

Solomon

Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes,
and the Song of Songs.

*From Wisdom to Despair:
A Tragic Life, Conflicting Writings,
and a Ray of Hope.*

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Contents

EXPANDED TABLE OF CONTENTS.	i
INTRODUCTION	vi
PROLOGUE	xi
PART 1: THE LIFE OF SOLOMON	1
CHAPTER 1 – ANCESTRY.....	2
<i>David and Bathsheba.</i>	
CHAPTER 2 – CHILDHOOD.....	50
<i>Infamy and Disjunction.</i>	
CHAPTER 3 – YOUTH.....	73
<i>Opportunity and Responsibility.</i>	
CHAPTER 4 – EARLY WISDOM.....	100
<i>Humility and Devotion (for the most part).</i>	
CHAPTER 5 – GROWING DEFIANCE.....	161
<i>Politics and Lust.</i>	
CHAPTER 6 – ENSUING TRAGEDY.....	168
<i>Idolatry and Division.</i>	
CHAPTER 7 – INEVITABLE MISERY AND DESPAIR.....	194
<i>Fear and Hatred.</i>	
PART 2: THE WRITINGS ATTRIBUTED TO SOLOMON	261
INTRODUCTION.....	262
CHAPTER 8 – PROVERBS.....	263
<i>Propounded and Ignored.</i>	
CHAPTER 9 – ECCLESIASTES.....	276
<i>Insightful Observations and Faithless Conclusions.</i>	
CHAPTER 10 – THE SONG OF SONGS.....	324
<i>A Ray of Hope.</i>	
CONCLUSION.....	364
EPILOGUE.	366

Expanded Table of Contents.

EXPANDED TABLE OF CONTENTS.	I
INTRODUCTION.	VI
A tragic life producing conflicting writings.....	vi
The arc of Solomon’s life.	vi
From wisdom to despair.....	vii
The conflict within the writings.....	vii
A cautionary tale with a ray of hope.	ix
PROLOGUE.	XI
The historical backdrop.	xi
Humanity’s inauspicious start.	xi
A different approach.	xi
God’s Covenant with Abraham – Nation, Land, and Blessing.....	xi
From the man Abraham to the nation of Israel.....	xiii
God’s name – Yahweh.....	xiv
Conquering the Promised Land – Seeds of destruction.	xviii
The period of the Judges – A downward spiral into savagery.	xix
The first two kings – Saul and David.	xx
God’s covenant with David – a Descendant, ruling forever, as a Righteous King.	xxi
Enter Solomon: The most dramatic moment in history (so far).....	xxii
After Solomon: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms, their destruction, and the need for a Savior.	xxiv
Diving in.....	xxv
PART 1: THE LIFE OF SOLOMON.	1
CHAPTER 1 – ANCESTRY.	2
<i>David and Bathsheba.</i>	2
Limiting our focus.	2
From obscurity to fame to fugitive: A sling, lyre, and decade on the run.	2
Abigail: The great blessing David threw away, and the destruction he chose instead....	3
Anointed in Judah, victory over the house of Saul, accepted by all Israel, and stabilizing his rule.....	6
Destabilizing his rule: A wholesale descent into polygamy.	7
The difference between David and Solomon.....	9
The Ark, Temple, and Davidic Covenant.	10
A beloved king.	12
Bathsheba and Uriah.	13
Nathan’s story and prophecy.	17
The prophecies fulfilled.	25
Amnon rapes Tamar.....	25
Absalom murders Amnon.	28
Absalom dethrones David.....	30
Back on the run, this time from his own son.	35
The death of Absalom.....	40

The bloody road back to Jerusalem.	44
The birth of Solomon into the second half of David's reign.	48
CHAPTER 2 – CHILDHOOD.	50
<i>Infamy and Disfunction.</i>	50
A rough start.....	50
Infamy for mother and child.....	50
Disfunction within the home and nation.....	50
Famine in the land and justice for Gibeon.	51
Fighting more Philistine giants.	54
Israel sins, Satan inspires a census, God's punishment, and the blessing that followed.....	55
Rising above it all.....	72
CHAPTER 3 – YOUTH.....	73
<i>Opportunity and Responsibility.</i>	73
A double whammy.....	73
Chosen by Yahweh.....	73
Challenged by a brother and anointed by his father.....	77
Solomon's first act as king.....	82
David's final (and extraordinarily productive) years.....	83
David's duty – organizing the nation.....	84
David's passion – planning for the Temple.....	90
Finishing well.....	94
The death of David.	94
Shouldering the burden alone.....	99
CHAPTER 4 – EARLY WISDOM.	100
<i>Humility and Devotion (for the most part).</i>	100
Solomon's best years, with an asterisk.....	100
The final steps to secure the throne (and the first step to ruin).	100
Solomon's finest hour – a request for wisdom.	108
The first test of Solomon's wisdom.....	112
Prosperity in Israel / Creativity in Solomon / More seeds of destruction.	113
Building Yahweh's Temple.....	116
Introduction.....	116
A vast storehouse, a friendly neighbor, and a forced labor pool.....	117
The design, furnishings, and courtyard.....	119
The symbolism.	133
The Tabernacle is retired, and the Ark and Glory of Yahweh enter the Temple.	142
Solomon's prayer.	144
Building palaces for himself and the daughter of Pharaoh.....	148
God's blessing and warning.	152
Other activities.	155
Zenith / The Queen of Sheba.....	158
CHAPTER 5 – GROWING DEFIANCE.	161
<i>Politics and Lust.</i>	161
The downward slope.....	161
Conflict – Splendor, self-indulgence, and competing loyalties.	161
Catastrophe – Solomon's 1000 wives and concubines.	164
CHAPTER 6 – ENSUING TRAGEDY.	168

<i>Idolatry and Division</i>	168
The wholesale idolatry of the people of Israel	168
Why did (and how could) God command His people to kill every Canaanite man, woman, and child?	168
The consequences for Solomon and Israel – three adversaries and a divided kingdom.	189
CHAPTER 7 – INEVITABLE MISERY AND DESPAIR	194
<i>Fear and Hatred</i>	194
The terminus of the arc	194
The mysteries of the human heart.....	195
One universal experience: Every conscience encounters the voice of God (where it all starts).	195
Two inward motivations: Humility or Pride (our internal response).....	198
Two outward expressions: Faith or Defiance (our external response).....	199
Two heart’s desires: Light or Darkness (the underlying current).	201
Two mindsets: Hope or Fear (the effect on our thoughts).....	205
Two behaviors: Love or Hate (the effect on our words and deeds).....	210
Faith, Hope, and Love create Joy and Peace (in a selfless, discerning, servant of God and others).....	218
Faith fills with hope and love, which drive out fear and hate.	218
Setting the palette with faith (where it all ends).	218
A fundamental transformation.....	219
Faith transforms the heart: From Self-Absorbed to Selfless.....	219
Hope transforms the mind: From Self-Deceived to Discerning.....	221
Love transforms behavior: From Self-Indulgent to Serving God and Others. .	226
The transformation’s purpose: From Master to Servant (true greatness).	229
The transformation’s results: Joy and Peace.....	236
Defiance, Fear, and Hate create Misery and Despair (in a self-absorbed, self- deceived, self-indulgent master).....	242
The alternatives: Misery and Despair.....	242
Pulling it all together and applying it to Solomon.....	248
Solomon’s death and Israel’s division.....	249
Why Solomon?	255
Conclusion.....	259
PART 2: THE WRITINGS ATTRIBUTED TO SOLOMON.....	261
INTRODUCTION.....	262
CHAPTER 8 – PROVERBS.....	263
<i>Propounded and Ignored</i>	263
What’s a proverb?	263
Solomon’s role.....	263
Structure of the book, with samples.	264
I. Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 1:1 to 22:16).....	265
II. Wisdom of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34).	268
III. More Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 25:1 to 29:27).....	269
IV. Wisdom of Agur (Proverbs 30:1-33).....	270
V. Wisdom of king Lemuel’s mother (Proverbs 31:1-31).....	270
Women in the Proverbs.....	271

The sad irony of Proverbs: Solomon defies his own advice and suffers the ruin he warned us about.....	271
Final thoughts.....	273
Hitting the fast forward button.....	274
CHAPTER 9 – ECCLESIASTES.....	276
<i>Insightful Observations and Faithless Conclusions</i>	276
Life’s train wreck - principles vs. realities.....	276
What Ecclesiastes is.....	276
What we have to remember, and what we will discover.....	276
The author of the book, and why he is so often misunderstood.....	277
Is Solomon the Qohelet?.....	280
A note on “hevel.”.....	281
Not everything Solomon says in Ecclesiastes is true.....	283
Structure of the book, with samples.....	284
I. Solomon’s candid admission: The impotence of material things (Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 2:11).....	285
II. Solomon’s increasing burdens: The fears that result from defiance (Ecclesiastes 2:12 to 12:8).....	290
III. The author’s warning to his son: Trust and obey Yahweh, so you don’t end up like Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14).....	304
Final thoughts.....	318
Putting it in reverse.....	323
CHAPTER 10 – THE SONG OF SONGS.....	324
<i>A Ray of Hope</i>	324
Introduction.....	324
Four characters and four interpretations.....	324
Solomon’s role in the composition.....	332
Structure of the book, with samples.....	333
Act One: Northern Israel, near a vineyard (Song of Songs 1:1 through 3:5).....	334
Act Two: Jerusalem, near a gate in the city wall (Song of Songs 3:6-11).....	335
Act Three: Solomon’s palace in Jerusalem (Song of Songs 4:1 through 7:9).....	335
Act Four: On the road to Shunem (Song of Songs 7:10 through 8:4).....	338
Act Five: The return to Shunem (Song of Songs 8:5-14).....	338
Common themes, regardless of interpretation.....	339
Surprisingly little instruction is provided in Scripture about marriage.....	339
Marriage is not the ultimate the source of happiness or unhappiness in life.....	339
Marriage is a magnifying glass.....	341
A happy marriage occurs when two happy people get married.....	342
What should you seek?.....	343
What should each partner bring to the marriage?.....	344
What not to expect.....	348
Don’t expect your spouse to ultimately be the one who makes you happy.....	348
Don’t expect your spouse to fulfill the place of your same-sex friendships.....	351
Don’t expect your spouse to never change, and don’t expect to change your spouse.....	353
Don’t expect accurate forecasts from limited data.....	354
What should you do while you are waiting?.....	355
What should you do while you are dating?.....	356

What should you do when you want to quit?	357
Practical tips on how to treat each other well.....	358
How should you parent?	359
A musical metaphor.	361
Final thoughts.....	362
CONCLUSION.....	364
The “Wisdom Literature.”	364
Solomon’s life in three acts.	364
EPILOGUE.	366
From Wisdom to Despair: A Tragic Life, Conflicting Writings, and a Ray of Hope.	366

Introduction.

A tragic life producing conflicting writings.

Solomon is one of the most fascinating men in the Bible. His life plays out like a Greek Tragedy, and the writings attributed to him are a conflicting mixture of great wisdom (Proverbs), faithless conclusions (Ecclesiastes), and a ray of unexpected hope (The Song of Songs). Both Solomon's life and writings are often misunderstood, and to truly grasp them requires mature reflection on Scripture as a whole.

The arc of Solomon's life.

Solomon's father was David, the second and greatest king of Israel (until Jesus), described as a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). But his mother was Bathsheba, the woman involved in David's greatest sin, where a night of adulterous lust leads to the murder of Bathsheba's noble husband, a Hittite named Uriah who was one of David's best soldiers.

David ultimately marries Bathsheba, who bears him Solomon. But the child grows up in the royal house under a cloud of infamy, as the son of the woman central to David's most disgraceful episode, which nearly cost him the throne. Solomon also grows up in an unspeakably dysfunctional family. His father was a polygamist, with several wives all bearing sons. As his half-brothers vie for the throne, one rapes a half-sister and another murders the rapist and ultimately leads a rebellion against David.

Yet (for reasons we will consider) during Solomon's youth God chose him to be not only David's heir, but also the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem. It's an extraordinary opportunity for a young man likely still in his teens, bearing an equally extraordinary responsibility – to emerge from his father's enormous shadow as his own man, lead God's nation, and build God's Temple.

Despite the infamy and disfunction of his childhood and the inexperience of his youth, Solomon has the humility to discern the tasks before him are too great and he cannot accomplish them on his own strength. When God offers him literally anything, Solomon humbly asks for the wisdom to rule wisely. God is so pleased with Solomon's prayer, He grants Solomon not only the wisdom he desires, but also all he could have asked for but didn't – health, wealth, fame, and peace.

This is the pinnacle of Solomon's spiritual life. It's a triumph resulting from his humility. But then Solomon becomes the most wealthy, famous, and powerful king of his day, and despite his blessings (or perhaps because of them), he begins to defy God, withholding his devotion in two areas – politics and sex.

Solomon enters into one political marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh (the king of Egypt), in an attempt to secure his border. Then he enters into 999 sexual unions with the daughters of the Canaanites (the pagan nations that were supposed to be driven from Israel), in an attempt to satisfy his lust. Solomon takes a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines – 1000 pagan women. Not one of them was Jewish.

This is the pit of Solomon's spiritual life. It's a tragedy resulting from his pride. God's Law expressly prohibited political alliances with Egypt, marriage with pagans, and taking many wives.

Yet Solomon defiantly married Pharaoh's daughter and took 999 other Canaanite spouses and concubines.

Under the influence of these 1000 foreign women, king Solomon the wise, who built the Temple of God on earth, ends his reign building hundreds of places of worship for the detestable gods of Canaan, which centered around temple prostitution and human sacrifice, ordinarily an infant burned alive on a brazen altar. The horror this brings to Israel is beyond imagination, and it leads to God dividing the nation into a Northern Kingdom of ten tribes who reject Solomon's heir, and a Southern Kingdom of two tribes faithful to the line of David.

As Solomon's life ebbs away, he slips into despair. His defiance of God creates fear in his heart, and he ends his reign committing acts of hatred against both God and other men. Even though God graciously promises Solomon's heir will sit on the throne of the Southern Kingdom, Solomon's last recorded deed is the attempted murder of the man God chose to rule the Northern Kingdom. It's an evil and vindictive act, meant to defeat the plan of the One who has been so good to him.

From wisdom to despair.

In this brief summary, we see the general arc of Solomon's life. Although he is privileged to be in the royal household, it's still a rough start. He's looked down upon as the offspring of the woman with whom David sinned so spectacularly. His half-brothers plot to succeed their father, while afflicting the royal house with rape, murder, and insurrection.

And yet when chosen to reign after David and build God's Temple, Solomon rises to the occasion magnificently. He demonstrates extraordinary humility when given the opportunity to ask the Creator of the universe for anything, and prays for what he needs to fulfill God's purpose. Would you or I do the same?

But as blessings reign down upon him, a fatal flaw is revealed in his character. He is not willing to trust God completely and defies God in two areas. He seeks security in political scheming and pleasure in promiscuous sex. This is his undoing.

As we shall see, the women he brings into his bed provide neither security nor pleasure. But they do lead him down a very dark path to ruin, not only for himself, but also for the entire nation of Israel.

Because of his humble request, Solomon rises to the highest heights of wisdom. Yet wisdom is not obedience. And because of his prideful defiance, he descends into the deepest pits of misery and despair.

The conflict within the writings.

Knowing the arc of Solomon's life is vital in order to understand the content of the writings attributed to him and the conflict between their themes. Each of the three books belong to different periods within Solomon's volatile life, as he rises to wisdom then falls to despair, so it's only natural both the spiritual and earthly perspectives of these books would shift according to their position along the curve.

The book of *Proverbs* is a compilation of the sayings of several authors, including Solomon. His proverbs are filled with tremendous insight and artistry. They are brilliant bursts of common sense. Yet when we consider the words of Solomon's proverbs against the canvas of Solomon's life, the bitter irony we realize is: Solomon completely ignored the proverbs he wrote. In his wisdom he eloquently expressed truth, but in his pride he chose to defy it. This suggests Solomon's proverbs were likely written towards the beginning of his life, relatively soon after he humbly asked God for wisdom, when his life was full of promise and before he chose a path diametrically opposed to principles he exalted.

By contrast, *Ecclesiastes* was likely written towards the end of Solomon's life, when the inevitable despair resulting from a descent into defiance, fear, and hate consumed him. The critical thing to recognize about *Ecclesiastes* is: The sayings of the *Qobeleth* (a Hebrew word often translated "preacher" representing Solomon) are made up of two distinct parts: (1) insightful observations about the harsh realities of life, and (2) ridiculous conclusions arising from a breathtaking lack of faith. This is not usually the way *Ecclesiastes* is interpreted, but it will leap off the page as we compare the conclusions of Solomon with the conclusions of the other authors of Scripture and Jesus Himself.

This leaves us with the final book attributed to Solomon, the *Song of Songs*. It's a ray of hope shining through the gloom of Solomon's disastrous life, because it's not really about him. It's about a young, common woman of Israel, who has what Solomon lacks – humility and faith. She's not rich, famous, or powerful (in the worldly sense), but she has far more integrity than Solomon. She demonstrates this by choosing whether to give her love to Solomon or a shepherd, and her choices light the way for all of us to follow if we wish to avoid the tragedy that is the life of Solomon.

The conflict in these writings will become apparent as we review them. *Proverbs* makes bold claims about all the good things we can expect when we trust God. Then *Ecclesiastes* wrongly suggests these good choices are meaningless. And unless you consider very carefully what is truly going on in the *Song of Songs*, it can look like an account of Solomon seducing one of his 1000 pagan wives and concubines, when in truth it's about the one Jewish woman who refused him.

Careful consideration of these three books against the backdrop of Scripture a whole, along with a commonsense emphasis on the holy and loving character of God, brings the true meaning of the books into focus.

- *Proverbs* is about life *principles*, which Solomon understood but ultimately chose not to follow.
- *Ecclesiastes* is about life *realities*, about which Solomon draws self-absorbed, faithless conclusions.
- And the *Song of Songs* is about life *choices*, not by Solomon, but rather by a woman who rejects him for a shepherd.

Together these books present a multifaceted look at the mysteries of life in a fallen world, while also serving as a three-act portrayal of the dramatic arc of Solomon's life.

- *Act One – Proverbs* represents the *hopeful beginning* of Solomon’s life, showing us how to live, through life principles worth following.
- *Act Two – The Song of Songs* represents the *defiant middle* of Solomon’s life, showing us what to reject (the descent of Solomon), through life choices worth emulating (those of the young woman); and
- *Act Three – Ecclesiastes* represents the *tragic end* of Solomon’s life, showing us what we will become (as miserable as Solomon), if we meet life realities without faith in the One who created us.

A cautionary tale with a ray of hope.

In a sense, Solomon is the “Michael Corleone” of the Bible. If you know the Godfather movies, even though Michael grew up in an infamous and dysfunctional family, he started out doing all the right things. He refused to enter the “family business” of organized crime. He served heroically in the military during wartime. He found a woman to love and with whom to raise a family. But when someone tries to murder his father, a fatal flaw in his character is revealed. He gives in to the temptation to take revenge, kills those responsible for the attempted murder of his dad, and starts down a dark and ruinous path, eventually losing everything he held most dear.

Solomon’s life is like that. He starts out great. Despite coming from a family scarred by polygamy, incestuous rape, fratricide, and insurrection, Solomon does the right thing. He humbly prays for the wisdom to lead God’s people well. God answers his prayer and then blesses him beyond imagination. Yet Solomon refuses to fully trust God and turns to politics for security and polygamy for pleasure. But these two indulgences eventually cost him everything. Instead of leading God’s people well, he leads them into the absolute savagery of pagan idolatry and causes the nation to be ripped in two.

Solomon’s writings reflect this tragic arc. His proverbs demonstrate undeniable, God-given wisdom. His refusal to heed his own proverbs leads to the deep despair reflected in the faithless conclusions drawn throughout Ecclesiastes. But against this dark backdrop, God provides us with the light of a different path, taken not by Solomon, but by an honorable young woman, which is extraordinarily fitting.

Solomon’s life is a *cautionary tale*. It’s not one to emulate, but rather one to learn from and avoid repeating. We discover all the material things the world has to offer can’t make us happy. They are at best temporary distractions from unhappiness. And all the wisdom in the world is not enough to make us a success. Being wise is not the same as being faithful.

Happiness (in the biblical sense of Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension”) and success (in the sense of discovering and fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives) only come from humbly choosing a life of faith, hope, and love, as we shall see as we consider Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

1 Peter 1:3-8 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope... and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” (NASB)

Philippians 4:6,7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (NASB)

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (NIV)

Philippians 2:13 “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (NIV)

Prologue.

The historical backdrop.

Before we draw open the curtains on the life of Solomon and consider the writings attributed to him, we should first review the backdrop against which his life unfolds. If we are to appreciate just how tragic his story truly is, we must understand the crucial point it occupies along the timeline of God’s plan for human history. Let’s start at the beginning.

Humanity’s inauspicious start.

For the first couple thousand years of human history – from Adam and Eve, to the Flood, to the Tower of Babel and its aftermath – God worked with humanity as a whole. He didn’t focus on a particular people group. Generally this would cover the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

It did not go well. The first man and woman defied the one and only commandment of God and lost the opportunity to live in a perfect garden. One of their sons murdered his brother over the correct way to worship God. As the human race began to grow, we find this sad description of people’s hearts and the society they created.

Genesis 6:1-12 “When human beings began to increase in number on the earth... The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become... and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time... the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence... for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.” (NIV)

The result was a global flood and rebooting of humanity through a man named Noah and his family. But his descendants don’t do any better. God tells them to spread out over the earth so He can bless them, and they do the opposite. They defiantly congregate in one place and build a tower in a vain attempt to reach God on their own. It’s an unmistakable step down the same path to evil and violence.

God promised to never bring another flood (and it didn’t do much good anyway), so this time He tries a much gentler method of getting mankind on the right track. He confuses the people’s language, they divide into groups accordingly, and reluctantly begin to spread out over the globe as God instructed.

A different approach.

As the groups disburse and start to form nations, God decides it’s time for a different approach. Instead of reaching out to the whole, which mankind for the most part ignored for the first two millennia of history, God will focus on one of these new nations as a sort of object lesson for the rest of the world, teaching His nation how to live, blessing them for their obedience, and then blessing all the other nations through them. But where to start?

God’s Covenant with Abraham – Nation, Land, and Blessing.

God chooses a guy named Abraham (originally Abram) to be the father of His nation. Abraham was living in a place called Ur in the southern region of Mesopotamia. God calls to him with this promise:

Genesis 12:1-3 “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ ” (NIV)

This is the first of God’s promises to Abraham. Essentially, God says, “follow Me to a land I will show you, and when we get there, I will make from you a great nation.” Abraham accepts. He arrives in this land, called Canaan, circa 1876 B.C. Then God makes another promise:

Genesis 12:4-7 “So Abram went, as the LORD had told him... they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there... The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ ” (NIV)

These promises are sometimes called the “Abrahamic Covenant,” whereby God swore:

1. To make from Abraham a great *nation*;
2. To give this nation a *land* in which to dwell;
3. To *bless the nation* in the land, and
4. Through the nation *bless all people*.

Note: The promise related to the land is sometimes called the “Palestinian Covenant,” but for our purposes we will refer to all of them as the “Abrahamic Covenant,” since each were made to Abraham.

It’s vital to note God did not place any conditions on these promises. Once Abraham obeyed and followed God to the land, all of these promises became binding upon God, because He is faithful and true. He is infinitely righteous and cannot go back on His Word.

Psalm 145:13-17 “... The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does... The LORD is righteous in all his ways... (NIV)

Psalm 33:4 “For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations...” (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:13 “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” (NASB)

Hebrews 6:18 “... it is impossible for God to lie...” (NIV)

This means a nation *will* arise from Abraham, she *will* dwell in the land, and she *will* both be blessed herself and a blessing to others – and *nothing* can stop these promises from being fulfilled. As a result, this unconditional covenant between God and Abraham is in a sense what drives the rest of human history forward. It’s the story of how God fulfills His Word to bring from Abraham a nation, dwelling in a land, where she is both blessed and a blessing.

He's got His work cut out for Him, because Abraham and his descendants are just like you and me – sinful, flawed human beings, born to wander like sheep from their shepherd. It is to say the least, a bumpy ride.

From the man Abraham to the nation of Israel.

One of the most refreshing things about the stories from these times is: The men and women depicted therein are just as screwed up as we are; yet by His mercy and grace God is able to accomplish great things within and through them.

Abraham and his wife Sarah have a hard time trusting God will provide them with an heir. At Sarah's suggestion, Abraham fathers a son through an Egyptian servant, Hagar, who has a son named Ishmael, the patriarch of the Arab nations who become Israel's bitter enemies.

A child is not born to Abraham and Sarah until they are an elderly couple. Their son Isaac and his wife Rebekah repeat many of the mistakes of Abraham and Sarah. Rebekah eventually bears twins, with Isaac favoring the firstborn, Esau, and Rebekah favoring the younger twin, Jacob, who eventually becomes the heir to the promises God made to Abraham. Jacob complicates things further by indulging in polygamy and fathers twelve sons through four different women.

But God is faithful to His promises to Abraham, and despite many dreadful failures by all these characters, God establishes the twelve tribes of Israel through the twelve sons of Jacob (who is renamed Israel). God even uses the evil intent of Jacob's sons towards their brother Joseph to save the entire clan during a time of famine, by bringing them all to Egypt, where Joseph has risen from slavery to second in command under Pharaoh.

Over the next couple of centuries, the Israelites grow and prosper so much in Egypt a new Pharaoh considers them a threat, so he enslaves them. By this time they number more than two million. They cry out to God for deliverance, and God answers.

A Hebrew man named Moses is miraculously brought up as a prince in Pharaoh's house for the first forty years of his life. But Moses murders an Egyptian oppressing his people, flees Egypt, and spends his next forty years as an obscure shepherd in the Arabian desert.

God calls to Moses from a burning bush on Mount Sinai and sends Moses to deliver His people from bondage. God visits ten plagues upon the Egyptians, until the Israelites are set free and allowed to return to the Promised Land of Canaan, in an event famously called the "Exodus," circa 1446 B.C. Pharaoh hardens his heart and attempts to bring the people back to Egypt, but God saves them at the Red Sea, in one of the most remarkable miracles recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures.

God gathers His people at Mount Sinai, where He originally appeared to Moses in the burning bush. They enter into a covenant, where God promises to be their God, and they promise to be God's people.

This is sometimes called the "Mosaic Covenant." In contrast to the Abrahamic Covenant, which was unconditional, in very broad terms the Mosaic Covenant has this condition: God will bless the people if they will obey His Law.

God spends a year with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, where they essentially do two things – learn God’s Law and build God’s Tabernacle. There were over six hundred commands in the Law, expressing in detail how God wanted His people to live in the Promised Land.

The Tabernacle was an ornate tent surrounded by a courtyard. Within the courtyard there was an altar for sacrifices and a large washing basin for the priests. The tent was divided into two areas: (1) a “holy place” with a lampstand, table for bread used in worship, and an incense altar; and (2) the “most holy place” (or “holy of holies”), wherein resided the Ark of the covenant and the very presence of God.

God promised to physically manifest Himself and dwell in the Tabernacle with His people, if they would follow His Law and worship at His Tabernacle as instructed. He also revealed His name to His people – Yahweh – which simply means “I am.”

God’s name – Yahweh.

We should pause and note something important before we continue. As you read the Old Testament Scriptures, you will notice God is often referred to as the LORD, with “LORD” spelled in either all caps or small caps. Where you see this, the original Hebrew Scriptures actually wrote out “Yahweh,” God’s name, but English translations write out “the LORD.”

Why did they do this? There are three Hebrew words used to describe God in the Old Testament.

1. *Elohim* is translated “God” and means an immortal, supernatural, spiritual being. It’s what God is. Sometimes *elohim* can also be translated “gods” and refer to angelic beings or the deities worshipped by the pagans.
2. *Adonai* is translated “Lord” and means a person with both authority over and responsibility for another. In a sense, this is God’s title, as the sovereign ruler of all creation.
3. *Yahweh* is simply God’s name.

Later in the history of the Jewish people, they decided to stop speaking God’s name, Yahweh, as a sign of religious piety and a means to ensure they didn’t break the commandment to never take God’s name in vain. So instead of saying “Yahweh” when they read the Scriptures, they would say “Adonai” as a substitute, which would be like us saying “Lord” in English. In deference to this custom, English translations of the Bible substitute “LORD” (in caps) when the Hebrew word is “Yahweh,” and use “Lord” (without caps) when the Hebrew word is “Adonai.”

This is a tragedy. God told us His name so we can use it! He *wants* us to call on His name and receive His grace and mercy. By adding these unnecessary layers of superficial religiosity, we miss out on all the fullness God intended when He told us His name. How foolish and sad that after God graciously revealed the name by which we are commanded to call upon Him for all generations, we decided it would be really smart to stop using it!

Exodus 3:15 “God (*Elohim*) also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “The LORD (*Yahweh*), the God (*elohim*) of your fathers – the God (*elohim*) of Abraham, the God (*elohim*) of Isaac

and the God (*elohim*) of Jacob – has sent me to you. This (*Yahweh*) is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” ’ ” (NIV)

Lamentations 3:55-57 “I called on your name, LORD (*Yahweh*), from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea... You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear.’ ” (NIV)

Calling Him “Lord” instead of “Yahweh” is like calling the person who loves you most in all the world by his official title after he has specifically asked you to call him by his first name. It’s an unnecessary and unwelcome formality that demonstrates your unwillingness to draw near to someone who cares for you and desires a closer relationship, all because you think your ideas are better than his.

This is a good reminder we should never add to or subtract from God’s Word. This inevitably introduces a layer of “religion” God never intended. We should just follow His Word, so we can experience what God graciously designed for us.

Proverbs 30:5,6 “Every word of God (*Elohim*) is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” (NIV)

Isaiah 29:13 “The Lord (*Adonai*) says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 4:6 “... learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant...” (NASB)

We should all be encouraged to reverse this error by beginning to reverently call to our loving Heavenly Father by His name, Yahweh. Try it in your prayer time. When you read Scripture and you see “LORD,” think or say “Yahweh.” It might feel awkward at first, because it is foreign to our upbringing. But if you will do this, you will begin to sense more intimacy with our Creator. That’s inevitable when you call someone by name.

It will also completely change the tone of your reading and the feeling you get as you meditate on God’s Word. Instead of threatening, passages become comforting.

When you read “the LORD says...” or “I am the LORD...” in a passage, it’s as if God is shouting at you, like someone using all caps in an angry email. But if you read “Yahweh says” or “I am Yahweh,” and you know this is God’s name, then the tone completely shifts. Instead of an appeal to God’s *authority* as Lord of all creation, it’s an appeal to God’s *person* as the Creator of you; that is, as your Heavenly Father.

God isn’t saying, “okay buster, you better listen up because I’m the LORD and that means I outrank you and you have to do what I say.” He’s saying, “okay My precious child, listen up because it’s Me, Yahweh, talking. You know Me. I’m loving, merciful, compassionate, and forgiving. I’m the One who created you, because I love you and have a plan and purpose for your life I really want you to discover and fulfill, because it’s infinitely better than the broken path you are choosing.”

Isaiah 48:17 “This is what the LORD (*Yahweh*) says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God (*elohim*), who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.’ ” (NIV)

When we call Him “God,” it’s identifying what He is (a spiritual being), like a scientist. When we call Him “Lord,” it’s addressing Him by title or rank, like a soldier or subject. But when we call Him “Yahweh,” we are calling out His name, as His child, which is what you do when there is a relationship based on love.

Psalm 116:1-13 “I love the LORD (*Yahweh*) for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD (*Yahweh*): ‘LORD (*Yahweh*), save me!’ The LORD (*Yahweh*) is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD (*Yahweh*) protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD (*Yahweh*) has been good to you. For you, LORD (*Yahweh*), have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD (*Yahweh*) in the land of the living... What shall I return to the LORD (*Yahweh*) for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD (*Yahweh*).” (NIV)

Psalm 68:4-20 “Sing to God (*Elohim*), sing in praise of his name... rejoice before him – his name is the LORD (*Yahweh*). A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God (*Elohim*) in his holy dwelling. God (*Elohim*) sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing... Praise be to the Lord (*Adonai*), to God (*Elohim*) our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God (*elohim*) is a God (*elohim*) who saves...” (NIV)

Much was lost when the Israelites stopped using God’s *name*, Yahweh, and started substituting His *title*, Adonai, as a way of injecting mankind’s religiosity over God’s express instruction. The *intimacy* desired by a loving, generous God gave way to a *formality* imposed by legalistic, self-serving religious leaders. This set up a barrier between God and His children our Heavenly Father never intended.

It’s as if by going this extra (but misguided) step and using Adonai/LORD instead of Yahweh, we are trying to earn God’s favor by exceeding His command. But what we have to realize is: *We already have His favor!* That’s why He told us His name. We don’t have to go out and earn it. We just have to receive it, with humility and gratitude, and then use it when we need it. And in this fallen world, we are going to need it a lot.

Isaiah 43:1-5 “But now, this is what the LORD (*Yahweh*) says – he who created you... he who formed you... ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God (*elohim*), the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you... Do not be afraid, for I am with you...’ ” (NIV)

Refusing to use God’s name because we are afraid we might misuse it appears righteous at first blush, but it’s really just imposing mankind’s concept of *religion* over God’s concept of *relationship*.

And at the end of the day, God is far less concerned about our rule-following than He is about our relationship-building, especially as it relates to Him.

Proverbs 16:2 “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD (*Yahweh*) weighs the motives.” (NASB)

Psalm 51:10-19 “Create in me a clean heart, O God (*Elohim*), and renew a steadfast spirit within me... For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it... The sacrifices of God (*Elohim*) are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God (*Elohim*), You will not despise... Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices...” (NASB)

Joel 2:13 “Rend your heart and not your garments...” (NIV)

How can we have a relationship with God if we refuse to call Him by His name, especially after He has expressly instructed us to do so? How would you feel, if you repeatedly invited someone to call you by name, but they doggedly insisted on calling you by your title from work? Would you feel respected or manipulated?

Sometimes, it’s important to address God with the respect inherent in His title as the Lord of all creation, but other times He simply wants us to call Him by His name, because He is our Father and we are His children.

Deuteronomy 14:1,2 “You are the children of the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God (*elohim*)...” (NIV)

And in writing, using LORD instead of Yahweh lessens the power of knowing God by name. Using the name of God is a privilege He granted to us, which we subsequently refused, opting instead for a confusing substitution of the wrong word set in a fancy font. The result is *both* Yahweh *and* Adonai lose their impact, because we just see the word “Lord” and skim over it, not really noticing whether it’s in all caps or not, and not really understanding the difference. And so we do not perceive whether the passage is emphasizing the *personal* nature of God’s name, Yahweh, or the *respectful* nature of God’s title, Adonai. This is not what God intended when the Creator of the universe and everything in it graciously shared with us His name.

Psalm 8:1-9 “LORD (*Yahweh*), our Lord (*Adonai*), how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet... LORD (*Yahweh*), our Lord (*Adonai*), how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (NIV)

God wants to be on a first name basis with us, because we are His kids. We are family. What family uses titles instead of names? Only a dysfunctional one! It’s cold and distant, when God wants us warm and close. That can only happen if we call on His name.

Psalm 145:18 “The LORD (*Yahweh*) is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” (NIV)

Lamentations 3:21-25 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD’S (*Yahweh*’s) lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD (*Yahweh*) is my portion,’

says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’ The LORD (*Yahweh*) is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.” (NASB)

Psalm 107:2-43 “Let the redeemed of the LORD (*Yahweh*) tell their story... they cried out to the LORD (*Yahweh*) in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way... Let them give thanks to the LORD (*Yahweh*) for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things... they cried to the LORD (*Yahweh*) in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the LORD (*Yahweh*) for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds... tell of his works with songs of joy... Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD (*Yahweh*).” (NIV)

And so, in your own prayer time try addressing God by His name, Yahweh, as He has commanded, and see if your spirit is drawn closer to the One to whom you pray. He is the great and mighty God (*Elohim*) who created the universe. He is the sovereign Lord (*Adonai*) of all creation. And He is also your loving Heavenly Father who told *you* His name, Yahweh. So use it, because when you call upon it, He does extraordinary things!

Jeremiah 33:2,3 “This is what the LORD (*Yahweh*) says, he who made the earth, the LORD (*Yahweh*) who formed it and established it – the LORD (*Yahweh*) is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’ ” (NIV)

Psalm 38:15 “LORD (*Yahweh*), I wait for you; you will answer, Lord (*Adonai*) my God (*elohim*).” (NIV)

We’ve spent a lot of time on this, but it’s extremely important if you want to better understand what’s being communicated in God’s Word. In this work we are going to use God’s name, Yahweh, when it is the most appropriate word to use in referring to Him, without ever abusing the privilege. And now you know why. It might seem a bit awkward at first, but once you get used to it, you come to value the infinite worth of being allowed to call upon the Creator of the universe and everything in it by His name.

Conquering the Promised Land – Seeds of destruction.

After a year at Mount Sinai, the Israelites have learned God’s Law and built God’s Tabernacle. They set out for the Promised Land. It’s a two-week journey. It takes them six months. Why? Because they complain to Yahweh and quarrel amongst themselves the entire way.

Once they get there, twelve men (one from each tribe) go to reconnoiter the land. They come back after forty days, and ten of the twelve are petrified. They report the land is everything they could ever hope for, with the exception of the height and ferocity of the inhabitants, and there is no way they could ever conquer this land. Two of the ten, Joshua and Caleb, say we can do anything with Yahweh’s help, so let’s go. But the people are faithless and therefore fearful, and they refuse to enter the land the Almighty Creator of the universe has promised them.

Yahweh is so upset by this He causes the people to wander around in the Arabian desert for forty years, until everyone twenty years and older has died off, except for Joshua and Caleb. He will then take the second generation of the Exodus into the land their parents refused to enter.

Forty years pass. Circa 1406 B.C., God brings the second generation to an entry point barred by the Jordan river, which forms the eastern border of the land. Echoing the parting of the Red Sea, God miraculously parts the Jordan. The second generation crosses on dry land and begins the conquest of Canaan. There are tremendous victories and spectacular failures along the way, but eventually they kill or drive out most of the Canaanites from the land and settle in.

“Most” is the operative word here, because in each of the territories allotted to the different tribes, remnants of the pagan nations are allowed to survive. This is in direct defiance of God’s command, which was to completely wipe these people from Israel.

That is a genuinely harsh command, and we will consider why it was given in more detail later in our study. For now, the basic reason God told His people to annihilate the Canaanites was to destroy their culture, which centered around temple prostitution and human sacrifice. Yahweh wanted these practices eradicated from the land, because He did not want His people seduced by them. The sexual temptation of temple prostitution was a gateway drug into the unthinkable, which led to parents burning their infants alive on the altars of the gods of Canaan.

The surviving remnants of the Canaanite people were the seeds of Israel’s eventual destruction. They grew like a cancer within the land, infecting the Israelites to such an extent Israel ultimately became worse than the pagans before them. The very kings and queens of Israel sacrificed their children on the altars of Baal and Molek. It became common practice in the Hinnom valley southwest of Jerusalem, in Greek called “Gehenna,” the word Jesus used to describe Hell.

The period of the Judges – A downward spiral into savagery.

All this plays out in dreadful fashion during the period following the conquest of the land. The people were supposed to do three basic things: (1) obey the Law, (2) worship at the Tabernacle, and (3) follow Yahweh, who literally dwelt among them in the Tabernacle, as their king. If they would do this, God promised to bless them with peace, prosperity, and security, as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) that would in turn be a blessing to all other nations.

Instead, everyone “did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:22), which is exactly what Moses commanded them *not* to do before he died (Deuteronomy 12:8). The result is an absolute catastrophe.

The second generation of the Exodus, who conquered and settled the land, did not bother to pass their history or Law on to their children. This is shocking given all Yahweh had done for them, and the result is a new generation grew up who “knew neither the LORD (*Yahweh*) nor what He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). So what happens next? They quickly adopt the horrifying customs of the Canaanites. To discipline them God sends in an invading army from the north. The people repent. God saves them. And everyone settles back down to a comfy life in the Promised Land, which “flowed with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).

Yet this generation doesn't pass their faith down to their kids either, and a vicious cycle begins, where the people abandon Yahweh for the gods of Canaan, He allows a neighboring power to invade, the people repent, God rescues them, and they all celebrate. Then once everything's nice again, the next generation turns their backs on God, except they are twice as bad as the generation before them.

In order to rescue His wayward people when they would finally return to Him, Yahweh would raise up men and women called "Judges," who were military and/or political leaders, and so this is often referred to as the period of the Judges. It was supposed to be the time of greatest freedom and peace for God's people, as they served their king, Yahweh, by obeying His Law and worshipping at His Tabernacle. Instead, some of the most appalling stories in the Bible come from this period.

One Judge (Jephthah) sacrifices his daughter to fulfill a vow he made that was both unnecessary and unlawful. A Levitical priest (the grandson of Moses) sets up a center for idolatry in the north, after men from the tribe of Dan murder every man, woman, and child living peacefully in a Sidonian outpost. Another priest forces his concubine out of a secure home to be literally raped to death by men from the tribe of Benjamin, in order to save his own skin. This sets off a civil war after which the tribe of Benjamin is reduced to just six hundred men, with every other man, woman, and child of Benjamin murdered by the rest of Israel. Then the Israelites resort to kidnapping and slaughter amongst their own people to find brides for the surviving Benjamites, so one of the tribes of Israel will not be extinguished.

