



A Course

In

**GENERAL
BIBLE**

PART THREE

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

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Pineland, Florida 33945

CHAPTER ONE

SOLOMON, REHOBOAM

Scripture Reading: I Kings 1 - 12

Solomon is one of the most brilliant and most tragic figures in all history. This is God's most impressive and signal warning against taking the sham for the true and against moral decay. Solomon, "Shelomoh" (Hebrew word) means "Peaceful", called also "Jedidiah" meaning "Beloved of Jehovah" born in Jerusalem, youngest son of David and Bathsheba, was chosen by David as his successor and to forestall the ambitions of Adonijah, was proclaimed king before David's death. David had built and cemented the kingdom and on these foundations Solomon reared a splendid structure of national prosperity, unsurpassed in Israelitish history. He did not extend the nation's boundaries, but conserved and strengthened it both externally and in a material and intellectual way internally. He reigned forty years in luxury and splendor, the "Golden Age" as it seemed of Israel and he died about 931 B.C.

1. His Equipment. Solomon had the prestige of his father's successes, was the chosen heir, and was favored by the priesthood, prophetic order and the army. Still more, he had an appreciation of the demands and duties of his position, "who is able to judge this thy so great people?" He began his reign with due and unaffected modesty, "I am but a little child." He had been reared amid the manipulations of the court; he was not a beginner in statecraft for he had seen the workings of successful management in the very movement which had made him the unquestioned king. His realization of his need is a gleam of that native shrewdness which ripened into the mature sagacity of Israel's "wisest" king. He was a worshipper of Jehovah, not only in splendor and pomp, but also in his heart. Sadly, this religious experience did not go deep enough. No one could have a dream like his at Gibeon who has not thought much on his duty to God and man. So we see Solomon, not only as the shrewd quick wit that solved such questions as that between the two women who claimed the child, but "the understanding which enabled him

to surround himself with able counselors and to "make himself solid" with surrounding kings. As the writer and subject of **Ecclesiastes** and the **Song of Solomon**, and the writer of **Proverbs**, his literary power was remarkable. Jehovah's words were fulfilled "none like thee before thee, neither after thee." He exceeded all the kings of the earth in wisdom.

2. His Achievements. He carried out his father's instructions concerning those who menaced his realm's internal security and punished offenders. He fortified the borders where strengthening was necessary to resist aggression. Only once he made war, to squelch the possible-war-fever of the King of Hamath on the north. He organized his country internally by dividing the land into twelve administrative districts, disregarding tribal lines. The army too was maintained at full strength. He strengthened the nation religiously by building the temple, magnificently supporting the worship, and publicly leading it. He built store-cities at important points. His palace building and garden construction were extensive. All kinds of commerce he systematically and successfully fostered. He sent caravans and ships to Ophir in Arabia and to India. He also had a league with the King of Tyre. Foreign wealth poured into his realm, and every sort of quaint curious and costly import increased his splendor and magnificence. Vassal kings sent him yearly tribute. In other ways, his intellectual ability worked appropriate results. He excelled in the sayings of pith, point, and puzzlement, so popular then. He was a distinguished scientist, of the observant and imaginative sort, though hardly of present day precision and insight. He was a naturalist of wide range; he knew of trees, beasts and birds. His fame was international – "there came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon." The splendor of his realm, the royal wealth, pomp, magnificence, grew with his advancing reign, till nothing in the country's history could equal it. The encyclopedia *Britanica* was modeled after his wisdom.

3. His Failure. Solomon, like all of us, was judged by the test of natural and spiritual laws. He was weighed in the balances and found wanting. Part of his failure was caused through external causes, but most was inward. First his religion was not deep enough; we get no hint of profound personal piety, like that which moved the imperfect, wave-tossed heart of David. He wanted wisdom, but it was worldly wisdom to administer affairs, not wisdom to know God in the secret places; still less a yearning like David's for a clean heart and a right spirit.

