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DON'T LET GOD'S BLESSINGS TAKE YOU OUT OF GOD'S CHURCH

All of us like to be blessed by God. It is a joyful thing to receive God's blessings. We are all familiar with Solomon's statement that "**the blessing of the Eternal, it makes rich**, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

In addition to blessing us with adequate amounts of financial resources, enabling us to live comfortably, God at times also blesses some individuals with status and with recognition for achievements. God may elevate people to certain positions, perhaps less so today than in Old Testament times, when God was working specifically with the nations of Israel.

Whatever form God's blessings may take, the greater they are, the greater the possibility that those very blessings **could** become a pressure for people to depart from God's truth, and to leave God's Church altogether. It doesn't have to turn out that way, but those blessings can at times become a temptation to become proud and conceited, or to become covetous, selfish and greedy. This was the case for a number of individuals in Old Testament times, that **the blessings God gave them led to them rejecting God's laws and instructions**. And likewise, over the years I have known people who left God's Church after they became wealthy, relatively speaking.

So let's look at some examples in the Bible of people who left God's ways after God had blessed them.

KING SOLOMON

Solomon was somewhere around 14-18 years old when he became king. He reigned for 40 years, and when he died he was about 54-58 years old. So Solomon died at a fairly young age. It is clear that Solomon did not die of a sickness or a disease or an accident or as a victim of some crime or plot. Solomon in fact died **a natural death** while he was still in his mid-50's.

The 5th commandment, which says "honor your father and your mother **that your days may be long** upon the land which the Eternal your God gives you", clearly didn't work for Solomon. When anyone dies **a natural death** below the age of 60 years, in a society where a lifespan of 70-80 years is fairly common, then that person is assuredly **not being blessed by God**. That's the principle of Psalm 90:10, which states:

The days of our years *are* **threescore years and ten**; and if by reason of strength *they be* **fourscore years**, yet *is* their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

So Solomon died in a state of not being blessed by God. What happened?

When Solomon first became king he "loved the Eternal" and he "walked in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3). At that time God also loved Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24). And at that time Solomon was assuredly still heading for the blessing attached to the 5th commandment.

But there was already, within the first few years of his rule as king (i.e. by the time he was around age 20 years), the beginning of a potential problem, and that potential problem was idolatry. How was that?

When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1), **he was marrying a pagan**, which meant that Solomon voluntarily chose to be "unequally yoked" with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). And so at Solomon's time the people in Israel "sacrificed in high places" (1 Kings 3:2), something they should not have been doing, because that was a part of paganism. And Solomon did the same. As verse 3 tells us: "... only **he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places**".

That was not something Solomon had learned from his father David.

The word "only" in verse 3 introduces something Solomon did that was not right. Solomon should not have done that, because **that was an idolatrous practice**. Anyway, Solomon was still young and God then appeared to him in a dream, and God said to Solomon "ask what I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5).

We all know about the humble attitude Solomon had at that time, readily acknowledging that he was still "a little child", that he was still quite immature (verse 7). Solomon then asked God for an understanding heart (verse 9), so that he might rule wisely and justly. God granted Solomon's request, and God also gave him great wealth, something for which Solomon had not asked.

But note also verse 14, where God said:

And **if** you will walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did walk, **then I will lengthen your days**. (1 Kings 3:14)

In this dream **God offered Solomon a long life!** But this was a conditional "if ..." offer from God. God was saying: then I will give you a longer life than the 70 years that your father David lived. When Solomon then died somewhere around his mid-50s, this proves very obviously that God had not lengthened Solomon's days. The reason for God not lengthening Solomon's life was that Solomon himself did not keep God's commandments and statutes and ways. Solomon had allowed himself to be drawn into idolatry, and **therefore God only gave Solomon a short life**.

Now after Solomon had ruled for 20 years, building the Temple (7 years) and then his own palace (13 years), exactly halfway through his 40-year reign, God appeared to him a second time (1 Kings 9:2). By this time Solomon was around 34-38 years old and no longer "a little child". By this time he had started to accumulate many wives, mostly foreign princesses, **all of whom were pagans**. So now God speaks to Solomon in a different tone.

God still says, paraphrased: if you walk before Me as your father David did, then I will bless you. But then **God added a warning**, something God had not done in the first dream. At the start of Solomon's reign there had been no need to give Solomon this kind of warning.

People who are truly humble before God don't need to be warned against sinning against God. It is when that humility starts to fade away, that then we need to be warned.

So here in the second dream God added the warning: "**but if you shall at all turn from following Me** ..." (1 Kings 9:6). This warning should tell us that halfway through his reign Solomon was no longer quite as humble and quite as committed to God, as he had been as a teenager. God only gives warnings when those warnings are needed. It should be clear that already **in his mid-30's Solomon needed a serious warning from God**.