This is just a small sample of the horrific things that took place during the time of the Judges. It all happened because the people "did what was right in their own eyes" instead of obeying the Law, worshipping at the Tabernacle, and following Yahweh as king.

After about three hundred years of this downward spiral into barbarism, the people in their wisdom decide their problem is: They don't have a king like all the other nations. However, this is exactly their purpose! They were not supposed to have a king like all the other nations. They were supposed to be *different* from all the other nations, with Yahweh, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as their king. But they reject Him, and God decides to do the most terrifying thing He could possibly do in response. He gives them what they ask for.

The first two kings – Saul and David.

Saul becomes the first king of Israel circa 1050 B.C. He is everything the people wanted – tall, handsome, from a good family, and a decent soldier. He ends up going insane and spending the last night of his life in disguise, asking a demon possessed occultist for help, instead of the God who made him king.

The second king of Israel is David. If Saul was what the people wanted in a king, David was what God wanted in a king. He is described as a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), although the sins he commits are grievous.

We will look at David's life in more detail in the chapter on Solomon's ancestry. But something extremely important happens during the reign of David we should note here.

God's covenant with David – a Descendant, ruling forever, as a Righteous King.

David loved Yahweh passionately, and he demonstrated this in his attitude towards the Ark. Near the end of the period of the Judges, the Ark had been captured by the Philistines, then returned to Israel because of the havoc it wrought in any pagan city that received it. David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and put it in a tent, while the rest of the Tabernacle resided a few miles northwest of Jerusalem in a town called Gibeon.

This made it impossible to worship Yahweh as directed by the Law. The Ark and Tabernacle were never supposed to be separated, but the people didn't really seem to care, because they never took the time to learn God's Law, so they didn't know what they were missing.

David's conscious is bothered, because while he is living in a palace in a portion of Jerusalem called the "City of David," the Ark is sitting outside in a tent, like a piece of old camping gear. So he has it in his heart to build a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, where he can reunite the Ark with the rest of the items necessary for worship according to the Law, which were in Gibeon with the Tabernacle. These included the altar and washing basin in the courtyard, and the lampstand, table, and incense altar within the "holy place" inside the Tabernacle.

God is delighted with David's desire, but He doesn't want David to be the one to build the Temple. He wants Solomon to do it, for reasons we will consider later. So Yahweh sends a prophet to tell David this:

2 Samuel 7:11-16 "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (NIV)

God essentially tells David, "I don't want you to build a house for me. Instead, I'm going to build a house for you that will last forever." By this, Yahweh means a royal house or bloodline that will never end.

It begins with a promise one of David's sons will succeed him to the throne and build the Temple. It contemplates sin in this person, whom God will discipline. But the throne will not be taken from him, as it was from Saul, such that a new dynasty or "house" is created. A descendant of David will always sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

But like many prophetic statements in Scripture, there is a greater meaning to the promise. God is also declaring that one day someone will come from the line of David fit to rule God's people eternally – a Righteous King – whom His wayward people so obviously and desperately need.

This became known as the "Davidic Covenant," whereby God promised that One would come from the line of David who would reign forever. Like the Abrahamic Covenant, this promise to

David is *unconditional*. No matter how bad things get, Yahweh will bring forth from David's descendants a King in Israel who will reign forever. And this King will not be corrupted by the throne (as is every other king in Israel's history), but instead rule with righteousness and justice for all eternity.

This is one of the many important prophecies about the Messiah ("Anointed One") of Israel, who would one day come and redeem both Israel and all the world from their sins. And all of these prophecies are fulfilled in the Person of Jesus, who is indeed called the "son of David."

John 7:42 "Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants..." (NIV)

Matthew 1:1 "... Jesus the Messiah the son of David..." (NIV)

In order for the nation to be blessed and a blessing in the land, she needs a Righteous King. Saul was a terrible failure. David did far better. Indeed, he was the best king in the history of the nation up until her destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. But he still committed terrible sins, which had far reaching impact on both his family and the nation.

So the question becomes: Will David's successor, who God will allow to build His Temple, be this Righteous King?

Enter Solomon: The most dramatic moment in history (so far).

Against this backdrop, we can now appreciate the drama unfolding when the spotlight hits Solomon as he appears on the stage of history.

The first two millennia were essentially one disaster after another, as God tried to reach mankind as a whole. He changes tactics and focuses on one nation, through which He desires to bless all nations. Yahweh unconditionally promises to create this nation from Abraham and give them the land of Canaan, in which He will bless them so they can bless others. But it's a constant struggle, wherein God always proves faithful, even when His people prove faithless. (Ironically, "Israel" means "he who struggles with God.")

Yahweh rescues the Israelites from Egypt and teaches them His Law and how to worship at His Tabernacle, but the first generation of the Exodus refuse to enter the land promised to them. He brings the second generation into the land instead, but they neglect to pass on their history and Law to their children and allow the despicable Canaanites to live amongst them, in defiance of God's express commands. So the Canaanites teach the children of Israel *their* history and customs, centered around temple prostitution and human sacrifice.

This leads us into the awful time of the Judges, where the Israelites become worse than the Canaanites before them. It was supposed to be a time of freedom, prosperity, and peace, where Yahweh ruled as King of Israel, and the people followed Him by obeying His Law and worshipping at His Tabernacle. Instead, it's a time of ever-increasing savagery.

After about three awful centuries of this, the people overtly reject Yahweh as their King and demand a "king like all the other nations." God gives them what they ask for in the person of Saul,

who is essentially driven insane by the authority and responsibility. Yahweh chooses the next king, David, who does much better, but ultimately fails as well.

Yet in His grace God promises to one day bring a Righteous King from the line of David who will rule forever. He also allows the successor to David's throne to build the Temple, a supreme honor.

So expectations are exceedingly high when Solomon takes the throne. Could this be the "Righteous King" Israel so desperately needs in order to be blessed by Yahweh, and a blessing to the other nations? Think of the extraordinary things God could do within and through Israel, with a Righteous King to lead her. If Solomon succeeds, it will forever change the course of human history for good. If he fails, what will Yahweh do in order to fulfill His unconditional promises to Abraham and David?

As Solomon takes the throne, it is a supremely critical point in the history of Israel. There has never been a better opportunity for things to go right, allowing divine blessing to flow as never before, not only to Israel, but also to the entire world. It's perhaps the most dramatic and important moment in the history of mankind so far.

Spoiler alert: Solomon fails. He starts out great, with extraordinary promise. But he ultimately fails with bitter irony. The author of so many wise proverbs rejects his own wisdom in shocking fashion. The man with more material blessings than anyone else on earth dies in misery and despair. And the man who *started* his reign building the one Temple of the holy God of all creation *ends* his reign building hundreds of temples for the abhorrent gods of Canaan, so the people he was supposed to rule with righteousness and justice can fornicate with prostitutes and burn their children alive.

The effects on Israel are devastating. And they resound throughout all nations for the rest of history. This is why it is so important to learn from Solomon's life and writings. They form perhaps the greatest cautionary tale in Scripture, meant to steer us away from the defiant choices made by Solomon that wrought such destruction upon himself, his nation, and those who came after.

While we might not have the same flashy place in history as Solomon, whether we realize it or not, our lives have tremendous meaning and impact, both in this life and eternity. And as we shall see when we get to the end of our study, in the eyes of God, our choices, when made to honor Jesus, will ultimately be exalted and remembered with far greater ceremony than anything Solomon ever did.

Psalm 98:1-9 "Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things... for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity." (NIV)

Colossians 3:23,24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." (NIV)

1 Peter 1:3,4 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope... to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you," (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:17,18 “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (NASB)

Hebrews 6:10-12 “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them... We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (NIV)

Revelation 22:12 “Look, I (*Jesus*) am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.” (NIV)

Revelation 11:17,18 “... We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because... The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small...” (NIV)

Revelation 3:4,5 “... you have a few people... who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me (*Jesus*) in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments... and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.” (NASB)

Revelation 3:21 “He who overcomes, I (*Jesus*) will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (NASB)

Revelation 3:12 “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God...” (NASB)

Matthew 19:28-30 “Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.’ ” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 2:9 “but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ ” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

After Solomon: The Northern and Southern Kingdoms, their destruction, and the need for a Savior.

Before we jump into the life of Solomon, let’s complete our look at the historical backdrop of these times by considering what occurred after his reign.

Because of Solomon’s descent into idolatry under the influence of 1000 pagan wives and concubines, after his death (circa 930 B.C.) God splits the nation into a Northern Kingdom, called “Israel,” and a Southern Kingdom, called “Judah.”

The Northern Kingdom is made up of ten of the twelve tribes, who rebel against the house of David and reject Solomon’s heir. The Southern Kingdom is made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. They remain faithful to the house of David and accept Solomon’s heir, fulfilling God’s promise that David’s line would endure. There are twenty kings of the Northern Kingdom, and twenty kings of the Southern Kingdom.

All of the kings of the Northern Kingdom were horrible, adopting the religious practices of the Canaanites. They began by creating golden calves and calling them “Yahweh,” but eventually abandon the pretense, along with the God of Israel, and wholeheartedly indulge in the worship of the gods of Canaan, building temples throughout the north for religious prostitution and child sacrifice. By 722 B.C. the Assyrians invade, conquer, and carry the survivors off to captivity in Assyria.

The kings of the Southern Kingdom do somewhat better. They are a mixed bag of good kings, horrible kings, and everything in between. Nevertheless, the Southern Kingdom also descends into the filth of idolatry, and by 586 B.C. the Babylonians invade, conquer, and carry the survivors off to captivity in Babylon.

This is an unthinkable tragedy for the Israelites. Yahweh promised them a Nation, Land, and Righteous King, whereby they can be blessed and in turn a blessing to others. Now because of their defiance, the nation is destroyed, they are driven from the land, and they have no leader. How will God be able to fulfill His unconditional promises to Abraham and David? If this is ever going to happen, they need a Savior.

The answer to their problem arrives six centuries later in the Person of Jesus. But that is, as they say, another story.

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I (*Jesus*) have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (NIV)

Diving in.

This brief review provides a broad overview of where Solomon fits into the overall story of God’s nation and human history. Yahweh picks one guy – Abraham – and promises unconditionally to make a nation from him, which will dwell in the Promised Land, and both receive God’s blessing and be the instrument through which God blesses the rest of the earth. Yahweh also unconditionally promises David that one of his descendants will sit on the throne of Israel forever.

These unconditional promises – of a Nation, living in the Land, being Blessed and a Blessing, under the eternal authority of a Righteous King descended from David – are in a sense what drive the rest of human history towards the conclusion we find in the book of Revelation. It’s the story of how God fulfills these promises, despite the sinfulness of all His servants – except for Jesus!

Solomon finds himself in the midst of this story at an exceedingly critical point, as the heir of David, charged with leading the people of Israel according to God’s Law and building God’s Temple in Jerusalem. It’s an enormous opportunity and responsibility, and he’s only about twenty years old when he gets the job. The kingship drove Saul mad and David, a man after God’s own heart, to adultery and murder. To say the least, the pressure is on.

Let’s now dive into the life of Solomon, see how he handles these things, and learn from his choices and writings.

Part 1: The Life of Solomon.

CHAPTER 1 – ANCESTRY.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

Limiting our focus.

Entire volumes have been written about the life of David, and rightly so. His life is fascinating, encouraging, and central to the story of how God brings a Savior to the earth. But alas, for our purposes, we will have to settle for a look limited to those events that directly affected Solomon.

From obscurity to fame to fugitive: A sling, lyre, and decade on the run.

David leapt onto the scene of Israel's history out of nowhere. He was an obscure shepherd boy, the youngest in a family of eight boys, literally put out to pasture by his father to do the lowliest job known to ancient culture.

David could have felt very sorry for himself out in the fields all alone taking care of a bunch of stupid sheep. Instead, he took it upon himself to learn how to use a sling and risked his life to protect his father's flock from lions and bears. He also used the time to learn how to play the lyre (a small, u-shaped harp) and develop his songwriting skills.

And while David may have thought there was no one to appreciate his acts of bravery and artistry, Someone was watching every battle and listening to every note.

Acts 13:22 “After removing Saul, he (God) made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’ ” (NIV)

God found in David the qualities He was looking for in a king. He sends the Prophet Samuel to anoint David, and soon puts the skills David learned as a lowly shepherd to good use.

King Saul needs a musician to play for him, to calm his mind when incapacitated by anxiety. David is chosen and introduced to the king at an early age, learning the ways of the royal court, which he will need to perfect to be prepared for the years ahead.

When Saul and the entire army of Israel are terrified of a Philistine giant named Goliath, David shows up with the sling he mastered as a shepherd, kills the giant, and leads the army of Israel to victory over the Philistines. As a result, Saul marries one of his daughters, Michal, to David, which will be important later.

David becomes a leader of Saul's troops, meets with unparalleled success, and the people of Israel fall in love with him, singing, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 18:7). Even Saul's eldest son, Jonathan, the heir to the throne, comes to love David as a brother. And in an act of incredible humility and integrity, Jonathan pledges loyalty to David, knowing God is going to take the throne away from his father and give it to the shepherd boy.

Saul, on the other hand, becomes insanely jealous of David and tries to kill him on multiple occasions. David is forced to go on the run for about a decade. During this time he makes great decisions and terrible decisions, but ultimately continues to grow as a follower of Yahweh and leader of men.

Abigail: The great blessing David threw away, and the destruction he chose instead.

During this decade on the run, David starts out completely alone. But by the end, he has assembled a small army of discontents from not only Israel but also the neighboring countries. He molds them into a deadly fighting force and teaches them to act with faith and honor.

To the astonishment of his troops, David twice spares Saul's life, when he could have killed the king and taken the throne by force. David wisely does not want to kill "Yahweh's anointed," so he waits for God's timing in his life, in turn teaching his men to trust God as well.

As this season in David's life draws towards a close and the time approaches for him to become king, Yahweh offers David one of the greatest blessings of his life. It's something vital he will need if he is going to rule Israel with wisdom and strength – a wise and resilient wife.

If you will recall, Saul married his daughter, Michal, to David as a reward for killing Goliath. But after trying to murder David on several occasions and forcing him into exile, Saul takes Michal and marries her off to another man. This makes David single once again.

While hiding from Saul in the Desert of Paran, in the far south of Israel below the Dead Sea, David and his men run out of supplies. They learn a rich man named Nabal was shearing his vast herds of sheep and goats in Carmel, which was near one of David's old hideouts called En Gedi along the western shore of the Dead Sea.

While in En Gedi, David had instructed his troops to never harass or steal from Nabal's men. They had treated Nabal well, when they could have robbed him blind, and it occurs to David in his time of need he may have some good will with his neighbor to the north.

The time of shearing was traditionally a festive season celebrated by acts of generosity. So David sends ten young unarmed men up to Nabal with a humble and polite request to share with David and his men "whatever Nabal can find for them."

This was a reasonable request according to the traditions of the day. It was not a demand or attempt at extortion. How does Nabal respond?

1 Samuel 25:10-13 "Nabal answered David's servants, 'Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?' David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. David said to his men, 'Each of you strap on your sword!' So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies." (NIV)

“Nabal” means “fool,” and the name suits him. Everyone knows who David is and how many men he commands. He has consistently conducted himself with integrity, and Yahweh has anointed him to be the next king of Israel. So Nabal should have been delighted to do this kindness to his future sovereign.

Instead, he insults David and sends his men packing. When David receives their report, he is livid and heads north to pay Nabal another visit, this time with 400 troops, suited up for battle, looking for blood.

Fortunately for Nabal, he has a very beautiful and wise wife named Abigail, which means “one who brings joy.” She learns from a servant David is on his way with 400 soldiers, and she takes immediate action.

1 Samuel 25:18-31 “Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs (*about 60 pounds*) of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, ‘Go on ahead; I’ll follow you.’ But she did not tell her husband Nabal. As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. David had just said, ‘It’s been useless – all my watching over this fellow’s property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!’ When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: ‘Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. And now, my lord, as surely as the LORD your God lives and as you live, since the LORD has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you. Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.’ ”
(NIV)

This is an extraordinarily wise woman. She is humble, strong, eloquent, faith-filled, and right. And to his credit, David recognizes this immediately.

1 Samuel 25:32-35 “David said to Abigail, ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.

Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.’ Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, ‘Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.’ ” (NIV)

David demonstrates his own humility by taking this very good advice from a woman he has just met, which was unusual during a time when women’s counsel was mostly ignored. He accepts her gifts and returns to the desert.

Abigail goes home to Nabal, who was very drunk and having a feast. The next morning, after Nabal sobers up, Abigail tells her husband what happened, and how close he was to death. The news terrifies Nabal. He collapses and dies ten days later.

David hears the news of Nabal’s death, and it’s his turn to act quickly.

1 Samuel 25:39-42 “When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, ‘Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.’ Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, ‘David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.’ She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, ‘I am your servant and am ready to serve you and wash the feet of my lord’s servants.’ Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five female servants, went with David’s messengers and became his wife.” (NIV)

This is a marvelous act of God’s grace to David. The marriage to Michal had been annulled by Saul. David was single. Then Yahweh brings an extraordinarily intelligent (and beautiful) wife to David to be his queen. Her beauty in court would only be surpassed by her wise counsel. God is blessing David with exactly what he needs to succeed as king of Israel and also experience all the fullness of romantic love, which God desires to give His faithful children.

If only this chapter in David’s life stopped here! Much of the heartbreaking tragedy to come in David’s life would never have happened, if David had appreciated Abigail, the “one who brings joy,” and found his delight in her.

Proverbs 5:15-23 “Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man’s wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman? For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly.” (NIV)

Instead, David does about the stupidest thing he could possibly do at this point in his life. He takes another wife, a woman named Ahinoam of Jezreel, a city not far from where Nabal and

Abigail lived (see Joshua 15:55,56). David is blessed with this amazing wife in Abigail, but it is not enough for him. He has to grab another local girl, for no other reason than to satisfy his ego and lust.

In the previous passage, we saw how delighted Abigail was to go to David. She could have been everything a man could ever want in a wife. She was eager to be a loving bride to David, and capable of being a magnificent queen to Israel.

And David needed her. She has tremendous insight. She is brave. She is decisive. And she knew how to approach David and speak wisdom to him in a manner he could receive without feeling emasculated. She could have been David's greatest ally, and the wise mother of his children, who imparted her wisdom and strength on to the future kings of Israel. God did all this for David when He brought Abigail to him in such dramatic fashion, which clearly demonstrated God was at work in his life.

But David seems to move on as soon as he gets the wise and righteous Abigail in his tent, and her heartbreak must have been incalculable. She was delighted to go to David and give herself to him. And as soon as she did, David goes and marries another girl from down the road just because.

David doesn't know it yet, but this decision may be the worst of his life, because it sets him on the dark, destructive path of polygamy, which draws him deeper and deeper into sin, until David commits the most abhorrent sins of his life, which have devastating, long-term consequences for both his family and the nation of Israel. It's the snare that nearly destroys him and will eventually cause him to spend another season of his life on the run – not from Saul, but from one of his own sons. All of this could have been avoided if he had appreciated God's gift of Abigail.

Proverbs 31:10-30 “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life... She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” (NIV)

Anointed in Judah, victory over the house of Saul, accepted by all Israel, and stabilizing his rule.

Tragically, Jonathan is killed in battle with the Philistines. During this same confrontation, Saul cowardly commits suicide rather than fight the enemy to the end.

David is anointed king by the tribe of Judah, to which David belongs and whose lands make up most of the southern part of Israel. But the house of Saul fights on with one of Saul's surviving sons as figurehead. This conflict lasts about seven years, until the resistance falls apart after Saul's son and his general are treacherously murdered, against the will of David.

Following the collapse of the house of Saul, David is anointed king over all Israel. He stabilizes his rule by taking the city of Jerusalem, strategically located towards the center of the Promised Land, from the Jebusites, a pagan people who had never been driven from the fortified city.

David then goes on to make peace with the powerful king of Tyre, a coastal city towards the north along the Mediterranean Sea. He also decisively defeats in battle the Philistines to the west and south. His rule of the land is now stable and unchallenged from without. But what about from within?

Destabilizing his rule: A wholesale descent into polygamy.

While David was ruling from Judah (before he defeated the house of Saul, conquered Jerusalem, and was made king over all Israel), David took four more wives, bringing his total to six. He then has one son with each of them, as follows:

- Amnon, his firstborn, son of Ahinoam of Jezreel.
- Kileab, son of Abigail, the widow of Nabal.

Note: Because Ahinoam is the first to bear a son, some believe David married her before he married Abigail, but this is not supported by the text. In 1 Samuel 25, the entire chapter is devoted to the story of Abigail, followed by two final verses mentioning Ahinoam and Michal.

The Hebrew in 1 Samuel 25:43 after the long story about Abigail simply states. “And also David took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and so were the two of them (Ahinoam and Abigail) his wives.” When you understand the whole story of David, and what the son Ahinoam bore David was like, it’s a literary gut punch, where you realize with dismay all the terrible things that will ensue because David did not appreciate Abigail.

Some translators render 1 Samuel 25:43 as “David had also married Ahinoam...” inferring he did so before marrying Abigail, as a way to explain why Ahinoam was the first to bear a son, but that’s not in the Hebrew. We don’t know why Ahinoam was the first to bear a son. Some women conceive quicker than others. All we know is Ahinoam conceived first, and her son turned out to be a monster.

These are David’s first two sons. Here are the next four:

- Absalom, son of Maakah, daughter of Talmai king of Geshur.
- Adonijah, son of Haggith.
- Shephatiah, son of Abital.
- Ithream, son of Eglah.

Let’s stop and think about this for a moment. Abigail was a truly magnificent woman, who would be the perfect queen for David and a wise, godly mother for the princes of Israel. David betrayed her when he took Ahinoam of Jezreel as a second wife.

But if David possessed an ounce of sense, as he ascended to the throne he would have repented from polygamy and treated Ahinoam with respect, but never have children with her. Then he should have had as many kids with Abigail as she would consent to, and with her raised one royal family in an exemplary way for all Israel to emulate.

Instead, David triples the number of his wives and starts having children with all of them. Only sons are listed, but there are also daughters in the mix, one of whom suffers a terrible fate because of David's choices here.

Consider the stupidity of this. As David looks forward to a bright future as king of Israel, he is setting his family up for disaster. His house will inevitably be consumed by bloodshed and strife. He has six sons from six different mothers. Each of them will aspire to the throne. This means they will spend every waking moment calculating the best course to power, and the royal house will be a turbulent ocean filled with nothing but ambitious sons and scheming mothers attempting to torpedo one another.

After David is crowned king of all Israel and settles into Jerusalem, it only gets worse.

2 Samuel 5:13-15 “After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. These are the names of the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 3:4-9 “David reigned in Jerusalem thirty-three years, and these were the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon. These four were by Bathsheba daughter of Ammiel. There were also Ibhar, Elishua, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet – nine in all. All these were the sons of David, besides his sons by his concubines. And Tamar was their sister.” (NIV)

During his seven years ruling Judah from Hebron, David had six sons by six different wives. But he was just getting started in his descent into the darkness of polygamy. Once he gets to Jerusalem, he takes more wives (Scripture does not reveal how many) and has a total of thirteen sons with them. Altogether that makes nineteen potential heirs to the throne; in other words, an extraordinarily combustible mix of competing ambitions and loyalties, guaranteeing hatred and bloodshed within the family he is supposed to lead as a godly follower of Yahweh.

We see from comparing these Scriptures four of the sons born in Jerusalem were from Bathsheba, whom we have yet to meet. Some names are repeated, most likely because the son died at an early age and the name was used again in his honor.

We also note David fathered a brood of sons with an undisclosed number of concubines, whose presence must have been resented by all. How selfish of David to take these women, use their bodies for his pleasure, and ignore the children produced by his lust.

And think of poor Abigail, who could have been such a wonderful wife to David, queen to Israel, and mother to the royal family, who has been forgotten and pushed aside by a growing harem and their offspring. Untold suffering for everyone involved will come of this, especially to David, who should have known better. The Law expressly forbids the king of Israel from taking “many wives” (see Deuteronomy 17:17). But he ignores all this, and as a result he will one day be served a very bitter cup, which not only he will have to drink, but also the rest of his family and indeed the entire nation.

David's first responsibility, even before ruling Israel, was to be a good husband to one wife and a good father to the children with whom God blesses them as a couple. Had David taken this responsibility seriously, the history of Israel would have been very different.

The difference between David and Solomon.

David's lust will bring untold suffering to himself, his family, and his nation. It's David's great, tragic character flaw, which is unfortunately passed down to Solomon to his utter ruin.

But as we shall see, the difference between David and Solomon is: Although David had terrible problems with lust, he never turned his back on Yahweh. David ran *to* God after sin, not *away* from Him. David was humble enough to recognize his sin, truly repent from it, and willingly receive whatever discipline Yahweh decided was just. This is dramatically expressed in some of David's most beautiful and heartfelt Psalms.

Psalm 51:1-7 “Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.... Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise... Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices...” (NASB)

Psalm 32:1-11 “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered...and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found... Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’S unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (NIV)

Unfortunately, this quality is not passed down to Solomon, because the willingness to repent is not a genetic trait. It's a choice, which David freely made, but Solomon freely refused.

Ezekiel 18:1-32 “The word of the LORD (*Yahweh*) came to me (*Ezekiel*): ‘... everyone belongs to me (*Yahweh*), the parent as well as the child – both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right... He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD. Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things (though the father has done none of them)... Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he is to be put to death; his blood will be on his own head. But

suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things... He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. But his father will die for his own sin, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. Yet you ask, "Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?" Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?... Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die... Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (NIV)

Joshua 24:14,15 "... serve him with all faithfulness... But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..." (NIV)

Deuteronomy 30:19,20 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days..." (NASB)

Hebrews 4:7 "... just as has been said before, 'TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.'" (NASB)

1 Chronicles 28:9 "... serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." (NASB)

The Ark, Temple, and Davidic Covenant.

David struggled with lust, but in nearly every other respect he was an extraordinary man, effective king, and passionate follower of Yahweh. His military successes were unparalleled and brought a peace to Israel she had never before enjoyed.

As we have seen, David's love for Yahweh inspired him to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, where he desired to build a magnificent Temple as its home. David's plans for the Temple followed the basic design of the Tabernacle (which was residing outside of Jerusalem in a town called Gibeah)

but on a much grander scale. He would then finally reunite the Ark and other instruments required for worship in Yahweh's Temple in Jerusalem.

God was delighted with the desire of David's heart, but He did not want David to build the Temple. He wanted Solomon to do it, for reasons we will consider later. Yet because of David's love and devotion, Yahweh chose to build a "house" for David instead, meaning both a physical and spiritual dynasty.

2 Samuel 7:11-16 "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (NIV)

Here, Yahweh essentially promises two things, one to come to pass in the near future, and one to come to pass throughout all eternity.

First, God promises He will not take the rulership of Israel away from David's descendants, the way He did with Saul. He will allow one of David's sons to build the Temple ("a house for my Name"). And when this son does wrong, Yahweh will punish him, but not remove him, as Saul was removed. We will see this promise fulfilled in the life of Solomon.

Second, there is a deeper promise in this passage that goes beyond the building of an earthly house through one of David's sons, and stretches on for literally all eternity. Yahweh promises to establish a throne through David's line that will endure *forever*. And when Yahweh says forever, He means forever.

That's a breathtaking promise. In human history, dynasties come and go. Some last longer than others, but none of them last forever – except for David's. The sovereign, righteous Lord of all creation just promised the "son of David" will occupy a throne established for all eternity.

This is known as the "Davidic Covenant," where God promised someone descended from David would rule forever as a Righteous King. And as we have seen, this is why Solomon's reign comes at such a dramatic point in Israel's history. Everyone was thinking, "Could Solomon be this Righteous King?"

Spoiler alert. Solomon will be an absolute disaster for Israel, so it quickly becomes clear the answer is: No. This promise has to apply to some future descendant of David, who would one day come and establish this throne, to rule over Israel forever.

Flashing forward in the history of Israel, the people unfortunately defied their covenant with Yahweh and ran headlong into the depravity of idolatry, eventually becoming worse than the Canaanites before them, fornicating with the priests and priestesses of the pagan gods, and sacrificing their children in the flames of pagan altars (2 Kings 21:9; Psalm 106:6-39; Jeremiah

32:30-35). As a result, the nation splits in two after Solomon's death, until the Northern Kingdom is destroyed in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians, and the Southern Kingdom is destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.

The Israelites were driven from the land and taken into captivity, but they always remembered this promise and looked for the "Son of David" to come, deliver them, and establish His throne in Israel. "Son of David" became synonymous with the "Messiah" ("anointed one"), who would one day come to Israel's rescue, with an emphasis on delivering them *militarily* from the rule and oppression of various gentile nations, as a mighty, earthly king. There was little thought of the more emphatic need to be redeemed *spiritually* by an eternal Savior.

Indeed, the Son of David does come to Israel one day and offer deliverance. And how the people respond to Him is the great tragedy of history.

Matthew 12:15-23 "... A large crowd followed him (*Jesus*), and he healed all who were ill...

All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' " (NIV)

Matthew 21:8,9 "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' " (NIV)

Matthew 22:41,42 "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?' 'The son of David,' they replied." (NIV)

John 1:1-12 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name," (NASB)

A beloved king.

David goes on to win military victories in every direction. He defeats the Philistines to the west, the Moabites to the east, the Arameans to the north, and the Edomites to the south. David secures the land of Israel in nearly every direction, except for a continuing dispute with the Ammonites towards the northeast in Transjordan across the Jordan river.

Winter arrives and the armies of Israel go home to await the spring, when military operations traditionally began in the more favorable weather. David has been with his men on the battlefield for each of these bloody campaigns, and they love him for it. He shares in their hardships and perils, and together they have tasted only victory. He returns from battle a triumphant, beloved king, renowned for his integrity and effectiveness.

And then all David has achieved begins to crumble.

Bathsheba and Uriah.

It starts with a small compromise.

When spring arrives, instead of going out to war with his troops, David stays in the comfort of Jerusalem. He sends his soldiers out under the command of a man named Joab, who was David's nephew and top general, to continue the fight with the Ammonites and besiege their capital, Rabbah, about thirty miles northeast of Jerusalem across the Jordan river.

Joab is an important person in both the stories of David and Solomon. He is a brilliant commander, but not above treachery. For example, when Abner, Saul's top general, wanted to defect and support David after Saul's death, which would have brought an end to the hostilities with the surviving house of Saul, Joab secretly assassinated Abner. Why? Because Abner had killed Joab's younger brother Asahel in combat, although Abner had done everything he could to spare Asahel's life. See 2 Samuel 2 & 3.

Joab leads the troops of Israel against the Ammonites, while David lounges around in Jerusalem. One evening David wakes from sleep. He goes up to the roof of his palace for a stroll in the cool night air. As he gazes across the city, his eyes land on a very beautiful woman named Bathsheba, who was bathing in an area David was able to observe from his roof – perhaps a courtyard of some kind, a lower rooftop, or an open window.

David inquires about the woman, and he is told she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's thirty "mighty warriors" (meaning his most loyal and effective soldiers, see 2 Samuel 23:39; 1 Chronicles 11:41) who is away fighting the Ammonites on David's orders. She is also the daughter of Eliam, another of the thirty (2 Samuel 23:34), and granddaughter of Ahithophel, one of David's close counselors (2 Samuel 15:12).

David considers all this, and then acts with unbelievable arrogance and selfishness.

2 Samuel 11:4,5 "Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness (*literally, "for she was purified from her uncleanness"*)).) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, 'I am pregnant.' " (NIV)

There is much debate regarding the relative blameworthiness of David and Bathsheba in this encounter. The passage is very brief and reveals little of the pair's motivations. What we know is:

- David got up from sleep and went for a walk on his roof. This was customary in the ancient world. Roofs were built with this in mind, so people could enjoy the cooler air. Most likely David was up there a lot, to be refreshed and look out over his capital city.
- Bathsheba was bathing in an area where she could be seen. This was not customary in the ancient world. In fact, it was pretty much unthinkable, as modesty in women was highly valued and strictly required, as it still is today in middle eastern cultures. And even in modern, western cultures, there are few women who would bathe in an area where they could be seen.

- We don't know whether Bathsheba's immodesty was intentional or reckless. Some believe she did it on purpose to seduce the king, whom she must have known could see her from the rooftop above, which he likely frequented. Others believe it was more of a foolish mistake, made when her husband was away at war.
- Regardless of Bathsheba's motivations, it was pretty creepy for David to secretly watch her bathe from his roof. He's a Peeping Tom.
- David should have gone back to bed, alone, or if aroused, with one of his many wives and concubines. It's not like his only alternative was to sleep by himself.
- Instead, he basically has a background check done on the naked girl next door.
- From this report he learns with certainty she was the wife of one of his best soldiers, who was away risking his life to fight David's battles. She was also the daughter of another of his best soldiers, and granddaughter of one of his close advisors.
- This makes David's midnight summons to Bathsheba a terrible, indefensible thing.
- There is no indication Bathsheba resisted, but at this time in history it was exceedingly rare for a woman summoned to the king's palace at night to be given any opportunity to resist or protest afterwards.
- The meaning of the phrase about Bathsheba being "purified from her uncleanness" is also debated.

Some believe it means *after* David slept with her, she followed the ritual purification required after people had sex. But this requires *both* people to bathe in water (Leviticus 15:18), which the passage does not mention.

Others believe *before* David slept with her, she had followed the ritual purification required after a woman's monthly period, and this was the purpose of her bathing that night. However, there is no requirement for a woman to bathe in order to be ritually pure after a normal menstrual cycle. She just has to wait seven days from the onset of her period to be ritually pure (Leviticus 15:19).

The Hebrew in the passage literally says, David "lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity." The simple meaning of this is: David slept with her, because the time of her monthly cycle had passed, and the timing was convenient.

Piecing all this together, Bathsheba's bath was likely not related to any sort of purification rite. It was just a bath. But it was in some sort of open space, and whether she did this intentionally to seduce the king, or carelessly while her husband was at war, she was wrong to take a bath where others could see her.

But David's choices here are far worse. Once he noticed Bathsheba, he should have looked away. If he was aroused, he should have gone to a wife. He had plenty. He should never have inquired about Bathsheba, except perhaps to protectively advise her of her vulnerability. If Bathsheba was out to seduce him, so what? He should have resisted. He's the king. This is going to happen a lot, and he should be setting a good example for his people.

And at the end of the day, the passage says, "*he slept with her.*" She didn't show up and climb into his bed. He summoned her and took her to his bed. And when it comes time for God to discipline, David rightly receives the greater portion.

When David learns Bathsheba is pregnant, he demonstrates no remorse for what he has done. He does, however, demonstrate a willingness to manipulate and deceive.

2 Samuel 11:6-13 "So David sent this word to Joab: 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and wash your feet.' So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. David was told, 'Uriah did not go home.' So he asked Uriah, 'Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!' Then David said to him, 'Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home." (NIV)

In contrast to David right now, *Uriah is a man of great integrity.* David is willing to idle about in Jerusalem and indulge himself, while his men are away risking their lives in battle in a foreign land. But not Uriah, even after David gets him drunk. Uriah will allow himself no comfort, including the comfort of his wife, while his brothers in arms are in harm's way.

It's interesting Uriah was a Hittite. The Hittites are one of the seven nations God commanded Israel to destroy, because of their penchant for temple prostitution and child sacrifice (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). And although Uriah was brought up in this horrifying culture, he chose another, righteous path, and became one of the greatest soldiers in the armies of Israel.

He must have been tremendously respected by all. He was rewarded with a beautiful Jewish wife, the daughter of another of the "mighty warriors" of Israel, and granddaughter of one of the king's counselors. This honor would never have been bestowed on just anyone, especially a foreigner. It would only have happened if Uriah was truly an exceptional person esteemed by all. And his behavior here demonstrates he earned this respect.

But this only infuriates David. At first he was willing to manipulate and deceive to cover his sin. With his conscience stung by Uriah's integrity, now David is willing to murder.

2 Samuel 11:14-16 “In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, ‘Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.’ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.” (NIV)

David began this episode in his life as an honorable servant of Yahweh, whose only desire was to build a Temple for the Ark in the city that would become the capital of God’s “holy nation and kingdom of priests” (see Exodus 19:6). God rewarded him with a covenant of supreme honor, then blessed him with stunning military victories.

But like so many of the characters in the Bible, after a spiritual high David imploded. Not all at once, but rather with one small compromise after another. But each seemingly small violation led to something worse, until the “man after God’s own heart” became an adulterer and murderer.

His first compromise was *laziness*, irresponsibly staying home and lounging around in bed while his troops marched off to battle. Maybe it seemed he had done his share and needed a rest. But his rest was unsatisfying. So he goes to pace his rooftop in the night.

From there he looks down and sees a naked girl. He should have looked away, and sent someone to warn her. But his next surrender was to *lustfulness*. His eyes linger. His thoughts stray. And he sends a servant to find out who this beautiful woman is.

He finds out, and instead of feeling shame for ogling the wife, daughter, and granddaughter of some of his most faithful men, he feels *entitled* to whatever he wants. He has no respect for what rightfully belongs to another, so he collects her, like a tax that is his due.

Then he takes her. But when the foreseeable news arrives concerning the results of his presumption, rather than take responsibility for what he has done, he attempts to deviously manipulate the righteous man he has wronged, because as a newly minted adulterer, he chooses *deceit* over repentance.

And when his machinations fail, he resorts to the last weapon in his arsenal – murder.

Laziness leads to lust. Lust leads to entitlement. Entitlement leads to adultery, which forces his unrepentant heart to deceive. And when deception fails, this once great leader murders one of the most honorable men in his nation.

David’s descent doesn’t end there. Notice Uriah was not the only one to die in this ambush. Other innocent men died as well. When this is reported to David, how does he react?

2 Samuel 11:18-25 “Joab sent David a full account of the battle... The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. The messenger said to David, ‘The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king’s men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.’ David told the messenger, ‘Say this to Joab: “Don’t let this upset

you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.” Say this to encourage Joab.’ ” (NIV)

The final depth of David’s descent is a cold, callous heart. Not only is the honorable Uriah dead, but so are several other of the “king’s men,” meaning soldiers brave and dedicated enough to go on this dangerous, militarily foolish mission. David just pats the messenger on the head, and sends Joab an “at-a-boy” for carrying out David’s murderous plan. And if a few other guys had to die, so be it.

What happens next?

2 Samuel 11:26,27 “Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.” (NASB)

Pleased with himself and thinking his plan has worked like a charm, David waits for the time of mourning to pass for that guy who used to work for him, and then, since the guy’s widow is having his kid, marries her and brings her into the palace so she can join the rank and file of his harem, who are populating the royal nurseries nicely with his every expanding litter of offspring.

Then with all these pesky loose ends neatly tied up like a pretty bow, king David kicks back, satisfied he got away with it. There’s nothing here for anyone to see or give a second thought.

But of course God has been watching all along. What He has seen is evil, and He will not allow it to stand.

Nathan’s story and prophecy.

Yahweh sends the prophet Nathan to David.

2 Samuel 12:1-6 “The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, ‘There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.’ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.’ ” (NIV)

Nathan is the prophet who revealed the Davidic Covenant to David, so the king is used to getting good news from Nathan. As he listens to the story, David is infuriated by the selfishness of the rich man and injustice done to the poor man. He completely overreacts, and threatens to kill the rich man, and make him pay four times over for the lamb, the latter of which seems pretty insignificant if you are going to be put to death anyway.

As a man who recently committed adultery with his faithful servant's wife, and then had that faithful servant shot full of arrows, David's judgment is askew. His reaction is extraordinarily self-righteous, imbalanced, and somewhat nonsensical. He imposes both a slap on the wrist (four times the costs of a lamb isn't much of a fine to a rich guy), and the supreme penalty, the rich man's life.

This is what happens to our minds when we give ourselves over to sin. We see ourselves as above the law, but are prepared to punish others cruelly and disproportionately for any offences we look down upon from our lofty seats.

Nathan bursts the king's self-righteous bubble with a stiletto of truth.

2 Samuel 12:7-13 “Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.” This is what the LORD says: “Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives (*“ishshah,” literally “women,” which can refer to wives or concubines*) and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.”’ Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD...’” (NIV)

Here we see the power of art to reveal our true selves, when we have the humility to see the piece is not about someone else, but about us. Nathan's story was quite captivating and motivating. It made the blood boil with indignation and created a desire to see justice done. David was prepared to kill the man committing the evil in the story. Then he learns he *is* the man. All of David's self-righteous, self-deluded, and self-indulgent walls come crashing down, and he sees his true reflection.

He also sees into his future, for Nathan prophesies about what tomorrow holds for the adulterous, murderous king:

- The sword will never leave his house.
- His own household will bring calamity on him.
- His “ishshah,” that is, “women,” meaning wives or concubines, will be taken by someone close to him, but not in the darkness of the night where no one can see, rather in the full light of day before all the nation.

Here in the narrative, David responds with a simple and direct “I have sinned against Yahweh.” And we have to wonder: How deep and sincere is his confession?

In David's music, we find the answer.

Psalm 51:1-19 For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar." (NIV)

This is one of the most powerful and moving confessions of sin in all of Scripture. And this is one of the qualities that makes David great, despite his horrific failure with Bathsheba and despicable murder of Uriah. He runs *to* God after sin, not *away* from Him, and trusts in his Heavenly Father to forgive and renew. This is a priceless psalm for us all to turn to when we likewise need God's mercy and restorative power.

