

“Faithless Love”

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Seventh in a series on King Solomon

1st Kings 3.1; 11.1-13, 41-43

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Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Solomon's is a love story. It begins with love. It ends with love. Throughout it, he loves. For better and for worse, he is a lover.

You and me, we are lovers.

Right at the beginning of his reign, young and inexperienced Solomon had one thing going for him. He loved **God**.

As king of God's beloved People, **Israel**, he wanted to show his love for God and his love for them by ruling well. So Solomon asked God for one thing. **Wisdom**. Wisdom is knowing how things work, how life works. Wisdom is having a “listening mind.” Wisdom is knowing what is good, and not good.¹

Of all Solomon could have asked for, he asked for wisdom. God loved that. So God gave him wisdom. God also promised him the **wealth** he had not asked for, the **fame** he had not asked for, and the **long life** he had not asked for.

II

Solomon used his God-gifted wisdom well.

Solomon wisely **judged** disputes between people.

Solomon wisely brought **prosperity** to the nation. (Also, remember God's promise of **wealth**? Solomon became very wealthy.)

Solomon inherited his father David's **empire**. He wisely ran it, governing the many nations beyond Israel that were under his authority.

Solomon wisely built a strong **military**, acquiring state-of-the art weapon systems (chariots and horses).

Solomon wisely grew in **knowledge**. He studied God's creation. He wrote philosophy and

¹ 1 Kings 3:9.

literature. He pondered the deep questions of life. (Also, remember God's promise of **fame**? Solomon became famous for his knowledge.)

Solomon wisely engaged in **diplomacy**. He formed alliances with neighbouring powers.

Solomon wisely built **buildings**. He made massive investments in infrastructure.

Especially, Solomon wisely built the **Temple**. It was the first building dedicated to worshipping the one Lord of Israel and all creation. Solomon loved **God**.

He acted wisely.

III

Too often, however, Solomon used his wisdom unfaithfully.

Yes, Solomon used his wisdom to judge. But did things become more **just**? Did people become more **right with God** (that's righteousness)? Justice is about much more than the "justice system." Righteousness is about much more than making the right offerings, or having the right theology, or even building the best Temple. Sadly, Solomon's reign did not see a flowering of justice nor righteousness.²

Yes, Solomon used his wisdom to build. But the building was done by **people forced to work**. They were drafted from the nations he controlled. He conscripted labour from God's People. That was unfaithful to God who frees people from bondage.

Yes, Solomon used his wisdom to grow the economy and made himself rich. **Excessively rich**. Over-the-top rich. Wastefully rich.³ The Bible warns against kings who acquire excessive wealth.⁴ Solomon's wisely-gained and obscene wealth was unfaithful.

Yes, Solomon wisely strengthened the military. But the Bible warns against kings who "*acquire many horses*."⁵ Horses, and the chariots they pulled, were the tanks and fighter

² During her visit, the Queen of Sheba praised Israel's king and Israel's God. She said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." However, that phrase "justice and righteousness" is never used to describe what actually happened during Solomon's reign. See John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology Volume 1: Israel's Gospel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 577.

³ 1 Kings 10:14-25.

⁴ See Deuteronomy 17:14-20, a list of rules for kings. First Kings 10:14-11:8 seem designed to show that Solomon violated these rules. 1 Kings 11:2 makes the link explicit.

⁵ Deuteronomy 17:16.

jets of the ancient world. Solomon entered the international arms trade and purchased thousands of **horses and chariots**.⁶ His embrace of militarism was unfaithful.

IV

The Bible also warns against kings who acquire many wives.

You heard. Seven hundred **wives!** In case all of them were busy, Solomon had 300 unofficial wives too!

Where is the wisdom in that?

Diplomacy. International relations. Solomon used marriages to seal alliances. So many wives meant many, many, many alliances. He was wisely securing Israel's place in the community of nations. Using marriages for diplomacy was how royal families did things, until very recently.

The main issue here is not sexual ethics. It's these foreign relations. Solomon's alliances entangled Israel into the affairs of other peoples. That undermined Israel's purpose as God's People on God's mission for this world.⁷

Solomon "**loved**" his wives, it says. That's not about romance. I can't see how he knew any of them well enough to form a real relationship. No, here "love" means commitment, allegiance, loyalty.⁸ Solomon first "loved" God. Remember? Now we're told he "loved" his wives. Out of loyalty to them, he built **shrines**—worship places—for them, to their gods. Out of allegiance to them, he worshipped their gods. I'm sure he thought he can love the

⁶ 1 Kings 10:26-29. The Deuteronomy rules specifically warn against purchasing armaments from Egypt. That's precisely where Solomon bought them.