We need to understand **why** God appeared to Solomon a second time. **If** Solomon had still been 100% committed to walking before God as his father David had done, **then** God would not have appeared to Solomon a second time! God appeared a second time to Solomon precisely because Solomon was starting to go off the tracks in his relationship with God. That was the very specific reason why God

appeared a second time to him.

God had done exactly the same thing with Cain, when Cain had started to harbor thoughts of murder against his brother Abel. God had then spoken to Cain to warn him.

When people with whom God is working start to go the wrong way, **then God gives them a warning!** That's the way God deals with the people He is calling and teaching and training. Early in His dealings with mankind God sometimes gave those warnings Himself. Later God used His prophets to deliver such warnings to the people of Israel. That's the purpose for which God sets up watchmen, to warn people of impending penalties, if they don't change. And almost always in the past people have not responded to those warnings. And that is also basically the way it still is today, that overwhelmingly people do not respond to God's warnings.

So understand that when God appeared to Solomon a second time, then that was **a serious indication** that something was not right with Solomon.

All his foreign pagan wives were starting to affect Solomon's commitment to the God of Israel. Solomon was in effect of his own free choice **surrounding himself with pagans**. That was not good. Solomon was not heeding his own advice of Proverbs 13:20 ... that "walking with" the wrong people can destroy us.

So God warned him, much like God had warned Cain before Cain killed his brother Abel (see Genesis 4:7). And even as with Cain, so also with Solomon, God's warning went unheeded. As we are told, "King Solomon loved many strange women" which turned away his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:1-2). (For "strange women" read "pagan women".) This is spelled out plainly two verses later.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, **that his wives turned away his heart after other gods:** and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. (1 Kings 11:4)

The expression "when Solomon was old" refers to perhaps the last four to eight years of his life. In other words, **Solomon was "old" when he hit age 50 years**, something that is easy for us to overlook. Solomon never even reached the age of threescore years, let alone threescore years and ten.

As far as the above Scripture is concerned, **Solomon got involved in paganism**. He in fact went "after Ashtoreth" and "after Milcom", and in that way "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Eternal" (1 Kings 11:5-6).

Solomon, who had built the Temple for God, then ended up building **pagan shrines** for "Chemosh" and for "Molech". He in fact did "likewise for all his strange (pagan) wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods" (1 Kings 11:7-8).

Solomon had become a pagan, who "kept not that which the Eternal commanded" (1 Kings 11:10), and whose heart had been turned "after other gods". That's being a pagan! So obviously, "the Eternal was angry with Solomon" (1 Kings 11:9). Solomon's heart "had turned (away) from the Eternal God of Israel".

Solomon is a prime example of someone receiving **enormous blessings** and then turning away from following the true God. God had given Solomon great wisdom and discernment and also a staggering amount of wealth. In addition, God had accepted that Solomon could have more than one wife, even as his father David had married more than one wife. But Solomon very obviously was not supposed to go to extremes with how many wives he accumulated. And neither was he supposed to accumulate wives that were pagans.

So instead of strengthening Solomon's commitment to God, all **these blessings had the opposite effect!** They went to Solomon's head and appealed to his selfishness. He looked upon himself as important. He became **extremely vain**, where earlier he had been very humble.

How do I know that?

That's easy. In his later life Solomon couldn't brag enough about how great he was. In his own eyes he was the best and the greatest in everything. That kind of reminds me of one of our politicians today ... a person who can never resist the opportunity to brag, whatever the subject might be. That's also what Solomon was like in his fifty-something "old age".

In Ecclesiastes chapter 2 Solomon gives us a catalogue of **all his bragging rights**. In verses 1-9 Solomon uses the pronoun "I" 16 times, and then reaches the conclusion "**so I was great**". Can you picture King David saying "so I was great"? Hardly! Can you picture King David saying: lest you forget, here's a list of all my wonderful accomplishments? Hardly! **Does any true servant of God ever say "I am great"?** That's pure vanity! The correct godly picture is that "every man (including Solomon!) at his best state is altogether vanity" (see Psalm 39:5). But that was not how Solomon saw himself.

With his statement "I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem" Solomon was saying, and not at all subtly either, "**I was greater than my father David**", who happened to have been the only one "before him" in Jerusalem. Why didn't Solomon just use his father's name outright instead of the somewhat disguised expression "all that were before me in Jerusalem"? That's how vain people disguise their real meanings. At this stage of his life Solomon had **a huge ego**. And God very obviously did not lengthen Solomon's days.