How does God respond to David's true repentance?

2 Samuel 12:13-25 "... Nathan replied, 'The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die.' After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, 'While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.' David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. 'Is the child dead?' he asked. 'Yes,' they replied, 'he is dead.' Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. His attendants asked him, 'Why are you

acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!’ He answered, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.” But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.’ Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah (*“loved by Yahweh”*.)” (NIV)

There is much to consider here. God does forgive David, who was truly repentant. Although David deserved death for both adultery and murder according to the Law, God chose to forgive him. And perhaps one reason God did so is to encourage both you and me. If God will forgive David for something like this, He will forgive us for our sins when we humbly come to Him with repentant hearts.

Ecclesiastes 9:4 “Anyone who is among the living has hope...” (NIV)

Micah 7:18,19 “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” (NIV)

Isaiah 55:6,7 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” (NIV)

Psalms 103:8-18 “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” (NIV)

Psalms 32:1-11 “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered...and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found... Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (NIV)

1 John 2:1 “... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;” (NASB)

But then we read of the death of the child of David and Bathsheba, who was innocent of all that transpired between his parents, and we are rightly left heartbroken and confused. Why should the child die for what his parents did?

Let's first consider this: The child's death is God's punishment of David and Bathsheba for what *they* did. His purpose is not to punish the child. And there are some punishments worse than death. We can see from David's behavior he is shattered by his child's illness, and he pleads with God to save the boy.

Then the child dies, and from our human perspective it is a terrible loss for the child, who never gets the opportunity to live his own life and contribute what he can to God's kingdom. And it *is* a terrible loss. There is simply no way around that.

And yet from God's divine perspective, He is completely capable of, and totally willing to, make up any losses to this child in eternity. While the boy misses out on the joys of this life, he is also spared its sorrows, and goes directly to the arms of a loving and merciful God who knows how to "work all things together for good," even a life cut so terribly short.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (NASB)

Hebrews 11:5-38 "By faith Enoch was taken from this life (*at a comparatively early age for his generation*)... For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God... And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about... the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them..." (NIV)

Isaiah 57:1,2 "The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death." (NIV)

This may still be difficult for us to accept, but perhaps that's because we are not at this moment standing before the eternal God of all creation, seeing what transpired in the unfiltered light of His truth and grace. Here on earth we look ahead, and death can easily appear as a heavy door at the end of a dark tunnel, with nothing beyond but uncertainty. But after stepping through the frame, and into the presence of God with all eternity spread out before us, our eyes open, our perspective shifts, and it's not what God allowed in the past that matters, but rather what God promises for the future that makes "all things" good – not in an earthly sense, but in the sense of the divine.

2 Corinthians 4:17,18 "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (NIV)

Romans 8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (NASB)

Revelation 21:3,4 “... God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 2:9 “but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ ” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

This leads to a larger issue of exactly what happens to children who die young, before they have an opportunity to make any decisions on their own for which they can fairly be held accountable. It’s encouraging to note David has a firm belief he will again see his son in eternity, which indicates those children who die before an age of accountability will go to heaven. We can also take comfort in the truth an all-knowing, all-powerful, and infinitely loving God knows exactly what this child would have done with his or her life, and will bless the child accordingly in eternity. God is holy, and God is love. He can act no other way.

Psalms 33:20-22 “We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (NIV)

Romans 8:31-39 “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

1 Peter 4:19 “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (NASB)

David fasts in sackcloth and prays with all his might on the ground for the sick child. Yet on the seventh day his son dies. David’s attendants fear what their king might do upon learning of the child’s death, but David provides a model for how we should deal with tragedy in our lives.

While the outcome of any situation is uncertain, it is time for us to fast and pray and plead our case with the Almighty. But once His will is revealed, we must trust Him and accept His judgment, no matter how difficult the test.

Proverbs 17:3 “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts.” (NASB)

Proverbs 19:21 “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.” (NIV)

Proverbs 3:5,6 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (NIV)

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (NIV)

Job 13:15 “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...” (NASB)

Job 23:10 “... when he (*God*) has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (NIV)

Once David learns of his child’s death, David washed, dressed, worshipped, and ate. In that order. Then he went and comforted Bathsheba, who was now his wife. And God blessed them with another son, Solomon, who would become the next king of Israel.

After seven days of fasting in sackcloth, David was a mess. Once the outcome of this tragic circumstance was certain, David accepted God’s will. He then cleaned himself up, and demonstrated his faith in worship. He didn’t go to worship a disheveled wreck. That would have been a self-serving act of disrespect, where he went to God seeking pity, not offering worship. He came before God humbly, respectfully, looking his best, and accepted the judgment of Yahweh.

Then he ate, because he still had something left to do. He needed to go comfort Bathsheba, who of course was also hurting tremendously over the loss of their child. But David wisely realizes he cannot be a comfort to her if he is about to collapse from starvation. He must reasonably take care of himself, so he can then effectively take care of his wife.

It’s also worth noting David did not abandon Bathsheba or blame her for all his sorrows, as many men would. At best, Bathsheba’s immodesty lured David into sin, and at worst she seduced him and was the instigator of the calamity that followed. But David seems to place no blame on her, confirms her status as his wife, and another child is born.

Of course no new child can replace another who was lost. The absence will always be felt, until the family is reunited in eternity by God’s grace. But a new child is a comfort. And this child is special. He will be Israel’s next king, and one of the most famous and blessed men in history.

As we shall see, Solomon’s life and character are complex. Tremendous good and horrific evil come to Israel through him. Regardless, we should note God uses this union between David and Bathsheba to bring Israel’s next king into the world; and Yahweh’s undeniable purpose in Solomon was to bless, even if Solomon refuses this destiny. One principle we can glean from this is: God can bring good out of anything, even our worst failures, if we will let Him.

Isaiah 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way...” (NIV)

Ephesians 2:3-5 “... we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),” (NASB)

Isaiah 57:15,16 “For this is what the high and exalted One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of me – the very people I have created.’ ” (NIV)

Psalms 103:8-18 “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear

him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” (NIV)

Lamentations 3:21-25 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.” (NASB)

Lamentations 3:31-42 “For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone... Why should the living complain when punished for their sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: ‘We have sinned and rebelled...’ ” (NIV)

Psalms 145:8-16 “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made... The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down... You (*God*) open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 3:12-15 “... I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious... Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God... Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.” (NASB)

Hebrews 12:1-13 “... let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith... FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES... God deals with you as with sons; for what son is their whom his father does not discipline?... All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.” (NASB)

Philippians 3:13,14 “... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (NASB)

Psalms 32:1-11 “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered...and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found... Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the

woes of the wicked, but the LORD'S unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (NIV)

Micah 7:18,19 "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (NIV)

Luke 15:7 "I (*Jesus*) tell you that... there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:19 "... If you repent, I (*God*) will restore you that you may serve me..." (NIV)

Jude 1:24,25 "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (NASB)

As all this is going on in David's household, Joab continues the fight in Ammon against her capital city, Rabbah. Joab captures the citadel, then sends messages for David to come and claim the victory, "otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me" (2 Samuel 12:28). David goes to Rabbah. The city is conquered. A tremendous amount of booty is taken, and the Ammonites are put to forced labor on behalf of Israel.

And so David's military victories over the threats in and around Israel are complete. It should have been a time of peace and plenty for the king of Israel and his household.

But then Nathan's prophecies start to come true.

The prophecies fulfilled.

Nathan had prophesied:

- The sword will never leave David's house.
- David's own household will bring calamity on him.
- David's "ishshah," that is, "women," meaning wives or concubines, will be taken by someone close to him, but not in the darkness of the night where no one can see, rather in the full light of day before all the nation.

Soon these prophecies start to come true, in barbaric, horrific fashion.

Amnon rapes Tamar.

Amnon is David's eldest son, by Ahinoam of Jezreel. This is the wife David took soon after meeting and marrying Abigail.

As you will recall, Abigail could have been a magnificent queen for David, but he threw God's gift away by marrying Ahinoam and his other wives (along with taking an undisclosed number of

concubines), all of whom start producing children and potential heirs to the throne. This sets up David's household for nothing but strife and tragedy. It's a powder keg ready to go off. So far, David has avoided a detonation, but his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah lights a fuse to the inevitable.

Ahinoam of Jezreel wins the race to bear the eldest son of David, Amnon. Abigail comes in second with her son Kileab. And Maakah, comes in third with her son, Absalom. 2 Samuel 3:2-5.

Maakah is the daughter of Talmi, the pagan king of Geshur. This means through this marriage David has defied the commandment in the Law for Israelites to never intermarry with the pagan nations surrounding Israel (Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:9-13).

Maakah's son Absalom is described as the most handsome man in Israel. He had long hair he only cuts once a year, and "from the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him" (2 Samuel 14:25,26).

David and Maakah also have a daughter named Tamar, making her Absalom's full-blood sister. She is described as very beautiful (2 Samuel 13:1), and Amnon, Tamar's half-brother and David's first born son, develops an unnatural desire for her.

2 Samuel 13:2,3 "Amnon became so obsessed with his (*half*) sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man." (NIV)

Because Tamar was a virgin, the custom was for her to live under tight security in her father's house. The Law even called for promiscuous daughters living in their father's house to be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:21). So there was no way for Amnon to be alone with her. His advisor, Jonadab, who was David's nephew, comes up with a vile but shrewd plan.

Amnon pretends to be sick in bed. He tells David the only thing that will soothe him is if Tamar prepares a meal and feeds him with her own hands. David falls for it and instructs Tamar to go to Amnon. She cooks the meal, and when she arrives, Amnon attacks.

2 Samuel 13:8-19 "So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. 'Send everyone out of here,' Amnon said. So everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, 'Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand.' And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, 'Come to bed with me, my sister.' 'No, my brother!' she said to him. 'Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you.' But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, 'Get up and get out!' 'No!' she said to him. 'Sending me away would be a greater

wrong than what you have already done to me.’ But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said, ‘Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her.’ So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.” (NIV)

In contrast to the adultery between David and Bathsheba, there is absolutely nothing consensual about this. It’s a horrid, forcible rape, by a half-brother against a half-sister. Tamar to her credit resisted, and Amnon, David’s first-born and heir, to his everlasting infamy overpowered her.

Tamar even pleaded for Amnon to first marry her, which might have actually been permitted in an ancient, royal household (although it was forbidden by the Law, see Leviticus 18:6-9). And if Amnon genuinely loved her, he would have sought this exception from his father. But Amnon is only interested in gratifying his lust.

The crime is committed. Did it satisfy Amnon? No. His intense desire turns to intense hatred, and in an act of unbelievable selfishness, he throws his violated half-sister out.

For Tamar, stuck in the twisted culture of the ancient world, this is worse than being raped. The Law required a man who raped a virgin, not pledged to be married, to marry the girl, whom he can never divorce, if she will have him (Deuteronomy 22:28,29), and Tamar is making it clear she will have him. Yet Amnon treats her with unfathomable contempt. He tosses his half-sister out like garbage.

This stands as a stark warning of the perils of infatuation. What appears to be selfless love is in truth selfish obsession, which can turn to loathing with astonishing speed after what is desired is tasted.

Time is the best test of whether something is love or obsession. If you find yourself infatuated with another, give it time to see if you truly love him or her, or if instead you are merely being overpowered by an emotion that could be produced by any of a vast number of influences, many of which you are likely unaware. If it’s love, it will be worth waiting for, and if it’s infatuation, you will save yourself incredible heartache by letting it pass.

If you are the subject of someone’s infatuation, remember as good as it might feel to be wanted, any person’s love should be confirmed by *virtuous behavior over time*. Don’t give your heart to a stranger, no matter how much attention he or she may initially give you. Let a suitor earn your affections over time. If they can’t be bothered to do that, they are not a suitor. They are a *predator*. And remember: The person infatuated with you can quickly turn dangerous, no matter what you do, so protect yourself. Beware the infatuated lover!

Sadly Tamar was unaware of Amnon’s infatuation and could not protect herself. In the custom of the ancient world she tears her robe and covers herself in ashes at the disgrace, and David’s house is full of her weeping.

David’s nephew devised a plan for David’s son to rape David’s daughter. Truly calamity has fallen upon David from his own house. Now it’s time for the sword to appear.

Absalom murders Amnon.

As Tamar's weeping fills the hallways, Absalom and David respond.

2 Samuel 13:20-22 “Her brother Absalom said to her, ‘Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart.’ And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman. When King David heard all this, he was furious. And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.” (NIV)

Absalom immediately discerns what happened, but then quiets his sister, tries to comfort her, and takes her in to his house. David is described as “furious,” but he does absolutely nothing to see justice done for this crime, with predictable results. A deep anger at this injustice grows in the silent Absalom, while poor Tamar is left to live a shattered life of desolation in her seething brother's home.

We hear no more about Tamar in Scripture, which stands as a harsh indictment, primarily of David's weakness. After all, Tamar was *his* daughter, and the fact she was raped by his son shouldn't matter. It only makes it worse. David is the king, and more importantly he is the father, and he should have seen justice done – fairly, impartially, and according to God's Law. It was his solemn, sacred duty twice over, as king and father. But to his shame he just rages about it for a little while, then lets it go.

This is also the failure of the entire household to demand justice for Tamar. When king and father failed, brothers should have stepped up and seen the Law upheld. But they slink into the woodworks of the house as well, and a terrible doom descends upon the entire family, while if someone had stood up for the innocent Tamar, the tragedy soon to unfold would never have befallen.

Two years pass. Sheepshearers come to Absalom's herd north of Jerusalem, near the land of Ephraim. This is traditionally a time of celebration, and Absalom invites his father to join him. David politely refuses. Absalom's keeps asking and urges him to come, but David keeps refusing and sends a blessing instead.

Perhaps this was the last straw for Absalom. His father won't come and celebrate with him. Nor will his father do justice for his sister. David refuses to enjoy life or pursue righteousness with his son. So Absalom must start to wonder: What good is this guy, and what exactly do I need him for anyway?

Then Absalom's attention returns to the brother who raped his sister, and he has a thought: If dad doesn't want to come spend time with me, maybe I can make other use of this occasion. So Absalom changes tack and asks David to send Amnon instead. David asks, “why should he go with you?” But Absalom persists, so David sends Amnon, along with the rest of the royal brothers. See 2 Samuel 13:23-27.

Here we see David acting as both a poor father and king. He should have accepted his son's invitation, especially when it was clear this was important to Absalom, who kept asking him to come. But David sends his "blessing," instead of himself.

That's a poor father. Absalom didn't ask for a blessing. He asked for his dad. Perhaps Absalom wanted to use this time to talk things over with his father. But David has no time for his son, and once again misses an opportunity to avoid the tragedy that follows.

It was also foolish from a royal standpoint to send all the heirs to the throne out of the security of the Jerusalem stronghold into the countryside, without any sort of guard. Any number of tragedies could come from this, from dangers both within and without Israel; and it's just something responsible kings who cared about their children and dynasty did not do.

But David did, and Absalom pounces.

2 Samuel 13:28-36 "Absalom ordered his men, 'Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, "Strike Amnon down," then kill him. Don't be afraid. Haven't I given you this order? Be strong and brave.' So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled. While they were on their way, the report came to David: 'Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left.' The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his attendants stood by with their clothes torn. But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, 'My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's express intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead.' Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill... Jonadab said to the king, 'See, the king's sons have come; it has happened just as your servant said.' As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his attendants wept very bitterly." (NIV)

Absalom's men kill Amnon. The rest of the brothers flee in terror, because they fear they are next, which is what usually occurred in ancient royal families when succession is unclear, and one brother wants to make sure he takes the throne.

This sort of report, of one heir massacring all his familial rivals, comes to David. He believes it, because these things happened all the time, and he's devastated. But then Jonadab tells him what actually happened and why. This is the same Jonadab, David's nephew, who advised Amnon regarding how to best be alone with Tamar so he could rape her.

Jonadab was described earlier as "a very shrewd man," and he shows it here, as he plays royal politics with rare skill. He can read the tea leaves of the family cup and discern what must have happened. Since his ally Amnon is now dead, he ingratiates himself to the king with comforting news only one of his sons has been murdered, the one who raped your daughter.

We don't hear any more from Jonadab in Scripture, so we don't know what ultimately became of him. But what we see is Nathan's prophesy coming true. Calamity is falling upon David because

of the machinations of his own family. Ruthless intrigue has taken deep root in his house, as was inevitable when he gave himself over to polygamy and starting have children with so many women. Now the sword has arrived as well, and it will never leave David's house. There will be continuing intrigue and bloodshed in the royal family, throughout his lifetime and beyond.

David's surviving sons make it back to Jerusalem. Everyone has a good cry. And once again, no one does anything useful. But what about Absalom?

2 Samuel 13:37-39 “Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned many days for his son. After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. And King David longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death.” (NIV)

Absalom flees to his mother's people and lives for three years with his pagan grandfather, Talmai, king of Geshur, who reigned from a Geshurite stronghold just north of Israel in an area called Aram (2 Samuel 15:8). David mourns for Amnon, his rapist son, for “many days,” but then seems to get over it, and longs to be reunited with Absalom, his murderous son.

David gets his wish.

Absalom dethrones David.

It's Joab, David's nephew and the commander of his troops, who orchestrates Absalom's return. He knows David misses Absalom and wants to help. So he writes a weepy, fictional story about a young man who kills his brother, then the clan wants to kill him in revenge, and he hires an actress to tell it to David and ask the king to intercede. David falls for it, then the actress guilt trips David into inviting Absalom to return from exile.

But when Absalom arrives in Jerusalem, David refuses to see him. It's another stunning display of bad parenting. He should either stand firm on Absalom's exile, or receive him back fully. This arrangement keeps Absalom in a sort of purgatory, where he is still being punished for what he did, just closer to home. He's back in Jerusalem, but he's lost the privileges of royalty, which he likely enjoyed in Geshur as the grandson of the king. David is tormenting his son, rather than exacting judgment or extending mercy, with predicable results. It further incites Absalom.

2 Samuel 14:28-33 “Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face. Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. Then he said to his servants, ‘Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire.’ So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab did go to Absalom's house, and he said to him, ‘Why have your servants set my field on fire?’ Absalom said to Joab, ‘Look, I sent word to you and said, “Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, ‘Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!’ ” Now then, I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.’ So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.” (NIV)

Joab did Absalom a great favor by orchestrating his return to Jerusalem, but it appears Joab never suspected David might refuse to see Absalom upon his arrival. When it's clear Absalom is still out of favor with the king, Joab repeatedly ignores Absalom's summons, seemingly washing his hands of the matter.

Never one to just sit around and wait for something to happen, Absalom sends his servants to Joab's field, which was ripe for harvest, and has them torch it. This gets Joab's attention.

It also reveals Absalom's aggressive character has not changed much while he was cooling his heels in Geshur for three years. Absalom is still prepared to do anything to get what he wants, including burning down the valuable field of the man who has been so good to him. It also reinforces Absalom has quite a group of servants, who will gladly murder and commit arson for the prince, which will later come in handy when Absalom wants to start a revolution.

Joab confronts Absalom, but the prince makes a fair point: It would be better for him to have been left in Geshur where he was treated like royalty, than to be brought to Jerusalem and treated like an outcast.

Then Absalom insists, "I want to see the king's face, and if I'm guilty of anything, let me be put to death." That is not a good faith appeal, because there is no question as to his guilt. The question is not *if* he is guilty. We already know he *is* guilty – of murdering his older brother. The real question is: What's David going to do about it? There is an arrogance in Absalom's brash, self-serving statement, and a total lack of remorse for, or even an acknowledgement of, the blood still dripping from his hands.

But Joab does what Absalom asks. The king summons his murderous son, who bows down before his father and receives both forgiveness and a kiss. Yet we have to conclude the son's obeisance to the father is not motivated by a humble repentance for what he did. It's motivated by a fierce desire to return to a position of influence and power.

Bottom line: Absalom does whatever it takes to get what he wants. When he wants revenge, he murders his brother. When he wants an audience with Joab, he torches the General's harvest. When he wants his father's forgiveness, he bows to the ground. But as will become clear, he sees his father's kiss, not as an act of mercy forgiving him for murdering his brother, but as an act of delayed justice, condoning and blessing the act.

In other words, when David kisses Absalom, in Absalom's mind his father is acknowledging Amnon had it coming, and David was wrong to exile Absalom. He sees it as a triumph being vindicated, not a sin being forgiven. From all we see of Absalom's words and actions – past, present, and future – we can be fairly certain as Absalom bows before his father with face to the floor, he is smiling with satisfaction, not weeping with gratitude. David and all Israel will pay dearly for allowing this distortion of truth to remain in Absalom's heart.

Let's now pause for a moment and note something about Absalom. Although he is an unrepentant murderer and arsonist, who arrogantly rationalizes his crimes, people love him.

2 Samuel 14:25-27 "In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no

blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head – he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him – he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels (*about five pounds*) by the royal standard. Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. His daughter’s name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.” (NIV)

Absalom was a long-haired, good looking prince of Israel – a true celebrity of his time. And in addition to a golden appearance, he had a golden tongue and an innate gift for manipulating people who lacked the wisdom to see the darkness within him.

He even had a beautiful daughter he named after his wronged sister, Tamar. People likely saw this as a lovely tribute to his poor sibling, but it’s far more likely it was purely a political move, to remind people why he murdered his rival for the throne, so in their authentic sympathy for a woman who genuinely deserved their compassion, they would overlook the lawless, brutal, sinister acts of which Absalom was capable.

It works like a charm.

2 Samuel 15:1-6 “In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, ‘What town are you from?’ He would answer, ‘Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.’ Then Absalom would say to him, ‘Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.’ And Absalom would add, ‘If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.’ Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.” (NIV)

This is textbook political pandering. First, Absalom gets a chariot, which you weren’t supposed to have in Israel (Joshua 11:6), but it makes him look really cool. Then he has fifty thugs run ahead of him, which makes him look rich and powerful.

This configuration, a chariot preceded by men on foot, was a symbol of kingship used by the prophet Samuel, when he warned the people of the oppression they could expect if they rejected Yahweh and made one of their own king (see 1 Samuel 8:11). Absalom is counting on the people remembering the symbolism but forgetting the warning. He is not disappointed.

He gets up early, goes to the road leading to the city gates, and waylays every person arriving in Jerusalem looking for an audience with the king. He tells them, “gee, I wish I was in charge of your case, because I would give you anything you want because you are clearly right. But you have to see the king and he doesn’t even have anyone around to talk to you, can you believe that?” And if anyone bows to Absalom, he feigns humility and helps them up with a big phony smile, then plants a slobbery kiss on their cheek, knowing he just won over another weak-minded supporter he can count on when the inevitable coup is staged.

After four years of this, Absalom is ready to drop the pretense and take what he wants.

2 Samuel 15:7-12 “At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, ‘Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: “If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.”’ The king said to him, ‘Go in peace.’ So he went to Hebron. Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, “Absalom is king in Hebron.”’ Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing.” (NIV)

Absalom asks his father for leave to fulfill a vow he made in Geshur: To worship Yahweh in Hebron, if he ever made it back to Jerusalem.

Now there are several odd things about this request that should have immediately tipped David off. For example, why would Absalom want to go to Hebron to thank Yahweh for returning him to Jerusalem? Wouldn’t Jerusalem be the place to do that, if Absalom was grateful to be back there?

Jerusalem is a safe, walled city, where the king and his household are protected by David’s soldiers. Why would Absalom want to leave a city full of men loyal to his father and go to Hebron?

Hebron is essentially the capital city of Judah, a few miles southwest of Jerusalem, where David was anointed king. Thinking further, why might Absalom want to go alone to a city with a history of anointing new kings to fulfill a vow? Did it ever occur to David a coup would be difficult to stage in the fortified city of Jerusalem brimming with David’s men; while Hebron, full of people freshly lathered up with Absalom’s manipulative posturing, would be perfect?

And exactly what might be the underlying motivation for a vow made by Absalom, while hiding out in Geshur, because his dad just couldn’t understand or accept the fact that murdering his rapist son and heir to the throne should have been totally justified and acceptable, even though he was Absalom’s brother?

In other words, Absalom made a vow to worship in the capital city of the powerful tribe of Judah where kings are anointed, while stewing on his plight in a foreign land where he felt betrayed and misjudged by his own father... who was king... and had just lost his heir... and hadn’t appointed a successor.

If David had thought all this through, he might have suspected Absalom’s vow was to worship Yahweh in Hebron, not as a forgiven prince who had been welcomed back to the family, but as the new king of Israel, who had just taken the throne that was rightly his.

We should pause here to note the conflicting principles and poor choices of David, Absalom, and Joab, which all collide and cause David to (temporarily) lose the throne.

Absalom was right that justice was not done by David for Tamar, Absalom's sister and David's daughter. David shouldn't have just got upset. He should have punished Amnon according to the Law.

But he didn't, so Absalom took the law into his own hands. Yet not God's Law, rather his own. And he went too far. Rape is a despicable and horrible crime, but according to the Law this situation was not punishable by death and without trial. So David's injustice towards Tamar inspires Absalom's injustice towards Amnon.

Absalom stewes on all this while in Geshur. Joab sticks his nose in where it doesn't belong and orchestrates Absalom's return, but David botches this up by denying Absalom either genuine forgiveness or just punishment, until Joab once again wrongly intercedes, after Absalom torches his crops.

From all this, Absalom gets the idea nice guys never win, and the only way to get what he wants is to take it by force. So he patiently nurtures a plan that came to him during an exile he felt was unjust, for an act he believed vindicated when his father received him back with a kiss, intended by David to convey mercy but received by Absalom as an admission he was right all along.

All these characters have both good and bad motivations, and make both good and bad choices, all of which get thrown into a smoking cauldron of royal intrigue, producing a deadly brew each will eventually have to drink to its dregs, until the cup finally falls from their hands and they depart this earth to stand before Yahweh.

But for now, Absalom designs everything perfectly. He brings two hundred men from Jerusalem with him. They don't know what's going on, but once they hear those trumpets blaring, they read the political tea leaves and know their lives are in danger if they don't dance to the music. And so Absalom now has two hundred followers from Jerusalem to support his coup, along with all the people from all the different tribes he has been grooming for the last four years.

Absalom also sends for Ahithophel, one of David's chief counselors, whose advice at that time was considered by all "like one who inquires of God" (2 Samuel 16:23). In other words, this man was greatly regarded but in truth highly overrated, because he's neither a priest nor prophet so he doesn't speak with God. He's just a political consultant. And he also just so happens to be the grandfather of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 15:12).

This makes Ahithophel an interesting choice for Absalom. He's inviting one of the king's most highly regarded advisors, and the grandfather of one of the king's wives, to join him. If he succeeds, by appearance it adds tremendous weight to his claim to the throne, because Absalom can say, "look, even my dad's wisest counselor and close relative thinks I should be king."

Absalom succeeds, and Ahithophel joins the procession to Jerusalem to depose David. Why? Maybe Ahithophel was angry at David for what he did to his granddaughter. Maybe he didn't really care who was king, so long as he was the chief advisor. Maybe he feared for his life if he didn't play along. It was probably a mixture of all these motivations.

Regardless, with the wise Ahithophel at his side, Absalom must have been very pleased with himself as he marched towards Jerusalem. In truth, this turns out to be, along with his grooming habits, one of Absalom's greatest mistakes.

Back on the run, this time from his own son.

Messengers arrive in Jerusalem with the news "the hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom" (2 Samuel 15:13), and David immediately understands what has transpired. He wastes no time, gathers all his loyal officials, troops, and household, and quickly evacuates Jerusalem. He leaves only ten concubines behind to take care of the palace.

Marching with him are the "Kerethites and Pelethites." These are elite troops and bodyguards (see 2 Samuel 8:18; 20:7,23; 1 Kings 1:38,44; 1 Chronicles 18:17). There is also a group of 600 Gittites from Gath; that is, Philistines loyal to David, who had just recently joined the king.

David gives these new recruits from Philistia an opportunity to leave, but they swear by Yahweh they will serve David (2 Samuel 15:21). This is a powerful condemnation of the Israelites, where Philistines are more loyal to David in this dark hour than his own countrymen. It's also an encouraging reminder that no matter who you are or where you come from, you can effectively serve Yahweh and play an important part in His plan.

David instructs the priests Abiathar and Zadok to remain in Jerusalem with the Ark, with David's blessing. Abiathar was a priest who escaped from Saul when he murdered all the priests of Nob, and was therefore loyal to David, (see 1 Samuel 22:20-23). Zadok was an Aaronic priest descended from the line of Eleazar and Phineas (Ezra 7:1-4).

David tells Zadok: "Take the Ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him" (2 Samuel 15:25,26). As David goes on the run for the second time in his life, now from his own son, he humbly chooses to trust Yahweh to do what is right, regardless of the outcome.

David heads east hoping to get across the Jordan to safety. He weeps as he passes through the Mount of Olives, barefoot and with head covered, in the ancient style of mourning. He learns Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom, and prays Yahweh will turn his counsel to foolishness. God doesn't wait long to answer David's prayer.

As David reaches the summit of the Mount of Olives, Hushai, another one of David's counselors, meets him with robe torn and dust on his head, prepared to join his king in exile. But David says Hushai would be a burden on the road, likely because Hushai was old or somehow otherwise unable to handle the rigors of life on the run.

Instead, David wants Hushai to return to Jerusalem and offer Absalom his services as a counselor. There, he can frustrate Ahithophel's counsel and pass on intelligence to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, whose sons can bring news to David. Hushai agrees and arrives in Jerusalem just as Absalom enters the city. See 2 Samuel 15:30-37.

Heading eastward from the Mount of Olives, a man from Saul's clan named Shimei approaches the king's company and begins to curse them. He throws rocks at David and his officials. David has a group of elite soldiers at his side, who could kill the man in an instant. What does David do?

2 Samuel 16:5-14 "... Shimei... pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, 'Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!' Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.' But the king said, 'What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, "Curse David," who can ask, "Why do you do this?"' David then said to Abishai and all his officials, 'My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.' So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself." (NIV)

We see some of David's best qualities in this exchange. Shimei is wrong to curse David for Saul's blood. David dealt honorably with the treacherous Saul. But David was a murderer of the honorable Uriah. And so he takes the misguided cursing of Shimei as a deserved rebuke for the crime he actually did commit and stays the hand of one of his fiercest soldiers, Abishai (another nephew of David and Joab's brother), who could have slain Shimei like a stray dog.

For all his faults, David was never vindictive. Nor did he ever wallow in self-pity. So long as his temper was cool, he was able to humbly receive rebuke and correction, even if offered imperfectly from someone like Shimei, when David's conscience was burdened with legitimate guilt. Then he had a rare ability to genuinely trust God with whatever comes next, confident the Lord of heaven will do what is right.

This is all the more remarkable, because Shimei appears to shower David and company with rocks and dirt for quite a long time. But David remains patient and humble. Shimei eventually slinks back home. The king and his loyal followers make it to their destination for the night – a ford of the Jordan river in the "wilderness" (2 Samuel 17:16). This is likely the Judean wilderness just north of the Dead Sea (see Joshua 15:5-8).

They collapse with exhaustion after a day that must have been both emotionally and physically draining, with the royal city of Jerusalem behind them and the ford of the Jordan river before them. But in this desperate hour, the passage says something remarkable: David "refreshed himself." How?

David wrote two psalms during this time, which hold the key.

Psalm 3:1-8 A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom. “LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’ But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side. Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.” (NIV)

Psalm 63:1-11 A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me. Those who want to kill me will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.” (NIV)

Yahweh is David’s shield, who lifts David’s head high. David can lie down and sleep well, because his God sustains him. David does not give in to fear, but rather looks to Yahweh for deliverance. Though the wilderness is barren, David is sustained as with the richest of food. And under the shadow of God’s wings, David sings.

Although this is without a doubt one of David’s darkest hours, it is also one of his finest hours, because he is able to humbly trust in God for his security and future. The result is: David’s genuine faith finds expression in poetry and song.

As David is refreshed in the wilderness, what is Absalom doing in Jerusalem?

2 Samuel 16:15-22 “Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him. Then Hushai the Arkite, David’s confidant, went to Absalom and said to him, ‘Long live the king! Long live the king!’ Absalom said to Hushai, ‘So this is the love you show your friend? If he’s your friend, why didn’t you go with him?’ Hushai said to Absalom, ‘No, the one chosen by the LORD, by these people, and by all the men of Israel – his I will be, and I will remain with him. Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you.’ Absalom said to Ahithophel, ‘Give us your advice. What should we do?’ Ahithophel answered, ‘Sleep with your father’s concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.’ So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.” (NIV)

As Absalom enters Jerusalem, Hushai is there to meet him and talk his way into the usurper’s service. This is the first bad decision made by Absalom.

The second bad decision is to take the advice of Ahithophel and sleep with David's concubines, who David left in Jerusalem to care for the palace. Ahithophel suggested this because it was an act of disrespect and defiance considered so terrible in the ancient world, it served as a sign any future reconciliation between son and father was now impossible (see Leviticus 18:8). It was a "burn the ships" strategy, meant to communicate Absalom was fully and irrevocably committed to this course, and everyone with him better be as well, because there was no turning back now.

It was also creepy, disgusting, and essentially a rape of all these women. Think of how depraved you would have to be, to set up a tent on your roof so the people of the city could watch you, as their new ruler, having sex with your father's concubines? It could only be perpetrated by a perverse man of unspeakable arrogance and cruelty, with voyeuristic propensities.

And it is not the concubines' fault. They did not wink at the new king and suggest they all grab some drinks and go up to the rooftop for some fun. This was not their idea, nor was it what they signed up for when, for whatever reason, they agreed to be one of David's concubines. This was a creepy old man's idea and a creepy young man's doing, as they were hauled up on a rooftop and forced to have sex with someone they did not belong to in sight of the entire community, which would have been considered horrifically shameful in the ancient world (as well as the modern).

Notice Absalom, who was so outraged by what his brother Amnon did to his sister Tamar, has become what he originally condemned. He hated Amnon for raping his sister. Now he's raping his father's concubines. This is what happens when we give in to hate. We become whatever we direct our hatred towards.

Psalm 28:3 "... the wicked... speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts." (NIV)

Romans 1:21-31 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy." (NIV)

Proverbs 29:10 "The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright." (NIV)

Proverbs 19:3 "A person's own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD." (NIV)

Proverbs 5:21-23 "For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly." (NIV)

Proverbs 26:27 "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him." (NASB)

Titus 3:1-8 "Remind them to... malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us... concerning these things I want you to speak

confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.” (NASB)

This was also the fulfillment of Nathan’s prophesy, made after David impregnated Uriah’s wife and then murdered him, that Yahweh will “take your wives (*‘ishshah’* in Hebrew, literally “women,” so this can refer to concubines as well) and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel” (2 Samuel 12:11,12).

What should Absalom do next, after a perverted romp on the rooftop with his father’s concubines? Ahithophel advises Absalom to get 12,000 men and pursue David immediately, while the king and his men are tired and weak. And once Absalom catches up with them, slay David only, so the rest of his men will give up and join Absalom.

This is actually excellent military advice, and Absalom and his officers like it. But before they muster and head out, Absalom asks Hushai for his counsel.

2 Samuel 17:7-14 “Hushai replied to Absalom, ‘The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops. Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’ Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave. So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba – as numerous as the sand on the seashore – be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not so much as a pebble is left.’ Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.’ For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.” (NIV)

Hushai likely senses Absalom and his men are ultimately cowards, and Hushai plays on their fears, rightly pointing out the experience, skill, and ferocity of David and his men. To be sure Absalom is victorious, he should gather soldiers from “Dan to Beersheba,” meaning from the farthest north to the farthest south, and when they’ve got enough guys, then go fight. It of course takes time to muster all these men, which is exactly what Hushai wants – time for David and his vulnerable troops to make good their escape.

Absalom falls for it, takes Hushai’s advice over Ahithophel’s, and David now has the time he needs to get to safety. Hushai passes all this along to David’s loyal priests Zadok and Abiathar, who send their sons to warn David, “Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up” (2 Samuel 17:16). David receives the message and makes it safely across the Jordan river.

Ahithophel is shattered by having his counsel rejected for Hushai's, so he leaves Jerusalem and returns home. There he "put his house in order and then hanged himself" (2 Samuel 17:23), an ignoble end to the treacherous counselor who betrayed his king.

Absalom learns David has made it across the Jordan. He assembles an army and crosses the Jordan as well, intent on killing his father.

The death of Absalom

David and his men travel to Mahanaim, in Transjordan just north of the Jabbok river. This was a fortified city and the unofficial capital of the tribes east of the Jordan river (see 2 Samuel 2:8).

Leaders in the surrounding region bring David supplies, including:

- Shobi, an Ammonite ruler who succeeded his brother Hanun, after Hanun was defeated by David (see 2 Samuel 10:1-19). This is an opportunity for Shobi to take revenge on David, but instead he wisely offers David aid, which sets up good relations between Israel and Ammon in the days ahead.
- Makir, who had taken care of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth before David brought him to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 9:4). Makir sees the integrity David has shown to the descendants of Saul, when other ancient kings would have slaughtered them, and remains faithful to his king.
- Barzillai, an elderly but wealthy and influential man from Gilead (2 Samuel 19:32).

Here we see David enjoys the favor of a foreign nation, the supporters of the prior king, and the powerful men of the region, all because they respect him and his rightful claim to the throne.

Absalom and his men camp in Gilead. To command his army, Absalom chooses Amasa, whose father was an Ishmaelite married to a woman named Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah, who is David's half-sister and the mother of three of David's nephews and top military men, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. This means Abigail is also David's half-sister, which makes Amasa David's nephew and Joab's cousin.

2 Samuel 17:25 "Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of Jether, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab." (NIV)

The genealogies here get a little complicated, but it appears Abigail and Zeruiah's father was a man named Nahash, who must have died, and their mother became a wife of Jesse and mother of David, making Abigail and Zeruiah half-sisters of David.

1 Chronicles 2:13-17 "Jesse was the father of Eliab his firstborn; the second son was Abinadab, the third Shimea, the fourth Nethanel, the fifth Raddai, the sixth Ozem and the seventh David. Their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. Zeruiah's three sons were Abishai, Joab and Asahel. Abigail was the mother of Amasa, whose father was Jether the Ishmaelite." (NIV)

Note in this passage from Chronicles, Zeruiah and Abigail are called “sisters” of David and his brothers, but not “daughters” of Jesse. This is why it’s believed they were half-sisters of David through a common mother, especially since Abigail is clearly described as the daughter of Nahash, a male name. Another simple solution is: Nahash is just another name for Jesse.

So Amasa was the nephew of the king and the cousin of the king’s commander in chief. And yet his father was an Ishmaelite (a descendant of Ishmael, not Isaac), and therefore not Jewish. Perhaps Absalom, whose mother was not Jewish, was drawn to Amasa as someone who also had a non-Jewish parent, and likely experienced the alienation that must have gone along with this status within Israel. Regardless, by choosing Amasa, Absalom was aligning himself with David’s blood, while at the same time, challenging him, all as a way of further legitimizing his claim to the throne.

The opposing forces square off for battle. David sends out three groups, under the command of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite, which was a great honor to the loyal Philistine. David wants to go out to battle with them, but his commanders talk him out of it. David then gives this order:

2 Samuel 18:4,5 “... So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, ‘Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.’ And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.” (NIV)

Even though Absalom was David’s son, as we shall see, this is an unwise order to give as thousands of men march out to risk their lives for your throne.

Battle ensues in the “forest of Ephraim.” There is debate over this location. Ephraim is not in Transjordan, but rather west of the river in central Israel. From the remainder of the narrative it’s clear the battle was east of the Jordan, so the forest of Ephraim is likely a wooded area across from a ford in the Jordan that leads to Ephraim, where 42,000 Ephraimites were slaughtered by the men of Gilead during the times of the judge Jephthah (see Judges 12:1-7). Such a huge loss of men would not be forgotten and would likely bear a name memorializing its location.

David’s army routes Absalom’s forces, which take 20,000 casualties. Absalom flees on a donkey through the forested battlefield, with David’s men on his heels.

2 Samuel 18:9-18 “Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going. When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, ‘I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.’ Joab said to the man who had told him this, ‘What! You saw him? Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior’s belt.’ But the man replied, ‘Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, “Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.” And if I had put my life in jeopardy – and nothing is hidden from the king – you would have kept your distance from me.’ Joab said, ‘I’m not going to wait like this for you.’ So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab’s armor-

bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him. Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes. During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, 'I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.' He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day." (NIV)

In a sense, Absalom's fate is a metaphor for vanity. He had a striking appearance and long, flowing locks he only cut once a year, then weighed so he could boast about it to all his admirers (2 Samuel 14:25,26). As he's fleeing for his life from David's men, his beautiful tresses flow into the tangled branches of an oak tree, the donkey keeps running, and Absalom is left hanging there like a piece of ripe fruit ready for plucking. The thing he prided himself for becomes the means by which he is ultimately defeated.

When Absalom is spotted, a man brings the report back to Joab, who can't believe his soldier did not take the opportunity to slay Absalom. But all the troops heard David's command to spare Absalom, and this soldier was wise enough to know it was not his place to kill his king's son.

But Joab and his men have no such scruples. They take turns beating on Absalom like a piñata, until they are certain he's dead, then bury him ignobly underneath a pile of rocks somewhere in the forest. Joab sounds his trumpet, and the battle is over.