Second, the shallowness of his wisdom and the coldness of his religion combined with his political sagacity and his intellectual broad-mindedness to make him blind to moral and spiritual dangers before him and his people. According to I Ki. 11:3-4, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Polygamy is the born foe of spirituality; we see that with David. But with Solomon polygamy became not only a means of sensual gratification, but also an ornament of national splendor through the size of his harem as an instrument of international diplomacy, by numerous foreign alliances. Broad-mindedness led to religious laxity. He never abandoned Jehovah; but he did what is always spiritually perilous, he compromised. This, good pure diplomacy at first; these foreign princesses, his wives, must have their religion with their altars, and their sacrifices; to deny them would not be good foreign diplomacy; and some of these consorts softened him toward their religion. So there is Solomon, "Beloved of Jehovah", the very purpose of whose nation and kingship is to preserve the pure religion of the one true God, officially sanctioning the licentious, bloody male and female deities of the heathen.

Third, his wealth rather than strength was weakness because it was not distributed properly. While it made the king and nobles richer, it made the people poorer and the rank injustices that it contained made the revolution which came under Rehoboam. The money for Solomon's building, pomp, fortifications, etc. came from galling taxation. Worse yet, much of the labor for his vast enterprises was conscripted labor. His very splendor enslaved his people.

4. Rehoboam's act, served as the last straw that caused the back of a patient people to break. On Solomon's death, Jeroboam, to whom God

had promised the rulership of the Ten Tribes returned from Egypt to lead a group of Israelites to the court to demand that the taxes be reduced. The haughty Rehoboam, ignoring the advice of his father's old advisors, answered, "I will add to your yoke. My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." To show their contempt for the House of Judah, the people stoned Rehoboam's chief collector, and the break was now complete and final. The Northern ten tribes were now called "Israel" and the Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were called "Judah."

5. The Political Effect of the Division. Internally, the situation was unfortunate. From now on the nation was divided into two hostile nations, ready for warfare at the least provocation. Only once did they unite against a common foe. Israel never succeeded in establishing a permanent government; Judah fared better because of the sure mercies of David, hence it was in possession of the capital and the Temple. Bearing in mind also, that one of the highways of the nations ran through Palestine and that this land was one of the coveted prizes of Israel's neighbors, we can see what effect this separation had upon its political history as far as its contact with other nations. A weak people at best, unable to cope with their foes when divided and warring against each other, they fell as easy prey to every enemy. In addition, as one of the other parties in the controversy was hard pressed, they called upon outside help to deliver them. In consequence the Syrian, Assyrian and Egyptian were introduced into the quarrel and soon provided their undoing.

6. The Religious Effect of the Division. Separation from the Temple resulted in the utter contamination of the religious life of the Northern Kingdom. Knowing how deep-seated religion was in the Jewish heart and fearing that the longing for the temple would gradually alienate his people from him, Jeroboam introduced a new form of religion which was a mixture of Jehovah worship and Baal worship (heathonism). At Bethel and at Dan he erected sanctuaries and placed in them images of bulls as objects of worship. The result was that Israel was soon steeped in idolatry, from which it never recovered. (This of course, does not mean that there were not some who remained faithful to Jehovah for in the days of Ahab, Elijah was told that there were still 7,000 who had not bowed the

knee to Baal, I Kings 19:18, but more and more as time went on, idolatry prevailed.)

In the Southern Kingdom, although idolatry made great inroads, it never became so deeply rooted as in the north. Still, contact with the Northern Kingdom, and with the heathen nations called in from without to champion their cause, eventually undermined the pure religion. Thus disobedience to Jehovah in not keeping aloof from the heathen round about, led to idolatry. This in turn undermined faith in Jehovah's ability to help and in the belief that Syria, Assyria or Egypt alone could save. Having chosen the help of man rather than God, Judah falls into the hand of its supposed helpers and goes into captivity for seventy years to learn that "...the Lord, He is God, there is none else beside him ." (Deut. 4:35)

7. The Prophets. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, the Lord sent warnings and reproofs to the people by the mouth of His prophets and in order to gain a clear understanding of the history of those days, it is necessary to read the writings of these faithful men. "The Lord testified . . . by all the prophets, and by all the seers", – warning, reproof, entreating His erring people. But largely in vain. "We have the written records of four prophets who tried to save Israel from Assyria, and failed," – Jonah, Amos, Hosea and Micah. Joel, Isaiah and Nahum succeeded in rescuing Judah from the power of Assyria; but Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah failed in their effort to save Judah from captivity to Babylon. In general, the result of their work is well expressed by the sorrowful question of Isaiah, "Who hath believed our report?"

END OF SAMPLE