We should also ask the question: why did Solomon even feel the need to compare himself to his father David, the person who had been in Jerusalem before him? What was Solomon trying to prove with these statements? If you reply that Solomon was just being objectively factual with these statements, then my answer is "baloney".

The same applies to Solomon's claim that "... **there is no new thing under the sun** ... it has been already of old time which was before us" (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10). Do you perhaps believe that this statement by Solomon is true? It isn't true at all.

That claim by Solomon is total garbage!

Solomon was just spouting off his arrogant opinion here, that's all. Solomon obviously had never heard of radio broadcasts, and bicycles, and photography, and TV, and batteries to store electric power, and flying in airplanes and in helicopters, and telephones, and video-conferencing, and submarines, and space stations, and wrist watches, and computers, and motor cars, and X-ray machines, and electric lights, and printed books and magazines, and retrieving information from the internet, and electric heating, and fridges and freezers, and dynamite, and guns, and DVD players, and washing machines, and electric stoves, and air-conditioning, and hang-gliding, and jacuzzis, etc., etc. **Solomon didn't even have the benefit of real toilet paper**, something we today find indispensable ... in Solomon's time toilet paper had not yet been invented. And he claims that there is nothing new on earth??

Now I am not saying that all of the above things are necessarily good or desirable. But they are all without contradiction "new" since the time of Solomon. And **there are thousands of other things that are also "new" since the time of Solomon!**

With the expression "under the sun" Solomon meant "**here on earth**". And for any of us to say that since Solomon's time there is nothing new here on earth is either willing ignorance or else genuine ignorance.

Consider a principle that God addressed after the flood, at the time of the tower of Babel. When people were building this tower, God said:

... Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and **now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.** (Genesis 11:6)

This statement by God reveals that there would in fact be an endless stream of "things that are new", that man would discover more and more and more things. And those discoveries would lead to more and more "new things".

Consider also God's statement that towards "the time of the end ... **knowledge shall be increased**" (Daniel 12:4). Increased knowledge also leads to "new things". "New knowledge" is not used to do "old things"; new knowledge is used to do new things.

Consider further the time context of Solomon's assertion. Solomon lived close to 1500 years after the flood. So at what point did there cease to be anything new? After Noah came out the ark, was anything new invented, made, created? Or was it already true at Noah's time that "there is no new thing under the sun"?

How about 100 or 200 or 300 years after the flood ... had the point then been reached that "there is no new thing under the sun"? Or was that point reached 1000 years after the flood? Precisely at what point in man's existence was the point reached where **from then onwards there would be "no new thing under the sun"**? Why should that point have been reached by the time of Solomon, approximately 1500 years after the flood?

"There is no new thing under the sun" is just a stupid, mindless mantra that any number of people throw at you because it fits in with their biases. And we are expected to simply accept it without a murmur.

They'll say: "well, you know, there's nothing new under the sun". And that is supposed to be proof for whatever point they are trying to make.

Let me be very plain here:

Solomon's "there is no new thing under the sun" statement is just **one of many anti-God statements** that Solomon makes in the Book of Ecclesiastes! That is something I explained at length in my 1996 article "Understanding The Book Of Ecclesiastes", and again in my 2001 article "Understanding The Writings Of Solomon". Both articles are still available on my website.

Listen!

God always wants progress! God looks for development. God does not want the present to continue ad infinitum. God starts the ball rolling by creating something (e.g. one pair of each animal species, etc.), and then God desires growth and development. God expected mankind to always think about how to do things better and more effectively, because that is what God Himself does, constantly making things better. The new heaven and the new earth will be absolutely "new" when they are created by God.

We are to grow in grace and in knowledge and understanding, and we are to produce fruit. It is to God's glory when we bear much fruit (John 15:8). And constantly seeking new ways to do something better or more effectively is a part of that process. God gave us **minds that have the ability to come up with original thoughts** and original ideas. And God wants us to use our minds. And using our minds then leads to many new things being developed by human beings.

Yes, of course, a great part of the "new things" we human beings have produced are destructive and detrimental to human life, and we would have been better off if those particular things had never been invented. But that doesn't mean that those things were not "new under the sun".

Not all the things that already existed at Solomon's time were good either. But they were still a part of "all the things under the sun" at Solomon's time in human history. Whether or not something is "a new thing" is not decided by whether that "thing" is good or bad. There are new things that are good, and there are other new things that are bad.

So Solomon's claim that there is "no new thing under the sun" is totally absurd! It denies reality and progress and development, and it also effectively denies God's statements in Genesis 11:6 and in Daniel 12:4.

But "there is nothing new under the sun" is the type of statement you might expect from **people who think they know it all**. Solomon couldn't deal with the thought that people after him might somehow have things or do things that he, Solomon, had never had or done or experienced. Such a possibility would threaten **the status in his own mind** that he was the greatest man to ever have lived.