We should note the viciousness with which Joab and his men killed Absalom. Joab approached the prince, hanging there defenseless from the tree, and considered the young man whose return to Jerusalem he had orchestrated to please his king. This was also the young man who burned his field ripe for harvest, when Absalom couldn't get his attention. The fearsome Joab, who had a long history of murdering people like Abner, Saul's commander (2 Samuel 3:22-39), let that go, and once again went to bat for Absalom. Joab orchestrated Absalom's return from exile, after which Absalom received David's kiss of reconciliation.

Then Absalom leads a rebellion against David, intent on murdering the king and all his men, including Joab. As David's commander in chief, Joab must have felt a sense of responsibility for all this, which would never have happened if he had left Absalom to rot in Geshur. With all this anger and resentment boiling up inside, Joab grabs his bodyguards and sets out to find the renegade prince dangling from an oak tree.

As Absalom tries in vain to free his fabulous hair from the branches, he sees Joab approaching with his men. With a sigh of relief, did Absalom in his pride think Joab was once again coming to the rescue, or did he see a look in Joab's eye that betrayed what was about to happen? Who knows? But the last thing Absalom saw before he died was Joab grabbing three javelins and plunging them into his heart, fueled by years of frustration and anger. And as his vision fades, ten men surround him and deliver savage blows meant to be sure the deed is done. And so Absalom dies at the hand of the man who had done so much for him, and yet in his selfishness chose to betray.

After such a violent death, there is no way Absalom's body could be displayed, especially to the king. So Joab and his men find a pit in the forest, toss him in, and cover him with rocks.

This sad passage ends with a notation about a monument Absalom built for himself in the King's Valley, likely the Kidron valley east of Jerusalem, while still a youth. It's very telling of whom Absalom was – a vain person bent on his own glory no matter the cost. It's odd as a young man he would build this because "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name." He indeed went on to have three sons and a daughter (2 Samuel 14:27). So building this monument to himself was a bit premature.

What we know for certain is: Absalom wanted to be remembered and revered. But the thing is, if you have to build a monument to yourself, you don't deserve one. And if you build it anyway, it will only serve as a warning against vanity, not a tribute to greatness. What other purpose could a monument to Absalom (and those like him) serve?

Word of Absalom's death reaches David. He is shattered and goes up to a room over the gateway to the city weeping and crying out, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you – O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33).

David's reaction to Absalom's death spreads like wildfire amidst the troops, who skulk back into the city "as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle" (2 Samuel 19:3). As they arrive, having just risked their lives for their king, instead of receiving his praise and thanks, they are ignored, and all they can hear is David wailing for his lost son, as if they had done something wrong.

Now they remember David's order to spare his son before the battle, and it starts to dawn on them they have just risked their lives, not so David could reclaim his throne, but to go fetch his treacherous son, even if they die trying. Joab sees the danger and acts swiftly.

2 Samuel 19:5-8 "Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, 'Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.' So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, 'The king is sitting in the gateway,' they all came before him..." (NIV)

Joab speaks the truth to David, and to his credit David realizes Joab is right. He goes to his men to extend his thanks and offer his praise.

This day Joab saved David's kingdom twice – first from the armies of Absalom and second from the self-absorption of David. He also brutally murdered the king's defenseless son and tossed his bloody corpse in a shallow grave somewhere in the forest no one will ever be able to find.

And as David maps his return to Jerusalem, there is a reckoning to be had with his commander in chief.

The bloody road back to Jerusalem.

The ten northern tribes of Israel are in a quandary. They supported Absalom, but he's now decomposing in an anonymous pit somewhere in Transjordan. They also realize David had been an effective leader, freeing them from the oppression of the Philistines. So they start to make plans to bring David back to Jerusalem.

David gets news of this and sends messages to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests in Jerusalem who are his allies. He wants to know why the ten northern tribes, who rejected him, are making plans to bring him back, while Judah, his own tribe and blood relatives, are doing nothing.

Then he makes a shrewd political decision, which is also an act of personal retribution. He makes Amasa, his nephew who led Absalom's army, commander of David's army in place of Joab. This shows a willingness to forgive anyone who may have supported Absalom, while also destroying the man who killed his son.

The men of Judah love it, and go to Gilgal (on the west bank of the Jordan river by Jericho) to meet David and bring him across the Jordan and back to Jerusalem. See 2 Samuel 19:9-15. But they are not the only ones who assemble at the fords of the river.

There are also a thousand Benjamites, led by Shimei, the guy who cursed David and threw dirt and stones at him and his men as they fled Jerusalem. He falls at David's feet and begs for forgiveness. Abishai is there, who wanted to relieve Shimei of his head on the way out of Jerusalem, and now on the way back, he urges David once again to let him kill Shimei. But David stays Abishai's hand, and promises Shimei he will not put him to death.

This is undeniably an act of mercy by David, but it's likely this was more of a political decision than a selfless one. Shimei brought a thousand Benjamites with him. This was an opportunity for Judah and Benjamin to ally themselves against the ten tribes to the north. Allowing Abishai to lop off Shimei's head as he grovels at David's feet and pleads for mercy sends the wrong message on the day of the king's triumphant return. It's also notable literally the last thing Scripture records David doing before he died was to advise Solomon to "not consider Shimei innocent... bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" (1 Kings 2:8,9).

Barzillai, the wealthy, influential old man who provided for David while he was in Mahanaim, comes to the Jordan to see David off. David urges Barzillai to come with him to Jerusalem, but Barzillai is eighty, and he says he is too old to enjoy the party and will just be a burden. So Barzillai offers one of his chief servants, Kimham, to go with David, and the king accepts. It's notable David advises Solomon to always be good to the sons of Barzillai for the support he gave David during this time, so it seems Barzillai was truly a good man (1 Kings 2:7).

Along with all the troops of Judah, half the troops of "Israel," meaning the ten northern tribes, are also there for the proceedings. Together, they all escort David across the Jordan river and head towards Jerusalem.

But the good vibes don't last long, and on the way to the capital city politics take over. The men of Israel ask the king why the men of Judah are here bringing him back, when this was their idea.

Then the men of Judah say hang on a minute, David's our relative, so why be mad at us? The men of Israel shout back about having "ten shares in the king," meaning they represent ten of the twelve tribes, so you bumkins from the southern desert need to back off, and anyway we asked first. The political posturing continues to escalate, with Judah out yelling Israel, as the horde of bickering men slog their way towards the capital. See 2 Samuel 19:40-43.

An ambitious Benjamite named Sheba sees this as a golden opportunity to start a revolution of his own. He sounds the trumpets and shouts, "We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son! Every man to his tent, Israel!" (2 Samuel 20:1). And what happens? All the men of Israel ditch their returning king, and David has another revolt on his hands, before he even makes it back to Jerusalem.

David returns to his palace. This is a crucial moment for him requiring decisive action. What is his first order of business to get his rule back on track?

2 Samuel 20:3 "When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them but had no sexual relations with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows." (NIV)

David went to the ten concubines who were raped by Absalom because David chose to leave them behind to mind the palace. Instead of comforting them, he put them under house arrest for the remainder of their lives. And to add insult to injury, he deprived them of children, which was about the worst slight David could have inflicted upon them in the ancient world.

This is wrong on so many levels it makes your head spin. *Nothing* that happened to these women was their fault. *Everything* that happened to them was David's fault.

To begin with, David shouldn't have taken concubines in the first place. That was sinful in and of itself. And no ancient custom, no matter how prevalent, made it right.

However, once he took them into his ever-expanding harem, they were his responsibility to protect. Yet he left them alone and unguarded at the palace to keep up the dusting while he was away. They get raped by one of his sons, for whom he was also responsible, up on the roof in broad daylight in front of the entire city, with who knows how many sleezy men leering at them. Then when David returns, he treats them like *they* are the ones who did something horrible to David, when it's *David* who did something horrible to them.

David's actions are pure, self-serving vanity, fueled by his own failures and sexual insecurities. After murdering Uriah, this is one of the most shameful acts in David's life.

Having disgraced the innocent women he abandoned to his vicious and deplorable son, David turns next to his new commander in chief, Amasa, and tells him to assemble the armies of Judah within three days, which Amasa will lead into battle in the north. Three days pass, and Amasa and the troops are nowhere in sight. So David turns to Abishai, and tells him to grab Joab's crack troops and all of David's "mighty men" (thirty best soldiers) and go kill Sheba before his revolt can gain any traction.

Think about this. Abishai is Joab's brother. David fired Joab and replaced him with Amasa, who can't seem to muster or lead the troops, either because he's incompetent or because he's planning a revolution of his own. So David goes to Abishai, and sends him on a dangerous mission with a small contingent of Joab's best troops to go save David's throne. It's quite a bold and presumptuous request to the brother of the commander David just sacked.

To Abishai's credit, he obeys his king and sets out with his men. They make it to Gibeon, just a few miles north of Jerusalem, and low and behold, Amasa catches up with them. And guess who is there tagging along with Abishai?

2 Samuel 10:7-13 “So Joab’s men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bikri. While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath. Joab said to Amasa, ‘How are you, my brother?’ Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab’s hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bikri. One of Joab’s men stood beside Amasa and said, ‘Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!’ Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. After Amasa had been removed from the road, everyone went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bikri.” (NIV)

Bottom line: It's not a good idea to become Joab's rival. Saul's top commander, Abner, became Joab's rival, and when David started to show Abner favor, Joab took Abner aside and stuck a dagger in his belly (2 Samuel 3:22-30).

Amasa must have known this story. It was famous throughout Israel, because David was furious for what Joab did. But apparently Amasa was not the best soldier or strategist, because he falls for the same ploy Joab used against Abner and suffers the same fate. True to Nathan's prophesy, the sword remains unsheathed in David's house, as one of his nephews disembowels another, and leaves his cousin to unceremoniously bleed out in the dirt.

Joab is one of the most fascinating people in David's story. He is a tremendous help to David in many respects, while also being David's principal bane. He is clearly not afraid to incur David's wrath, and is in many respects David's equal in bravery, strategy, and decisiveness. David recognized this early on after Joab murdered Abner:

2 Samuel 3:38,39 “Then the king said to his men, ‘Do you not realize that a commander and a great man (*Abner*) has fallen in Israel this day? And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah (*the survivors, Joab and Abishai*) are too strong for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!’”

Joab always seems to somehow survive and stay on top. David cursed him after he killed Abner (2 Samuel 3:20). And yet when David promises the command of his troops to whomever would lead the attack against the Jebusites at Jerusalem, who led the charge? Joab. (1 Chronicles 11:6). So who became David's commander in chief? Joab.

Joab serves David faithfully, effectively, and ruthlessly over the years. David wants Uriah murdered. Joab says, "no problem!" and takes care of it immediately. David misses his rapist son, Absalom, and Joab orchestrates both his return to Jerusalem and reconciliation with David, even after Absalom burns up Joab's valuable field.

But Joab is in no way David's lackey. He ultimately does what he thinks is right, no matter what David says, and intentionally disobeys the king's order and murders David's son Absalom.

David has enough and sees it as an opportunity to rid himself of Joab. He fires him, hires Amasa, and when Amasa can't deliver, turns to Joab's brother.

But that's no problem for the resourceful Joab. When Amasa conveniently turns up, Joab slips a dagger in his stomach and shrewdly leaves his bloody corpse lying in the middle of the road – a clear message to those who follow. As the troops march up, they get it immediately. Joab's back, and that's cool with them. Everyone keeps heading north after the rebel Sheba with a chipper Joab leading the way.

And once again, Joab delivers.

2 Samuel 20:14-23 "Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maakah and through the entire region of the Bikrites, who gathered together and followed him. All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maakah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down, a wise woman called from the city, 'Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him.' He went toward her, and she asked, 'Are you Joab?' 'I am,' he answered. She said, 'Listen to what your servant has to say.' 'I'm listening,' he said. She continued, 'Long ago they used to say, "Get your answer at Abel," and that settled it. We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the LORD's inheritance?' 'Far be it from me!' Joab replied, 'Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bikri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city.' The woman said to Joab, 'His head will be thrown to you from the wall.' Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bikri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem." (NIV)

You've got to love it when a "wise woman" shows up in Scripture. You know something interesting is about to happen!

Sheba and his followers have fled all the way to the far north of the Promised Land to a city called Abel, between Tyre and Dan in the tribal lands of Naphtali. Joab besieges the city, intent on visiting the carnage of the ancients upon the town, once he tears down its walls.

A *very* wise woman comes to the battered ramparts, calls out for Joab and essentially asks, “Now what’s all the fuss about? Why do you want to exterminate your fellow Israelites? We are a city known for our wisdom and goodwill. And you bunch of thugs are going to slaughter us all!”

Joab explains what’s going on. The wise woman gets it immediately, nods her head knowingly, and says, “Just wait a tick and I’ll sort this out in a jiffy.” A few minutes later, Sheba’s head comes sailing over the wall, and all is well. Everyone heads home happy, including Joab, who struts into Jerusalem and presents himself before the king.

How does David receive him? The next verse says it all.

2 Samuel 20:23 “Joab was over Israel’s entire army...” (NIV)

Joab gets his job back and remains there throughout the life of David, until, as we shall see, he finally makes a fatal mistake with Solomon. For now, after Joab’s quick victory over Sheba, David and Joab come to terms, and the king returns to ruling Israel from Jerusalem.

The birth of Solomon into the second half of David’s reign.

We have spent a lot of time here following this phase of David’s life, because it directly impacts the life of Solomon. It also helps us understand both the historical times and the house into which Solomon is born. His polygamous father impregnated the wife of a loyal soldier, then murdered him and took his widow as yet another wife. Soon after Solomon’s birth, God’s discipline finds the house of David, and there was rape and murder among Solomon’s half-siblings. His father lost the throne for a time and only regained it after much political intrigue and spilling of blood.

Although we can’t map out the exact years of David’s rule with certainty, all this likely occurred around the middle of David’s forty-year reign. David was thirty years old when he became king; and he reigned a total of forty years, seven in Hebron over Judah, and thirty-three in Jerusalem over the entire nation (see 2 Samuel 5:4,5).

David had a total of four sons with Bathsheba. The first would be the one who died, and Solomon was likely the second, since his birth is mentioned immediately following his older brother’s death (2 Samuel 12:23-25), although he is named last in the list of sons by Bathsheba (see 1 Chronicles 3:5).

When Solomon eventually becomes king, he was called a “youth” (see 1 Chronicles 22:5; 29:1; 1 Kings 3:7). In Hebrew culture, you entered adulthood at twenty (see Exodus 38:26; Numbers 1:3; 26:2; 32:11), so Solomon was probably around this age when he took the throne.

Pulling all this together, Solomon was likely born right in the center of David’s forty-year reign, around the twentieth year, with twenty left to go, when David was fifty years old. This would have been around the time of Amnon’s rape of Tamar, which was followed by Absalom’s murder of Amnon, Absalom’s three years of exile in Geshur, and the rebellion that followed. This means a

young Solomon and Bathsheba would have been with David and the rest of his household while he was on the run from Absalom.

After surviving Absalom's rebellion, it must have been a time battered by complex and conflicting emotions. There would have been a sense of relief to be back in the security of Jerusalem, but also a deep sorrow as the brutal reality of all that has transpired within the royal house sets in. And with both Amnon and Absalom dead, renewed posturing in the hunt to become David's successor.

In other words, Solomon was born during a time of tragedy and disaster and then grows up in a time ripe for "post-traumatic stress" to disrupt the order of a family dynamic already set up for failure by David's polygamy. What would his childhood have been like?

CHAPTER 2 – CHILDHOOD.

INFAMY AND DISFUNCTION.

A rough start.

We actually know very little about Solomon's childhood. There are no stories directly about him, only more stories about David. We can only speculate, but it's a pretty safe bet it was rough start, as the son of an infamous woman within a horribly dysfunctional polygamous household.

Infamy for mother and child.

Among David's wives, it's unlikely Bathsheba would have won a popularity contest. None of the other spouses slept with David while married to another man (at least as far as we know). It's uncertain whether Bathsheba intentionally seduced David or unintentionally aroused him by bathing in an open area, but either way she would have been despised. Modesty is central to all respectable middle-eastern women, both in ancient and modern times, and for a woman to bathe in an area where a stranger could see her while her husband was away on campaign was unthinkable. Bathsheba would have been regarded as a harlot.

She would also be regarded as the woman who almost got them all killed. All the dreadful things that followed Uriah's murder were set into motion by David's relationship with Bathsheba, including the rape of Tamar, murder of Amnon, and rebellion of Absalom.

Anything could have happened during Absalom's rebellion. If the prince's forces had caught up with them early on while they were defenseless, or overwhelmed them later on while they were on the run, all of the male heirs could easily have been slaughtered, along with the rest of the royal house who had gone with David. That was standard operating procedure in the tactics of ancient dynastic disputes.

Then Bathsheba has four sons, suggesting David gave extra attention to her, which would be another reason for the other wives to despise her. She would have four times the chances of being the mother to the next king as compared to the wives who bore only one son, even though she was the hussy who almost brought the entire household down.

As Bathsheba keeps bearing the king sons, each would have been regarded with increasing outrage. Perhaps it would have been tolerable for Bathsheba to have a son to replace the one who died. But when a third and then a fourth arrive, they would not have been welcome additions to David's house. On the contrary, they all would have been perceived as unwelcome, born to a slutty woman who must be doing something unnatural to keep David calling her to his chambers.

Both mother and her children would have been regarded with infamy by the rest of the royal house. And to make matters worse, this house was itself extremely dysfunctional, during a time when the nation of Israel was also in disarray.

Disfunction within the home and nation.

We have already seen how messed up David's household was. In 1 Chronicles 3:1-9, we learn David eventually had a total of nineteen sons, likely by sixteen different wives. Then he had an unknown number of sons by an unknown number of concubines. This created a powder keg just waiting to go off, as mothers and sons all schemed for the throne. There could be no unity or common purpose within the family. Only individual pursuits of power, at the expense of the other family members.

Events from David's life during this time also indicate the nation as a whole was in a state of disfunction and decline. Let's look at three examples.

Famine in the land and justice for Gibeon.

The first story we have in Scripture following David's victory over Absalom and return to Jerusalem is troubling. There is a three-year famine in Israel. David inquires of Yahweh, and the cause is revealed.

2 Samuel 21:1,2 “During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, ‘It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death...’ (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites *(a general name for the original inhabitants of the Promised Land – they were more specifically Hivites, see Joshua 9:7)*; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)” (NIV)

The background is a bit complicated. Back when the second generation of the Exodus first conquered the Promised Land, they were supposed to destroy or drive out seven different nations, including the people of Gibeon. After Jericho was raised, the Gibeonites were terrified, so they went to Joshua, pretending to be from a far off nation (even though they were just a few miles away), and asked for a peace treaty, whereby the Gibeonites agreed to serve the Israelites. Joshua agreed, and swore an oath by Yahweh. The ruse is soon discovered, but it's too late because of Joshua's oath. So the Gibeonites survived and ended up serving the Levites at the Tabernacle. See Joshua 9 & 10.

During his reign, Saul went into a rage and wiped out most of the Gibeonites in violation of this oath, which of course is despicable in and of itself. But the real problem is that the people of Israel stood by and allowed it to happen. They did nothing to stop it, nor did they do anything to help the survivors.

This strongly reflects what was going on in the hearts of the Israelites. They were indifferent to this violation of the oath made to the Gibeonites and the genocide that followed. Yahweh could not allow that to stand, so He sent a three year famine.

David goes to the Gibeonites, who request the lives of seven of Saul's male descendants. David complies, and the famine ends.

Stories like these are hard for us to understand as modern audiences. Why might God honor these executions and end the famine? There are several things to consider.

- Saul and his household nearly committed genocide against an entire people group.
- Israel had made an oath to protect these people, and Gibeon had upheld her side of the bargain.
- The job of the Gibeonites, which they had faithfully fulfilled, involved service at Yahweh's Tabernacle.
- After Saul and his household committed this atrocity, no one in Israel, including David, cared.
- But God cared, for many reasons.
 - Israel made an oath in His name, which her king and his family broke in an extraordinarily grievous fashion.
 - Israel felt no remorse for what had happened and allowed this terrible injustice to continue for many years after the crime.
 - The Gibeonites had kept their oath and served Yahweh faithfully at His Tabernacle, and shown great respect for Yahweh when the oath was initially sworn.
 - Although the Gibeonites are not Israelites, God still loves and cares for them, as He does all people.
 - And so, even though David and the rest of Israel were willing to look the other way, God was not.
- The Gibeonites are actually quite reserved in their request for only seven lives. They were nearly exterminated by Saul and his family, so thousands must have died. Yet they only ask for seven, generally a number representing completion in Scripture.
- And so this is not an “eye for an eye” punishment. If it had been, thousands of Saul's descendants would have been executed.
- It's quite likely, given David's character, that the seven descendants of Saul who were executed were somehow complicit in Saul's crime. David is not the kind of person who would pick seven random guys who had nothing to do with it to pay this price. If he had, it would only have given Yahweh a reason to extend the famine, not end it.

Perhaps the moral of this story is: God cares about justice *for everybody*. He hates injustice wherever it is tolerated. He will discipline His own people, the Israelites, when they deny justice to others, even the people God had originally commanded them to destroy.

We see in this story, when the people God originally wanted destroyed humbled themselves, submitted to the rule of God's people, and faithfully carried out the duties of their oath, God set aside His decree against them. And when they were injured by His own nation, Yahweh sent the famine and saw justice done. So God was willing to amend His own policy, because of the acts of

humility and faithfulness of the Gibeonites. That's an encouraging and beautiful example of God's desire for all people to come to Him and find grace.

Ezekiel 18:21-32 “But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed... None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them... Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?... Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?... I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!” (NIV)

Isaiah 55:6-9 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’ ” (NIV)

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is... patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (NASB)

Luke 15:7 “I (*Jesus*) tell you that... there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” (NIV)

Lamentations 3:21-25 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD’S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.” (NASB)

Lamentations 3:31-42 “For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone... Why should the living complain when punished for their sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: ‘We have sinned and rebelled...’ ” (NIV)

Psalms 145:8-16 “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made... The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down... You (*God*) open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:21 “Those who cleanse themselves... will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:19 “... If you repent, I (*God*) will restore you that you may serve me...” (NIV)

And so from this story we see the people of Israel were callous to the suffering of others, which is important as we consider the people Solomon will soon rule.

The next story is more personal to David and reveals how he conducts himself after Absalom's rebellion.

Fighting more Philistine giants.

War continues with the Philistines, and it is clear David learned his lesson about going to fight with his men. He does not stay home. In fact, he fights on the front lines with his troops. But he is no longer the teenager who fought Goliath, nor is he a warrior in the prime of his life. He's a man in his fifties fighting hand-to-hand, so when he meets another Philistine giant, the king's age starts to show.

2 Samuel 21:15-17 “Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted. And Ishbi-Benob (*“dweller upon the height”*), one of the descendants of Rapha (*“giant”*), whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels (*7 ½ half pounds*) and who was armed with a new sword, said he would kill David. But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, ‘Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished.’ ” (NIV)

When the Philistines see David on the battlefield, one of their soldiers swore to kill him. And not just any soldier, but “Ishbi-Benob,” which means “dweller upon the height,” whose spearhead weighed 7 ½ pounds, and who is described as “a descendant of Rapha.” Pull all this together, and David is fighting another giant.

“Rapha” is an obscure word but probably means “giant.” To be a descendant of Rapha is essentially the equivalent of being one of the “Rephaim,” a descendant of a race of very tall people (see 1 Chronicles 20:4). Og, a giant ruler of the northern Amorites in Transjordan defeated by Moses, was a Rephaite.

Deuteronomy 2:20,21 “... the Rephaites... were a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites...” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 3:11 “... Og king of Bashan was the last of the Rephaites. His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits (*13 ½ feet*) long and four cubits (*6 feet*) wide...” (NIV)

This giant's spearhead was made of bronze and weighed 7 ½ pounds. For perspective, Goliath's spearhead was made of iron and weighted twice that (see 1 Samuel 17:7). So this giant is likely smaller than Goliath, although no specific height is given.

David doesn't have his sling, and it is inferred from the passage he is nearly killed by the giant, until Abishai comes to his rescue and strikes the Philistine down. After this, David's men never let him actively fight in battle again. But it's somewhat poetic to note, David began and ended his career as a combat soldier fighting a giant.

David's men do a pretty outstanding job without him. Three more Philistine champions of gigantic height are killed. One of them was the brother of Goliath. Another had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot (and was therefore likely quite good at math). But when he “taunted Israel,” one of David's nephews took inspiration from his uncle, stepped forward, and killed the giant, just as a young David had when Goliath taunted Israel so many years before.

2 Samuel 21:18-22 “In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbekai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha. In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver’s rod. In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot – twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David’s brother, killed him. These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 20:4-8 “In the course of time, war broke out with the Philistines, at Gezer. At that time Sibbekai the Hushathite killed Sippai, one of the descendants of the Rephaites, and the Philistines were subjugated. In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver’s rod. In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot – twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David’s brother, killed him. These were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.” (NIV)

Of course the thought of these huge warriors stomping around ancient battlefields seems incredible to us today, but both the biblical accounts of these times and other extrabiblical accounts all speak very clearly of soldiers of extraordinary height inhabiting the land. That one of these giants had twenty-four fingers and toes suggests some sort of genetic mutation accounting for their stature.

With the defeat of Philistia’s four champions, it appears the Philistine threat to Israel was extinguished for some time, and Israel entered a period of peace, during which Israel could begin to focus on building the Temple (see 1 Chronicles 22:17-19). David writes a lengthy song of praise, recorded in 2 Samuel 22.

From this we see David generally seems to be doing better in this second half of his reign. When famine strikes the land because of the injustice done to the Gibeonites, he goes straight to Yahweh and sees justice done. He does not stay home and lounge around while his troops go off to battle, as he did before the terrible incident with Bathsheba and Uriah. He’s out on the front lines with his men. He’s not collecting more wives or concubines. And God is giving him victory over his enemies.

The important thing to note about this period is: David is doing well. How are the Israelites doing?

Israel sins, Satan inspires a census, God’s punishment, and the blessing that followed.

This next episode in David’s life can be difficult to understand. It’s one of those stories where we have to pay careful attention to what is and what is not said. We also have to remember how God sometimes allows Satan (the fallen angelic being who is the origin of all rebellion against God – see Ezekiel 28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12-15; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 2:10,11; 4:4-10; 1 Peter 5:8-11; Revelation 20:1-10) to bring suffering into the lives of individuals to accomplish some divine purpose (for example, as with Job). Indeed God will sometimes allow Satan to bring suffering to

an entire nation, as He does here, through the bad decisions of a leader, as a means of disciplining the nation for sin.

This story is told in parallel passages in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. We need to look at both of them to understand what's going on.

2 Samuel 24:1,2 “Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.’ So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, ‘Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.’ ” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 21:1,2 “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, ‘Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are.’ ” (NIV)

Let's start by noting: With whom is Yahweh angry? Answer: The Israelites (not David).

Why? The passages don't tell us. It would be interesting to know, and we will try to reasonably speculate after we have considered the entire story in the context of the history of Israel, but it must have been something really bad, because 70,000 people die before this episode is over, and God is prepared to destroy the entire city of Jerusalem.

So David has done nothing wrong, but the nation has. As the supremely responsible parent, God will discipline the children He loves. But how?

The passage from 2 Samuel 24 tells us God “incited David against” the nation, and by comparing it with 1 Chronicles 21, we learn how God did this – by allowing Satan to inspire David to take a census of the fighting men in the nation.

How did Satan inspire David's actions? We don't know. It's not explicitly stated in Scripture. But what we can derive from this is: Through means we do not necessarily understand, Satan is able to give us really bad ideas, which we will all too often act upon if we are not wary of his schemes.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (NASB)

Ephesians 6:10-17 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (NIV)

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”
(NIV)

David was not somehow forced to order the census against his will. He was not under the mind control of Satan. But Satan is able to put the idea into David’s head, and although David (as we shall see) innately knows this is a really bad idea, he orders it anyway in an act of self-serving pride.

This is how Satan attacks us. He will put a sinful idea in our heads, tempting us to do wrong. But the choice to give in to the temptation, or to resist and follow the leading of God’s Spirit, is ours and ours alone.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” (NASB)

Galatians 5:16-23 “... walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (NASB)

Ephesians 3:16 “... be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;” (NASB)

Romans 8:26 “... the Spirit helps us in our weakness...” (NIV)

So God wants to discipline Israel for some sort of sin. He allows Satan to tempt David to take a census, and David bites. Now the question becomes, why is taking a census a problem if you are the king of Israel?

Yahweh commanded Moses to take a census of the nation twice before. First, God told Moses to count the fighting men before they left Sinai and departed for the Promised Land (Numbers 1:1-3). This would be the *first* generation of the Exodus. Then God commanded Moses to count the fighting men right before they entered the Promised Land, about 38 years later (Numbers 26:1-4). This would be the *second* generation of the Exodus, after the first generation had died off in the desert.

God also commanded Moses to do something very specific any time a census was taken.

Exodus 30:11-16 “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel (*one fifth of an ounce of silver – about \$5 in today’s currency*)... This half shekel is an offering to the LORD. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the tent of meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, making atonement for your lives.’” (NIV)

In the culture of the ancients, only a person who owns something has the right to count it. In other words, to count something is to claim ownership. It’s a way of proclaiming, these things I

have counted belong to me and me alone. That means only Yahweh has the right to count His people. If anyone else was to count the people of Israel, it would mean he is claiming them as his own.

It also suggests any king who counts the people is doing so to measure military might and national security, as if this depends on the number of soldiers he can put on the field, not on Yahweh who watches over them. So taking a census on one's own initiative is to say Israel belongs to you, not Yahweh, and your security resides in the people's military power, not Yahweh's favor.

This is why only God could initiate a census. And when He did, He also provided a way to symbolically remind both the leaders and the people they belong to Him alone, and He is their protector. According to the Law, as the fighting men were counted and "crossed over" into the group now included as part of the nation of Yahweh, each paid a "ransom for his life" of about five bucks. This was true whether rich or poor, with the amount so small everyone could pay it regardless of their economic standing.

The symbolism here is: As these fighting men were counted, they were entering into the nation of God. In order to do so, their sins must be atoned for, because they were coming into the presence and under the protection of the *holy* Creator of the universe and everything in it. The cost to them was insignificant, because the *loving* Creator of the universe and everything in it wanted this available to everyone.

But it had to be paid, "so no plague will come to them" when they were numbered. That is, their lives needed to be symbolically ransomed and sins atoned for before they joined Yahweh's kingdom, otherwise a plague would fall upon them as those unfit to be counted among God's people.

Now let's return to the story. Israel has sinned. God decides to discipline them. He does so by allowing Satan to tempt David to call a census. As the story later reveals, David knows this is a violation of the Law, but he does so anyway, in an act demonstrating he arrogantly has the idea Israel belongs to him, and he needs to know how many troops he can muster to protect his possession.

So David orders the census. Guess who tries to talk him out of it?

2 Samuel 24:3,4 "But Joab replied to the king, 'May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?' The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel." (NIV)

1 Chronicles 21:3,4 "But Joab replied, 'May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?' The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem." (NIV)

Joab tries to talk sense to David. He has the wisdom to see this will be a disaster for both king and country. But David won't listen to him, perhaps because he still harbors resentment towards his

commander in chief for killing his son and throwing his bloody corpse in a ditch. So David orders Joab to carry out the census, and Joab obeys his king.

The census takes nine months and twenty days to complete, so there is plenty of time for David to repent and call it off, but he doesn't. In the account from 2 Samuel 24, Joab returns and reports 800,000 fighting men in Israel (meaning the ten northern tribes) and 500,000 in Judah. But in 1 Chronicles 21, the numbers are 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah.

Briefly, here is how we reconcile these numbers.

- For Israel:
 - In 1 Chronicles 27:1-15, we learn Israel had a standing army of twelve units of 24,000 men each. This totals 288,000 men.
 - In 2 Chronicles 1:14, we learn there were 12,000 charioteers in Jerusalem.
 - That is a total of 300,000 troops the author of 1 Chronicles included in the number for Israel, which the author of 2 Samuel did not.
- For Judah:
 - In 2 Samuel 6:1, we learn David had a standing army of 30,000 troops, which the author of 2 Samuel counted, and the author of 1 Chronicles 21 did not.

We also learn “Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king’s command was repulsive to him” (1 Chronicles 21:6). Joab hated this job, so he looked for any reason to cut it short. He could justify omitting the Levites, because they were the priestly tribe who were omitted from the previous two censuses by Moses (see Numbers 1 & 26).

Why he omitted the Benjamites is more speculative. The Benjamites were the smallest tribe, having been nearly annihilated during the time of the judges (Judges 19-21), so it may be Joab thought it wasn’t worth the trouble. Or, since they were so small, it may have been Joab was trying to spare them from any discipline to follow, as they couldn’t afford to lose any more men.

The numbers are reported to David, and instead of feeling pleased with himself, he realizes he has done something terribly wrong. To his credit, he does the right thing.

2 Samuel 24:10-15 “David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’ Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer: ‘Go and tell David, “This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.”’ So Gad went to David and said to him, ‘Shall there come on you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.’

David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.' So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died." (NIV)

1 Chronicles 21:8-14 "Then David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.' The LORD said to Gad, David's seer, 'Go and tell David, "This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you."' So Gad went to David and said to him, 'This is what the LORD says: "Take your choice: three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, with their swords overtaking you, or three days of the sword of the LORD – days of plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD ravaging every part of Israel." Now then, decide how I should answer the one who sent me.' David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into human hands.' So the LORD sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead." (NIV)

David confesses his sin to Yahweh. Through the prophet Gad, God gives David three choices for discipline – famine, war, or plague. David chooses plague, because this is the only option that is entirely in God's hands. In war, he is at the mercy of his neighbors' swords. In famine, he is at the mercy of his neighbors' charity. But who dies in a plague is totally up to God, and this gives David comfort in his distress. Also, a plague is fitting as the discipline here, because this is exactly what God told Moses would happen in Exodus 30, if a census was taken without paying the token ransom, indicating those counted belonged to Yahweh, not the king.

It's interesting to note the plague was brought by "the angel of Yahweh." This is God in the form of the pre-incarnate Jesus (see Genesis 16:7-13; 22:15-17; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-4; Judges 2:1-5; 6:12-23; 13:21-24; John 1:18; 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9,10). So God Himself selects whom in Israel dies from the plague, a total of 70,000, "from Dan to Beersheba," meaning from the furthest north to the furthest south; in other words, throughout the entire nation. And with these 70,000 deaths, God disciplines the people His anger burned against at the beginning of these parallel passages.

But the danger is not over yet.

2 Samuel 24:16-25 "When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand.' The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.' On that day Gad went to David and said to him, 'Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.' So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad. When Araunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. Araunah said, 'Why has my lord the king come to his servant?' To buy your threshing floor,' David answered, 'so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped.' Araunah said to David, 'Let my lord the king take

whatever he wishes and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. Your Majesty, Araunah gives all this to the king.’ Araunah also said to him, ‘May the LORD your God accept you.’ But the king replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 21:15-22:1 “And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was destroying the people, ‘Enough! Withdraw your hand.’ The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown. David said to God, ‘Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I, the shepherd, have sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? LORD my God, let your hand fall on me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.’ Then the angel of the LORD ordered Gad to tell David to go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. So David went up in obedience to the word that Gad had spoken in the name of the LORD. While Araunah was threshing wheat, he turned and saw the angel; his four sons who were with him hid themselves. Then David approached, and when Araunah looked and saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground. David said to him, ‘Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price.’ Araunah said to David, ‘Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this.’ But King David replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.’ So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site. David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. Then the LORD spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. The tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD. Then David said, ‘The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’ ” (NIV)

The angel of Yahweh is poised to “destroy” Jerusalem. This does not mean to strike it with the plague, as has occurred throughout the nation, but to actually wipe out the entire city. This is further evidence the sin of Israel must have been very great, and likely centered in Jerusalem. But God “relents” (which we will discuss in a moment), as the angel of Yahweh hovers over a location called the “threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” This is a wide, smooth surface on a hill just to the north of the walls of Jerusalem.

David observes this and cries out to God, asking Him to punish David and his family, and spare the people. The prophet Gad goes to David and tells him to build an altar and make sacrifices at the site where the angel of Yahweh lingers.

Araunah owns this property. He was not a Hebrew but rather a Jebusite, one of the pagan peoples who were supposed to have been wiped out during the conquest of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 7:1). However, the Jebusites were spared and occupied Jerusalem until it was conquered by David (2 Samuel 5:6-16).

Araunah offers to give David the site of his threshing floor and the oxen and wood needed for the sacrifice. This is a gallant gesture by the Jebusite, who could have been happy to see the Hebrews dropping dead all around him. Instead, he shows great loyalty to David, calling him “my lord the king.”

But David wisely insists on purchasing at full price both the property and the things needed for the sacrifice, for how could his offering be genuine if it did not belong to him? (Note: The 50 silver shekels in 2 Samuel was for the “threshing floor and oxen,” while the 600 gold shekels in 1 Chronicles was for “the site;” that is, the entire property owned by Araunah that surrounded the threshing floor.) God accepts the sacrifice, even sending “fire from heaven” to consume the offerings, after which “the plague on Israel was stopped.”

Finally we should note from this day forward David stopped going to Gibeon to make sacrifices, where the Tabernacle was (but not the Ark), and started making sacrifices at this location. Why? The 1 Chronicles passage says, “because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of Yahweh.”

The gist of this is: David was so overcome by how close his beloved city of Jerusalem had come to total annihilation, he did not want to stop making sacrifices at the spot where God relented, and His angel sheathed His sword. David wants to make sure that sword was never drawn again. So he stopped going to the Tabernacle at Gibeon to make offerings and made them here instead.

This in turn put David in a quandary. He realized the current situation was untenable, with the Ark in Jerusalem, the Tabernacle in Gibeon, and the king making sacrifices on this hill he now owns outside the northern wall of the city. Then it dawns on David: He call pull all three together, by having Solomon build the Temple at this site and finally unite the Ark with the center of Israel’s worship and sacrifice, where it was always intended to be.

And guess what? This hill David purchased from Araunah the Jebusite was not just any hill. It was Mount Moriah, the spot where God tested Abraham and asked him to offer up Isaac, about 1000 years earlier in history.

Genesis 22:1,2 “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’ ” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 3:1 “Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.” (NIV)

Notice the beautiful symmetry here. On this spot, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, but Yahweh withheld his hand. About 1000 years later, at this same spot, David was willing to allow him and his family to take the punishment for Israel, but Yahweh spared them, and instead used these circumstances to guide David to where the Temple of God on earth should be built. There, sacrifices symbolically atoning for sin would be offered, foreshadowing the actual atoning sacrifice of Jesus about 1000 years later in history on another hill outside Jerusalem.

Hebrews 9:1-28 “Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant... When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance... when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant... Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:1-25 “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. Therefore,

brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day (*the Second Coming of Jesus*) approaching.” (NIV)

Now with all this information, we can try to make sense of what’s going on in this story.

- By the severity of the plague and the potential destruction of Jerusalem, we can infer the people of Israel had sinned greatly.
- God chose to discipline them, and He did so by allowing Satan to tempt David, Israel’s leader, to do something stupid that would trigger the punishment of the nation.
- David willingly gave in to the temptation, which brought calamity to the people.
- From this we learn God will sometimes give Satan permission to bring destruction upon nations, by manipulating leaders to do destructive things.

Proverbs 21:1 “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (NASB)

Daniel 2:21 “It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings...” (NASB)

Proverbs 16:4-20 “The LORD works out everything to its proper end – even the wicked for a day of disaster. The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished... blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.” (NIV)

1 Kings 22:23 “So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours (*king Jehoshaphat*). The LORD has decreed disaster for you.”

Revelation 20:7,8 “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.” (NIV)

- While David gave in to the original temptation, to his credit he repented, took responsibility for what he had done, and even prayed God would punish him and his house and spare the people from the consequences of his poor decision.
- Once God’s purpose in disciplining Israel had been accomplished, God honored David’s prayer, accepted his offerings, and ended the plague.

- God also used this debacle as a way to bless David and the people, by leading David to the site where the Temple would be built, reuniting the Ark and Israel's center of worship, and bringing about the circumstances whereby David could lawfully purchase the location.

There are “anthropopathisms” used in this story, where human emotions are ascribed to God, such as His “anger” burning against Israel, and then “relenting” His decision to bring destruction to Jerusalem. God is above all this. But He communicates in words we can relate to, so we can better understand Him and His ways. His “anger burns,” because He doesn't like sin. But He will “relent” and respond with compassion and mercy, when we humbly repent.

Hebrews 12:5-11 “... DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES... God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline... He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (NASB)

Psalms 103:8-18 “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” (NIV)

Psalms 130:3,4 “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” (NIV)

Now considering all we have learned, we can reasonably speculate as to what the sin of Israel might have been at the beginning of the story – idolatry.

Why? First we should note when God's anger “burns” in Scripture, it's often because His children are giving in to the sin of idolatry, which is so destructive to His people and His plan for the nation.

