

## What's the Message – Lesson 57

Today we look at the decline of Solomon and the beginning of the divided kingdom.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that God would guide us to see that we could make the same mistakes Israel made at this particular point in their history if we think we have become so wise we no longer need the guidance of God, and turn our backs on Him. Amen.

In our last two lessons we have seen the glory days of King David, days that would be remembered by generation after generation of Israelites as the glory days of Israel, and they would long for the restoration of this kind of kingdom when the messiah came. But we also were seeing signs that this kind of material prosperity would not last. God had promised Solomon, in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 9, that if he would “walk in the ways of David, his father” the Lord would continue to bless him. But if the king and the nation would not keep the commandments of God and turn to other gods and worship them, then He would “cut off” Israel and bring evil upon them.

Solomon reaped the rewards of the conquests of David, and we read in chapter 10 of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings about the enormous wealth that flowed into the country. But it didn't stop with riches. No, Solomon also played the role of the politically smart middle-eastern monarch. He entered into treaties with the major kingdoms around him, and sealed those treaties by marrying a daughter of that king, including the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt.

This might have been smart politics in some eyes, but it was undisputable disobedience of the words God had previously proclaimed when He said, *You shall not enter into marriage with them . . . for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.* But Solomon had 700 wives, and many of these were princesses, and one could not insult all those wives and their nations with religious intolerance.

So tolerance became the order of the day. And this, of course, also applied to the children of the royal household. Many today would label those children as “spoiled brats”. These children, especially the son marked to succeed Solomon, were raised in a nation that began with a royal hierarchy that was at the top of a golden social ladder. And the difference between

that golden top and the masses at the bottom was not just a gap, it was a chasm.

This was most clearly seen when Solomon died, and his son Rehoboam became king. At his coronation, the people of Israel came to him and asked for relief from the forced labor and heavy taxes that Solomon had instituted. Rehoboam first consulted with the old men who had advised Solomon, received prudent counsel, but then turned to his luxury-spoiled cronies for their opinion.

Chapter 12 of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings gives us the outcome. Beginning with verse 13, we read: *And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel which the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."*

It was the final straw. The people revolted, and the northern 10 tribes broke away to follow the man who had at one time been Solomon's taskmaster. His name was Jeroboam, and he had become sick with the extremes of the forced labor he saw, and what he was made to do. Now he had become the leader of the opposition to this excess of royal luxury. The division of the united kingdom of Israel, that unity that King David had achieved under God, was now divided into north and south. The united Israel was no more.

And that, Teacher, brings us to a major milestone in the history of the Children of Israel. This was truly a major turning point for them, but what does it mean for us in our lives? Teacher, what's the message for us?

There are many things that could be said here, but I will choose only a couple of points to focus on. Solomon began his reign so well, asking God for wisdom and guidance to lead His people. But in his later years, Solomon would write in the second chapter of Ecclesiastes: *Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

This was the voice of a frustrated man, one who had learned a life that departed from God was an incomplete life, an empty life, regardless of how much material wealth one had acquired. Solomon may have lived nearly three thousand years ago, but this lesson has a very modern ring to it, and definitely applies to us today. Living our lives apart from our Savior will only bring us the same emptiness, the same conclusion that all is vanity, and a striving after the wind. We experience the joy and comfort of a complete life only when we are close to our Creator and Savior. It is only then that we can be certain that we can face any trial and challenge, because we know we will not face it alone.

The second point to be made is what we have been seeing throughout many chapters to date is a message of Law and Gospel. Yahweh is the one who created this universe and established the rules for His creatures to live by. And He will judge those who violate His rules. This is Law. But He is also the God who has acted on behalf of His people generation after generation because He loves His children. This is Gospel. The relationship that He desires is the one He described to Israel as Himself being the “bridegroom” and Israel being the “bride” . . . that with Yahweh at their side Israel was invincible, but without Him they would crumble into nothingness. Just as a bride loves her husband for all the goodness he has shown, so Israel should be a faithful wife, showing her love to God by keeping his commandments and not going after other false gods. It is the pattern that God requires of us today.

Next time we will look back and see how the “big picture” fits together.