Anyway, God never fulfilled His offer to lengthen Solomon's life in return for a real commitment to God on the part of Solomon. **The physical blessings God had bestowed on Solomon became Solomon's stumbling block.** And Solomon ended his life as a pagan who had built multiple pagan shrines right in Jerusalem. **Because of Solomon's evil conduct** God then took 10 tribes away from David's line of kings. That all by itself, taking ten tribes away from David's line, is proof that Solomon ended his life as a pagan. That was a penalty for Solomon's paganism.

Earlier in his life, but many years after God had already blessed Solomon with enormous wealth, Solomon had said: "give me neither poverty nor riches ... lest I be full and deny you, and say Who is the Eternal?" (Proverbs 30:7-9).

By the time Solomon wrote those words in Proverbs 30 God had already given Solomon great riches, and sure enough, **Solomon turned away from God**, not necessarily in word, but **in his actions**.

It is very sad to see how Solomon, a man who quite possibly had received greater blessings from God than any other human being, ended his relatively short life.

REGARDING SOLOMON'S AGE

Some people may wonder about Solomon's age, thinking that Solomon may have had a much longer life than I have stated in the above section. The Bible does not actually state Solomon's age in so many words. Rather, we have to piece the context of David's life together in order to see when Solomon was born.

The only time periods that are mentioned for Solomon himself are: he was king for **40 years** (1 Kings 11:42), and he took the first **20 years** of his reign to build the Temple and his own palace (1 Kings 9:10). That was when God appeared to Solomon a second time. We are also told that Solomon's son Rehoboam was **41 years** old when Solomon died (1 Kings 14:21).

The Jewish historian Josephus is notorious for exaggerating the facts in an attempt to make the Jewish people look good. It is not difficult to find gross errors in Josephus' accounts of biblical history. But obviously, many of the things Josephus states are also correct because those things are in agreement

with the biblical record. But certain other things in Josephus' writings are clearly wrong because they contradict the biblical record.

I mention this because I will now present what Josephus had to say about Solomon. Here are three quotations from "**Antiquities of the Jews**" by Josephus. All three quotations are about Solomon, and they are from three different chapters in Book 8 (my emphasis throughout).

And when **Solomon** his son, who **was but a youth in age**, had taken the Kingdom, and whom David had declared, while he was alive, the Lord of that people, according to God's will: when he sat upon the throne, the whole body of the people made joyful acclamations to him: as is usual at the beginning of a reign: and wished that all his affairs might come to a blessed conclusion; and that he might arrive at a great age, and at the most happy state of affairs possible. (Book 8, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1)

Hereupon all the people privately **laughed at the King, as no more than a youth**. (Book 8, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2)

So Solomon died when he was already an old man, having reigned eighty years, and lived ninety-four. He was buried in Jerusalem, having been superior to all other kings in happiness, and riches, and wisdom, excepting that when he was growing into years he was deluded by women, and transgressed the law; concerning which transgressions, and the miseries which befell the Hebrews thereby, I think proper to discourse at another opportunity. (Book 8, Chapter 7, Paragraph 8)

So Josephus twice stated that Solomon was "a youth" when he became king. And then Josephus stated that Solomon died at age 94 years after having reigned for 80 years. While the age of 14 years may have been reasonably correct for the start of Solomon's reign, the length of 80 years for his reign is obviously false and contrary to the biblical figure of 40 years. So correcting the figure of 80 years to 40 years, that brings us to Solomon's death at age 54 years. This figure may well be wrong by 3 or 4 years, but Solomon was definitely still a teenager when he became king, and therefore died before age 60 years.

Let's consider the biblical information.

David became king at age 30 years (2 Samuel 5:4). He reigned in Hebron for 7½ years and for 33 years in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:5). During his time in Hebron David had **six sons** by six different women (2 Samuel 3:2-5). These sons are very clearly identified as first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth.

By the time David moved to Jerusalem he was **close to 38 years old**. David then took "more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 5:13), and then many more sons and daughters were born to David. It then lists another **11 sons** that were born to David in Jerusalem. But these 11 sons are **not listed in birth order**, and neither are the names of the mothers of these additional 11 sons mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:14-16. After the first six sons, birth order was no longer significant. So while Solomon happens to be listed in fourth place in this list of 11 sons, Solomon was not the fourth in birth sequence amongst these 11 sons. As a matter of fact, the account of Solomon's birth is not arrived at till seven chapters later, in chapter 12.

In the next chapter, 2 Samuel 6, we have the account of David bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem and his wife Michal disrespecting him. By this time David was in his **early 40's**.