Exodus 32:7-10 “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” I have seen these people,’ the LORD said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.’ ” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 6:13-15 “Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your

God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 7:3-7 “Do not intermarry with them (*the pagan nations*). Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.” (NIV)

Joshua 23:16 “If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.” (NIV)

2 Kings 22:16,17 “This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people... Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.” (NIV)

Spoiler alert. We should also note after David dies and Solomon becomes king, the people of Israel descend headlong into (guess what?) idolatry. To preview the awful things to come, Solomon does indeed build an extraordinary, magnificent Temple at the threshing floor of Araunah, reflecting the same structure as the Tabernacle, but on a much grander scale. And God demonstrates His acceptance of this new dwelling place, by filling it with His glory, a physical manifestation of His presence. See Exodus 40:33-38; 1 Kings 8-11.

But then Solomon builds a palace for himself that makes the Temple look like a rundown shack, and fills his personal dwelling with 1000 pagan wives and concubines, who lead him – the man who built the Temple of God on earth – to also build hundreds of “high places” for the worship of all the pagan gods of the Canaanites.

1 Kings 11:1-33 “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. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.... So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates... Then he said to Jeroboam... I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes... I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the

Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon's father, did." (NIV)

And the people of Israel love it. They flock to these pagan temples and do what you do in them, which is start out by having sex with the priestesses, and then the priests, and then a bunch of them at the same time, and then burning your children alive on pagan altars. They even fill the Temple Solomon built for the Lord of all creation with altars to these demonic gods, and eventually become more evil than the pagan nations who lived in the Promised Land before them.

1 Kings 14:15-24 "And the LORD will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they aroused the LORD's anger by making Asherah poles... Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites." (NIV)

Hosea 4:12-14 "My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner's rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes – a people without understanding will come to ruin!" (NIV)

Jeremiah 19:4,5 "... they (*the Israelites*) have forsaken me (*Yahweh*) and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal – something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind." (NIV)

2 Kings 21:1-9 "Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years... did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, 'In Jerusalem I will put my Name.' In the two courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger. He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, 'In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses

gave them.’ But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.” (NIV)

This story with its plague and destruction might seem harsh, but it is actually a story of God’s incredible grace to His people. It’s the story of how He tried to warn them of the ruin that would come to Israel if they continued down the destructive path of idolatry (the horrifying, wrong way to worship), while at the same time leading them towards the right path by showing them where to construct the Temple (the glorifying, correct way to worship).

In bringing a plague that killed 70,000 throughout the land and nearly destroying Jerusalem, but then leading David to the place where the Temple would be built, unifying the Ark with a more permanent incarnation of the Tabernacle, God is extending His grace to the people of Israel. He is demonstrating on no uncertain terms His hatred for idolatry through His discipline, but then showing them a better way by facilitating the construction of the Temple, where people could worship Yahweh as He commanded according to His Law.

And if the people had learned from this experience, rejected idolatry, followed God’s Law, and worshipped at God’s Temple, then they would have fulfilled their covenant at Sinai to become “a kingdom of priests and holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) and a blessing to the entire world. They would have been exalted beyond their wildest dreams, and avoided all the absolutely horrific things to come in their history, if their love for Yahweh had been greater than their lust for idolatry.

Deuteronomy 28:1-58 “If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock... Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to... The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in obedience to him. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you... The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them. However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to

sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The LORD will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. Your carcasses will be food for all the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away. The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. At midday you will grope about like a blind person in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you. You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and rape her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it. Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue them. Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. The sights you see will drive you mad. The LORD will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. The LORD will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your ancestors. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. You will become a thing of horror, a byword and an object of ridicule among all the peoples where the LORD will drive you. You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land. The foreigners who reside among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. They will lend to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the head, but you will be the tail. All these curses will come on you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or olive oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs

of your flocks until you are ruined. They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you. Because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you – so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot – will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For in her dire need she intends to eat them secretly because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of your cities.” (NIV)

This story is subtle and profound, and it dramatically sets the stage for Solomon’s grand entrance. It actually brings the book for 2 Samuel to a close, with the next book being 1 Kings. This reinforces the story’s importance and critical place in the history of Israel. It’s where God gave His people an unmistakable warning of what was to come if they did not turn from idolatry, and where He blessed them with what was needed to bring the Ark and Tabernacle back together in one place where they belonged, in what would become the Temple of Almighty God on earth. As we shall see in a moment, Moses longed for this day, and encouraged the people with the promise God would one day lead them to a spot to build a “dwelling for His Name” (see Deuteronomy 12:10-14).

This is also the last story in Scripture where David makes a major error in judgment. From here on, the events recorded in David’s life revolve around his incredible efforts to set the nation in order before Solomon became king, and preparing for the construction of the Temple he so badly wanted to build. From all this we can see the second half of David’s reign, while being far from perfect, is much better than the first half. The trajectory of David’s life, as the “man after God’s own heart,” is pointing in the right direction.

And in this story, we learn what is perhaps the main reason David was given the supreme honor of being called a “man after God’s own heart.” He runs *to* God, not away from Him, during this dark episode, which is one of David’s greatest qualities. But he also does something else only one other person does in all of Scripture, other than Jesus. David offers to sacrifice his life to save the people.

2 Samuel 24:17 “When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.’ ” (NIV)

The only other person to make this sort of offer was Moses, who received a supreme honor of his own. Yahweh would speak to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

Exodus 32:31-34 “So Moses went back to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.’ The LORD

replied to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.’ ” (NIV)

Exodus 33:11 “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend...” (NIV)

So perhaps a central reason David was “a man after God’s own heart” and God spoke to Moses “as a friend” was the willingness David and Moses expressed to sacrifice their lives for the people. Essentially, this made them like Jesus, God incarnate, who actually did sacrifice His life for the people, and told us there is no greater love than to die for another person. It’s when we act like Jesus our hearts are conformed His, and He is able to treat us like a friend.

1 Peter 2:21-23 “... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;” (NASB)

1 John 4:16,17 “... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.” (NIV)

1 John 2:6 “Whoever claims to live in him (*Jesus*) must live as Jesus did.” (NIV)

Romans 8:29 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (NIV)

Ephesians 4:13-24 “... reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work... you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned... put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (NASB)

Ephesians 3:14-21 “For this reason, I (*Paul*) bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

John 15:9-14 “As the Father has loved me (*Jesus*), so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.” (NIV)

Rising above it all.

And so Solomon’s childhood was a rough start. He and his mom are infamous within the royal household, which is filled with the inevitable disfunction resulting from polygamy. The nation is dysfunctional as well. They are callous to the suffering of other people while also descending into the filth of idolatry, even though Yahweh brings famine and plague in an attempt to get them on the right path.

Yet despite all this, Solomon seems to rise above it all. As he enters his youth, he is presented with tremendous opportunity and responsibility, which he handles magnificently. That could only happen if during these formative childhood years Solomon rejected the instinct to be sullen, insecure, and resentful, and chose instead to be honorable and strong.

It’s also helpful David is on a better path in his own journey. Together, Solomon and his father will accomplish great things as Solomon moves from a child in the royal court to the heir to the king’s throne.

CHAPTER 3 – YOUTH.

OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

A double whammy.

At this point in history, perhaps the two most important jobs anyone could be entrusted with are: (1) building the Temple; and (2) ruling Israel. One is to construct the dwelling of Almighty God on earth. The other is to lead the people of Almighty God in their mission to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” as a blessing to every other nation on earth.

These are extraordinary opportunities, bearing responsibilities of equal magnitude. The potential to make your mark on history is in many ways unparalleled, for good or evil, which means the pressure to succeed would also be unparalleled. Either one of these pursuits would be all-consuming and require the total dedication of every ounce of energy a man possessed, even the most mature and resilient.

While still a teenager, Solomon is about to be charged with both.

Chosen by Yahweh.

While standing on the threshing floor of Araunah, after offering sacrifices to Yahweh, and seeing the angel of Yahweh put away his sword, David decides what he must do to bring the Ark and Tabernacle back together once and for all.

1 Chronicles 22:1-4 “Then David said, ‘The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’ So David gave orders to assemble the foreigners residing in Israel, and from among them he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for building the house of God. He provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways and for the fittings, and more bronze than could be weighed. He also provided more cedar logs than could be counted, for the Sidonians and Tyrians had brought large numbers of them to David.” (NIV)

David starts to collect the materials needed for the Temple, and as we shall see, also works on the artistic design and complex logistics necessary to pull off this unprecedented construction project. Yet he also recognizes it is not God’s will for him to be the one who ultimately builds the Temple of God on earth. But who will do it, and why?

1 Chronicles 22:5-19 “David said, ‘My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.’ So David made extensive preparations before his death. Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon: ‘My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: “You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon,

and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.” Now, my son, the LORD be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the LORD your God, as he said you would. May the LORD give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged. I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents (*3,750 tons*) of gold, a million talents (*37,500 tons*) of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workers: stonemasons, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron – craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you.’ Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon. He said to them, ‘Is not the LORD your God with you? And has he not granted you rest on every side? For he has given the inhabitants of the land into my hands, and the land is subject to the LORD and to his people. Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the LORD.’ ” (NIV)

There is much to draw from this passage.

- David knew he was not the one God wanted to build the Temple. Why?

Because David had “shed much blood in Yahweh’s sight” and “fought many wars,” while God wanted a “man of peace and rest” to “build a house for my Name.”

What this all comes down to is: David has a lot of baggage, both good and bad. Some of the blood he has spilled was righteous and some unrighteous. This makes him unsuitable for the task of constructing a house “for Yahweh’s Name;” in other words, designed to be about who Yahweh is and what He wants to do for this world.

By giving this task to Solomon, a “man of peace and rest,” it’s essentially giving it to a blank slate, someone who does not bring the reputation of his own name to the project, as the famous warrior David would. Solomon is a young, relatively obscure member of the royal family, who has only known the blessing of peace and prosperity handed down to him through his father and by Yahweh’s grace. So the Temple will be about the Name of the One giving the blessing, not the one receiving it.

This is in turn a metaphor for what God wants to do for all people through the Temple. He wants to offer peace and prosperity to anyone who will accept Him as his or her Heavenly Father, not because of who they are, but because of who He is.

In other words, just as Solomon would inherit blessings as a gift made possible by the work of his father, those who come to Yahweh as their Father will likewise inherit the gifts available to Yahweh’s children as a result of the work of the Messiah.

1 Peter 1:1-17 "... To God's elect, strangers in the world... Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." (NIV)

Ephesians 1:4-19 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace... we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will... And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe..." (NIV)

Solomon receives all this, and his house will be established forever, not because of what a great guy Solomon is (as we shall see, he becomes a monster), but because he is the son of David, the "man after God's own heart," and God will not break His unconditional promise to David to establish an eternal king through his house. More on this later.

2 Samuel 7:4-17 "But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: 'Go and tell my servant David, "... The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'" ' Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation." (NIV)

- David knew Solomon was the one God wanted to build the Temple. Why?

The simple answer is: Because God told David so. Yahweh told David he would have a son to be named Solomon (which means "peace") and this son would be the one to build the Temple and rule after David.

So David selects Solomon, not necessarily because Solomon was awesome and David liked him better than his other sons, but because this was the person God has chosen and specifically told David to name for the job. And if Solomon is going to build the Temple, he must also be David's heir to the throne.

This begs the question: Why did God choose Solomon? The answer is complex and will have to wait until after we have more fully examined Solomon's life.

- David knew Solomon was unprepared to build the Temple. Why?

Because Solomon was young and inexperienced. He had basically never done anything before, and the Temple would be a house "of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all nations." There was absolutely no way Solomon could pull this off on his own.

- So what did David do?

Perhaps most importantly, David *prays* for Solomon, asking Yahweh to give him "success, discretion, and understanding," which may be one reason Solomon thought to ask Yahweh for wisdom when given the opportunity to ask for anything.

David *charges* Solomon to "keep the law of Yahweh your God, and be careful to observe the decrees and laws Yahweh gave Moses for Israel." This is to keep his son out of trouble as he takes on this monumental task. We shall see how well Solomon follows this charge.

David *encourages* Solomon, telling him to "be strong and courageous" and "do not be afraid or discouraged," echoing Yahweh's words to Joshua before the Israelites crossed the Jordan to conquer the Promised Land.

Joshua 1:7-9 "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (NIV)

David *assists* Solomon, gathering huge stores of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. He also recruits all the skilled craftsmen necessary to work with these materials, then orders all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon.

And finally, David *commands* Solomon to get started.

1 Chronicles 22:19 "Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the LORD." (NIV)

What was the underlying purpose of all this? To finally reunite the Ark and Tabernacle, in a Temple built for the Name of Yahweh.

The phrase “Name of Yahweh” was tremendously important to the Hebrews. It encapsulated everything the great “I am” is.

To build a house for His Name was an unparalleled honor carrying the highest responsibility. It was to be the permanent center for worship of the one true God of all creation. It was also something for which the people who knew the Law and understood their history longed (that is, people like David), because about 500 years earlier, Moses told the people this momentous opportunity would one day arrive.

Deuteronomy 12:5-14 “... seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you... you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name – there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. And there rejoice before the LORD your God – you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.” (NIV)

And so here is another reason why the story of David’s census and how the angel of Yahweh led David to this site is so important in Israel’s History. It’s the fulfillment of the prophecies that God would one day show the people where His dwelling should permanently reside within Israel.

The planning and preliminary work for the Temple is underway. An heir to David’s throne has been selected by God Himself. Now it’s time to announce this heir and begin the transfer of power.

But David seems to delay and needs a little push.

Challenged by a brother and anointed by his father.

As David ages, he encounters a problem common to older people – he has a hard time keeping warm at night.

1 Kings 1:1-4 “When King David was very old (*literally “old in years”*), he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. So his attendants said to him, ‘Let us look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our

lord the king may keep warm.’ Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The woman was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no sexual relations with her.” (NIV)

Notice this passage opens the book of 1 Kings. This is the story the author chose under divine inspiration to kick off the book, which suggests we should pay close attention, because it will set into motion everything that follows.

Some suggest David was near the end of his life here and in a state of dotage, but as we shall see, the last part of David’s life was extremely productive, and he was able to accomplish a huge amount of worthwhile things after relinquishing the throne and making Solomon king. The NIV describes David as “very old,” but the Hebrew literally just says “old in years.” So while David is certainly an older man at the time of these events, he’s not an elderly, incapacitated man about to die. He’s an old man who can’t get warm at night.

In a manner that could only be considered acceptable in an ancient culture, David’s attendants find a beautiful young woman to wait on David and sleep next to him at night to keep him warm. She’s a virgin, and to his credit, David keeps her that way.

Although David is not a weak old man unfit to rule, David’s fourth son, Adonijah, sees this as an opportunity to portray him as one and claims the throne.

1 Kings 1:5-10 “Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, ‘I will be king.’ So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. (His father had never rebuked him by asking, ‘Why do you behave as you do?’ He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.) Adonijah conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they gave him their support. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David’s special guard did not join Adonijah. Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the Stone of Zohemoth near En Rogel (*a spring south of Jerusalem*). He invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon.” (NIV)

Adonijah is David’s fourth son, born after Absalom. Although he and Absalom have different mothers, they share the same qualities of good looks and aggressive decisiveness. Also as with Absalom, David has not disciplined Adonijah as a good father should, and so another son has grown up arrogant, entitled, and unrestrained.

Adonijah follows Absalom’s example and gets himself a chariot and fifty guys to run before him, as signs of royalty and authority (1 Samuel 8:11; 2 Samuel 15:1-6). Adonijah also gains the support of two of the most important people in the royal court: Joab, David’s nephew and commander of the king’s armies, and Abiathar, one of the two main priests, along with Zadok. Then Adonijah throws a big party at the “Stone of Zohemoth near En Rogel,” a spring south of Jerusalem, inviting all his brothers (except Solomon) and all the royal officials of Judah.

Let’s consider those who didn’t receive a party invite.

- *Solomon*. By leaving out Solomon, we can see Adonijah, and indeed all Israel, must have known Solomon had been chosen to succeed David, otherwise, he would have been included.
- *Nathan*. He is excluded because he is a prophet who represents Yahweh, and by claiming the throne, Adonijah is defying Yahweh's will. Ironically, Adonijah's name means "Yahweh is my lord."
- *Benaiah*. He is the chief of David's bodyguards and one of David's mightiest warriors, who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day and killed an Egyptian giant 7 ½ feet tall with the giant's own spear (1 Chronicles 11:22-25; 2 Samuel 23:20-23). He likely terrifies Adonijah, and since his plans defy the king's wishes, Benaiah is left out for obvious reasons.

We also see Zadok, the other high priest, remained loyal to David, along with "Shimei and Rei," who were likely part of David's loyal guard and who will one day join Solomon's inner circle (see 1 Kings 4:18). This was probably not the Shimei who cursed David as he fled Jerusalem and was forgiven upon the king's return, because David expressly told Solomon not to trust him (1 Kings 2:8,9).

All this is carried out behind David's back, which suggests Joab and Abiathar, as two of David's closest and most long-standing allies, have abandoned their king and are trying to shape their future without him. Nathan, on the other hand, remains loyal and has the good sense to act. He goes to Bathsheba.

1 Kings 1:11-27 "Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, 'Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in to King David and say to him, "My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: 'Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne?' Why then has Adonijah become king?" While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and add my word to what you have said.' So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. Bathsheba bowed down, prostrating herself before the king. 'What is it you want?' the king asked. She said to him, 'My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: "Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne." But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it. He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his ancestors, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals.' While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived... he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground. Nathan said, 'Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne? Today he has gone down and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. Right now they

are eating and drinking with him and saying, “Long live King Adonijah!” But me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he did not invite. Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?” (NIV)

When Bathsheba enters, it’s interesting to observe David is being attended by the young and beautiful Abishag. It could have been a tense moment. But in an act of great humility, Bathsheba prostrates herself before the king and then talks sense to him. The king has promised her that Solomon will sit on the throne, but in failing to act on this promise, Adonijah has usurped the king’s will. Now the lives of Solomon and Bathsheba are in danger.

Nathan arrives and backs up Bathsheba. He wants to know if David has changed his mind about the succession, which would be in defiance of Yahweh’s will and something Nathan, as Yahweh’s prophet, should know about.

David listens and then acts like a king, taking immediate, decisive action.

1 Kings 1:28-35 “Then King David said, ‘Call in Bathsheba.’ So she came into the king’s presence and stood before him. The king then took an oath: ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place.’ Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground, prostrating herself before the king, and said, ‘May my lord King David live forever!’ King David said, ‘Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.’ When they came before the king, he said to them: ‘Take your lord’s servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon (*a spring east of Jerusalem*). There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, “Long live King Solomon!” Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah.’ ” (NIV)

Two springs provide water to Jerusalem, En Rogel to the south and Gihon to the east. Both were outside the city walls and only about a half mile apart. Adonijah and his supporters are at En Rogel throwing their party, while Solomon and his supporters march to Gihon upon David’s authority to anoint Solomon as king.

A large number of people follow Solomon to witness the event, then have a huge celebration of their own that gets so loud the ground shakes. And guess who can hear all the commotion?

1 Kings 1:38-48 “So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon mount King David’s mule, and they escorted him to Gihon. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, ‘Long live King Solomon! And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound. Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, ‘What’s the meaning of all the noise in the city?’ Even as he was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said,

‘Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.’ ‘Not at all’ Jonathan answered. ‘Our lord King David has made Solomon king. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king’s mule, and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up cheering, and the city resounds with it. That’s the noise you hear. Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne. Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, “May your God make Solomon’s name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!” And the king bowed in worship on his bed and said, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.” ’ ’ (NIV)

The scene at Adonijah’s party is comical. Everyone is sitting around very pleased with themselves, high fiving each other and making plans for the future, when they hear trumpets and another group of people having even more fun than them. The wily Joab immediately knows something’s up.

However, the would-be king, Adonijah, is clueless. Jonathan approaches (the son of the priest Abiathar, who used to bring secret messages to David when he was on the run from Absalom), and Adonijah supposes the celebration is for him.

When they learn the truth, it’s their worst nightmare. Not only has the king discovered their plot, he’s had Solomon:

- Anointed by a priest and a prophet,
- Paraded through Jerusalem on the royal mule,
- Seated on the throne, and
- Paid tribute by the royal officials as the new king.

And finally, just to make sure there is absolutely no doubt as to his will and capacity to transfer power, David personally and publicly acknowledged Solomon as the successor to his throne with lucid, eloquent words.

So while Adonijah and his pals were living it up, the deal was done right under their noses. They might have thought David was a tired old man they could outsmart and outmaneuver, but the king of Israel has proven himself to be strong, decisive, and resolute. Now their party turns into a panic.

1 Kings 1:49,50 “At this, all Adonijah’s guests rose in alarm and dispersed. But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar.” (NIV)

Adonijah is terrified. According to the swift, merciless ways of ancient royalty, he is a dead man. Moments earlier his buddies were fawning all over him and sucking up to the new king. Now all they want to do is get as far away from him as they possibly can. So he does the only thing he knows that might save his skin. He makes a run for it and “takes hold of the horns of the altar.”

This would be the altar at the Tabernacle, which was designed with horns at each corner (Exodus 27:2). The Tabernacle seems to still be in Gibeah, just a few miles northeast of Jerusalem, so it was

nearby (see 1 Kings 2:28; 2 Chronicles 1:3). By running there and grabbing the horns of the altar, Adonijah is seeking sanctuary and a promise his life will be spared.

Solomon's first act as king.

What happens next will be Solomon's first act as king.

1 Kings 1:51-53 "Then Solomon was told, 'Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, "Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword."' Solomon replied, 'If he shows himself to be worthy, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die.' Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, 'Go to your home.'" (NIV)

Notice he is called "King Solomon" in the passage. The people recognize the transfer of power, and now everyone is looking to see how their new sovereign is going to behave when things get interesting.

Right here at the start, Solomon demonstrates his innate wisdom in handling delicate matters. He extends mercy to his brother, but only on the condition Adonijah "shows himself to be worthy." But "if evil is found in him, he will die."

This is an insightful and savvy response from Israel's new king. Why? Because although it might seem natural for Adonijah to want Solomon to promise not to harm him, it's not a fair or reasonable request under these circumstances. Adonijah just attempted a coup, and yet he is the one making demands of the rightful king. At the same time, Adonijah's request places the burden on Solomon to be faithful to Adonijah, while relieving Adonijah of the responsibility of being faithful to Solomon.

If Adonijah was sincere, right about now he would be promising fidelity to the guy whose throne he just tried to usurp. That's what a humble heart would do, along with offering up a few genuine apologies as he maintains a death grip on the horns of the altar. Instead, he's arrogantly demanding blanket assurances no harm will come to him from Solomon, which serves no purpose other than establishing a sneaky way to protect himself from past, present, and future acts of insurrection.

Solomon sees through all of this. He does not paint himself into a corner and promise unconditionally he will never put Adonijah to death. This would place the burden on Solomon to be faithful to Adonijah (which is essentially what David did for Shimei and later regretted, when Shimei put David on the spot with a cry for mercy upon the king's return to Jerusalem after fleeing from Absalom). Instead, Solomon places the burden on Adonijah to be faithful to him, and left his options open if Adonijah later turns against him. Which, by the way, is exactly what Adonijah will do.

Adonijah realizes this is the best deal he's going to get, so he lets go of the altar, runs and bows before king Solomon, then slinks on home. And it's interesting to note as a bit of foreshadowing, another person who was at Adonijah's party will one day seek sanctuary at these same horns, with less favorable results.

And so Solomon begins his reign with a wise act of conditional mercy towards his rival older brother. Solomon is now king of Israel. What is left for David to do? It turns out, quite a lot.

David's final (and extraordinarily productive) years.

Many wrongly presume (as Adonijah and his buddies did) David was a tired old man at this point in his life, incapable of doing anything other than snuggling up to a young girl to keep warm. But if we look closely at his story, this was definitely not the case.

Although David delayed in announcing his heir and transferring power, when the time came he acted decisively with clear insight as to what needed to be done. His mind was active and alert, and in the crisis brought about by Adonijah's ambition, David had no trouble listening to Bathsheba and Nathan, grasping the problem, and immediately deciding what to do. David wasn't a sleepy, toothless invalid, bewildered by what was going on around him. He was a king in total command during a dangerous situation that threatened the succession plans laid out by Yahweh Himself.

His physical state is more difficult to define. 1 Kings 1:47 does state David "bowed in worship on his bed" after Solomon took the throne, so he may have been suffering from some condition that confined him to his chambers. And as we have seen, he had trouble keeping warm at night.

Yet at the same time, 1 Kings 1:4 mentions David did not have sexual relations with Abishag as she slept next to him, suggesting he was physically able to do so if he had so desired. So while David may have been limited in his mobility, his mind and body remained vital.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate David's state of being after he made Solomon king is to look at what he *did*. When we do, we observe a man of extraordinary intellect, creativity, and energy making the most of his final years with honor and integrity, because both the list and nature of his accomplishments are astonishing!

In 1 Kings 1, we get the detailed story of how David finally made Solomon king and transferred power. In 1 Chronicles 23, we get *one sentence*.

1 Chronicles 23:1 "When David was old and full of years (*literally "satisfied of days"*), he made his son Solomon king over Israel." (NIV)

Then we get *seven chapters* of all David did *after* making Solomon king. It's a mind-blowing list of sophisticated activities demonstrating absolute genius in multiple disciplines, including political science, architecture, administration, logistics, and of course, songwriting. It's also a *selfless* list, where David is not trying to venerate and memorialize himself, but rather set Solomon up for success.

The passage introduces David as old and "full of years," but the Hebrew literally describes him as "satisfied of days." The inference here is not negative, as if he was weighed down by old age and about to croak any second, but rather positive, describing a man, while elderly, still full of wisdom and prepared to effectively contribute in valuable ways because of his character, skill, and experience.

And so, before anyone presumes David sat around slurping soup from a spoon waiting to die after handing over the throne, let's look at what he was able to accomplish in the years between Solomon's coronation and the day David leapt into eternity.

David's duty – organizing the nation.

Essentially, David reorganized and restructured every major religious, tribal, governmental, and military body in the entire nation, then filled them with capable leaders. Here are a few examples.

- *The Levites.* David completely reorganized the duties of the Levites. This was long overdue, since they had not had to move the Tabernacle around with any frequency for centuries, which had been the primary responsibility of this tribe. They needed productive tasks, clear lines of authority, and specific responsibilities, all of which David provided.

1 Chronicles 23:2-32 “He (*David*) also gathered together all the leaders of Israel, as well as the priests and Levites. The Levites thirty years old or more were counted, and the total number of men was thirty-eight thousand. David said, ‘Of these, twenty-four thousand are to be in charge of the work of the temple of the Lord and six thousand are to be officials and judges. Four thousand are to be gatekeepers and four thousand are to praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have provided for that purpose.’ David separated the Levites into divisions corresponding to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari... For David had said, ‘Since the Lord, the God of Israel, has granted rest to his people and has come to dwell in Jerusalem forever, the Levites no longer need to carry the tabernacle or any of the articles used in its service...’ The duty of the Levites was to help Aaron’s descendants in the service of the temple of the Lord: to be in charge of the courtyards, the side rooms, the purification of all sacred things and the performance of other duties at the house of God. They were in charge of the bread set out on the table, the special flour for the grain offerings, the thin loaves made without yeast, the baking and the mixing, and all measurements of quantity and size. They were also to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord. They were to do the same in the evening and whenever burnt offerings were presented to the Lord on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals. They were to serve before the Lord regularly in the proper number and in the way prescribed for them. And so the Levites carried out their responsibilities for the tent of meeting, for the Holy Place and, under their relatives the descendants of Aaron, for the service of the temple of the Lord.” (NIV)

- *Aaronic priests.* Within the tribe of Levi, the descendants of Aaron were the Tabernacle priests, the highest duty of any Levite. David carefully identified all the descendants of Aaron who were qualified to serve as priests, and divided them into twenty-four groups according to family leaders. Lots were then cast to impartially assign the order in which these groups would serve at the Tabernacle and ultimately the Temple, with one group serving per week and everything memorialized in writing. This made sure there was no favoritism in the order or potential challenges in the future that could disrupt the function of the priests at the Temple.

1 Chronicles 24:3-19 “With the help of Zadok a descendant of Eleazar (*a son of Aaron*) and Ahimelek a descendant of Ithamar (*another son of Aaron*), David separated them (*the descendants of Aaron*) into divisions for their appointed order of ministering... They divided them impartially by casting lots, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of God among the descendants of both Eleazar and Ithamar. The scribe Shemaiah son of Nethanel, a Levite, recorded their names in the presence of the king and of the officials: Zadok the priest, Ahimelek son of Abiathar and the heads of families of the priests and of the Levites – one family being taken from Eleazar and then one from Ithamar... This was their appointed order of ministering when they entered the temple of the LORD, according to the regulations prescribed for them by their ancestor Aaron, as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded him.” (NIV)

Notice the priest Zadok is still at David’s side, while Abiathar, who had supported Adonijah, is not. Instead, Abiathar’s son, Ahimelek, is mentioned. As we shall see Abiathar is still around, but out of favor and likely still among the living only because he is a priest and has a long history with David, having joined him when he went on the run from Saul (1 Samuel 22:20).

- *The rest of the Levites.* Next David orders the rest of the Levites in a similar manner to the Aaronic priests, by identifying twenty-four family groups and then casting lots to determine the order in which each group would serve.

1 Chronicles 24:20-31 “As for the rest of the descendants of Levi...They also cast lots, just as their relatives the descendants of Aaron did, in the presence of King David and of Zadok, Ahimelek, and the heads of families of the priests and of the Levites. The families of the oldest brother were treated the same as those of the youngest.” (NIV)

- *Temple Musicians.* David identifies those in the land who were gifted to serve as musicians at the Temple. There were three main musicians who presently served with David: Asaph, Herman, and Jeduthun. They “prophesied, accompanied by harps, lyres, and cymbals,” which suggests a sort of inspired, improvisational praise and worship.

Each of these three had large, gifted families. As with the Levites and Priests, twenty-four family leaders are identified, with 288 total musicians, and lots are cast to determine the order of their service.

1 Chronicles 25:1-8 “David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals... All these men were under the supervision of their father for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives – all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD – they numbered 288. Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties.” (NIV)

- *Gatekeepers – including “sons of Korah.”* The “Gatekeepers” were the men entrusted to guard the Temple grounds and what was stored there – priceless sacred items, including the Ark, and a vast store of gold, silver, and other wealth. Clearly, this was a job that could not be entrusted

to just anyone. It had to be the most capable and honorable men in the land; otherwise, the treasuries would have been easily robbed. Who did David select for this vital responsibility?

1 Chronicles 26:1-19 “The divisions of the gatekeepers: From the Korahites... Obed-Edom’s son Shemaiah also had sons, who were leaders in their father’s family because they were very capable men. The sons of Shemaiah: Othni, Rephael, Obed and Elzabad; his relatives Elihu and Semakiah were also able men. All these were descendants of Obed-Edom; they and their sons and their relatives were capable men with the strength to do the work... Meshelemiah had sons and relatives, who were able men... Hosah the Merarite had sons: Shimri the first (although he was not the firstborn, his father had appointed him the first)... These divisions of the gatekeepers, through their leaders, had duties for ministering in the temple of the LORD, just as their relatives had. Lots were cast for each gate, according to their families, young and old alike. The lot for the East Gate fell to Shelemiah. Then lots were cast for his son Zechariah, a wise counselor, and the lot for the North Gate fell to him. The lot for the South Gate fell to Obed-Edom, and the lot for the storehouse fell to his sons. The lots for the West Gate and the Shalleketh Gate on the upper road fell to Shuppim and Hosah. Guard was alongside of guard: There were six Levites a day on the east, four a day on the north, four a day on the south and two at a time at the storehouse. As for the court to the west, there were four at the road and two at the court itself. These were the divisions of the gatekeepers who were descendants of Korah and Merari.” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 9:17-32 “The gatekeepers... Shallum son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his fellow gatekeepers from his family (the Korahites) were responsible for guarding the thresholds of the tent just as their ancestors had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the dwelling of the Lord. In earlier times Phinehas son of Eleazar was the official in charge of the gatekeepers, and the Lord was with him... The gatekeepers had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer. They and their descendants were in charge of guarding the gates of the house of the Lord – the house called the tent of meeting. The gatekeepers were on the four sides: east, west, north and south. Their fellow Levites in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods. But the four principal gatekeepers, who were Levites, were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. They would spend the night stationed around the house of God, because they had to guard it; and they had charge of the key for opening it each morning. Some of them were in charge of the articles used in the temple service; they counted them when they were brought in and when they were taken out. Others were assigned to take care of the furnishings and all the other articles of the sanctuary, as well as the special flour and wine, and the olive oil, incense and spices. But some of the priests took care of mixing the spices. A Levite named Mattithiah, the firstborn son of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with the responsibility for baking the offering bread. Some of the Kohathites, their fellow Levites, were in charge of preparing for every Sabbath the bread set out on the table.” (NIV)

As an interesting side note, Korah was the worst of the worst of the Exodus generation. After Yahweh delivered the people from the slavery of Egypt, they basically spent the next two years complaining to Him and finally refused to enter the Promised Land. After this debacle, Korah led a rebellion against Moses, making the nonsensical claim, “the whole community is holy, every one of them.” See Numbers 16.

Yahweh was so fed up with Korah and his followers, He caused the earth to open up and bring them down to Sheol (the abode of the dead before the resurrection of Jesus) alive in one terrible gulp. This is the major story that comes to us during the wandering of the Israelites after their refusal to enter the land, and Korah is perhaps the most notorious person of this extraordinarily rebellious generation.

And yet Korah's sons were spared from the dreadful judgment against their father, and their descendants became some of the finest citizens in the land. The prophet Samuel was descended from Korah, and Samuel's grandson was a renowned Tabernacle musician (1 Samuel 1:1; 1 Chronicles 6:31-38). Others became expert warriors (1 Chronicles 12:1-6). Eleven of the Psalms (42, 44 through 49, 84, 85, 87, and 88) are attributed to the "sons of Korah."

Here we see the descendants of Korah made Gatekeepers at the Temple. And notice in the above passages these men are consistently described as "very capable," "able men," "with the strength to do the work," and "wise counselors." They were hand-picked by David and "assigned to their positions of trust" to guard the house of Yahweh and all it contained.

We note this because it's nice to know: Regardless of your background, you can rise to the top when you work hard and live with integrity. These descendants of Korah clearly earned a reputation for excellence and honor by their words and deeds, and everyone took notice. Although the "sons of Korah" were related to one of the most notorious men in the history of Israel, they didn't let that hold them back. And neither did Yahweh, David, nor the rest of the Israelites.

In fact, Scripture seems to go out of its way to draw attention to the accomplishments of the "sons of Korah," as a way to both guide and encourage us. God actually appears to enjoy blessing the descendants of notorious people, when those descendants refuse to feel sorry for themselves and instead choose to live honorable, hardworking lives that glorify Him. It demonstrates both His justice and His merciful character.

Psalm 145:8-16 "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made... The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down... You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." (NIV)

Ezekiel 18:1-32 "The word of the LORD (*Yahweh*) came to me (*Ezekiel*): 'What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" (*meaning the kids suffer for the parent's error*)' As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child – both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right... He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD. Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things (though the father has done none of them)... Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he is to be put to death; his blood will be on his own head. But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees

them, he does not do such things... He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. But his father will die for his own sin, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. Yet you ask, "Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?" Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?... Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die... Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (NIV)

And in the same way, we should delight to honor those who choose to live lives of integrity, regardless of their background. God doesn't hold grudges. Neither should we.

Micah 7:18,19 "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (NIV)

Luke 6:31-38 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." (NASB)

- *Treasurers.* David assigned certain Levite families to oversee the treasuries at the Temple. This included plunder from the wars David fought, along with the things "dedicated" to the Temple by Samuel, Saul, Abner, and Joab during the campaigns they led. See 1 Chronicles 26:20-28.
- *Judges and Administrators over Israel.* David chose certain Levites to work away from the Temple to act as judges and administrators over the people living throughout "Israel," meaning all of the tribal lands west of the Jordan. See 1 Chronicles 26:29,30.

- *Judges and Administrators over Transjordan.* Likewise, David sought out and found Levites living in Transjordan to oversee the affairs of the tribes living east of the Jordan. See 1 Chronicles 26:31,32.
- *Standing Army Divisions.* David established twelve army divisions, each with 24,000 men. Altogether this was a standing army of 288,000 soldiers. Each division had a “family head,” with commanders of thousands, and commanders of hundreds, and other officers. Each individual division was on duty during an assigned month of the year. See 1 Chronicles 27:1-15.
- *Tribal Leaders.* Each individual tribe was assigned a leader. For Manasseh, which was split into two territories divided by the Jordan river, there was one leader for the western portion, and one for the eastern portion. 1 Chronicles 27:16-22.
- *Various Overseers.* Finally, David created overseers for the property owned by the king, including:
 - Storehouses in Jerusalem
 - Storehouses for all other districts, towns, villages, and watchtowers
 - Farmland workers
 - Vineyards
 - Winemaking
 - Olive and fig production
 - Olive oil production
 - Herds (likely cows and oxen) in Sharon, a plain running along the coast of the Mediterranean in central Israel.
 - Herds in the “valleys,” likely those leading into Sharon.
 - Camels
 - Donkeys
 - Sheep

By setting up all these overseers, David is ensuring the royal household, and all the enterprises that supported it, would run efficiently and profitably after he was gone. See 1 Chronicles 27:25-31.

This is just an overview of the extraordinary work David did to organize and empower those responsible for the nation’s spiritual health (the Levites), national security (the martial leadership and standing army), political stability (tribal leadership), and orderly function of the royal house. It required tremendous personal leadership, organizational insight, and disciplined tenacity, as he completely reorganized every critical function of the nation.

These tasks were essential to the future success of Solomon and Israel, but for someone of David’s temperament, most likely not a lot of fun. It would have required difficult and decisive decision making on the organization level, followed by seemingly endless personnel decisions and all the drama that goes along with creating an effective hierarchy of authority.

This was the vital work it was David's *duty* to undertake and complete before he died. But as all this came together, David could also turn to his *passion*, which was conceptualizing and preparing to build a house for God in Jerusalem, finally reuniting the Ark with the Tabernacle. This had been his dream, and something he had been working towards, since the day he brought the Ark to Jerusalem.

David's passion – planning for the Temple.

And so, as the great leader he was, David gathered the people and shared his vision for Israel, Solomon, and the Temple.

1 Chronicles 28:1-10 “David summoned all the officials of Israel to assemble at Jerusalem: the officers over the tribes, the commanders of the divisions in the service of the king, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the warriors and all the brave fighting men. King David rose to his feet and said: ‘Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it. But God said to me, “You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood.” Yet the LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose my family, and from my father’s sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel. Of all my sons – and the LORD has given me many – he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. He said to me: “Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. I will establish his kingdom forever if he is unswerving in carrying out my commands and laws, as is being done at this time.” So now I charge you in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God: Be careful to follow all the commands of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land and pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants forever. And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.’ ” (NIV)

David lays out his vision and explains why it is Solomon's job to carry it out. Then he charges both the people and their new king to follow the Law and worship at this Temple, as was God's original vision for Israel, given to them during the year they were at Mount Sinai.

His charge also comes with a stark warning, “If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.” Then David challenges them to consider the fact that of all the people on all the earth, they are the ones Yahweh chose to do this work – so be strong and get going. We will see how well Solomon and the people fulfill their charge.

Then in an extraordinary moment, David hands the plans for the Temple to Solomon.

1 Chronicles 28:11-18 “Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things. He gave him instructions for the divisions of the priests and Levites, and for all the work of serving in the temple of the LORD, as well as for all the articles to be used in its service. He designated the weight of gold for all the gold articles to be used in various kinds of service, and the weight of silver for all the silver articles to be used in various kinds of service: the weight of gold for the gold lampstands and their lamps, with the weight for each lampstand and its lamps; and the weight of silver for each silver lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand; the weight of gold for each table for consecrated bread; the weight of silver for the silver tables; the weight of pure gold for the forks, sprinkling bowls and pitchers; the weight of gold for each gold dish; the weight of silver for each silver dish; and the weight of the refined gold for the altar of incense. He also gave him the plan for the chariot, that is, the cherubim of gold that spread their wings and overshadow the ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ ” (NIV)

David provides Solomon with incredibly detailed plans, not only for the Temple, but also for all the supporting structures as well. These included measurements of all the gold and silver needed for the various service articles, lampstands, lamps, tables, altars, and statues within the Temple. And with these plans, David gave Solomon written instructions related to all the organizational work he had done with the priests and other Levites, so once built the Temple could function effectively.

How was David able to do all this?

1 Chronicles 28:19-21 “ ‘All this,’ David said, ‘I have in writing as a result of the LORD’s hand on me, and he enabled me to understand all the details of the plan.’ David also said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished. The divisions of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work on the temple of God, and every willing person skilled in any craft will help you in all the work. The officials and all the people will obey your every command.’ ” (NIV)

As Solomon stood there, with volume after volume being presented to him, with detailed plans, supply lists, and organizational documents, he must have felt overwhelmed. David comforts and encourages his son, by stating the obvious: There is no way I could have done this on my own strength. It was Yahweh who blessed me with the understanding and strength I needed to do it, and in the same way, He will bless you with what you need to finish the task. He will not fail you. And if you will rise to this occasion and lead, the priests, Levites, artisans, administrators, and laborers “will obey your every command.”

With this, David then turns to the people he just declared would obey Solomon.

