



Studies in Bible Biography— Solomon

Topic for the August Consecration Meeting, under direction of the First Vice-President. (Week of August 6th.)
Suggested Lesson for the Meeting—1 Kings 8: 27-62.

We now come to the study of one of the most interesting characters of the Old Testament—a young man who came to the throne of Israel in the very zenith of her power and whose equipment and capacity of mind and heart were such as to ensure an eminently successful reign. But Solomon had a weakness. He nursed and coddled it, and eventually it wrought his downfall and split his kingdom in twain. In consequence his whole life is one continuous warning against high and luxurious living. The splendid characteristics of David's life still linger in your mind. Freshen them up and contrast or compare them as you will with the characteristics of Solomon, a mixer and a compromiser in respect of things holy and unholy with the inevitable disastrous result. Remember, however, that at the beginning of his career he was possessed with the endowment of exceptional talents. Wisdom and knowledge of a rare kind vouchsafed him by Jehovah, shrewdness, enterprise, ability to further his interests and accomplish his ends, and fine administrative talent, constituted him a monarch capable of developing the nation's resources and continuing the work along lines initiated by his father David.

To bring out the lessons from his life either of two methods might be used. You might throw the programme into the form of a debate. "Resolved, that Solomon contributed more to the development of the Kingdom of Israel than David," or, secondly, select certain phases of Solomon's character or reign and have them set forth in brief addresses by a number of young men of the society. If you adopt the first suggestion eliminate the desire to win and emphasize in all the addresses the moral issues involved. Perhaps your pastor might well sum up the debate and press the points home.

You have already much material for the negative side of the debate in the June Era. Solomon's character and reign might be summed under some or all of the following headings suggested in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible under Solomon:

1. *Name and Sources of Material.* The name Shelomoh (Solomon) means "peaceful," "pacific," and was probably intentionally given by David, who recognized that a long period of struggle should be followed by a reign of peace to ensure restoration and reconstruction of the nation's shattered forces. The sources of information in respect of the life and reign of Solomon are found in 1 Kings, Chapter 1-11, and 1 Chronicles, Chapter 21, 11, Chronicles, Chapter 15. These chapters afford an interesting character study. Read them.

2. *Birth, Parentage and Education.*—Solomon was either the second or fourth child of David and Bathsheba, and was, without doubt, the most promising member of the family group. His education was probably carried on within the palace, where he had every opportunity of

equipping himself to worthily succeed his father. At the same time, the conditions prevailing in the household of a despotic Oriental potentate, where of necessity there were many dissensions and exhibitions of passions were not conducive to healthy moral development. No doubt Bathsheba, who possessed a strong personality, as well as being a beautiful woman, and possibly Nathan, played a large part in his training.

3. *Commencement of his reign and his request for wisdom.*—For an account of Adonijah's rebellion, see 1 Kings 2: 13-35. In discussing Solomon's sentence of death on Joab and Shimei, we must consider the age in which he lived, and the extreme cruelty and revenge that was practised by the surrounding Oriental monarchs. Thus far the King had combined mildness with strength, and was in a fair way to become the idol and the people. To cement the bond, he called the heads of the people together at Gibeon, and there offered in thanks to God a thousand burnt offerings. It was also here that in a dream he received from Jehovah the promise of wisdom and knowledge, wealth and honor, and conditionally on his obeying the Divine law, length of days. This wisdom gave him a wonderful insight into human nature, and splendidly qualified him to act as supreme judge in the many disputes throughout Israel. See 1 Kings 3: 16-28.

4. *His Home and Foreign Policy.*—Solomon in some measure was a statesman. His aim was to maintain peace at home and to strengthen himself abroad by foreign alliances. Of these the treaty with Hiram, King of Tyre, and the Egyptian alliance were the most important. He married the daughter of Pharaoh who became at once by virtue of her education and accomplishments, and continued to be the chief personage in his harem. His natural tastes to live a luxurious life were no doubt strengthened by this mesalliance. And while these treaties opened up avenues for the expansion of trade and commerce and broadened the life and stimulated the activity of the Hebrew people so as to make this reign the period of greatest material progress in the history of Israel, the effects were disastrous upon the moral and religious life of the people.

His domestic policy might be summed up in the one word "concentration." The tribal system with its rights and privileges was gradually weakened, and in time the King became an absolute potentate. For a time everything went well. But Solomon, entrusted with unlimited power, was bound to abuse it. He became intensely selfish. He gloried in wealth and power and splendour and fame. To realize his ends he devised means offensive to the tribal leaders and oppressive in respect of the poor. He exacted increased taxes, and practically resorted to slavery many of the common people. His immense buildings, elaborate furnishings, large retinue and many wives and concubines were expensive luxuries—and the yoke became intolerable. Disruption was bound to come. See 1 Kings 12: 1-16.

5. *His wisdom, wealth, and glory.*—Although Solomon possessed wisdom, it was not such a wisdom as to include permanently to any large measure the fear and love of God. In integrity and

righteousness, David, notwithstanding his many weaknesses, far surpassed him. But in quick discernment and practical sagacity in the acquiring of knowledge and culture, and in the solving of riddles and speaking of proverbs, Solomon was a master. His wealth was immense. It is said (1 Kings 10: 14, 2 Chron. 9: 13), that his annual revenue was 666 talents of gold, equal in Canadian money to \$19,929,000. This is quite a moderate income, and easily accounts for the lavish display and expenditure of wealth for which his court was noted. The glory of Solomon was not of the highest order. It was not the glory of excellence of character and unselfishness in service, but rather of pomp and show and glitter, which so strongly appeals even to-day to the Oriental mind.

6. *The causes of his downfall.*—We say downfall, for, while personally Solomon did not see the division of his kingdom, the oppression and injustice of his reign resulted at his death in the break-up, which is inevitable in every kingdom under similar conditions. Overtaxation of the common people, lavish expenditure and luxurious living, licentiousness at court, intense selfishness, dishonoring God, self-degradation,—all these contributed to his loss of popularity and ultimately to the overthrow of the united kingdom.

Solomon offers perhaps the greatest character study in the Old Testament. His splendid opportunities, magnificent talents, and natural ability were all sacrificed to mere pleasure, pomp and luxury. He staked his all and lost. With all his wisdom, he failed at the decisive hour to choose those things which are first and absolutely essential to real success.

Prayer and Nation Building

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IT is impossible! I do not believe that John took that Two Hundred Dollars; he could not do it," said an employer to a detective, who had charged his employee with stealing from a locked till. "But," answered the detective, "All the evidence is against him; there are only two keys, and he has both of them. He had every opportunity; he was alone in the office at the time and admits that he opened the till to put money into it. He also found the empty cash box when we were searching for it. No one else, as far as we can find out, knew anything about the money excepting yourself, and you would not steal your own money. I will arrest him."

"No," said John's employer, "I cannot appear against him. I would defend him."

"Why do you speak so positively?" asked the detective.

"Well, the fact is, that boy has stated times for prayer."

"I have accidentally found him praying, and a boy who keeps company with God could not steal."

The money was not found. Years after the thief confessed that while John was out of the office for a few minutes, he slipped in, and with a key which he had made for the purpose unlocked the till, took the cash box, and after putting the money into his pocket, hid the box where John found it.

John's prayer life saved him. He continued to work and pray. The business grew. When his employer wished he sell out, he sold to John, giving him easy terms. John prospered. He is to-day one of our foremost business citizens and his beautiful family are wielding an influence which enriches the commercial, political and religious life of our nation.

If every boy and girl kept company with God would they become rich and