After several years of wars with the enemy nations around Israel, God eventually gave David a brief period of "rest around about from all his enemies" (2 Samuel 7:1). Now with those wars behind him David was in his **mid-to-late 40's**, and he desired to build a house for God. So David said this in so

many words to the Prophet Nathan. God then sent a message back to David (rather than communicating directly with David, as God later did twice with Solomon) that the house David desired to build for God would in due time be built by a son of David.

Here is the key statement:

And when your days be fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up **your seed** after you, **which shall proceed out of your bowels**, and I will establish his kingdom. **He shall build an house for my name**, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13)

God here did not select Solomon! God only selected Solomon after Solomon had been born! If David had not committed adultery with the wife of Uriah, and then killed Uriah, Solomon would never have been born as a son of David. If David had not killed Uriah, then David could not have married the mother of Solomon. So this was not a prediction for Solomon specifically.

Here God simply said that He would choose **a son of David who had not yet been born**. In saying this, God was effectively rejecting all of the sons who had been born in Hebron, as well as the ones that had already been born in Jerusalem. God indicated that none of them were going to succeed David as king.

Then, some time "after this it came to pass" that David got involved in another war, this one with the **Philistines** (2 Samuel 8:1). After that David fought against the **Moabites** and subdued them (2 Samuel 8:2). Then David got involved in a military campaign against **Hadadezer**, the king of Zobah, which campaign took David as far as the River Euphrates (2 Samuel 8:3). Then the **Syrians** from Damascus came to help Hadadezer, and so David then fought against them and put them into servitude (2 Samuel 8:6). And then David put garrisons "throughout all **Edom**" and the Edomites became David's servants (2 Samuel 8:14).

Now while all of these military campaigns are chronicled one after another in these 14 short verses, in practical terms this took a number of years to complete. At the end of these campaigns David was **very likely in his early 50's**, or at the very least in his very late 40's.

The next chapter recounts David's efforts to show kindness to a son of his good friend Jonathan, the son of King Saul.

Then the next chapter discusses **another war**, this time with the **Ammonites**. The Ammonites then form a coalition with some other nations in that area. This time David himself did not get involved in the initial fighting. Instead David first sent Joab to lead the army into battle (2 Samuel 10:7). When the Syrians and the Ammonites fled before Joab, then David gathered the rest of the army and went out and thoroughly defeated the Syrian army (2 Samuel 10:17-18).

The next chapter starts with "and it came to pass **after the year was expired ...**" (2 Samuel 11:1). Then we have the well-known episode with Bathsheba. This time David sent Joab with the whole army to fight against the Ammonites. The fact that David himself didn't go on this particular military expedition is also a hint that David was getting older and getting tired of all the fighting.

By this time David was surely in his early 50's. The matter of adultery with Bathsheba and her first baby took 9 months, i.e. almost a year. After that David married Bathsheba and in due time she fell pregnant again and had Solomon. That would have taken approximately another year. So two or more years passed between the adultery with Bathsheba and the birth of Solomon.

In other words, it really does come down to David very likely being somewhere in his mid-50's when Solomon was born.

Now let's look at a statement from Solomon himself, which we briefly referred to earlier. When God appeared to him in a dream when he first became king, Solomon said to God:

And now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of David my father: and **I am but a little child**: I know not *how* to go out or come in. (1 Kings 3:7)

Solomon didn't say: I am dumb or stupid. He said: I am still immature, and I lack experience and maturity. I'm just a teenager. Therefore I need a lot of help.

Solomon was simply acknowledging that **he was still a teenager** faced with responsibilities that required a mature adult to handle correctly.

There is no reason to assume that Solomon was not being realistic when he made this statement about being "but a little child" (i.e. a teenager). So I personally have no hesitation accepting that Solomon was making a realistic assessment of his own stage in life, that he was nothing more than a teenager when he became king. And this is fully compatible with the chronology of David's life.

Now regarding Solomon already having a 1-year old son when he became king, I will just point out the following things:

Regarding Benjamin:

Benjamin was born 6-7 years after Joseph. In the 2nd year of the 7-year famine Joseph was 39 years old when his father Jacob and his 11 brothers came into Egypt. At that point in time Benjamin was no more than 32-33 years old. Yet Benjamin already had 10 sons, apparently by one wife (see Genesis 46:21). So Benjamin must surely have been a teenager when his first son was born.

Regarding Josiah:

Josiah was 8 years old when he became king, and he reigned for 31 years (see 2 Kings 22:1). When Josiah died at age 39 years his son Jehoahaz was already 23 years old (2 Kings 23:31). So Josiah was only 16 years old when Jehoahaz was born, and Josiah was 15 years old when Jehoahaz was conceived.