1 Chronicles 29:1-9 “Then King David said to the whole assembly: ‘My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because

this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God – gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble – all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents (*110 tons*) of gold (gold of Ophir (*high quality, likely from Arabia*)) and seven thousand talents (*260 tons*) of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?’ Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents (*190 tons*) and ten thousand darics (*185 pounds*) of gold, ten thousand talents (*380 tons*) of silver, eighteen thousand talents (*675 tons*) of bronze and a hundred thousand talents (*3,800 tons*) of iron. Anyone who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the LORD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.” (NIV)

David makes an appeal to the people to assist Solomon, not only with their labor, but also with their wealth. But first David leads the way, by pledging essentially all of his vast fortune as king of Israel to the project.

This has the desired effect. When the people see how David has passionately devoted his time and fortune to the building of God’s house, they give as well – freely, wholeheartedly, and joyfully. This is how it’s supposed to be when we give to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (NIV)

This is a staggering amount of wealth being dedicated to the Temple construction. David is overwhelmed by the generosity of the people. He praises God and offers a remarkable prayer.

1 Chronicles 29:10-20 “David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, ‘Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on

earth are like a shadow, without hope. LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. LORD, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, statutes and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided.' Then David said to the whole assembly, 'Praise the LORD your God.' So they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; they bowed down, prostrating themselves before the LORD and the king." (NIV)

David recognizes the only reason this vast store of wealth can be offered is because God has blessed them. They are only giving to God what was already His. David prays the people's generous hearts and devotion to Yahweh will endure. He doesn't want this to be an emotional moment that's here today but gone tomorrow. Then he leads the people in an extraordinary time of praise. What happens the next day?

1 Chronicles 29:21-25 "The next day they made sacrifices to the LORD and presented burnt offerings to him: a thousand bulls, a thousand rams and a thousand male lambs, together with their drink offerings, and other sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. They ate and drank with great joy in the presence of the LORD that day. Then they acknowledged Solomon son of David as king a second time, anointing him before the LORD to be ruler and Zadok to be priest. So Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of his father David. He prospered and all Israel obeyed him. All the officers and warriors, as well as all of King David's sons, pledged their submission to King Solomon. The LORD highly exalted Solomon in the sight of all Israel and bestowed on him royal splendor such as no king over Israel ever had before." (NIV)

Thousands of offerings are made. The Israelites feast with joy. Then, for a second time, they acknowledge Solomon as king, along with the faithful Zadok as high priest. The people are delighted with the transition of power from David to Solomon. The key officials, including David's other sons, all pledge loyalty to Solomon, as he sits on the throne, with a royal splendor bestowed on him by Yahweh himself.

David did something else to prepare for the construction of the Temple, which is not recorded in 1 Kings or 1 Chronicles. Instead, it's recorded in Psalms. David wrote a beautiful song he would never hear performed, but would instead be performed after he was gone when the Temple was finally complete and dedicated.

Psalms 30:1-12 A Psalm; a Song at the Dedication of the House (*Temple*). A Psalm of David. "I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up, and have not let my enemies rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to You for help, and You healed me. O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning. Now as for me, I said in my

prosperity, 'I will never be moved.' O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong; You hid Your face, I was dismayed. To You, O LORD, I called, and to the Lord I made supplication: 'What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper.' You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, that my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever." (NASB)

Finishing well.

Considering all this, what can we say about David in his final years? He was clearly suffering from some of the common maladies of old age. He couldn't get warm at night. When he first announced Solomon as king, he may not have been able to get out of bed.

But by the time Solomon was declared king the second time, David seems to have made quite a physical recovery. In 1 Chronicles 28:2, David "rose to his feet" and delivered a long, artful speech about his passion for the Temple before the most important people in all the land. He challenges, warns, and encourages them. He prays and leads the people in worship. Then the next day, he feasts and rejoices with the people as Solomon sits on the throne.

Considering all this, the period after David relinquished the throne until his death may have been David's finest years. He completely reorganized the nation, from a spiritual, political, and military perspective. He set the royal house in order. He completed his detailed plans for the Temple. He calculated all the materials necessary for the project. He led a campaign for the required funds, donating essentially all of his personal fortune, then finally capped everything off with a beautiful celebration, affirming Yahweh's choice to make Solomon king.

Is there a record of any king accomplishing more in his final years than David?

The death of David.

As David felt death draw near, he provided Solomon with some final advice.

1 Kings 2:1-4 "When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. 'I am about to go the way of all the earth,' he said. 'So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel." ' " (NIV)

David begins by giving his son the best advice any father could give any son – follow God's Law. This is the key to future blessing for Solomon as a person, and for all the descendants of David's house. We will see if Solomon was listening.

David also knows the moment he dies, there will be a brief time of uncertainty where it will be important for Solomon to know who he can trust and who he cannot. And so David turns to some unfinished business, both good and bad, within the royal inner circle.

1 Kings 2:5-9 “Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me – what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood he stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace. But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom. And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: “I will not put you to death by the sword.” But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.’ ” (NIV)

First, David warns Solomon about Joab, who supported Adonijah when he tried to usurp the throne. Joab has repeatedly resisted David’s will throughout the king’s reign, murdering Abner and Amasa in peacetime in violation of both the Law and military ethics. And yet, as we have seen, the cunning Joab was always able to retain his position of power.

This can’t continue into Solomon’s reign. Were Joab able to do so, it would make Solomon look weak and vulnerable, inevitably leading to a challenge to his throne ending in bloodshed. David doesn’t tell Solomon what to do, but rather to “deal with Joab according to your wisdom.” Yet his message is clear, “don’t let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.” A man who murders his fellow soldiers during peacetime can’t be allowed to plot against you at his leisure. When the time is right, get rid of Joab before he gets rid of you.

Next David turns to Barzillai, who supported David when he was on the run from Absalom. Here David names Barzillai’s sons as people Solomon can trust and allow to “eat at Solomon’s table.” They were loyal when David was most vulnerable, and they will support Solomon as he takes the throne.

Finally, David names Shimei, who, as opposed to Barzillai, had cursed David as he fled Absalom. Upon David’s return, Shimei picked an opportune time to seek David’s forgiveness, in a public setting when it was politically wise for David to show mercy. David had foolishly promised unconditionally not to put Shimei to death, but Solomon is under no such vow. And with a similar epitaph as directed towards Joab, David advises Solomon as a man of wisdom to be prepared to “bring Shimei’s gray head down to the grave in blood;” in other words, by causes other than natural.

These are somewhat chilling words, unfortunately necessary due to the political climate Solomon will endure as he takes the throne. The people and officials as a whole support him unconditionally. But the hard reality is: There are still dangers close at hand, ready to strike and bring ruin to the new king if he is unwary. So David ensures his son and Yahweh’s choice begins his reign, not with an unrealistic expectation of easy living, but with a steely resolve, prepared to act decisively if necessary to secure the throne.

Yet these are not David's last words. Those were set aside and recorded earlier in 2 Samuel, and they help us better understand what was on David's heart right before he died.

2 Samuel 23:1-7 “Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, ‘the Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, “He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.” Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me (*better rendered: “Although my house be not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant”*), ordered in all things, and secured; for all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow? But the worthless (*literally, the “sons of rebellion”*), every one of them will be thrust away like thorns, because they cannot be taken in hand; but the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they will be completely burned with fire in their place.’ ” (NASB)

As David looks back over his extraordinary life, he realizes, not only has Yahweh been *with* him, Yahweh has acted *through* him. Yahweh “raised him on high,” and then Yahweh’s Spirit put “His word on my tongue.” What greater life could there be?

Then with beautiful, poetic words, David reflects on how Yahweh describes a “Righteous Ruler.” He is “the light of the morning as the sun rises on a cloudless day,” as “tender grass springs from the earth, through the sunshine after rain.”

This is truly a prophetic psalm, because only Jesus fulfills this description, which is full of imagery used to portray Him in the New Testament. He is often described as a “light” breaking through the darkness like morning, with the light of His resurrection coming with the dawn.

John 1:1-14 “In the beginning was the Word (*Jesus*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NIV)

John 8:12 “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’ ” (NIV)

Revelation 22:16 “... I (*Jesus*) am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” (NIV)

2 Peter 1:19 “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (NIV)

Luke 24:1-6 “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces

to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!...’ ” (NIV)

The “tender” or new, healthy grass that springs from the earth is an image often used to represent those who welcome and receive Jesus as Savior, like “sunshine after rain.”

1 Peter 1:23-25 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For ‘All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.” (NIV)

Matthew 13:3-30 “Then he (*Jesus*) told them many things in parables, saying: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear...’ Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’ ” (NIV)

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine (*Jesus*) and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (NIV)

After prophesying about the Messiah and those who welcome Him, David declares his faith in Yahweh’s covenant. Despite his own failings and those of his family, David firmly believes this Righteous Ruler will one day come from his house, as Yahweh has promised.

In the passage, you will note a portion translated “Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me.” But the Hebrew is better rendered “Although my house be not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant.”

Think about it. David just described what a Righteous Ruler is like. It’s silly to think he would imply his house has somehow met this standard. There has been nothing but horrible crime and bloodshed from his house so far. He slept with a married woman then murdered her husband.

His son raped his sister. Another son murdered the rapist, then rebelled against his father. When Yahweh selected Solomon as heir, another son tried to usurp the throne.

In light of this, clearly David is saying: “My house is presently nothing like this Righteous Ruler, but still, Yahweh has made me a promise I can rely on, and one day this Righteous Ruler we all long for will come from my house, because Yahweh is faithful and true.” Any other interpretation is nonsensical.

After declaring his own faith, David then describes the destiny of those who reject the Righteous Ruler. The “worthless” is literally the “sons of rebellion.” They are described as “thorns” to be removed by a man “armed with iron” so they can be “burned in fire.” These images are all used in the New Testament for the destiny of those who reject Jesus.

Matthew 7:15-20 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” (NIV)

Hebrews 6:7,8 “Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.” (NIV)

Revelation 19:11-16 “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’ ” (NASB)

And so as David feels death approaching, his last thoughts are upon how extraordinarily good God has been to him, how Yahweh has made use of him despite his failings, and how one day a Righteous Ruler will come from his descendants, full of light and life for those who will receive Him and darkness and destruction for those who won’t.

And after these words of both tremendous encouragement and dire warning, David, the “man after God’s own heart,” passed into eternity.

1 Chronicles 29:26-28 “David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. He ruled over Israel forty years – seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor. His son Solomon succeeded him as king.” (NIV)

Shouldering the burden alone.

David was thirty when he became king (2 Samuel 5:4) and reigned forty years (1 Kings 2:11; 1 Chronicles 29:27), so he was seventy when he died.

As Solomon takes the throne, he is only about twenty. He will no longer have his extraordinarily gifted father by his side. All eyes are now on him and him alone. The full weight of the opportunities and responsibilities of Temple builder and king of Israel now rest on his shoulders, with no one to share the burden. How will he handle the load?

CHAPTER 4 – EARLY WISDOM.

HUMILITY AND DEVOTION (FOR THE MOST PART).

Solomon's best years, with an asterisk.

The early years of Solomon's reign are undoubtedly his best. He makes wise choices leading to his finest hour. All this is the result of a humility in Solomon's soul, shining through his words, deeds, and exquisite prayers.

Perhaps Solomon's youth is a benefit to him here. The awesome weight of his dual responsibilities would humble all but the most arrogant hearts. And being young he has not had time to develop the undeserved bravado of an older man.

Yet we must view this golden period of Solomon's life with an important asterisk. As we shall see, during these same wonderful years seeds of ruin are planted. They will grow slowly but steadily, from seemingly insignificant seedlings to mighty forests, bearing a terrible harvest to plague the nation. They will not be uprooted for centuries, until the Assyrians and Babylonians tear through the nation like wildfire and carry the survivors into exile, leaving behind only scorched earth upon which a remnant may return and rebuild.

What we shall see is: Solomon's heart, though humble, is only partially devoted to Yahweh. He will trust God in most areas of his life, but not all. He is *substantially* devoted to God, but not *totally* devoted to Him. Solomon will withhold his devotion in two areas – politics and sex – and these two footholds within Solomon's heart are all Satan needs to eventually create strongholds from which to sally forth and destroy both him and ultimately the nation.

Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;” (NASB)
Ephesians 4:27 “... do not give the devil a foothold.” (NIV)

But at this moment, Solomon has nothing before him but tremendous potential. Let's see how he begins his reign over Israel without his father by his side.

The final steps to secure the throne (and the first step to ruin).

The book of 1 Chronicles ends with David dying and Solomon succeeding to the throne. The year would be circa 970 B.C. The book of 2 Chronicles then takes up Solomon's story sometime thereafter, at what we will see was his finest hour.

However, between David's death and Solomon's finest hour, Solomon took several final steps to secure his throne. These are recorded in 1 Kings 2:13 to 3:1. Most of these steps are unfortunate but necessary, and exactly what David, knowing he would soon die, had prepared Solomon to do. But one was sinful and unnecessary, in direct violation of what God had commanded for His people and especially their king, and the first step towards Solomon's ruin.

With David newly buried, a twenty-year-old king takes the throne of Israel. Will he be weak or strong, foolish or wise, someone to manipulate, or someone to fear? The royal house quickly finds out.

1 Kings 2:13-18 “Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother. Bathsheba asked him, ‘Do you come peacefully?’ He answered, ‘Yes, peacefully.’ Then he added, ‘I have something to say to you.’ ‘You may say it,’ she replied. ‘As you know,’ he said, ‘the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the LORD. Now I have one request to make of you. Do not refuse me.’ ‘You may make it,’ she said. So he continued, ‘Please ask King Solomon – he will not refuse you – to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.’ ‘Very well,’ Bathsheba replied, ‘I will speak to the king for you.’ ” (NIV)

There is a lot going on in this passage. It’s unusual for Adonijah to go to Solomon’s mother, especially with Adonijah’s history of aspirations for the throne. There are some assurances and niceties. Then Adonijah goes after Bathsheba in the palace the way the serpent went after Eve in the garden.

He mixes lies (“the kingdom was mine... all Israel looked to me,” which is nonsense) with truth (“the kingdom has gone to my brother... it has come to him from Yahweh,” which is true). This is to put Bathsheba off her guard. Then with flattering words he asks for something seemingly simple and innocent – permission to marry Abishag. This is the beautiful young virgin who attended on David before he died. She slept next to him to keep him warm at night, but David did not have sex with her.

Remember Abishag was waiting on David when Bathsheba went and bowed down to the king, pleading for protection from Adonijah. The psychology here is subtle and complex. Bathsheba must have resented Abishag to some degree. She must have also resented Adonijah, who likely would have murdered her son and potentially her as well, if he had been successful in his coup.

But here, Bathsheba can be seemingly magnanimous towards Adonijah, while also sticking Abishag with the loser in the contest for the throne. This has a perverse appeal to Bathsheba, which Adonijah is counting on.

Why? Because what is really going on here is another attempt at the throne. In ancient cultures, to claim a dead king’s concubine was to claim the crown. Abishag was not technically a concubine, because David never had sex with her. But he slept next to her, and she was young and beautiful, and that’s all Adonijah needs to insinuate the lovely Abishag did more under the sheets than serve as a human hot water bottle.

Adonijah was also the older brother, with the same good looks, charm, and aggressive nature as Absalom. If he can use Bathsheba to force an early error from the young, inexperienced king, he can quickly act before Solomon’s rule is stabilized and make all the lies he told Bathsheba about the kingdom being his come true.

Bathsheba is deceived by Adonijah and goes to Solomon with the proposal, the way Eve went to Adam with the fruit. Will Solomon bite?

1 Kings 2:19-25 “When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king’s mother, and she sat down at his right hand. ‘I have one small request to make of you,’ she said. ‘Do not refuse me.’ The king replied, ‘Make it, my mother; I will not refuse you.’ So she said, ‘Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.’ King Solomon answered his mother, ‘Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him – after all, he is my older brother – yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!’ Then King Solomon swore by the LORD: ‘May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request! And now, as surely as the LORD lives – he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised – Adonijah shall be put to death today!’ So King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he struck down Adonijah and he died.” (NIV)

Solomon immediately sees through the ploy. This is a skillful attempt to usurp the throne before the new king has had a chance to sit down, take a breath, and get his bearings.

If you will recall, after Adonijah’s first attempt at the throne was discovered, he ran to the Tabernacle seeking sanctuary, grabbed hold of the horns of the altar, and begged for Solomon’s unconditional promise to never put him to death. Here we see why. Although Adonijah’s plans had been thwarted, he had no intention of setting aside his aspirations for the throne and would continue to scheme until he sat down on it. So he was hoping to get Solomon to make the same unwise promise David made to Shimei, to keep handy like a “get out of jail free” card in his back pocket.

But Solomon wisely refused Adonijah’s request and instead conditioned his mercy upon Adonijah’s future loyalty. He left his options open in the event the contrition of his older half-brother, squealing for mercy at the altar with a death grip on its horns, turned out to be less than sincere.

When Adonijah’s pledge of loyalty to Solomon is revealed to be as genuine as his peaceful intentions towards Solomon’s mom, the young king takes immediate action. He sends the fearsome Benaiah, who was chief of David’s bodyguards and loyal to Solomon during Adonijah’s first attempted coup, to do the deed. And true to his word, Solomon puts Adonijah to death on the same day Adonijah put this plot into motion with Bathsheba.

Solomon also knows Adonijah must have had fellow conspirators in this plot, Abiathar and Joab – the same two who were at his brother’s side during the previous attempt. So the day’s work is not yet done. He turns first to the priest.

1 Kings 2:26,27 “To Abiathar the priest the king said, ‘Go back to your fields in Anathoth (*a city for the Levites a few miles northeast of Jerusalem*). You deserve to die, but I will not put you to death now, because you carried the ark of the Sovereign LORD before my father David and shared all my father’s hardships.’ So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the LORD, fulfilling the word the LORD had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.” (NIV)

Abiathar has a long history with David. He was the sole survivor of Saul's attack on the priests at Nob and went on the run with David (1 Samuel 22:6-23). He also served as high priest when David was on the run from Absalom, and Abiathar's son was one of the young men who ran messages to David (2 Samuel 15:36). So instead of putting him to death, Solomon strips Abiathar of his office and exiles him to his lands outside of Jerusalem.

This fulfilled a prophesy made during the early years of Samuel that the descendants of the priest Eli would lose their position. Eli allowed his sons to corrupt the function of the priests, by sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle and extorting food from those who came to offer sacrifices, demanding the choice cuts of meat for themselves. They were satisfying both their sexual and culinary appetites by abusing their position as priests. Their father Eli did nothing to stop them, so Yahweh declared these two sons would soon die (which they did), and He would eventually take the privilege of the priesthood away from Eli's descendants (which He does here). See 1 Samuel 2:12-36; 4:10-18.

Solomon is wise enough to know: You don't kill a priest of Yahweh unless you have a very good reason and Yahweh's approval. This saves Abiathar's skin.

Joab, on the other hand, is not a priest.

1 Kings 2:28-35 “When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar. King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the tent of the LORD and was beside the altar. Then Solomon ordered Benaiah son of Jehoiada, ‘Go, strike him down!’ So Benaiah entered the tent of the LORD and said to Joab, ‘The king says, “Come out!”’ But he answered, ‘No, I will die here.’ Benaiah reported to the king, ‘This is how Joab answered me.’ Then the king commanded Benaiah, ‘Do as he says. Strike him down and bury him, and so clear me and my whole family of the guilt of the innocent blood that Joab shed. The LORD will repay him for the blood he shed, because without my father David knowing it he attacked two men and killed them with the sword. Both of them – Abner son of Ner, commander of Israel’s army, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of Judah’s army – were better men and more upright than he. May the guilt of their blood rest on the head of Joab and his descendants forever. But on David and his descendants, his house and his throne, may there be the LORD’s peace forever.’ So Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck down Joab and killed him, and he was buried at his home out in the country. The king put Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the army in Joab’s position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.” (NIV)

News of what's going on reaches Joab before one of Solomon's men. This is interesting, because it suggests Joab had a network of informants bringing him news of anything of importance going on in the royal house, which would be necessary if you were conspiring against the king.

Joab immediately realizes he is a dead man for what he has done, and he is likely shocked at the quick and decisive work done by the young and inexperienced Solomon, all on the same day the conspiracy was put into motion. In a panic, he attempts the same maneuver that previously saved Adonijah's life. He flees to the Tabernacle, grabs ahold of the horns of the altar, and begs for sanctuary.

In a somewhat pathetic scene, Solomon orders Benaiah to go to the Tabernacle and kill Joab. If you will recall, Benaiah was a veteran warrior who had killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and killed an Egyptian giant 7 ½ feet tall with the giant's own spear (see 1 Chronicles 11:22-25; 2 Samuel 23:20-23). Joab, on the other hand, was never recorded as a skillful fighter. He was more of a strategist and tactician, who murdered Abner and Amasa with a knife in the belly when they weren't expecting it.

Benaiah calls for Joab to come out of the Tabernacle so blood will not be spilled within. Joab refuses. Benaiah doesn't know what to do, so he goes back to Solomon, who orders Benaiah to enter and do what needs to be done. Benaiah complies (and gets promoted to Joab's position), and after so many years of cheating death, the long life of the cunning Joab finally comes to an ignoble end.

When Joab murdered Abner, David was furious but afraid to take action against him because of how politically strong Joab and his surviving brother Abishai were. But David prayed Yahweh's justice would one day find Joab, saying "though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah (Joab and Abishai) are too strong for me. May the LORD (Yahweh) repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!" (2 Samuel 3:39). Solomon does not want the guilt for these unjust murders to linger on his house by allowing Joab to live. And so, on the day doom found the house of Eli, it found Joab as well, courtesy of David's son, Solomon.

This leaves one more known antagonist to the house of David upon whom Solomon must call.

1 Kings 2:36-46 "Then the king sent for Shimei and said to him, 'Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else. The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head.' Shimei answered the king, 'What you say is good. Your servant will do as my lord the king has said.' And Shimei stayed in Jerusalem for a long time. But three years later, two of Shimei's slaves ran off to Achish son of Maakah, king of Gath, and Shimei was told, 'Your slaves are in Gath.' At this, he saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath in search of his slaves. So Shimei went away and brought the slaves back from Gath. When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned, the king summoned Shimei and said to him, 'Did I not make you swear by the LORD and warn you, "On the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die?" At that time you said to me, "What you say is good. I will obey." Why then did you not keep your oath to the LORD and obey the command I gave you?' The king also said to Shimei, 'You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the LORD will repay you for your wrongdoing. But King Solomon will be blessed, and David's throne will remain secure before the LORD forever.' Then the king gave the order to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he went out and struck Shimei down and he died. The kingdom was now established in Solomon's hands." (NIV)

Shimei did not actively take part in Adonijah's conspiracy, but he is a known threat to the house of David, so Solomon does not take any chances. He basically puts Shimei under "city arrest," where he can't leave Jerusalem, in order to ensure he never conspires with any of Solomon's enemies. The penalty for breaking this oath is death, which places all the responsibility for Shimei's life in Shimei's own hands. The king makes sure Shimei understands this, and Shimei approves and confirms.

Then three years later, Shimei's slaves run off to Gath in Philistia. Shimei goes there and brings them back. This is reported to Solomon, who hauls him in. The king does not entertain any excuses for why Shimei might have gone to the capital city of Israel's greatest enemies. He just reminds Shimei of his oath, which he clearly understood, and his historical animosity towards the house of David, then calls for Benaiah, who once again is relied upon to do the dirty work.

This may seem harsh, but it's not when you think about it carefully. Shimei clearly understood his life depended upon keeping his oath. By ancient standards, Solomon's decree was generous and merciful to a potential threat to his reign.

In breaking his oath, Shimei shows a total lack of respect for the king's word, which, if tolerated, given his widely known antagonism towards the house of David, would in turn inspire disrespect and insurrection from anyone within or without Israel who aspired to the throne. So Solomon calls for Benaiah, and when his work is done, there are no known challengers to Solomon's reign left in Israel.

It's sad to note Solomon's first recorded act as king following David's death was to execute his half-brother, Adonijah. He then exiled the priest Abiathar but showed no mercy to Joab. He gave Shimei a chance to live in peace, but Shimei broke his oath and suffered the consequences.

While these are all grim, severe acts, they are justifiable given the realities of the time. This was Adonijah and his conspirator's second attempt at the throne. Shimei's oath breaking demonstrated his continuing disrespect for David's line. How Solomon handled these men, so early in his reign, would set the tone for the rest of his kingship, and in many ways determine how long that might be.

If Solomon is perceived as weak or indecisive, he won't last long. His rule and life will be aggressively challenged. But if he is strong and unhesitant, all will quickly realize this new king, though young and inexperienced, is fully prepared to fearlessly rule the nation with authority and power, and he is not someone with whom it is wise to trifle.

The passage acknowledges this by ending with, "the kingdom was now established in Solomon's hands." Through these brutal but necessary acts, Solomon sat on a firmly established throne, guided by his own confident hand. All known rivals were soundly defeated, and there was no debate about who was in charge. These first few steps as king were a deft display of strong, uncompromising, resolute leadership.

Then he makes his first mistake, and perhaps his most ruinous.

1 Kings 3:1 "Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem." (NIV)

Let's reflect for a moment on Israel's history. Which nation enslaved them? From which nation were they freed by Yahweh? Which nation was miraculously brought to its knees and had its army utterly destroyed by Yahweh, all so Israel could go live in peace in the Promised Land?

The answer is of course: Egypt. So what possible reason could there be for Solomon, king of Israel, to make an “alliance” with Egypt? And if he insisted on doing so, is there any worse possible way than to marry Pharaoh’s daughter?

Solomon just decisively took care of his *domestic* rivals. He was fearless, strong, and uncompromising. Then he seems to consider his *international* rivals, and drops to his knees in terror. He is fearful, weak, and immediately stoops to despicable compromises.

Think about it. Why on earth should he fear Egypt? If there is one nation Yahweh has demonstrated His absolute competency to handle on Israel’s behalf without breaking a sweat, it’s Egypt. He hit them with ten plagues and then buried their army at the bottom of the Red Sea.

All this means nothing to Solomon, who demonstrates an extraordinary lack of faith here. Instead of trusting Yahweh for protection from his neighbor, he follows the pagan custom of entering into alliances with foreign nations through marriage.

This is a total dereliction of his duty as king of Israel. He is their leader and should set an example of unfailing trust in Yahweh. Instead, he sends the people three unmistakable messages: (1) be afraid of Egypt; (2) don’t count on Yahweh to protect you; and (3) trust me instead, because I’ll do what Yahweh can’t, by marrying Pharaoh’s daughter so he’ll be nice to us.

This also creates a horrendous succession problem. If the Egyptian princess bears Solomon a son, will a half-Israelite half-Egyptian rule Israel? What symbol does that insert into Yahweh’s design for Israel as a “kingdom of priests and holy nation?” Should the ruler of this nation be descended from both slaveowner and slave? Did Yahweh really save these people, or did they just make a deal with their previous owners?

And where does this lead? If a half-Egyptian rules Israel, why not a whole-Egyptian? Wouldn’t it be simpler if there was one king over both nations? Why even have two nations? Why not a consolidation of the two into one? We’ll call it Egiyprael or Isragypt. Think of how strong we’ll be. I’m sure we’ll find some way to combine the religions as well. Yahweh won’t mind.

What Solomon does here is terribly sinful. While Egypt was not one of the Canaanite nations Yahweh expressly forbade the Israelites from intermarrying with (see Deuteronomy 7:1-6), that’s because Egypt was not in Canaan. The Israelites had left Egypt behind in spectacular fashion, but were entering this new land full of horrific religious traditions, so the prohibition was against them. But the principle is the same – don’t intermarry with pagan cultures. And it was kind of unthinkable a future king of a formerly enslaved nation might want to go back to the slaveholders looking for a gal to marry.

Yahweh was also pretty clear about what the Israelite’s attitude should be towards Egypt, after they got to the Promised Land.

Leviticus 18:1-4 “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “I am the LORD your God. “You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God.” ’ ” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 “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,’ be sure to appoint over you a king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. 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.’ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. 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 Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.” (NIV)

Yahweh told the people, “don’t go back that way again,” referring to Egypt. But then their king goes back to get a bride. And then he builds her what we shall see is a shockingly lavish palace of her own.

This is again a horrible signal to the people of Israel. It’s an act of deference and obeisance to Egypt, that is nauseatingly unbecoming of the leader of the nation whose God so spectacularly defeated this enemy. It’s saying, “Yahweh can’t protect us from this nation, but if I build a fancy house for Pharaoh’s daughter, maybe they’ll leave us alone.”

Some have speculated Solomon somehow loved this woman, but that’s nonsense. As we shall see, he goes on to collect 999 other wives and concubines during his forty-year reign. Just doing some quick math, that’s twenty-five per year – one every two weeks for half a lifetime. Solomon picked up women with the same frequency we pick up our paychecks. He didn’t love this Egyptian princess. He *used* her for political purposes, stuck her in a gilded cage, and satisfied his lust with the leftovers.

At this time Solomon was also collecting unimaginable amounts of wealth to build a house for Yahweh (and a bigger house for himself), so it may be he feared a foreign invasion to loot the treasury. David had defeated all the nations immediately surrounding Israel in every direction, but never confronted Egypt to the distant west, likely because of the buffer created by the Sinai Peninsula and the simple fact Egypt had never been a threat since Yahweh defeated them about four and a half centuries earlier.

Now for some reason, Solomon is fearful of Egypt, but with Pharaoh’s daughter locked up in Jerusalem, Solomon likely thinks he has nothing to worry about, because if Egypt invades, that’s the end of Pharaoh’s daughter. This was the custom of the ancients that carried through to modern times, where royalty from different countries would intermarry to firm up alliances, build up dynasties, and serve as *de facto* hostages.

But it’s the first step towards ruin for Solomon. It sets the precedent for the rest of his life, where he marries foreign women by the bushel and treats national security as if it depends on his diplomacy, rather than Yahweh’s faithfulness. Later in Israel’s history, the prophet Isaiah would comment on this policy, which was repeated by subsequent kings.

Isaiah 30:1-5 “Woe to the obstinate children,’ declares the LORD, ‘to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh’s protection, to Egypt’s shade for refuge. But Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame, Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace. Though they have officials in Zoan (*likely Tanis, an important city on the Nile delta*) and their envoys have arrived in Hanes (*another important city, possibly further south*), everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.’ ” (NIV)

Isaiah 31:1-3 “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD... He will rise up against that wicked nation, against those who help evildoers. But the Egyptians are mere mortals and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, those who help will stumble, those who are helped will fall; all will perish together.” (NIV)

Solomon will suffer terribly for these decisions, and so will the nation, not just during Solomon’s lifetime, but for the remainder of Israel’s history. Solomon will be the one who builds the Temple of God on earth (at the request of Yahweh and with the help of his father), and shares credit for all the good that flows from that. He will also be the one who builds hundreds of temples for the detestable gods of Canaan (at the request of his 1000 wives and concubines), and shares responsibility for all the evil that flows from that.

In one of the great, bleak ironies of history, the guy who built the single most glorious place to worship the one true God of the universe, also built hundreds of places for people fornicate with temple prostitutes and burn their children alive, during his lifetime and for centuries to follow.

This political marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter was the first step down this dark road. And to confound us further, soon after Solomon made this most fatal of errors, he also made perhaps the best decision of his life.

Solomon’s finest hour – a request for wisdom.

Solomon didn’t start the construction of the Temple until the fourth year of his reign (1 Kings 6:1). Why the wait? There was no reason to delay. David had done all the prep work and expressly told Solomon to get started. What was he doing all this time?

1 Kings 3:2,3 “The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.” (NIV)

Since the Temple had not been built, people were making sacrifices in “the high places.” That basically means at any geologically elevated place they liked, which was a pagan custom. It was also a violation of the Law, which commanded offerings to Yahweh only be offered at the Tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:5-21; Leviticus 17:3,4).

However, other than this one glaring exception, Solomon was doing pretty good. The passage states Solomon “showed his love for Yahweh” by following David’s instructions. What were David’s instructions? These were stated in 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles.

1 Kings 2:2-4 “... So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’ ” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 28:8-10 “So now I (*David*) charge you (*Solomon*) in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God: Be careful to follow all the commands of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land and pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants forever. And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.”

So at this point in his life, Solomon seems to be making a genuine attempt to follow the Law. A notable exception would be marrying the Egyptian princess, but that’s in the past and can’t be undone. This passage is about what Solomon is doing in his life *now*, which is generally following the Law, but not building the Temple, even though David told him to “be strong and do the work.”

Since he had not built the Temple, Solomon goes to the Tabernacle to make offerings, located at nearby Gibeon. It’s here 2 Chronicles picks up his story.

2 Chronicles 1:1-7 “Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great. Then Solomon spoke to all Israel – to the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, to the judges and to all the leaders in Israel, the heads of families – and Solomon and the whole assembly went to the high place at Gibeon, for God’s tent of meeting was there, which Moses the LORD’s servant had made in the wilderness. Now David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to the place he had prepared for it, because he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. But the bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the tabernacle of the LORD; so Solomon and the assembly inquired of him there. Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the LORD in the tent of meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it. That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ ” (NIV)

1 Kings 3:4,5 “The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ ” (NIV)

Solomon’s rule has been firmly established. Yahweh is blessing him. So he gathers all the leaders of Israel, and they all go to the Tabernacle to celebrate, where Solomon offers 1000 sacrifices. The

Ark is notably in a tent in Jerusalem, so it has not been returned to the Tabernacle where it belongs in the Holy of Holies. But the Tabernacle courtyard still contains the bronze altar used for sacrifices, built by the divinely inspired Bezalel back at Mount Sinai about 475 years earlier circa 1446 B.C.

After making these sacrifices Solomon falls asleep, and Yahweh appears to him in a dream. This would be a physical manifestation of God, as with the “angel of Yahweh.” His offer is something any of us would be thrilled to receive, “Ask for whatever you want Me to give you.” Solomon gathered all these leaders and offered 1000 sacrifices, and it’s as if God comes to him and says, “okay, you got My attention. What’s on your mind, and how can I help?”

Solomon answers, and it’s the highpoint of his spiritual life.

1 Kings 3:6-15 “Solomon answered, ‘You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?’ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both wealth and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.’ Then Solomon awoke – and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.” (NIV)

Solomon shows tremendous humility here. He recognizes the greatness of his father, and his blessings have come to him, not by his own merit, but because he is David’s son. He realizes he has a tremendous responsibility to the nation as king, and the task is beyond him without Yahweh’s help. He even says, “I do not know how to carry out my duties.” This may be the primary reason for the delay in constructing the Temple. Despite David’s planning and encouragement, Solomon is simply overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and feels incapable of accomplishing it. So he wisely asks for a “discerning heart... to distinguish between right and wrong.”

This is undoubtedly a great prayer, and it genuinely pleases Yahweh. But we should pause here and note something: There is a difference between wisdom and integrity. Wisdom is *knowing* right from wrong. Integrity is *choosing* right over wrong.

Jeremiah 9:23,24 “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD

who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD." (NASB)

1 Chronicles 29:17 "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity..." (NIV)

Psalm 15:1,2 "O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart." (NASB)

Of course to *choose* the right path, we first need to *know* right from wrong. But at the end of the day, that's not enough to follow Jesus. Once we discern the right path, we have to choose to walk it, if we want to be like Him.

Colossians 1:9-12 "... be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." (NASB)

Ephesians 4:1-32 "... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (NASB)

John 8:12 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" (NIV)

1 John 2:5,6 "But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." (NIV)

Most moral decisions don't require tremendous discernment. The right decision is pretty obvious. But choosing good over evil is the great challenge we all face in life in a fallen world.

Romans 7:14-25 "... I (*Paul*) am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!..." (NIV)

Galatians 5:16-24 "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever

you want... The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (NIV)

We can be wise, but dishonorable. For example, Satan knows right from wrong. Other than Jesus, nobody better. God is said to have actually filled Satan with divine wisdom (Ezekiel 28:12). But he still fell, because he selfishly chose wrong over right.

This will be a pattern repeated in Solomon. Yahweh will answer his prayer and fill him with divine wisdom, “so there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.” Solomon will literally become the wisest person to ever live (other than Jesus).

But it does him absolutely no good. Although Solomon gets off to a really good start, his wise and discerning heart will turn away from the Giver of these gifts, and Solomon will carry out unspeakable acts of evil that literally tear the nation in two. As we shall see, Solomon’s life becomes a cautionary tale, where all the wisdom in all the world proves worthless when we freely choose to indulge ourselves in selfish desires.

Hebrews 10:26-31 “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment... It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (NIV)

But we are getting ahead of ourselves in Solomon’s story. For now he is at his moral zenith, and Yahweh is delighted with him; so much so in fact, Yahweh not only grants his prayer for wisdom, but also gives him more wisdom than any person to ever live, along with all the other things he could have asked for instead.

God unconditionally promises Solomon will become the most wealthy and honored man of his generation, with “no equal among kings.” Only one blessing is conditional – the length of his life. This is dependent upon Solomon’s future obedience.

Solomon wakes from his dream and is overwhelmed. He returns to Jerusalem, stands before the Ark, and makes more offerings. Then he throws a feast for his entire court. And as if to prove to Solomon He is true to His Word, Yahweh immediately puts Solomon’s newly granted wisdom to the test.

The first test of Solomon’s wisdom.

Solomon is approached by two women of less than stellar repute.

1 Kings 3:16-28 “Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, ‘Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. During

the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son – and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne.' The other woman said, 'No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.' But the first one insisted, 'No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.' And so they argued before the king... Then the king said, 'Bring me a sword.' So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: 'Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.' The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, 'Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!' But the other said, 'Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!' Then the king gave his ruling: 'Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.' When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice." (NIV)

This is a famous story, and rightly so. Solomon is presented with a seemingly unanswerable question: Which woman is the mother? Since they are prostitutes, there are no husbands around to testify, and since it was just the two of them in the house, there are no other witnesses.

Solomon doesn't ask them any questions, sparring back and forth to uncover the truth. He just calls for simple, immediate action. But through the women's responses to his horrifying command, he can instantly tell who is the mother, because God has been true to His promise, and as part of the gift of divine wisdom, Solomon now possesses a keen understanding of human nature.

This deep appreciation for how we are wired and skillful use of insight like a slashing blade, leaves the people in awe of their king. And more importantly, they recognize this is divinely inspired. Solomon immediately has their respect and loyalty, because they see in him someone empowered to rule with justice.

This moment ignites two explosions. One is prosperity in Israel. With a wise, just king on the throne, clearly enjoying Yahweh's favor, the potential of the nation is unleashed. They prosper as they never have before and never will again, until the Millennial reign of Jesus.

The second is an explosion of wisdom literature from the heart and mind of Solomon. God has blessed Solomon with tremendous insight into both human nature and the human predicament, and it will overflow in an outpouring of songs, proverbs, and personal reflection.

We will look at the explosion of prosperity within Israel first, and then be introduced to the explosion of creativity within Solomon, which will be more fully developed later.

Prosperity in Israel / Creativity in Solomon / More seeds of destruction.

Here is how Israel is described in the early years of Solomon's reign.

1 Kings 4:20-28 "The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border

of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors (*five and a half tons*) of the finest flour and sixty cors (*eleven tons*) of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphseh to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree. Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses." (NIV)

2 Chronicles 1:15 "The king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills." (NIV)

The population increased. The people were prosperous, secure, and content. Tribute flowed in from the surrounding nations, as Solomon ruled over the entire region, from the Euphrates in the northeast, to the Egyptian border in the southwest. The daily provisions required by Solomon's court were staggering. Twelve district governors were required to make sure the king's table was adequately supplied. Yet no one begrudges the king's excesses, because the entire country lived "under their own vine and fig tree," meaning everyone had all they could ever want. Jerusalem was the epicenter of it all, with silver, gold, and cedar considered commonplace.

Yet notice the mention of horses and chariots, which is emphasized in 2 Chronicles:

2 Chronicles 1:14-17 "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... Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue – the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels (*fifteen pounds*) of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty (*three and three-quarter pounds*). They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans." (NIV)

Solomon began accumulating huge numbers of horses and chariots, which he imported from Egypt and Kue, a region in the south of modern-day Turkey. He was also in turn selling them to other nations. Given horse drawn chariots were the superweapons of the day, Solomon is essentially acting as an arms broker.

Also, we should note this passage from Moses' speech to the second generation of the Exodus before they entered the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 17:14-16 "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,' be sure to appoint over you a king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. 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.' He must not take many wives, or his

heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.” (NIV)

Solomon breaks every one of these commands, sowing more seeds of destruction, to his ruin and the ruin of the nation. Here we see him collecting horses, silver, and gold. Later we will see him collecting foreign women. We should note chariots were also prohibited. Joshua was commanded to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots they captured during the conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 11:6-9).

Why were all these things forbidden? Because they are what ancient kings relied upon for pleasure and security. Silver, gold, and girls were for fun, while horses and chariots were for war.

Yahweh didn't want Israel's king to accumulate silver and gold, because it becomes too easy to trust in wealth instead of Him. And the danger of foreign wives, who would “lead the king's heart astray,” will be dramatically realized in the life of Solomon.

In the ancient world, horses and chariots were the standards by which an army's strength was measured. Yahweh told his people to maim the horses and destroy the chariots they captured, as a public demonstration of their faith in Him. They didn't need the things other nations coveted, because they had Yahweh.

David wrote about this in the Psalms, and it's a tragedy Solomon didn't heed the compositions of his father. Then about 200 years later, the prophet Isaiah would warn against repeating this sin.

