big a deal is 2 degrees? Well, if I'm finding my way across this room, it's not a big deal. Over a great distance, though, it quickly becomes a big deal! If my fingers are spread out to 2 degrees, the trajectory of these two points might be 20 feet apart by the front door back there. But a block or two away, or a few miles away, those points might be miles apart. In a sense, this is what happens with King Solomon. His heart is divided, and over time, the results are devastating! He goes from loving God, to disregarding one of God's commandments, and ends up at a point where he is following other gods, even to the point of building altars of prostitution and child sacrifice right there in Jerusalem.

So, the lesson for us is: Sin has a trajectory. And over a lifetime, this trajectory takes us far away from where we need to be. Solomon was so far, in fact, that by the time he was an old man he had pretty much done everything that God had specifically told kings not to do! Hundreds of years before they even had a king, God gave a warning in Deuteronomy 17:14-17, where he said,

***<sup>14</sup> "When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' <sup>15</sup> you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. <sup>16</sup> Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' <sup>17</sup> He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.***

We look at what happens, and it's almost as if Solomon used this as a guide of what to do. He ended up doing exactly what God had warned about - he multiplied wives, multiplied horses, and stockpiled silver and gold. As a young man, Solomon probably never imagined going this far, but here he is doing exactly what God had warned him not to do. His heart is divided.

As we apply this to ourselves today, sometimes it's easy look at somebody else who has fallen, to look at somebody like Solomon, to look at somebody like Mr. Petraeus, and to say, "I would never do that!" But we need to look very carefully at the choices we are making right now. We need to look at that trajectory we're on, because those seemingly small choices we make right now may have a huge impact over a period of many years. That's what happened to Solomon. He loved what God said he couldn't have. And after a series of compromises, he comes to the last few years of his life, and he finds himself doing exactly what God condemns. His heart is divided. We think of James and how he condemns the ***"double minded man"*** who is ***"unstable in all his ways."*** If it can happen to Solomon, if it can happen to great military leaders today, then it can certainly happen to us.

#### **IV. And this leads us to the final stage here, and that is: DISASTER AND DESTRUCTION - FOR HIMSELF, AND ALSO FOR OTHERS.**

Notice, please, 1 Kings 11:9-13,

***<sup>9</sup> Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded. <sup>11</sup> So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the***

***kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup> Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.***

There are a few things to note here, starting with the reminder that this is now the third time that God speaks to Solomon. The first two were encouraging, but this time, God is **“angry,”** and this time God explains that because of Solomon’s sin, he would be tearing the kingdom away. It wouldn’t happen immediately, but it would happen during the reign of Solomon’s son. Solomon’s sin, then, leads to disaster and destruction - for himself, and also for others. Solomon is not the only one to be hurt by this. Sometimes we think that if we sin, it only affects us, but that is not the case. With Solomon, the whole nation suffered. His children suffered. Future generations suffered. What Solomon does here leads to a divided kingdom and eventually leads to the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivities. If you continue in verse 14 and read through the rest of this chapter, it’s basically a record of God raising up various enemies - one after the other - to bring Solomon down and to weaken the kingdom. Solomon’s choices had consequences. And today, when we sin, our choices also affect others - the body of Christ, our families, and our friends. So, what Solomon does here ends in destruction - for himself, and also for others.

### **Conclusion:**

As we come to the end of this passage, we need to ask the “So what?” question. What does all of this really mean for us? I would make two very brief observations:

1. **First of all, we learn from King Solomon how important it is to MAKE A CLEAN BREAK WITH SIN, TO TEAR DOWN THE HIGH PLACES.**

That’s what Solomon should have done. He should have torn down those altars he built. We can only imagine what his life would have been like if he had put God first and had never gone down that road. But having gone down that road, he still should have turned around. He should have torn down those altars.

In Galatians 5, Paul makes a contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit (there’s a list of bad things and then a list of good things), and then he says, **“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** He continues with a challenge, **“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”** But the point is: As Christians, we need to be crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires. That’s some strong language! As Christians, we cannot give in to sin, but we need to keep on struggling against it. And the sins Paul outlines there in Galatians 5 are **“sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”** If we give in, we end up like Solomon. I don’t know what you struggle with. I do know what I struggle with on that list. So, I’m hoping that today’s passage serves as a reminder to all of us: Let us not give in to sin. As Paul says in Romans 13:14, we are to, **“...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”** We are to **“crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.”** We cannot let things go, but we need to make every effort to make a clean break with sin, just as Solomon should have done.

2. **But as we close, there is something else we need to think about, and that is: GOD IS ALWAYS WILLING TO RESTORE ANYONE WHO IS WILLING TO REPENT AND RETURN.**

And I say this because of the punishment. If Solomon was so bad (which he was), why didn't God just strike him dead on the spot? Why not just remove Solomon and give the kingdom to Rehoboam immediately? Why did God even speak to Solomon again at all? I believe God was giving Solomon one more chance, one more opportunity to turn back. We don't know exactly how Solomon reacted to this, but we do have the closing verses of Ecclesiastes, where, near the end of his life, King Solomon finally seems to realize that, ***"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."*** Whether he lived that out at the end, we aren't really told. But as a wise man, he at least knew it. He understood what is truly important in this life.

And the point for us is: God is willing to restore if we are willing to repent, if we are willing to turn back. He is willing to save and forgive, if we are willing to turn to him in faith, trusting in the sacrifice of his Son. That trust is demonstrated in our obedience to the gospel. We turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, and we are raised up to live the Christian life. If you'd like to know more, we hope you'll get in touch. If you are on the wrong trajectory and need the prayers of the church to help you get back on track, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, we hope you'll let us know right now as we sing this next song together. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)