But Jehoahaz wasn't even Josiah's oldest son. Jehoahaz actually had an older brother named Eliakim, who was renamed Jehoiakim by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt (see 2 Kings 23:34). Jehoahaz was king for only three months (verse 31) before Pharaoh Necho took him into captivity in Egypt, where Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum (Jeremiah 22:11), died (2 Kings 23:34).

With Jehoahaz reigning only three months, it means that Jehoiakim became king that same year. But Jehoiakim was already 25 years old at that time (2 Kings 23:36). So Jehoiakim was about 2 years older than Jehoahaz. So where Josiah had been only 16 years old when Jehoahaz was born, Josiah was only about 14 years old when Jehoiakim was born.

A question that comes up is: If Jehoiakim was two years older than Jehoahaz, why didn't Jehoiakim become king when their father Josiah died? Why did the younger brother become king first? The answer here is that **"the people of the land"** had decided to make Jehoahaz king (see 2 Kings 23:30). In other words, Jehoahaz was the people's popular choice; he wasn't necessarily the rightful heir. So Pharaoh Necho removed the people's "popular choice" and then installed the rightful heir on the throne, the eldest son.

At any rate, it seems like Josiah already had a son when he was only 14 years old.

Based on these accounts, I don't see a problem with Solomon also already having a son when he was 14 to 16 years old. When it tells us that Rehoboam's mother was "an Ammonitess" (1 Kings 14:21), I take that as an indication that Solomon had married "Naamah the Ammonitess" **before he married "Pharaoh's daughter"** (1 Kings 3:1). Marrying Pharaoh's daughter close to the start of his reign was a high-profile political affair that took place after Solomon had become king, the purpose for that marriage being to form an alliance with Egypt (same verse).

When Josiah was a father at age 14 years, and a two-time father at age 16 years, I don't see a problem with Solomon also having been a father at round age 15 years, give or take a year. I have mentioned the age 14 years at the one end of the spectrum because that is the age Josephus recorded for Solomon becoming king. But it may well have been one or two years later.

But Solomon was definitely below age 20 years when he became king.

Let's now consider God's dealings with Satan.

SATAN

We all know the relevant points here. God had created Satan with more beauty and wisdom and status than any other angel. And at that time Satan was perfect in his ways. In effect, Satan had received **more blessings** from God than any other angel. God made Satan a covering cherub, the highest possible position at that time under God the Father and under Jesus Christ. These facts are all recorded in Ezekiel 28:12-15.

But instead of all these blessings engendering in Satan an indestructible loyalty and commitment and devotion to God, these blessings went to Satan's head. He became vain and arrogant and conceited and totally selfish. He wanted more! He wanted God's status and position and power. So he rebelled against God. And God then defeated Satan and the angels that rebelled with him.

Now I don't in any way have any feelings of compassion for Satan. I most assuredly don't feel sorry for Satan. I want to make this clear so that you don't misunderstand the following statements.

It is extremely sad to see a situation where staggering blessings from God are answered by anger and jealousy and rebellion. What more could God possibly do for someone or give to someone?

A selfish mind is such a perverse and depraved thing. A selfish mind can never ever achieve true happiness! Even at the pinnacle of success a selfish mind feels threatened and insecure, even while it is outwardly boasting.

And so a selfish mind is the antithesis of the mind of God. Selfish minds are always destructive influences. And God will never allow selfish minds into His presence. Selfish minds must be and will be permanently removed.

Great blessings from God have a way of bringing out into the open the secret selfishness of the heart (i.e. of the mind). They did that with Satan on the spirit level, and they did that with Solomon on the human level. Great blessings are in fact a major, major test from God.

Let's look at another example.

KING JEROBOAM

Because of Solomon's idolatry, God was angry with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9), and God was going to take 10 tribes away from David's descendants (1 Kings 11:31). God then selected Jeroboam to be king over those 10 tribes of Israel. Through the prophet Ahijah God told Jeroboam:

And I will take you, and you shall reign according to all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And it shall be, **if you will hearken unto all that I command you**, and will walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I **will be with you, and build you a sure house**, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto you. (1 Kings 11:37-38)

Jeroboam had been insignificant, with a widowed mother, and God offered to make him king over the greater part of the people of Israel. God was offering to establish a dynasty of kings through Jeroboam (i.e. "I will build you a sure house") in return for faithful obedience from Jeroboam. And on top of that Jeroboam would then also have ended up in the first resurrection.

God was going to bestow very great blessings on Jeroboam.

In due time Solomon died, and Solomon's son Rehoboam became king. And Jeroboam then became king over the 10 northern tribes of Israel, just as God had predicted years earlier through the prophet Ahijah.