Psalm 20:7 For the director of music. A psalm of David... “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” (NIV)

Isaiah 31:1 “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.” (NIV)

Isaiah 22:18 “... the chariots you were so proud of will become a disgrace to your master's house.” (NIV)

When Pharaoh chased the Israelites to the Red Sea, he did so with horses and chariots (Exodus 14). By accumulating the things the Pharaoh of Moses' day prized and marrying the daughter of the Pharaoh of his own time, Solomon is turning from Yahweh towards Egypt, beginning a slow but steady metamorphosis, where he eventually becomes an image, not of the “son of David,” Israel's future Savior, but of Pharaoh, Israel's former slaveowner.

Indeed at this time Solomon becomes the moral equivalent of a slaveowner, by conscripting forced labor. Once he gets around to building the Temple (and his own palace), Solomon forces thousands of Israelites to work on different projects, sometimes in foreign lands. He had a special officer among his chief officials whose duty was to oversee these conscripted laborers. Then later in his reign, he enslaved non-Israelites living in the land.

1 Kings 4:1-6 “So King Solomon ruled over all Israel. And these were his chief officials... Adoniram son of Abda – in charge of forced labor.” (NIV)

1 Kings 5:13,14 “King Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel – thirty thousand men. He sent them off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month, so that they spent one

month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor.” (NIV)

1 Kings 9:21 “Solomon conscripted the descendants of all these peoples remaining in the land – whom the Israelites could not exterminate – to serve as slave labor, as it is to this day.” (NIV)

Yet God remains true to His Word and grants Solomon more wisdom than any man to ever live (other than Jesus). But this is all the more damning of Solomon. It means he should have known better.

1 Kings 4:29-34 “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite (*who wrote Psalm 89*) – wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.” (NIV)

Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs. This is the explosion of creativity that burst forth after God blessed him with wisdom and insight. What survives of these writings is contained in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, which we will consider after we have seen the entire arc of Solomon’s life, so with the benefit of this perspective we can better appreciate the “wisdom” of Solomon.

As Israel prospers and the king’s fame spreads, Solomon finally gets around to starting in on the Temple.

Building Yahweh’s Temple.

Introduction.

The construction of the Temple is one of the defining moments of Israel’s history. The first generation of the Exodus built the Tabernacle to Yahweh’s specifications during the year they spent at Mount Sinai, circa 1446 B.C. The date is now the “fourth year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6:1; 2 Chronicles 3:2), generally believed to be 966 B.C. And so for 480 years, the Tabernacle has served as Yahweh’s dwelling place on earth.

All this is about to change. The Tabernacle was essentially an ornate tent, designed to be mobile, so it could go with the Israelites as they travelled until they reached the Promised Land. It was Yahweh’s idea, created at His command.

The Temple is designed to be a stationary, permanent dwelling for Yahweh, built on Mount Moriah, just north of the walls of Jerusalem. The Temple was David’s idea, created at his request, with Yahweh’s permission.

There will be much to consider about this project. Let's begin by looking at the materials and labor.

A vast storehouse, a friendly neighbor, and a forced labor pool.

Remember while David was alive, he collected an enormous amount of wealth and materials, from his own fortune and from the people, in order to build the Temple.

1 Chronicles 22:1-19 “Then David said, ‘The house of the LORD God is to be here *Mount Moriah, where the threshing floor of Araunah was located*), and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’ So David gave orders to assemble the foreigners residing in Israel, and from among them he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for building the house of God. He provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways and for the fittings, and more bronze than could be weighed. He also provided more cedar logs than could be counted, for the Sidonians and Tyrians had brought large numbers of them to David. David said, ‘My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it... I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents (*3,750 tons*) of gold, a million talents (*37,500 tons*) of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workers: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron – craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you... Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the LORD.’” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 29:1-9 “Then King David said to the whole assembly: ‘My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God – gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble – all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents (*110 tons*) of gold (gold of Ophir (*high quality, likely from Arabia*)) and seven thousand talents (*260 tons*) of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?’ Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents (*190 tons*) and ten thousand darics (*185 pounds*) of gold, ten thousand talents (*380 tons*) of silver, eighteen thousand talents (*675 tons*) of bronze and a hundred thousand talents (*3,800 tons*) of iron. Anyone who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the LORD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had

given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”
(NIV)

But it does not appear Solomon had enough cedar. So he works out a deal with Hiram, king of Tyre, for the lumber necessary to build the Temple, which could only be found in Hiram's lands.

Tyre is a city along the Mediterranean coast at the north of Israel within the lands of Asher (Joshua 19:29), but it was never conquered (Joshua 13:3,4; 2 Samuel 24:7). Nevertheless, David had a friendly relationship with Hiram (2 Samuel 5:11), which continued into the reign of Solomon.

Hiram also seems to be a follower of Yahweh. He is delighted Solomon wants to live in peace, and agrees to send Solomon, not only the lumber he needs, but also Tyre's greatest artisans.

2 Chronicles 2:11-16 “Hiram king of Tyre replied by letter to Solomon: ‘Because the LORD loves his people, he has made you their king.’ And Hiram added: ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with intelligence and discernment, who will build a temple for the LORD and a palace for himself. I am sending you Hiram-Abi, a man of great skill, whose mother was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your skilled workers and with those of my lord, David your father. Now let my lord send his servants the wheat and barley and the olive oil and wine he promised, and we will cut all the logs from Lebanon that you need and will float them as rafts by sea down to Joppa. You can then take them up to Jerusalem”
(NIV)

This is where Solomon began the practice of conscripted labor from Israel, and slave labor from the foreigners living in Israel, putting together the massive workforce necessary for the project.

1 Kings 5:12-18 “The LORD gave Solomon wisdom, just as he had promised him. There were peaceful relations between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty. King Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel – thirty thousand men. He sent them off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month, so that they spent one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hills, as well as thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the workers. At the king's command they removed from the quarry large blocks of high-grade stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple. The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and workers from Byblos cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple.” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 2:1-18 “Solomon gave orders to build a temple for the Name of the LORD and a royal palace for himself. He conscripted 70,000 men as carriers and 80,000 as stonecutters in the hills and 3,600 as foremen over them... Solomon took a census of all the foreigners residing in Israel, after the census his father David had taken; and they were found to be 153,600. He assigned 70,000 of them to be carriers and 80,000 to be stonecutters in the hills, with 3,600 foremen over them to keep the people working”
(NIV)

The Israelites were never supposed to enslave the Canaanites. As we have seen, there was an exception for the Gibeonites, who tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them to be Israel's woodcutters and water carriers (Joshua 9). But other than that, all the inhabitants of Canaan were to be driven out of the Promised Land or destroyed.

Every tribe in Israel failed to carry out this command (Judges 1 & 2). Canaanites lived among *all* of them. Here Solomon takes a census of those that remained and enslaves them all. He is to them what Pharaoh was to Israel. And while it may seem better to enslave than destroy, what we will see as we move forward in the history of Israel is the opposite.

The design, furnishings, and courtyard.

On the second day of the second month of the fourth year of Solomon's reign, he finally gets started (2 Chronicles 3:2; 1 King 6:1). By ancient standards, the scale of the project is extraordinary. See 1 Kings 6 & 7 and 2 Chronicles 3 & 4 for the details.

The Temple was:

- Sixty cubits (90 feet) long
- Twenty cubits (30 feet) wide
- Thirty cubits (45 feet) high

By comparison, the Tabernacle was:

- Thirty cubits (45 feet) long
- Ten cubits (15 feet) wide
- Ten cubits (15 feet) high

So the Temple was twice as long, twice as wide, and three times as high.

There was also a "portico" or covered porch at the front of the Temple:

- Ten cubits (15 feet) long
- Twenty cubits (30 feet) wide
- Ten cubits (15 feet) high

A three-story structure was also built along three sides of the Temple (excluding the entrance), full of rooms to store the items necessary to operate the Temple. Each story was five cubits (7 ½ feet) tall, so this reached a total of fifteen cubits (22 ½ feet) high, which is half the total height of the Tabernacle. Above this structure, there were narrow windows high up on the Temple walls to provide natural light within.

As a way of respecting the purpose of the Temple, this structure was designed so no penetrations of the Temple walls were needed for support. This was accomplished by making ledges around

the Temple walls of different heights and widths, to act as supporting rests for the second and third floors of the structure.

The bottom ledge extended out two cubits from the wall, and was five cubits high (the height of the bottom floor). Its purpose was to support the 2nd and 3rd floors of the structure. The bottom floor was then five cubits wide, so the total width extending from the Temple wall was seven cubits.

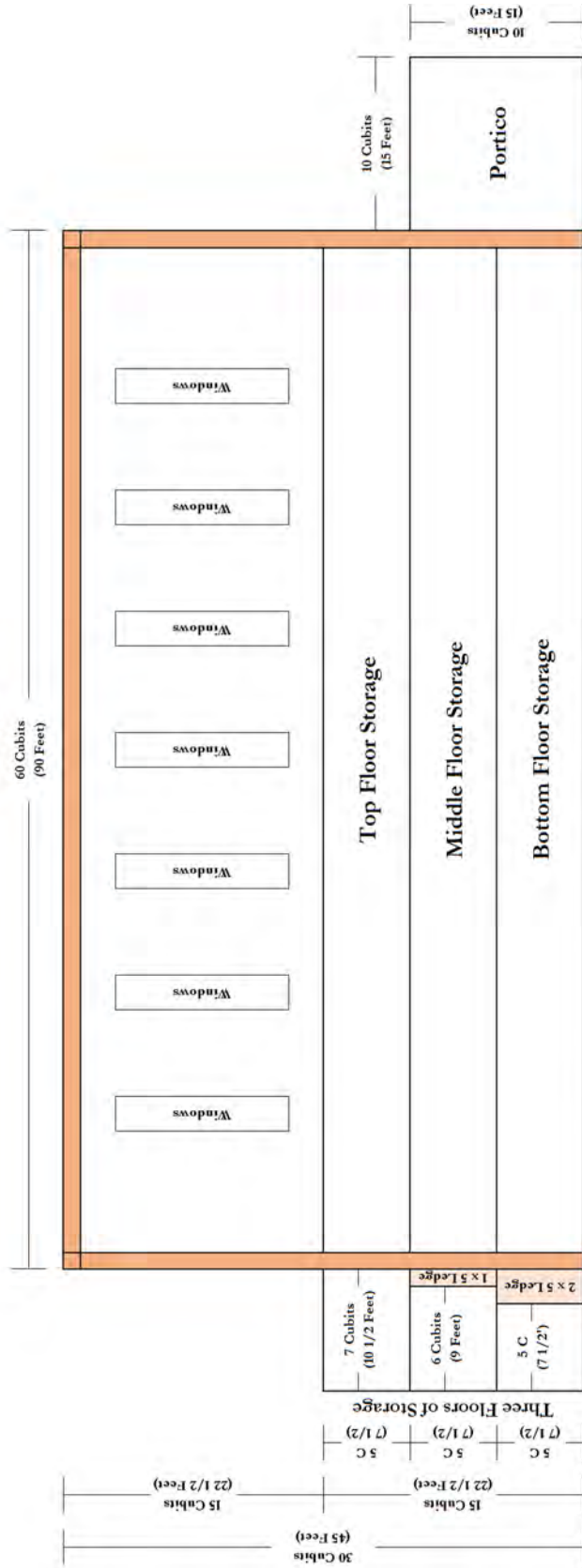
The second ledge extended out one cubit from the wall, and was five cubits high. Its purpose was to support the 3rd floor of the structure. The 2nd floor was then six cubits wide, so the total width was seven cubits, matching the floor below.

Since there were only three stories, no other supporting ledges were required, so the 3rd floor was seven cubits wide, to match the two floors below.

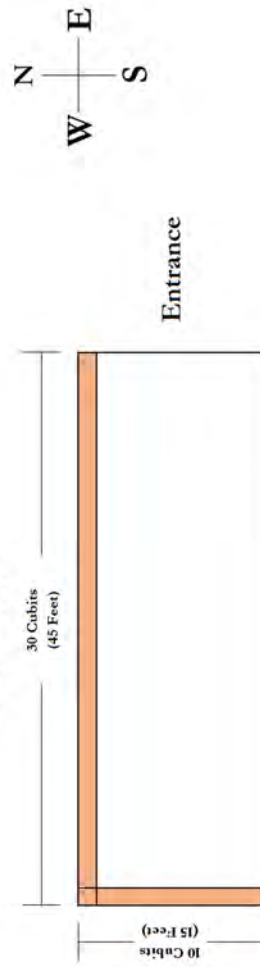
Both the Temple and the Tabernacle faced east. On the south side of the Temple there was an entrance to the bottom floor of the storage structure, with stairways to get to the 2nd and 3rd floors.

Temple / Tabernacle Comparison Side View

Temple



Tabernacle



The precision required to build the Temple was extraordinary. All stone blocks were dressed at the quarry and fit together so perfectly, “no hammer, chisel or other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7).

The interior of the Temple was divided into two sections. The entryway (or “Main Hall”) was 40 cubits (60 feet) long, 20 cubits (30 feet) wide, and 30 cubits (45 feet) high. Then at the far end of the Temple, the Holy of Holies was built, 20 cubits (30 feet) long, 20 cubits (30 feet) wide, and 20 cubits (30 feet) high.

Since the structure was 30 cubits (45 feet) high, but the Holy of Holies was only 20 cubits (30 feet) high, it’s likely a stairway led up from the floor of the Main Hall to the Holy of Holies, which would have been elevated 10 cubits (15 feet) from the floor of the Main Hall. More on this in a moment.

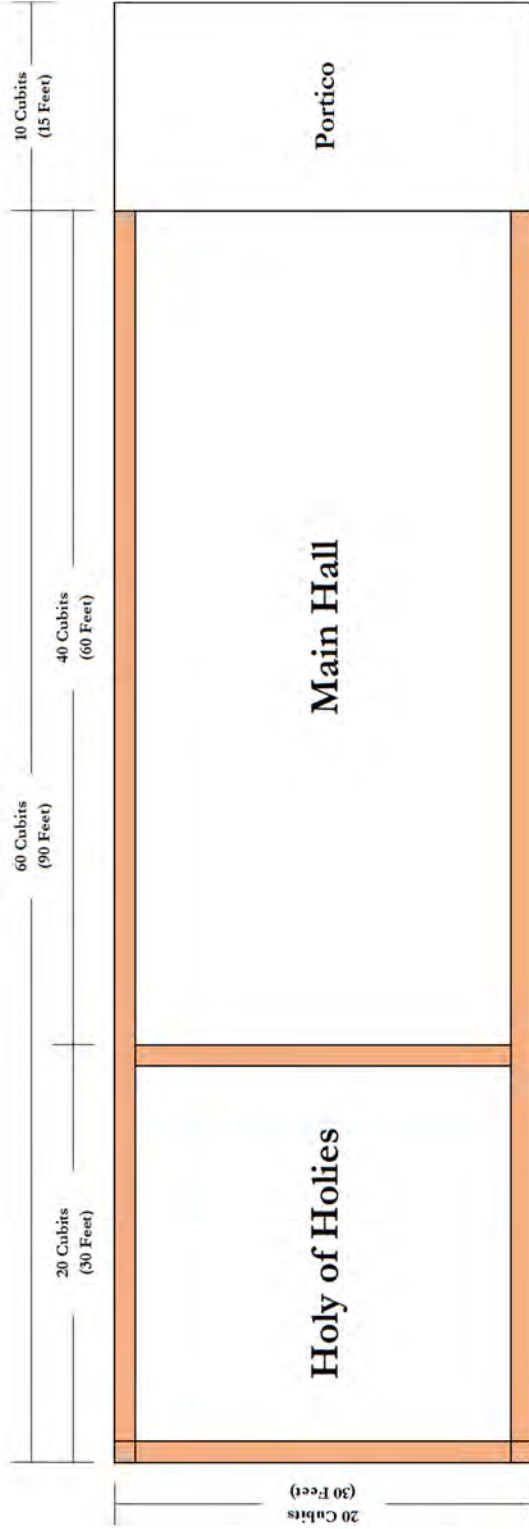
At the Tabernacle, the “Holy Place” was the first two thirds of the structure – 20 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high. Then the Holy of Holies was the back third – 10 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high.

At the Temple, the Main Hall was also the first two thirds of the structure – 40 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. Then the Holy of Holies was the back third – 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits high, but elevated 10 cubits to account for the ceilings, which were proportionally higher than the Tabernacle.

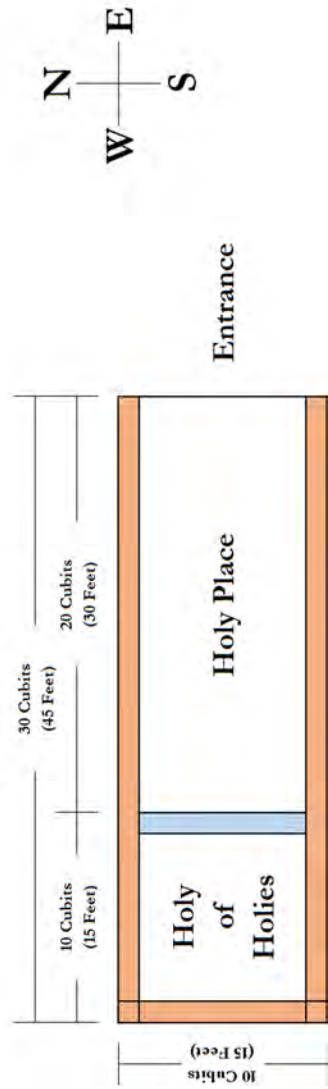
The Temple’s Holy of Holies was likely elevated so it could retain the same perfect cube shape as in the Tabernacle. The stairs leading up to it would also portray its exalted state, where the “Name of Yahweh” dwells.

Temple / Tabernacle Comparison *Aerial View*

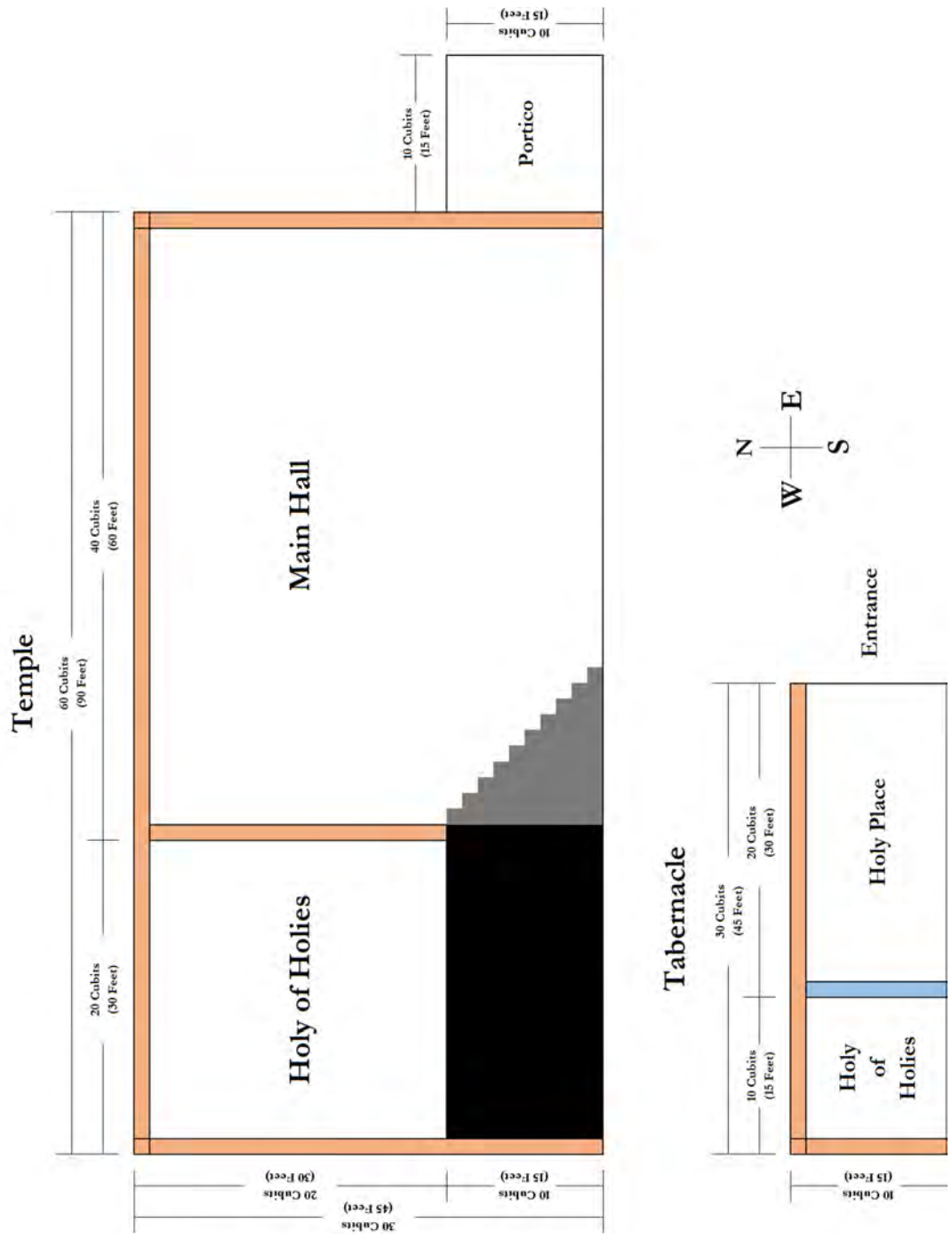
Temple



Tabernacle



Temple / Tabernacle Comparison
Side View



The roof of the Temple and interior walls were made from cedar. The floor was made of juniper. Both cedar and juniper are aromatic woods, which would have imparted a pleasing scent to the Temple. Juniper is a harder, more durable wood than cedar, which makes it well suited for flooring.

The interior walls of the Temple were intricately carved with images of cherubim, palm trees, gourds, and open flowers. Then everything inside of the Temple – walls, floors, and ceilings – was overlaid with pure gold, and precious stones were incorporated into the designs.

There were two large doors leading from the portico into the Main Hall, and then two doors leading from the Main Hall into the Holy of Holies. The doors for the Main Hall were made from juniper, and the doors for the Holy of Holies were made from olive wood, a firm, durable, fine-grained wood, even more valuable than juniper or cedar. As with the interior Temple walls, these doors were carved with cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, then overlaid with pure gold.

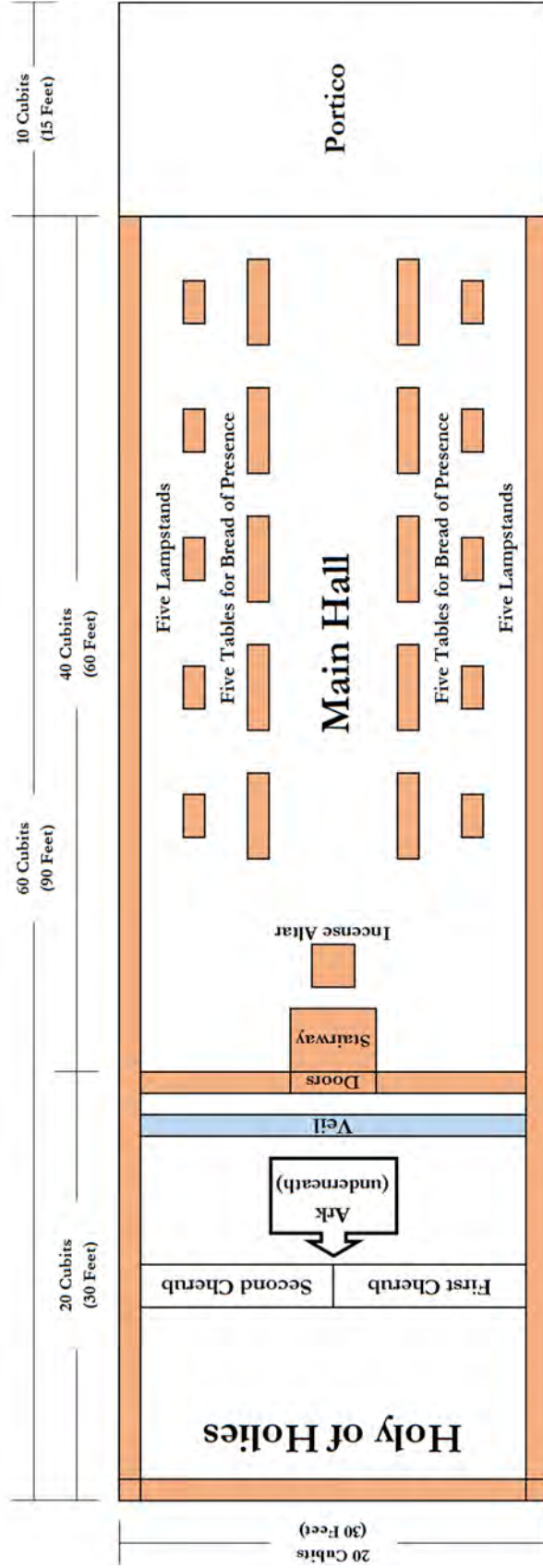
There were several items inside the Main Hall:

- Ten golden *lampstands*, with five on each side, filled with golden *lamps*.
- Ten golden *tables*, with five on each side, for the Bread of the Presence, used in worship.
- An incense *altar* made of cedar and overlaid with gold, probably located directly in front of the Holy of Holies.
- A wide variety of basins, bowls, dishes, censers (vessels for burning incense), wick trimmers, and tongs, all made from pure gold.

Inside the Holy of Holies, there were only three items:

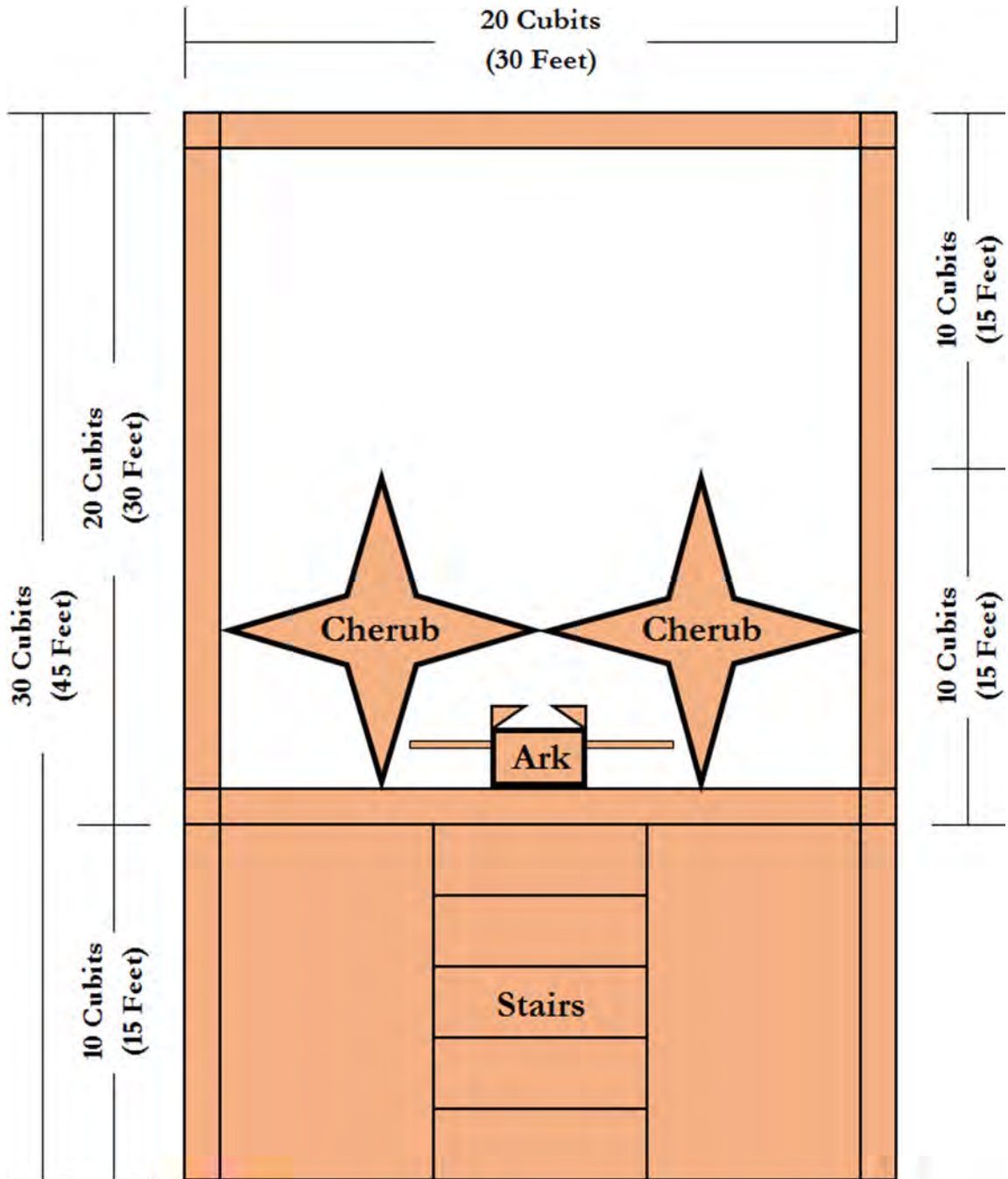
- A *veil* made of fine linen and blue, purple, and crimson yarn, with cherubim woven into it. This is the same design as the veil of the Tabernacle. The Temple veil likely hung just inside the doors, so the Temple design more closely mirrored that of the Tabernacle.
- *Two identical statues of cherubim* made from olive wood and overlaid with gold. Each of these were ten cubits (15 feet) high, with wings extending five cubits (7 ½ feet) in each direction, so a total width of ten cubits (15 feet) each. As you entered, the cherubim faced forward, towards the veil, and were set side-by-side, with their inward wings touching each other and their outward wings touching the opposite walls. Each cherub was ten cubits (15 feet) wide, from wingtip to wingtip. When set side by side like this, they stretched a total of twenty cubits (30 feet), the entire width of the Holy of Holies.
- The *Ark* was made from acacia wood and covered in gold, two and a half cubits (3 feet 9 inches) long, a cubit and a half (2 feet 3 inches) wide, and a cubit and a half (2 feet 3 inches) high. The “atonement cover” also had golden cherubim on either side, facing inward with wings spread upward and inward, overshadowing the cover. There were also long acacia wood poles covered in gold that fit through golden rings in the Ark. These were used for transporting the Ark. They remained inserted at all times, so the Ark would not be touched when it was moved. See Exodus 25:10-22. The Ark was then placed underneath the wings of the two statues of cherubim.

Temple Layout



Holy of Holies

Layout



There were two courtyards surrounding the Temple:

- An inner courtyard, called the “courtyard of the priests.”
- An outer courtyard, called the “large court.”

Dimensions of these courtyards are not provided in Scripture. They were made of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams with bronze doors.

Within the inner courtyard of the priests, there were several items. Everything but the Altar was made by Hiram, an artisan sent by the king of Tyre who specialized in bronze. His mother was a Jewish widow, from the tribe of Naphtali in the north of Israel, who married a man from Tyre.

- *Two pillars.* These were located at the two front corners of the portico. They were eighteen cubits (27 feet) high, with a circumference of twelve cubits (18 feet), which means the diameter was about 4 cubits (6 six feet). At the top of the pillars there were capitals an additional five cubits (7 ½ feet) high, so the total height was twenty-three cubits (34 ½ feet).

There is some debate over how these capitals looked, but it appears they began with two rows of pomegranate designs encircling the capital, with two hundred pomegranates per row, which accounted for the first cubit of height. This was then topped by an open lily shape four cubits high, for a total height of five cubits. Alternatively, the lily shape rested on top of a bowl-shaped capital, adding its four cubits to the overall height. Seven chains also adorned each capital.

The pillar at the north of the portico was named Boaz, which means “in Yahweh is strength.” The pillar at the south of the portico was named Jakin, which means “Yahweh establishes.”

- *The Sea (washing basin for the priests).* This was a massive bronze washing basin used exclusively by the priests for washing their hands. It was circular in shape, with a diameter of ten cubits (15 feet) and height of five cubits (7 ½ feet). The rim was cup shaped like a lily blossom. It was one “handbreadth” (3 inches) thick.

Below the rim there were there were two decorative rows, each with three hundred ornamental shapes cast in one piece with the basin. In 1 Kings 7:24, these shapes are called in the Hebrew “buds” or “semi-globes,” while in 2 Chronicles 4:3 they are described as “the likeness of a bull.” These are likely different ways of describing the same general shape.

The Sea stood on twelve bronze bulls, in groups of three facing outwards in each direction (that is, three facing north, three facing south, three facing east, and three facing west).

The Sea had a capacity of three thousand “baths,” which is 18,000 gallons, but was ordinarily filled with two thousand baths, which is 12,000 gallons.

The Sea was located at the southeast corner of the Temple.

- *The Altar.* This was an enormous structure made of bronze, twenty cubits (30 feet) long, twenty cubits (30 feet) wide, and ten cubits (15 feet) high. The length and width are the same as the Holy of Holies, and the height is the same as the portico.

Steps to the altar were forbidden at the Tabernacle (Exodus 20:26), but the Tabernacle altar was only three cubits (4 ½ feet) high (Exodus 38:1). The Temple altar was 15 feet high, and in order to get the sacrifices up to the grating there must have been steps, likely to the east, as in the vision of the Millennial Temple in Ezekiel 43:17.

The passages do not specify the location, but it was likely at the entrance to the inner court of the priests, similar to the location of the bronze altar at the entrance to the Tabernacle courtyard (Exodus 40:6), and as is implied in 2 Kings 16:14.

- *Ten mobile basins with stands (to prepare the offerings).* There were ten identical basin stands, with five on the north side of the Temple and five on the south side. While the Sea was used by the priests for washing, these were used to clean the various items used to prepare the burnt offerings.

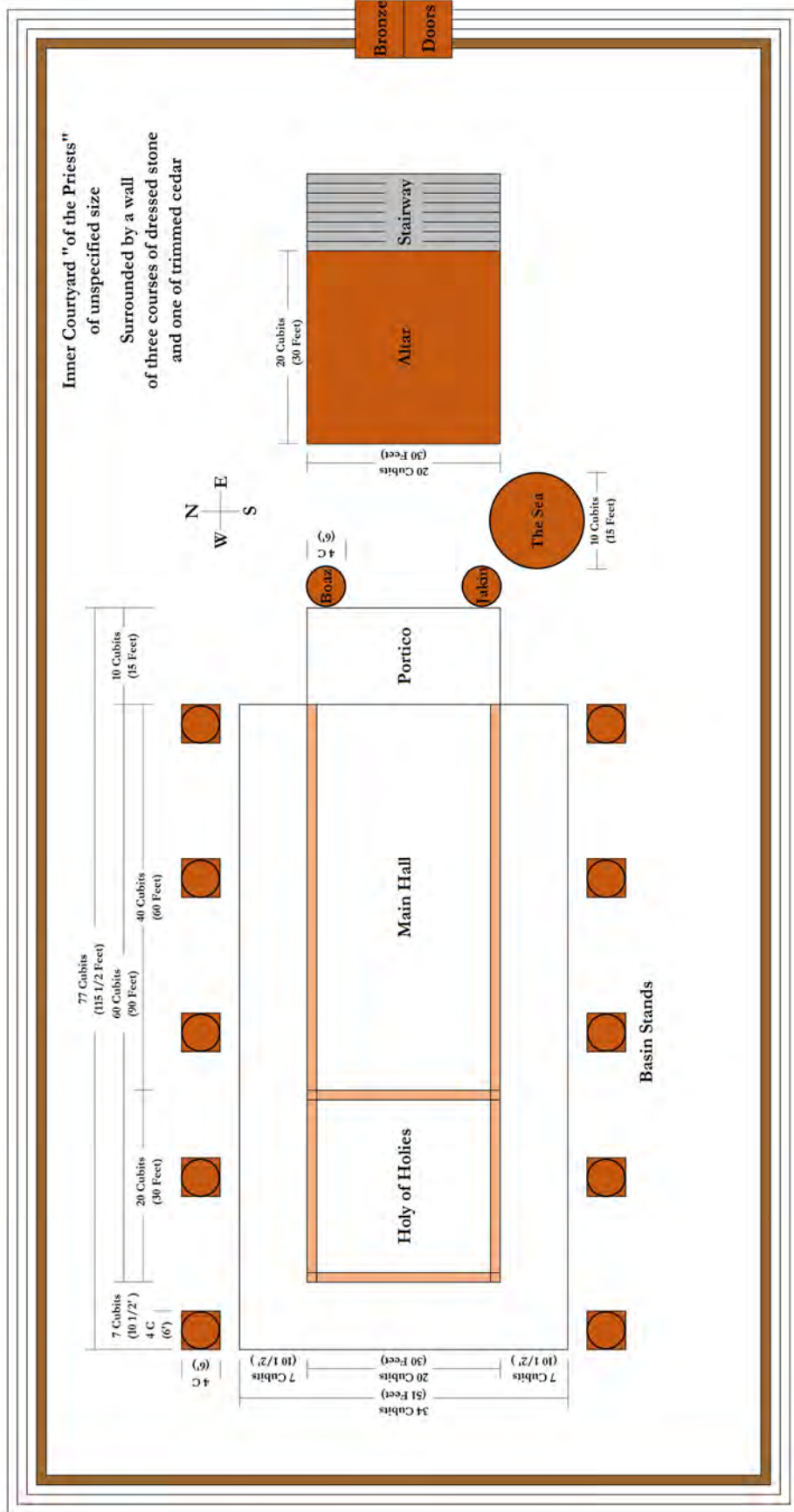
The stands were four cubits (6 feet) long, four cubits (6 feet) wide, and three cubits (4 ½ feet) high. They had four wheels, one and a half cubits (2 ½ feet) in diameter, on two axels, so they were mobile. The stands were highly decorated with lions, bulls, cherubim, palm trees, and wreaths, all expertly cast from the same mold.

Each stand held a bronze basin, four cubits (6 feet) in diameter, large enough to hold forty baths (240 gallons) of water.

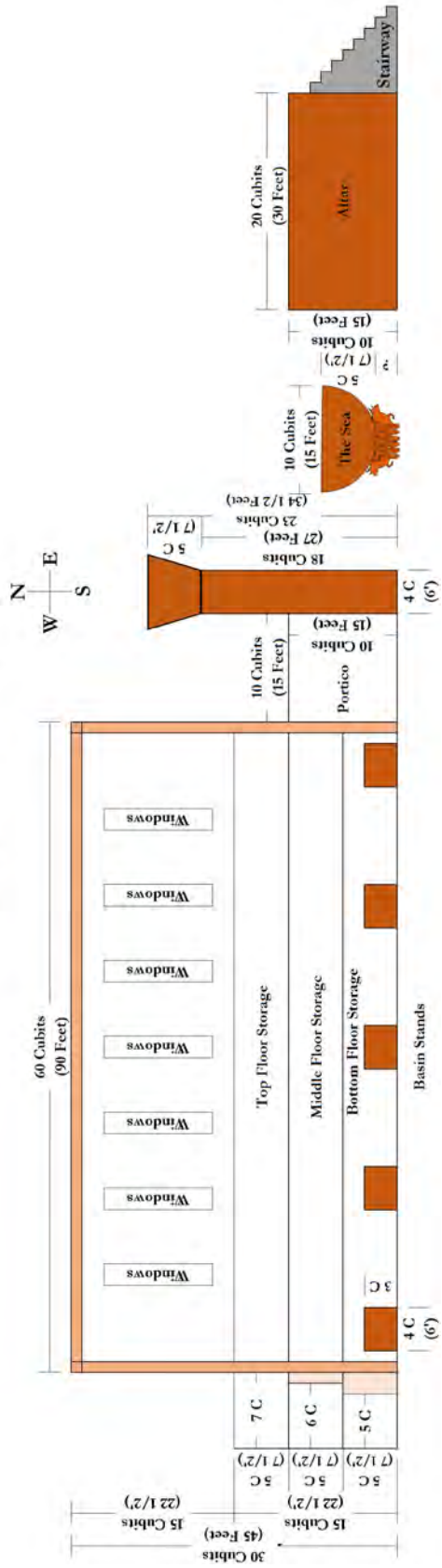
Temple Courtyard - Aerial View

Outer Courtyard called the "Large Court"
of unspecified size

Surrounded by a similar wall



Temple Courtyard - Side View



The symbolism.

The Temple retains much of the imagery used at the Tabernacle. The entire complex mirrors God's Throne Room in heaven. As you enter the courtyard and progress inwards towards the Ark in the Holy of Holies, it's as if you are approaching Yahweh in the Throne Room in heaven.

Hebrews 8:3-5 “Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices... They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” (NIV)

Hebrews 9:8,9 “... the... tabernacle... is a symbol for the present time...” (NASB)

The symbolic features of the Temple and Tabernacle include:

- There was one entrance into the courtyard, just as there is only one entrance into God's presence, through the saving work of the Messiah.

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (NIV)

Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (NIV)

John 10:9,10 “I (*Jesus*) am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (NASB)

- The sacrifices at the Altar represent the saving work of the Messiah on the cross.

Hebrews 9:1-26 “Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place... when Christ came as high priest... he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant... Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:1-22 “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (NIV)

Hebrews 4:14-16 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (NASB)

- The Washing Basin / Sea is symbolic of two things – one earthly and the other heavenly – which are also interconnected.

