

## CONSEQUENCES

### 1 Kings 11

We've been looking on Sunday mornings at Solomon and this evening we come to the last in this short series, the end of his story. But of course it's not really the end. There were consequences. He left a legacy and in spite of the splendour of his reign he had sown the seeds of division and unrest.

Chapters 5 to 8 concentrate on the preparations for the building of the temple and the dedication of the temple once it was completed. It was the end of a crucial phase in Solomon's life and in chapter 9 the LORD appeared to him again with promises and warnings.

Verses 4 to 7: 'As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command 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.'

Last week we noted that the historian wants us to read between the lines. The rest of chapter 9 through to chapter 11 round off the story of Solomon, but now what was obliquely hinted at earlier becomes more obvious. We don't have to read between the lines. The lines themselves are clear enough.

Most of all, the historian wants us to read against the background of God's law. Listen to these words from Deuteronomy chapter 17.

<sup>14</sup> 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," <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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 has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." <sup>17</sup> He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. <sup>18</sup> When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.'

There are four things in the law, there in Deuteronomy, that the king must *not* do. They have to do with acquiring great numbers of horses, returning to Egypt to get them, taking many wives, and accumulating large amounts of silver and gold.

In chapters 5 to 8 there is much to applaud – the building and dedication of the temple, increased wealth and prosperity, but from chapter 9 onwards a different side to the story emerges.

Back in 4:26 we read, 'Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses.' 9:19 tells us that he built towns 'for his chariots and for his horses'. 10:25 and 26 inform us that, 'Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. 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.'

In chapter 3 of 1 Kings we saw the seeds of compromise being sown. Verse 1: 'Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter.'

Politically, that was an astute move. An alliance with Egypt gave him a very powerful hand and it wasn't just an agreement on paper. It was an agreement sealed in a very personal relationship. The problem was that it was contrary to the will of God.

Now in 10:28 we read, 'Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt.' Egypt was the place God had delivered the people *from* and told them never to return *to*. Solomon ignored all that.

By chapter 11 the consequences of Solomon's earlier decisions become clear. Verses 1 and 2: 'King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter —Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.' And sure enough they did turn his heart after other gods. That's number 3 in the things kings should avoid, listed in Deuteronomy.

And what was number 4? Accumulating large amounts of silver and gold. Chapters 6 and 7 refer to gold 15 times, each time in connection with the fabulous furnishings of the temple.

But when we reach chapters 9 and 10 we find more and more references to gold.

1Kgs. 9:11 'King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and pine and gold he wanted.'

1Kgs. 9:14 'Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold.'

1Kgs. 9:28 '[Solomon's fleet] sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.'

1Kgs. 10:2 'Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan —with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones —[the queen of Sheba] came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.'

1Kgs. 10:10 'And she gave the king 120 talents of gold'

1Kgs. 10:11 'Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir.'

1Kgs. 10:14 'The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents.'

1Kgs. 10:16–18 '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. Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.'

1Kgs. 10:21 '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.'

1Kgs. 10:22 '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 and ivory, and apes and baboons.'

1Kgs. 10:25 'Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift —articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.'

You can't miss it, can you, the obsession with gold. Someone has said that while God has a kingdom Satan has a 'thingdom'. Throughout the Bible we are warned about wrong relationships, looking for the wrong things in the wrong places, the lust for money.

Way back in chapter 2 of 1 Kings we saw evidence of worldly wisdom, brutality, the establishment of power by simply killing off the opposition. God graciously mitigated against that tendency in Solomon.

Chapter 4 of 1 Kings mainly describes Solomon's administration but there is an emphasis on the way his prosperity was shared by the people. Verse 20: 'The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.' Verse 25: 'During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.'

But now those early evidences of selfishness and insensitivity reappeared. The queen of Sheba said, 'How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!' (10:8). And no doubt they were, but that could not be said for everyone. Chapter 10 describes the influx of luxury items that were for the benefit of the king and his courtiers, not the common people. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne, the consequences of this indulgency became clear.

'Jeroboam ... and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labour and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you"' (12:3, 4).

All our decisions have consequences and it's not only we who have to live with them.

Throughout the book of Kings there is a contrast with another king, and that was David.

Listen to Solomon's words in 3:6. 'You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart.' Listen to God's word to Solomon in 3:14. 'If you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.' And again in 9:4,5. 'As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command 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.'

David was not perfect, but he loved the LORD with all his heart and never turned to false gods.

David's devotion and obedience had consequences beyond his own life which Solomon benefited from, and which every king after him benefited from, in spite of their sinfulness. Our lives can have good consequences as well as bad ones.

But finally, as we come round this table we must think of the consequences of another life, another king, one who was tempted in all points as we are, yet was without sin. Today we celebrate the eternal consequences of his sinlessness, his selflessness, his sacrifice, his love.