So now Jeroboam is king. What does he do? Does he thank God and fervently seek God's will? Does he in faith accept that God will therefore "build him a sure house"? Does he follow God's commandments like David had done?

What does he do?

The first thing that Jeroboam does is disbelieve God! He doesn't believe that God will really "build him a sure house". No, he worries that the people might kill him and then go back to seeking a king of the line of David (1 Kings 12:26-27). Jeroboam feels extremely insecure in the position he has been given.

Instead of trusting God to establish his throne, Jeroboam looked for ways that would minimize the likelihood of the people ever going back to Jerusalem, from where David's line was ruling.

Of all the dirty rotten things Jeroboam could have done to solidify his own kingly line, he had to settle on **establishing paganism as the official religion** of the northern 10-tribe nation. He replaced the true religion of God with two golden calves (1 Kings 12:28-29), claiming that they represented the "gods" which had brought Israel out of Egypt.

Jeroboam wasn't any better than Solomon had been!

Until God selected him, Jeroboam had never had the slightest chance of ever becoming a king. Being selected as king was a phenomenal and undeserved blessing that God had bestowed on Jeroboam. Yet once he was king, he became extremely selfish, rejecting the God who had made him king. Jeroboam also became a pagan.

What is it in human nature that motivates people who receive great blessings from God to reject the God who has very obviously blessed them? That is such a perverse response!

It seems that our gratitude to God never lasts for very long. The obvious answer to this matter is

selfishness. Like Satan, we human beings are great at obeying God when nothing is on the line. But as soon as major self-interests are at stake, then we spontaneously respond selfishly, frequently even in opposition to God. That's what Solomon and Jeroboam did.

Let's consider another man.

KING JEHU

Jehu was a military general in the army of Israel. God had predicted to the Prophet Elijah that Jehu was to become king of Israel (1 Kings 19:16). Many years later (i.e. about 12 chapters later in the books of Kings) the Prophet Elisha sent a man to anoint Jehu as king (2 Kings 9:3). So this man went and anointed Jehu as king (2 Kings 9:6). Jehu then obeys God's instructions to destroy the family of Ahab, including Jezebel, who was then eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:36).

Jehu was very zealous in obeying God's instructions. He then had another 70 sons of Ahab killed (2 Kings 10:7). Then Jehu "slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him" (2 Kings 10:17). He was zealous!

Of interest is Jehu's statement to Jehonadab, a descendant of Moses's father-in-law Jethro, when Jehu said to Jehonadab:

"Come with me, and **see my zeal for the Eternal.**" (2 Kings 10:16)

And Jehu had a zeal alright! He killed every single Baal worshiper he could find. As 2 Kings 10:28 says:

Thus **Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.** (2 Kings 10:28)

For this zeal God even rewarded Jehu by saying "your children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10:30). However, while this is a blessing from God, it is at the same time also a limitation. Jehu's descendants would be on the throne **only until** the fourth generation.

This should tell us that in spite of all his zeal for carrying out God's instructions regarding the house of Ahab and regarding Baal worship, Jehu wasn't really fully committed to God in other areas of life. Had Jehu been fully committed to God in every way, then God might have "built him a sure house", even as God had previously offered Jeroboam.

And sure enough there was a problem with Jehu's zeal.

While he zealously destroyed Baal worship, **he merrily tolerated the two golden calves** at Bethel and at Dan (see 2 Kings 10:29). Jehu was not really zealous for eradicating all paganism from Israel; he was only zealous for eradicating one very specific form of paganism (i.e. Baal worship). The other forms of paganism being practiced by the people of Israel didn't bother Jehu at all.

Now the point for us is: how can someone be so zealous in eradicating one specific form of paganism, and at the same time be so unconcerned with all other forms of paganism?

God had blessed Jehu, and Jehu did indeed carry out the very specific job for which God had blessed him. But Jehu couldn't care less about re-establishing a worship of the only true God, the God who had made him king, in the nation of Israel. Jehu wasn't motivated to destroy all forms of paganism in Israel, even though he did the specific things he was instructed to do very zealously.

So:

How can someone be so zealous in carrying out God's instructions against the house of Ahab, and in thoroughly eradicating Baal worship at that time; and yet be **so ambivalent about all other forms of paganism**?

Here was a man who was obviously being blessed by God, and who zealously did some of God's will, and yet he couldn't care less about **the bigger picture**! Have you ever known people like that?

The bigger picture is that Baal worship is just one of many forms of paganism. To effectively deal with paganism in the nation of Israel means dealing with **all** forms of paganism. It is not as if one form of paganism is better or more acceptable than another form of paganism. Paganism, in any and every form, is bad! And all paganism is something that God hates. Every aspect of it must be eradicated.