⁷ Goldingay gets at the fundamental dynamics when he writes, "[Solomon's] marriages makes sense in the context of internal and external politics. They demonstrate to his own people that he is a world-class ruler, and significantly his first wife is the daughter of the Egyptian king, so that his marriages cement good relations with a major nearby world power. But prophets such as Isaiah will see alliance with Egypt as undermining the trust relationship between Israel and Yhwh, and Solomon's other marriages imperil the commitment to Yhwh that David safeguarded. Marrying Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite wives has the potential to encourage peaceful relations with these local peoples, but it also subordinates religion to politics as these marriages carry with them the obligation to make it possible for these women to continue their religious allegiance in Jerusalem. There is no necessary implication that Israelites start worshipping these other deities, but the mere existence of such worship within sight of Yhwh's house has a defiling effect on Yhwh's city." Gospel, 578.

⁸ "The language could elsewhere be the language of love. The words translated 'commit oneself / commitment' (*'ahab*, *'ahaba*) can mean 'love,' and the expression for 'join' (*bo*, *be*) is similar to the one for having sex with someone. The word for inclination (*lebab*) refers anatomically to the heart and can refer to emotions, and 'adhere' (*dabaq*) is the word for a man attaching himself to his wife (Gen 2:24). But here all these terms are the language of politics and religion." Ibid.

Lord, and also be loyal to these other allegiances, alliances, and commitments. But it can't work. His loyalty to them corroded his love for **God**.⁹

As the king went, so went the nation. Solomon unfaithfulness to his first love began a slide that lead all the people away from God.

V

We are all lovers. We are made to love — to give ourselves, to attach ourselves, to be loyal and committed, to serve.

What is your first love? What is your number-one? This “what” could be a who. Or a group of “who’s.” Or, your number-one love could be an activity, a dream, an idea, a lifestyle. It could be something you have or something you want. Your number-one love might be you, as you are or as you want to be.

Can you have more than one love? Of course. We love many people. We love many things. I love my spouse and I love learning both, but differently. I love summer, and I love my children, and I love the Blue Jays, and I love you, all and differently. Our loves are many, but each of us has one love that stands before all others. We pursue this one love. We sacrifice for this one love. We attach to this one love. We serve this one love. We are loyal and committed to this one love, above all others.

Our number one love, above anything else, shapes us. We become what we love. All our other loves, we love in the light of this first love. Or in its shadow. Our first love might let us love our other loves rightly and well. Or, our first love might blind us from truly loving our other loves. (For example, that’s what an addiction does.)

VI

God was Solomon’s first love. But later, his first love became . . . what? Wisdom? Loving wisdom is not wrong . . . unless it becomes number-one. Then we see how Solomon came to use his wisdom unfaithfully. Did his fame become his number-one? His wealth? His power? His success? His monuments? His Temple?

I suspect Solomon was tempted by all of them. They are all enticing. It is his multitude of wives, though, that most-dangerously drew him away from God. I am sure he wanted to please them and keep strong the allegiances they represented. I expect he loved the status of having so many. He might have loved a few of them personally. And don’t forget the “benefits.”

⁹ “Solomon committed himself to many foreign women’ stands in some tension with ‘Solomon committed himself to Yhwh’ (1 Kings 3:3; 11:1).” Ibid. If anything, I’d say Goldingay understates it.

Solomon shifted God from being his number-one love. Everything started to fall apart. Solomon's reign was the high point of Israel's existence as a nation among the nations. But with him began a downward slide of disasters that almost destroyed it.

VII

But! Time and again, God loves the likes of Solomon, and the likes of us, who cannot get our loves straight.

When God is our number-one love, other loves flourish. They are in a right relationship with God whom we love first. Instead, we put other loves first, out of order. Then all our loves are disordered. We suffer, others suffer, and our world suffers.

Still! God loves us. God attaches to us. God commits to us. God seeks us. God saves us. Jesus is God's love offered, given, poured out and sacrificed. For us! We who are disordered, suffering, failed lovers. God takes us—broken, unfaithful, hardened, disordered. God saves us. God remakes us.

God is making you into a lover. Someone who finally loves God first. And so loves other people, and other things (like wisdom), as they need to be loved.

I strongly advise, though, that if marriage is your thing, stick to one.

Not 700.