But Jehu didn't see it that way, and so his line only sat on the throne unto the fourth generation. If Jehu had applied the same zeal to destroying all paganism, as the zeal he applied to destroying Baal worship, his line might have continued much longer.

So what about us?

HOW ABOUT US?

Let's go back to Solomon's statement in Proverbs 30.

Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: **give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:** Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*. (Proverbs 30:7-9)

This was Solomon's perspective many years before he wrote Ecclesiastes. But this statement is not the perspective of a poor person.

Poor people readily believe that if God would bless them with wealth, then they could easily handle this (e.g. the song "If I were a Rich Man" from Fiddler on the Roof), without compromising their loyalty and submission to God. After all, people like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and King David, etc. had all managed their wealth without letting that wealth interfere with their commitments to God. So why shouldn't we also be able to cope correctly with great wealth? That's how poor people easily reason.

These verses present the perspective of a rich person, someone who has experienced firsthand the pressures to compromise, which pressures great wealth so commonly brings with it. There is the pressure to maintain that wealth, the pressure to increase it, the fear of loss of that wealth, the pressure to uphold a status achieved through the wealth, etc. Wealth changes people.

Great wealth almost always creates **a heightened sense of selfishness** in us. This was typified in a parable Jesus Christ told about a certain rich man.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, **The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:** And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. (Luke 12:16-19)

This rich man was just **totally selfish**. God wasn't in the picture for this rich man. And so Jesus Christ said in the next verse:

But God said unto him, *You* fool, **this night your soul shall be required of you**: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided? (Luke 12:20)

Now the point we should understand here is that this parable is not about a rare, isolated individual. This parable presents a very typical response by rich people to additional riches coming to them.

Wealth very easily makes us very selfish! This is not inevitable, but it is extremely common.

And that is what Solomon understood when he said "give me neither poverty nor riches".

Over the past half century there have been many people who were in the Church, and who then left the Church when they became wealthy, or in some of those cases when they were faced with the prospect of becoming wealthy.

For example: They were offered a high-paying job, but that job would require certain things from them:

- perhaps occasional work on the Sabbath or Holy Days,
- perhaps some dishonest book-keeping,
- perhaps tricking naive people into making bad contractual commitments,
- perhaps selling undesirable products,
- perhaps misleading people into buying high-priced policies,
- perhaps getting guilty people out of legal troubles,
- perhaps making or selling products that are in fact harmful to human health, like cigarettes, etc.

If they could get this job, then they would really be making a big income, plus bonuses and commissions, etc. At first the "undesirable requirements" bothered their consciences somewhat. And so in some cases they didn't take the job right away. But as they thought about it, and how badly they needed a bigger income to pay off all their debts, etc., they managed to minimize all objections in their own minds. They took the jobs, and with bigger incomes there were also bigger tithes to pay. And suddenly tithing became more stressful than it had been before.

And so over the years quite a number of people in such situations eventually drifted out of the Church. They had received physical blessings, and **those blessings became a major cause for them leaving God's Church.**

Obviously, there are also many other people in the Church, where well-paying jobs and wealth did not in any way detract from their commitments to God. And I certainly don't mean to imply that.

But these are the types of pitfalls that apply to Proverbs 30:8. And Solomon had a firsthand understanding of this type of situation.

It is easy for us to quote "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). But that's not what guides our minds **when we think about how to**

make more money, is it? With the expression "all these things shall be added unto you" Jesus Christ basically meant what Solomon had asked for: "give me neither poverty nor riches".

I believe that when God blessed Solomon with enormous wealth, **God expected that Solomon would be able to cope with that wealth** the same way his father David had coped with great wealth. King David also accumulated a great amount of wealth, but at no time did that wealth in any way detract from David's relationship with God. That's because David didn't have a selfish motivation in acquiring wealth. David didn't want wealth for himself; David wanted wealth to set aside for building a Temple for God.

I believe that God anticipated Solomon having that same attitude towards wealth, that the wealth wouldn't go to Solomon's head and become a negative influence in his relationship with God.

Solomon married 1000 women, each one of whom had one or more female servants at her disposal. Solomon could do that because he was extremely wealthy. Without his great wealth he could not possibly have afforded all those wives and their personal servants. To maintain this lavish lifestyle Solomon then taxed the people of Israel to the hilt (see 1 Kings 12:4). Solomon placed "a grievous yoke" on his own people for purely selfish purposes.

Those pagan wives then led Solomon into idolatry, where Solomon himself ended up as a pagan. So the blessing of great wealth in time became a snare for Solomon.

The lesson for us is this: we need to make sure that God's blessings never cause us to become covetous.

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