First, the Washing Basin represents the spiritual *cleansing* that occurs within us here on earth after we put our faith in Jesus, which purifies us from all sin and allows us to approach God without stain or blemish. For example, the priest would offer a sacrifice for his own sins at the Altar, symbolically receiving forgiveness of sin, then wash his hands and feet at the Washing Basin, symbolizing the purification that follows forgiveness, and finally enter the presence of God within the Tabernacle washed clean and ready to serve. This illustrates what happens when we go to the cross, receive forgiveness for our sins, and are in truth washed clean, so we can experience God’s presence in our lives and serve Him with enthusiasm and power.

Hebrews 1:3-13 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say... ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?’ ” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22,23 “... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right

hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” (NIV)

Psalm 51:1-7 “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” (NIV)

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NASB)

2 Timothy 2:21 “Those who cleanse themselves... will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” (NIV)

In addition to symbolizing the spiritual cleansing that follows salvation on earth, the Washing Basin also represents the loving attention God pays to humanity from His throne in heaven.

In order to understand this, we need to look at what lies before the throne of God in heaven – a “Sea of Glass.”

Revelation 4:6 “Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” (NIV)

Revelation 15:1,2 “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign... I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire...” (NIV)

The Sea of Glass is described in Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Among other things, Revelation records a vision of the end of history given to the apostle John towards the end of his life while he was imprisoned on Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, which is a part of the Mediterranean Sea near modern-day Greece. Revelation is filled with highly symbolic images, including the Sea of Glass.

These types of images are best understood as describing what things in heaven are *like*, not necessarily what they *are*. John and the other writers of Scripture are attempting to convey through the finite conventions of human language the function and purpose of infinite, indescribable things in the divine realm. And so in interpreting the meaning of these images, we should look at what they do (their function) and accomplish (their purpose), in order to understand what they represent.

With this in mind, let’s consider various Scriptures and see what we can learn about this body of glassy, glowing water that lies before the Throne of God in heaven.

- *It’s transparent.* The sea is described as being made of glass, “clear as crystal,” and this means it is something God on His throne can look through. But at what?

Revelation 4:6 “Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” (NIV)

- *There is something underneath.* The sea is said to “glow with fire.” If it is like clear, transparent glass, the fiery glow cannot come from within the sea itself, but must instead originate from underneath. What could be below this sea?

Revelation 15:1,2 “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign... I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire...” (NIV)

- *Earth is said to exist “underneath” heaven.* Throughout Scripture, the earth is described as being below heaven, with us looking up from earth towards God in heaven, and God looking back down upon us from the vantage point of His heavenly Throne.

Psalms 33:13,14 “From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth.” (NIV)

Isaiah 40:21-26 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?... He (*God*) sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent... ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens...” (NIV)

Isaiah 51:6 “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath...” (NIV)

All this suggests the Sea of Glass represents what might be thought of in poetic terms as the “window” through which the holy Creator looks down upon His fallen creation from His Throne in heaven, watching human history unfold. It glows with fire and turbulence as the drama rises up and pierces through the transparent, glassy sea.

These and other Scriptures confirm this idea, and also tie the Sea of Glass before the Throne with the Washing Basin before the Tabernacle and Temple. Indeed, Solomon called the massive Washing Basin at the Temple the “Sea.” This suggests the ancient Hebrews understood the connection between the Washing Basin on earth and the Sea of Glass in heaven.

2 Chronicles 4:1-6 “He (*Solomon*) made a bronze altar twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and ten cubits high. He made the Sea of cast metal (*“musaq” in Hebrew, molten bronze*), circular in shape, measuring ten cubits (*fifteen feet*) from rim to rim and five cubits (*seven and a half feet*) high. It took a line of thirty cubits (*forty five feet*) to measure around it. Below the rim, figures of bulls encircled it – ten to a cubit. The bulls were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea. The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center. It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held three thousand baths. He then made ten basins for washing and placed five on the south side and five on the north. In them the things to be used for the burnt offerings were rinsed, but the Sea was to be used by the priests for washing.” (NIV)

The original Washing Basin at the Tabernacle and the Sea at the Temple were shaped like a bowl, made from burnished bronze, and filled with water. Light reflecting off the highly polished bronze up through the water would take on the red, copper, and brown hues of

bronze. This same bronze tinted light would also pass through water mixed with the blood washed from the priests' hands, giving it the appearance of fire, as described in Revelation.

Revelation 15:1,2 “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign... I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire...” (NIV)

When viewed from above, the round shape of the bowl evokes the image of God looking down upon the “circle of the earth,” as described in Isaiah 40:21-26. Indeed, if you looked down into the mirrored Washing Basin, with shimmering light bouncing up at you, colored by bronze and twisted by blood stained water, it would be like looking down into a different world.

Isaiah 40:21-26 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?... He (*God*) sits enthroned above the circle of the earth... He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent... ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens...” (NIV)

Water itself is also an image used in Scripture to describe the boundary between heaven and earth.

In Genesis 1 on the second day, the atmosphere in our sky was created by separating “water from water,” such that there were waters on the surface of the earth (in the oceans and seas), and then also in the troposphere atop the atmospheric layer (in the clouds and various forms of humidity). From the perspective of heaven, this top layer of moisture overlaying our atmosphere, which lies between the “heavens and the earth,” is like the Sea of Glass before the Throne Room through which God looks downward upon the earth.

Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (NIV)

Genesis 1:6-8 “And God said, ‘Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.’ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault ‘sky.’ And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.” (NIV)

This top edge of the sky, the boundary where our atmosphere ends and the “heavens” begin, is also referred to in Job as a “mirror of cast bronze.” From the vantage point of the surface of the earth, looking up at the sky is like looking into the concave shape of a bowl. If this shape is then imagined to be made of burnished bronze, the bowl-shaped boundary between heaven and earth becomes a bronze mirror, and we get another picture of the connection between the Washing Basin before the Tabernacle and the Sea of Glass before the Throne.

Job 37:18 “can you join him (*God*) in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze? (NIV)

Poetically, that is the vantage point of the Sea of Glass looking up from earth towards heaven. It's like looking into the trough of an enormous bowl.

In Isaiah 40 we find this same shape, only it is reversed, because the perspective in this passage is the opposite – looking down from heaven towards earth. The shape is circular, because a

bowl is round. But instead of facing towards us, the bowl faces away from us. In geometric terms, it is convex (like the back of a spoon), instead of concave (the front of a spoon).

We see this in the comparison of the heavens to a canopy or tent draping over the sphere of the earth. From the vantage point of the Throne Room, the boundary between God in heaven and a person on earth would follow the convex shape of one side of the earth's sphere, like material folding over the frame of a rounded canopy.

Isaiah 40:21-26 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?... He (*God*) sits enthroned above the circle (*bowl shape*) of the earth... He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent... “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens...” (NIV)

And if we think of the material of this convex, bowl-shaped boundary as water, the image of a Sea of Glass, viewed from above, comes into focus. In poetic terms, God looks down from heaven towards earth. The atmospheric waters separating the heavens from the earth from this vantage point form a circle, which is actually the outside of a bowl draping over the sphere of the earth like a tent. Through these clear waters, all the drama of human history shines like glowing fire.

This is described vividly in the writings of Ezekiel, who was a prophet of Israel during the time in which the presence of God left the Temple, due to the severe, continual, unrepentant idolatry of Israel, circa 592 B.C. On two separate occasions, Ezekiel saw angelic beings on the earth. Above them was an expanse, “like an awesome gleam of crystal.” And through this transparency, Ezekiel could see beyond it the Throne of God Almighty. And so this describes Ezekiel looking up from earth through the Sea of Glass into the Throne Room in heaven.

Ezekiel 1:1-28 “Now it came about in the thirtieth year... the heavens were opened and I (*Ezekiel*) saw visions of God... As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. Within it there were figures resembling four living beings... Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads... Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man... and there was a radiance around Him.... Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face...” (NASB)

Ezekiel 10:1 “I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of lapis lazuli above the vault that was over the heads of the cherubim.” (NIV)

Finally, we should note in Revelation there is a passage describing those who stand by the Sea of Glass in heaven as those who have been “victorious” over the forces of evil during the Tribulation. Elsewhere in Revelation we see the victorious are also “dressed in white.” This suggests those passing through the Sea of Glass have been washed clean before they enter the presence of God in heaven, just as those who utilize the Washing Basin are symbolically washed clean before they enter the presence of God in the Tabernacle.

Revelation 15:1,2 “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign... And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name.” (NIV)
Revelation 3:5 “The one who is victorious will... be dressed in white...” (NIV)

Pulling this altogether, the Washing Basin on earth symbolizes the cleansing we receive when we put our faith in Jesus, allowing us then to stand before a holy God unstained by sin and ready for service. It's us approaching God, having been purified through grace.

Isaiah 1:18-20 “... ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey’... Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (NASB)

Titus 2:13,14 “... Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:19 “... If you repent, I (*God*) will restore you that you may serve me...” (NIV)

The reverse of this is the Washing Basin symbolizes the Sea of Glass before the Throne of God in heaven through which God pays loving attention to all mankind. God looks through this fiery window to earth, longing to see His children on the other side at the Basin, washing themselves clean of sin through the work of His Son, sacrificed on the altar of the cross. It's God approaching us, seeking out those who will accept His grace.

Proverbs 15:3 “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good.” (NASB)

2 Chronicles 16:9 “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...” (NASB)

Psalms 33:13-22 “From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth – he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do... the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (NIV)

And so in a sense the Washing Basin represents the grace by which, like a portal between heaven and earth, we are able to reach up, and God is able to reach down, take hold of clean hands, and in the light of His countenance guide us to His plan and purpose.

Isaiah 42:5,6 “This is what God the LORD says – the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you... a light...’ ” (NIV)

Psalms 73:21-26 “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh

and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
(NIV)

Psalm 31:14-16 “But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me. Make Your face to shine upon Your servant...” (NASB)

Psalm 119:1-135 “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart. They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways... With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path... The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple... Turn to me and be gracious to me, after Your manner with those who love Your name. Establish my footsteps in Your word, and do not let any iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts. Make Your face shine upon Your servant...” (NASB)

Numbers 6:24-26 “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” (NASB)

- Inside the Holy Place (at the Tabernacle) or Main Hall (at the Temple), there are lampstands as before the Throne, with the Bread of Presence on the Tables representing the presence of Jesus at Yahweh’s “right hand.” An incense alter is described in the Throne Room just as in the Tabernacle and Temple, with the smoke symbolizing our prayers rising up to Yahweh.

Revelation 4:1-5 “After this I (*John*) looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven... At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne... In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing.” (NIV)

John 6:25-57 “When they (*those who had been miraculously fed by the Sea of Galilee*) found him (*Jesus*) on the other side of the lake, they asked him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’ Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’ So they asked him, ‘What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘always give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me (*they already saw Him miraculously feed 5,000 people*) and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my

Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I came down from heaven?" ' Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered. 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world... Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.' (NIV)

Colossians 3:1 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (NIV)

Psalm 141:1,2 "I (*David*) call to you, LORD, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (NIV)

Revelation 8:1-4 "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I (*John*) saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand." (NASB)

- The Holy of Holies contained the Ark, which is pictured as the footstool of God's Throne.

1 Chronicles 28:2 "King David rose to his feet and said: 'Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it.' " (NIV)

Psalm 99:1-5 "The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim... Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool..." (NIV)

- The cherubim decorating the Tabernacle and Temple mirrored the actual cherubim surrounding Yahweh on His Throne.

Ezekiel 10:1 "I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of lapis lazuli above the vault that was over the heads of the cherubim." (NIV)

- The floral designs throughout the Tabernacle and Temple evoke Eden on earth, and Paradise in heaven.

Genesis 2:8,9 “Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 “I know a man in Christ (*Paul, referring to himself*) who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven... And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.” (NIV)

Revelation 2:7 “... To him who overcomes, I (*Jesus*) will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.” (NIV)

Revelation 22:1-19 “Then he (*an angel*) showed me (*John*) a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations... ‘Behold, I (*Jesus*) am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done’... Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city... if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” (NASB)

It is also important to note the Temple was built on Mount Mariah, where Abraham was tested and willing to sacrifice Isaac, but God allowed Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead. This was in many ways the pinnacle of the life of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, and a fitting place for the people of Israel to offer their sacrifices to Yahweh.

Genesis 22:1,2 “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’ ” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 3:1 “Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 12:5-7 “But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.” (NIV)

The Tabernacle is retired, and the Ark and Glory of Yahweh enter the Temple.

After seven years of construction, the Temple was finally complete. Work began during the fourth year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6:1), which is generally believed to be 966 B.C., so it was completed circa 959 B.C.

Solomon gathers all the elders of Israel and the heads of the different tribes to Jerusalem, at “the time of the festival in the... seventh month” (1 Kings 8:2). This would be during the Festival of Tabernacles, the last of the seven annual festivals, which celebrated how Yahweh took the people from temporary dwellings to permanent dwellings in the Promised Land. (Leviticus 23:33,34; Numbers 29:12; Deuteronomy 16:13-16). This made it the perfect occasion to celebrate the transition from the Tabernacle, a mobile structure, to the Temple, a permanent structure.

Solomon then has the priests and Levites bring two things to the Temple.

1. The *Tabernacle* with all its sacred items, which had been at Gibeon, just a few miles northwest of Jerusalem. This would include the courtyard fence, the original Altar and Washing Basin, the wooden beams overlaid with gold, the four levels of coverings of the Tabernacle, and the Lampstand, Table for the Bread of Presence, and Incense Altar.
2. The *Ark* is brought from the “City of David.” This is David’s fortress at the south of Jerusalem, where it had been kept in a tent pitched for it by David. Within the Ark were the two stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, which Moses had placed in it at Sinai (1 Kings 8:9).

Scripture does not declare what became of the original Tabernacle or its contents. It is likely they were retired so there would be no confusion as to where Israel was to worship Yahweh. If the Tabernacle was still standing in Gibeon while the Temple was in Jerusalem, it would be inevitable different factions would attempt to capitalize on the alternate location for worship and seek to consolidate power there, especially in Israel’s decline. So it is likely the Tabernacle and other items were stored in the three-story structure surrounding the Temple, and ultimately destroyed when the Temple was razed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., about 373 years later.

Solomon and the assembly sacrifice so many cattle and sheep “they could not be recorded or counted” (1 Kings 8:5). In a truly historic moment, the priests bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, and set it under the wings of the two golden cherubim. The priests withdraw, and something miraculous happens.

2 Chronicles 5:11-14 “The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians – Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives – stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: ‘He is good; his love endures forever.’ Then the temple of the LORD was filled with the cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.” (NIV)

As the people of Israel left Egypt, a supernatural pillar of cloud led them by day, and a pillar of fire led them by night (Exodus 13:21,22; 14:19-24). This pillar was with them always, as a figure of the presence of Yahweh among them. When they got to Mount Sinai, the cloud settled on the

mountain, with the glory of Yahweh appearing within it (Exodus 24:15-18). Then on the day the Israelites completed the Tabernacle at Mount Sinai, this happened.

Exodus 40:17-35 “So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year... Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (NIV)

By repeating the miracle that occurred when Yahweh took up residence within the Tabernacle, with the cloud filling the Temple and the glory of Yahweh appearing, Yahweh sends a powerful message He has accepted the Temple. This will be His dwelling place among His people, with the country united and Solomon as their king. It’s a triumphant moment full of tremendous promise, which Solomon recognizes.

Solomon’s prayer.

After the glory of Yahweh fills the Temple, Solomon turns to address the people. He begins by acknowledging the momentous nature of this day, when the Temple of Yahweh and the house of David are established in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 6:3-11 “While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them. Then he said: ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hands has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David. For he said, “Since the day I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my Name might be there, nor have I chosen anyone to be ruler over my people Israel. But now I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there, and I have chosen David to rule my people Israel...”’ The LORD has kept the promise he made. I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. There I have placed the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with the people of Israel.’ ” (NIV)

Solomon then offers a truly remarkable prayer.

1 Kings 8:22-53 “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: ‘LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below – you who keep your covenant of love (*“hesed” – loyal love*) with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it – as it is today. Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, “You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.” And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true. But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I

have built! Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, "My Name shall be there," so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. When anyone wrongs their neighbor and is required to take an oath and they come and swear the oath before your altar in this temple, then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing down on their heads what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence. When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and give praise to your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their ancestors. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance. When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel – being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple – then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart), so that they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors. As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name – for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm – when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name. When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the LORD toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name, then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. When they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin – and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors and say, "We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly;" and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy; for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace. May your eyes be open to your servant's plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may

you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign LORD, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.’ ” (NIV)

This is Solomon at his finest, acting as a true, humble leader of God’s nation. He begins by praising Yahweh’s uniqueness and faithfulness, and the inability of the Temple to truly contain the Creator of the universe. Yet because Yahweh has promised this dwelling will contain His “Name” – the great “I am” – Solomon prays Yahweh will “hear and forgive” when humble prayers are offered at, or simply towards, this place. And this is where the practice of praying towards the Temple in Jerusalem originates.

Solomon then goes on a lengthy recitation of all the different petitions for pardon he desires Yahweh to heed. Solomon is wise enough to know Israel will sin grievously, and their only hope is Yahweh’s “covenant of love,” *hesed* in Hebrew, a loyal love based upon His fidelity to His people, rather than His people’s merit.

So Solomon lists all the different types of divine discipline he wants God to be prepared to reverse – military defeat, drought, famine, plague, blight, locusts, and notably, captivity near and far. In this beautiful prayer, Solomon is looking into Israel’s dark future of exile and ensuring the people know the road back.

Solomon also prays for the foreigners among them. He asks Yahweh to grant their petitions as well, so people from every land can come to know and serve the God of all creation. This is part of the fulfillment of Yahweh’s vision for Israel as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (see Exodus 19:6). Other nations will be blessed, when their people come to Israel and offer prayers at the Temple of Yahweh.

Solomon asks God to hear and grant the humble prayers of His people, because they are His “inheritance,” meaning the people He chose, rescued from Egypt, and intends to use to bless all nations. Solomon is appealing to the plan God Himself has ordained, because it will never come to fruition without His mercy upon His people and His faithfulness to His plan.

This is a very wise way to pray. We call upon our knowledge of Yahweh’s nature and purpose, not because this somehow paints God into a corner and forces Him to do something He doesn’t want to do, but because the understanding and humility demonstrated in these prayers allow God to do exactly what He wants to do, which is bless His wise and humble children.

Psalm 79:9-13 “Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake... Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 3:13-15 “Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God... Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.” (NASB)

Psalm 145:8-21 “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made... The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down... You open your hand and satisfy the desires

of every living thing... The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him... My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.” (NIV)

How did Yahweh respond to this prayer?

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 “When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, ‘He is good; his love (*“hesed” – loyal love*) endures forever.’” (NIV)

Fire rains down from heaven and consumes the offerings, and Yahweh’s glory appears a second time. This would be an unequivocal sign to the people God has not only accepted the Temple as His dwelling, but also granted Solomon’s petition to hear and forgive when the people call out to Him at this place.

How do Solomon and the people respond to this dramatic sign from Yahweh?

2 Chronicles 7:4-10 “Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, ‘His love (*“hesed” – loyal love*) endures forever.’ Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing. Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions. So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him – a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath (*in the farthest north, near the Euphrates*) to the Wadi of Egypt (*the farthest south and boundary with Egypt*). On the eighth day they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their homes, joyful and glad in heart for the good things the LORD had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel.” (NIV)

An enormous number of sacrifices are made over a two-week period. In order to accommodate all of them, Solomon had to consecrate additional portions of the courtyard for this purpose, as the Altar alone could not handle the volume. People came from the farthest north, all the way up by the Euphrates, and the farthest south, all the way down by the border with Egypt. They spent seven days dedicating the Temple, then celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles for seven days, followed by a final day of sacred assembly (see Leviticus 23:36), for a total of fifteen days in all. Then Solomon sent the people home, “joyful and glad in heart.”

This was an extraordinary “fresh start” for the people of Israel and their young king. It was a time of welcome peace (because David had defeated all their enemies), and also a time of great plenty (because of all the blessings Yahweh has graciously bestowed upon them).

The people were prospering as they never had before. Yahweh had dramatically demonstrated His presence and power to them. It was the perfect “reboot” for all Israel to put away the darkness of the time of the judges and the wars of Saul and David, and take up their mantle as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

With all this spiritual momentum, what does Solomon choose to do next?

Building palaces for himself and the daughter of Pharaoh.

It took Solomon seven years to build the Temple, the dwelling of Yahweh. He spends the next thirteen years of his reign building his own dwelling, along with a dwelling for the daughter of Pharaoh.

1 Kings 6:37 to 7:12 “The foundation of the temple of the LORD was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv (*the second month*). In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications (*this would have been right after the Festival of Tabernacles in the seventh month*). He had spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace. He built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon a hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high, with four rows of cedar columns supporting trimmed cedar beams. It was roofed with cedar above the beams that rested on the columns – forty-five beams, fifteen to a row. Its windows were placed high in sets of three, facing each other. All the doorways had rectangular frames; they were in the front part in sets of three, facing each other. He made a colonnade fifty cubits long and thirty wide. In front of it was a portico, and in front of that were pillars and an overhanging roof. He built the throne hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge, and he covered it with cedar from floor to ceiling. And the palace in which he was to live, set farther back, was similar in design. Solomon also made a palace like this hall for Pharaoh’s daughter, whom he had married. All these structures, from the outside to the great courtyard and from foundation to eaves, were made of blocks of high-grade stone cut to size and smoothed on their inner and outer faces. The foundations were laid with large stones of good quality, some measuring ten cubits and some eight. Above were high-grade stones, cut to size, and cedar beams. The great courtyard was surrounded by a wall of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams, as was the inner courtyard of the temple of the LORD with its portico.” (NIV)

With the Temple complete, Solomon turns to his own dwelling. It takes him thirteen years, nearly twice as long as the Temple, because it was four times as big.

Yahweh’s Temple was:

- Sixty cubits (90 feet) long

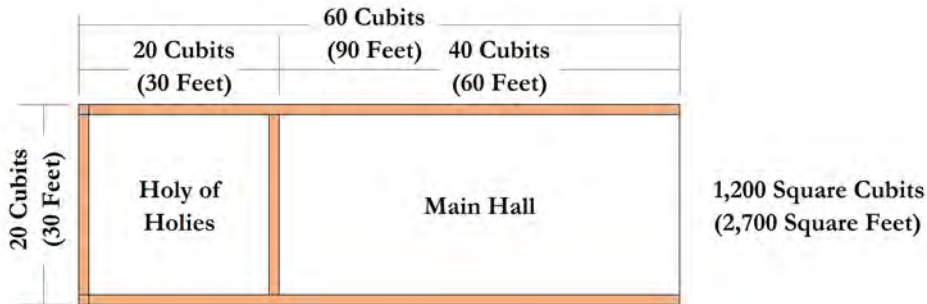
- Twenty cubits (30 feet) wide
 - Total area of 1,200 square cubits (2,700 square feet)
- Thirty cubits (45 feet) high
 - Total volume of 36,000 cubic cubits (121,500 cubic feet)

Solomon's palace was:

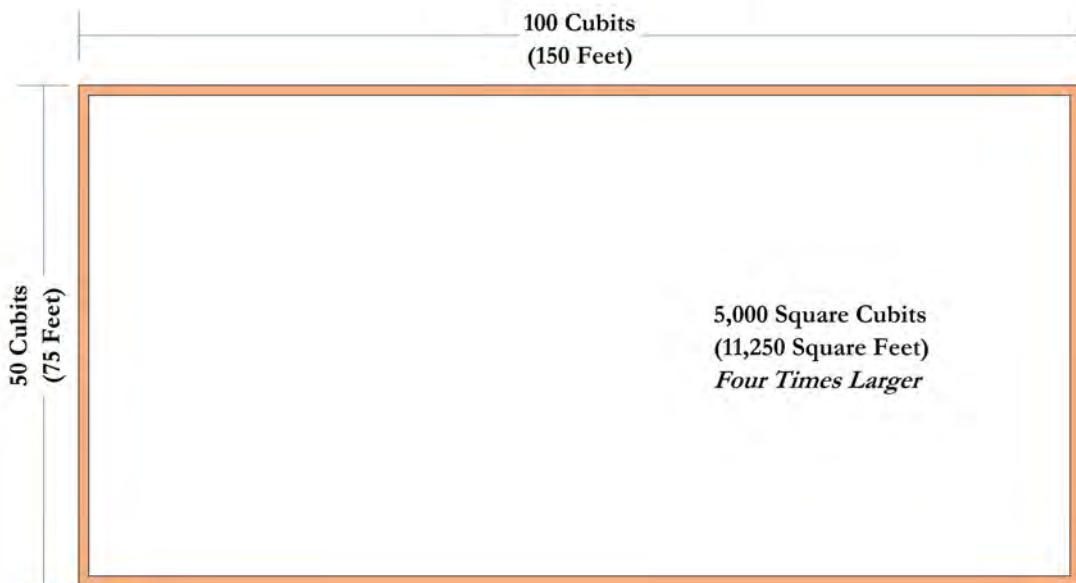
- One hundred cubits (150 feet) long
- Fifty cubits (75 feet) wide
 - Total area of 5,000 square cubits (11,250 square feet)
- Thirty cubits (45 feet) high
 - Total volume of 150,000 cubic cubits (506,250 cubic feet)

Temple / Palace Comparison Aerial View

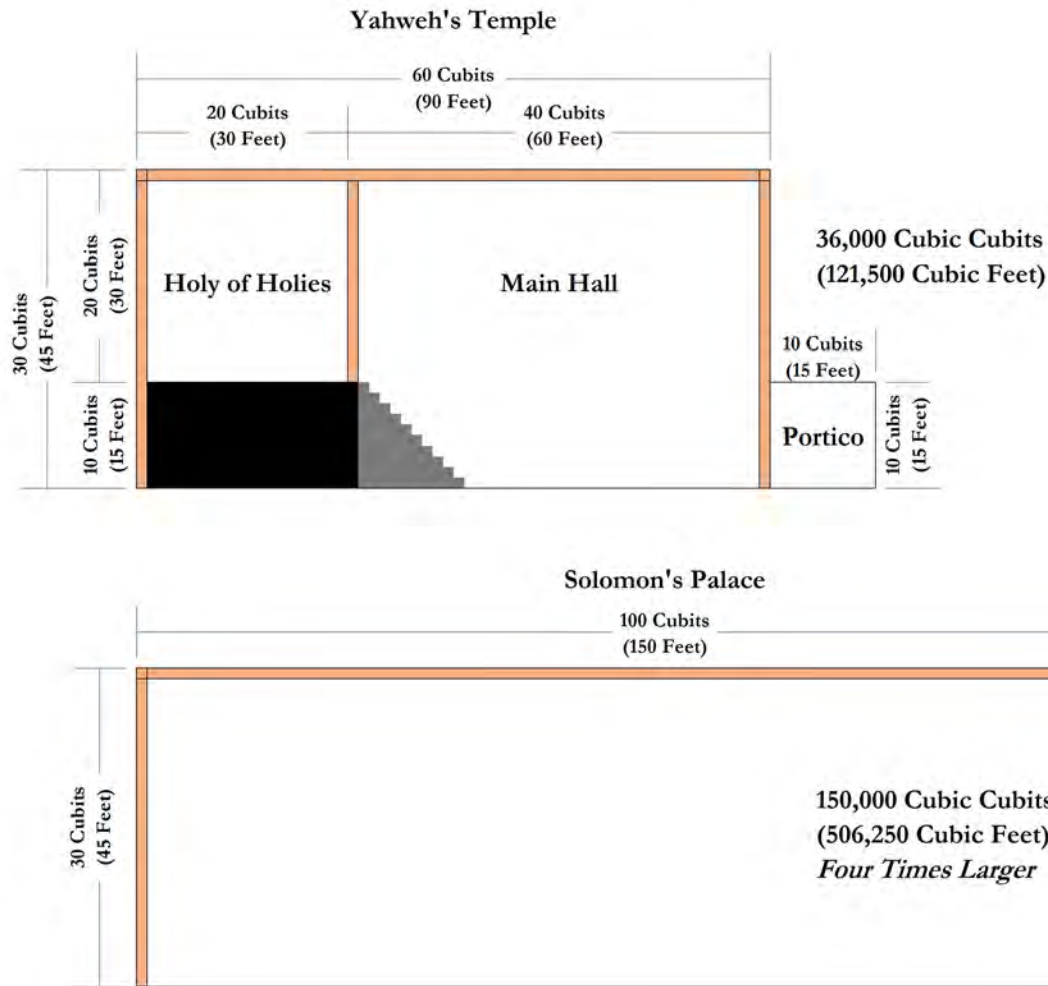
Yahweh's Temple



Solomon's Palace



*Temple / Palace Comparison
Side View*



Solomon's palace is called the "Forest of Lebanon" because of all the cedar used in its construction and the use of a large number of cedar columns. This made the interior of the structure resemble a woodland.

The palace's exact design is uncertain. 1 Kings 7:6 seems to describe pillared colonnades (covered walkways made with pillars), forming a rectangle fifty cubits (75 feet) long and thirty cubits (45 feet) wide, with a large inner patio area. Then this colonnade in turn had its own portico (covered porch). All of this would have created various meeting places and waiting areas before entering the palace. The open-air colonnade design would have allowed breezes to flow through the pillars and keep everyone cool in the warm months, and also seek shelter from the sun under the walkways and portico. However, the Hebrew here is uncertain and there are alternative ideas as to what this structure was, and whether it was attached to the palace or its own separate structure.

Within the palace there was a throne hall, called the “Hall of Justice,” where Solomon held court. Then the king’s living quarters were located further back within the palace. The interior was covered with cedar “from floor to ceiling,” presumably carved with intricate designs and certainly sweet smelling because of the aromatic nature of cedar.

The palace had a large courtyard surround by walls with construction similar to the Temple – three courses of dressed stone and one of trimmed cedar beams. Scripture does not reveal the exact proximity of Solomon’s palace to Yahweh’s Temple, but Jerusalem is not a large city, so it must have been relatively close.

The main thing to note about the construction of Solomon’s palace (as compared to Yahweh’s Temple) is: Solomon spent nearly twice the amount of time to build a home for himself, which was four times larger than Yahweh’s house. Regardless of the responsibilities of the king of Israel, the optics here are not good. If we were to look out over Jerusalem and see the king’s house dwarfing God’s house, we get a clear picture of which direction Solomon’s heart was leaning; and this imbalance will become more pronounced as we move into the later part of Solomon’s reign.

Another point not to be missed is the fact Solomon also built a palace for the daughter of Pharaoh. Solomon ends up with 700 wives (and 300 concubines). More on this later. But we should note he only built a palace for one of them. Why?

2 Chronicles 8:11 “Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, ‘My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy.’ ” (NIV)

This is a curious statement. Solomon says, “the places the ark of Yahweh has entered are holy,” so “my wife should not live there.” Not a very complimentary thing to say about your spouse! It essentially means she is unholy, and can’t be allowed to live anywhere the most precious, holy article Israel possesses has dwelt.

Some have speculated Solomon was willing to marry the daughter of Pharaoh because she was a devout convert to Judaism, but this passage strongly suggests this was not the case. If Pharaoh’s daughter truly loved Yahweh, she would have been welcome anywhere in Israel, including the City of David and also the Temple grounds, where she would have worshiped.

Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter for wrongheaded political reasons. Egypt was the only neighboring nation David didn’t confront and defeat in battle. Rather than stand strong without fear of the Egyptians, Solomon marries Pharaoh’s daughter, then shows her preference over all his other wives, whom as we shall see came from all the foreign nations David did confront and defeat and were no longer a military threat.

In other words, Solomon didn’t marry Pharaoh’s daughter and build her a big beautiful palace because he loved her. He took 999 wives and concubines in addition to her. That’s not what you do when you love someone. And if he really loved her, he wouldn’t have built her a palace of her own in the first place. He would have wanted her next to him in his palace, which would have actually been *their* palace.

And Solomon didn't marry Pharaoh's daughter and build her a big beautiful palace because he respected Egypt as a like-minded ally, joining with Israel to fulfill the mission of bringing the love of Yahweh to the lost world. Egypt was the same awful, pagan place it had been about five centuries earlier, when the Israelites were there laboring away as slaves making bricks out of mud in the burning sun.

Egypt was an advanced, powerful, idolatrous nation to the west of Israel, which David had not subdued, and which Solomon therefore feared, because his faith in Yahweh was fragile. So he married Pharaoh's daughter and built a big, pretty house for her, then kept his fingers crossed this would appease her dad.

We will see how this works out for Solomon. For now, his marriage calms his fears of the mighty, unconquered nation to his west, and he probably thinks his political maneuvering is really clever. Yet in truth, all this was a public demonstration of a total lack of faith in the God who had already rescued Israel from Egypt in spectacular fashion. Solomon is just too self-absorbed to realize it.

However, the union did cause one glaring political problem at home. He couldn't have the pagan daughter of Israel's former slaveowner living it up in the City of David, where the Ark used to reside with honor, so he builds her a palace of her own in a different part of Jerusalem, separate from his own palace (and 999 other wives and concubines), and away from the Temple. This would be a neutral area away from the City of David in the south and the Temple in the north.

This created even worse optics in Jerusalem. Think about it. As you gazed out over the wonders of the metropolis, you would see the City of David on one end, Solomon's palace and Yahweh's Temple at the other end, and then a separate but magnificent palace somewhere in the middle. A newcomer would ask, "what's that beautiful palace in the middle of the city?" And someone would answer, "oh, that's the palace Solomon built for the daughter of Pharaoh, one of his 700 wives and 300 concubines." And the newcomer would think, "okay, so that's what Solomon cares about – Yahweh's Temple is pretty cool, but Solomon's palace is incredible, and he sure must be scared of Egypt, because he's doing everything he can to keep Pharaoh's daughter happy."

If you consider these images long enough, you will see Solomon's doom written all over them. But for now, Yahweh seems willing to graciously overlook all this, because once the construction is done, He appears to Solomon a second time with an incredible offer of blessing and an equally powerful warning of the consequences of disobedience.

God's blessing and warning.

Let's start with the good part.

1 Kings 9:1-5 "When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him: 'I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with 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 successor on the throne of Israel.” ’
” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 7:11-14 “When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace... the LORD appeared to him at night and said: ‘I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.’ ” (NIV)

Solomon started the Temple in the fourth year of his reign. Seven years later, he finished the Temple and began on his palace. Thirteen years later, he was done. Temple and palace took him twenty years total. He’s been king of Israel for twenty-four years, starting his reign in his late teens or early twenties. So Solomon is middle aged, likely in his early forties.

During these twenty-four years, Israel has prospered exceedingly. Solomon entered into the political marriage with Pharaoh’s daughter. He ends up with 1000 wives and concubines, all from other foreign nations, so presumably his haram of pagan women numbers in the hundreds by now. But it seems Solomon has not made any other major mistakes. And with all the construction finished, now it’s time for Solomon to start receiving people in his new digs, representing Israel, the nation of Yahweh, before all the other nations of the world.

This means it’s a pivotal moment in Solomon’s life. With all these labors complete, in which direction will he lead the nation? Where will he direct his abundant wisdom and energy, along with the wisdom and energy of the people of Israel? The construction of these dwellings is over. Now it’s time to choose how to live within them.

Of course Yahweh realizes all this, and because He loves Solomon and wants him to succeed, Yahweh “appears” to Solomon a second time, as He had at Gibeon at another pivotal moment in Solomon’s life, before construction of the Temple had commenced (see 1 Kings 3:5; 2 Chronicles 1:7). This means Yahweh physically manifests Himself before Solomon (as with the “angel of Yahweh,” a preincarnate appearance of Jesus), and has a heart-to-heart with the middle-aged king, poised to embark upon the second half of his remarkable life.

Yahweh assures Solomon He heard Solomon’s prayer at the Temple dedication. With tender words Yahweh promises to grant humble prayers for forgiveness offered at the place where “My eyes and My heart will always be.” The 2 Chronicles passage is interesting because it treats the future rebellion of the people as a given, and droughts, locusts, and plagues will be necessary to get their attention. Yet even so, Yahweh graciously promises to forgive and renew, if the people will humbly repent and return to Him.

Yahweh then shifts His attention specifically to Solomon and affirms His promises to establish “his royal throne over Israel forever,” because of His promise that David would “never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.” But all these assurances to Solomon are conditioned upon whether Solomon will choose to “walk before Me faithfully with integrity of heart” and “do all I command and observe My decrees and laws.”

These are all beautiful, tender words of comfort and assurance. It should thrill Solomon to the bone and provide him with the encouragement he needs to make the remainder of his reign something marvelous. But just in case this was not enough, Yahweh also provides Solomon with stern and sobering words.

1 Kings 9:6-9 “**But if you or your descendants 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. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, “Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?” People will answer, “Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them – that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.”**’” (NIV)

The polarity of these two passages is jarring. The first passage is full of gentle reassurance that Yahweh’s Name, eyes, and heart will always be at the Temple, ready to answer genuine prayers of repentance. Then in the second passage the pendulum swings to the opposite extreme, and with equal certainty promises this very same Temple will become a heap of rubble and object of ridicule, if either Solomon or his descendants choose to worship and serve other gods.

Remember, God never asked for a Temple. It was David’s idea, and when he presented it, God said this:

2 Samuel 7:5-11 “**... Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”... The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:”** (NIV)

So the Temple is no big deal to Yahweh. He would have been perfectly happy to continue dwelling in the Tabernacle. He promised He would guide the people to the *place* within Israel He wanted His dwelling to be (Deuteronomy 12:5-1; 16:2-11), which as we have seen ended up being the threshing floor of Araunah on Mount Moriah (1 Chronicles 21:18 to 22:1). But He never asked His people to ditch the Tabernacle He designed for them at Sinai and build Him a big, fancy Temple. It’s the *worship* offered at this location that matters to Yahweh, not the habitat.

Notice the emphasis in this passage is on the choices of “Solomon and his descendants,” not the nation. This is Yahweh looking Solomon in the eyes and warning him of the consequences of his choices and those of his heirs. It’s warning Solomon of the tremendous responsibility he carries as Israel’s king, and the effect whom *he* becomes will have on what the *nation* becomes.

Of course it’s possible for a nation to reject an honorable leader, and if it does God knows how to deal with the people. But at this critical point in history, with so much promise for the nation, God is telling Solomon, “don’t screw this up.” There will never be a better opportunity for Israel to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” than now. The Temple is complete. Israel is at

peace. Prosperity is erupting. Solomon's fame is spreading. If you lead the people in the right direction, they will follow you along the paths of righteousness. And if you lead them in the wrong direction, they will likewise follow you along the paths of evil.

And so it's Solomon's solemn duty to provide the correct example, following Yahweh's Law and worshipping at Yahweh's Temple. If he will do it, his people will do it. Then Solomon is to pass the importance of these duties on the succeeding kings. Otherwise, everything Solomon has done over the last twenty-four years will be reduced to a looted pile of splintered wood and shattered stone.

This would include not only the Temple, but also Solomon's palace and the other architectural wonders he would go on to build, because if an invading army was able to reduce the Temple to rubble, they would sack the rest of the city as well. So this is a stark warning to Solomon that his entire legacy is on the line. If he turns his back on Yahweh, he is going to lose all the gifts of Yahweh, and instead of being a man remembered for his unprecedented wisdom and the glory of his reign, he will be remembered for his unprecedented folly and the infamy of his reign, where the king of Israel opened the gate to the road of destruction and led the people onward to ruin.

We will see if Solomon takes this warning to heart.

Other activities.

After completing Yahweh's house and his own, Solomon moved on to other activities.

- *Turning twenty cities over to the Canaanites.* The most infamous thing Solomon did during this time after the completion of the construction of the Temple and palace (other than add to his collection of pagan wives and concubines) was to gift twenty cities in Galilee (northern Israel, west of the sea of Galilee) to Hiram, King of Tyre.

1 Kings 9:10-14 “At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings – the temple of the LORD and the royal palace – King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. ‘What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?’ he asked. And he called them the Land of Kabul (*which sounds like the Hebrew for “good for nothing”*), a name they have to this day. Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold.” (NIV)

This is shocking. You have the king of Israel deeding over portions of the Promised Land to a Canaanite. David and Solomon enjoyed good relations with the king of Tyre, but Tyre was located within the Promised Land along the Mediterranean coast in the northern lands of Asher. To give Hiram these lands was a direct violation of Yahweh's design for His nation.

Solomon could have paid Hiram back with gold. As we shall see, he had plenty of it. But he gave Hiram a piece of the Promised Land instead, although apparently not a particularly desirable one. So Solomon both violated Yahweh's command and essentially cheated his ally in the same transaction. This is a warning of things to come.

- *Walls of Jerusalem.* Solomon extended the fortified walls of Jerusalem beyond the city of David in the south, to reach around the Temple and palace in the north.
- *City terraces.* Jerusalem is built on uneven, hilly terrain. Solomon beautified the land by constructing terraces throughout the city.
- *Three fortified cities.* Solomon built three notable fortified cities, to strengthen Israel:
 - Hazor – north of the Sea of Galilee in the lands of Naphtali (Joshua 19:36). Joshua burned this city to the ground during the northern campaign of the conquest of the Promised Land, because it was the capital of the northern Canaanite nations (Joshua 11:10,11). Here Solomon builds it back up as a stronghold in the north.
 - Megiddo – near the Valley of Jezreel in central Israel in the lands of Manasseh (Joshua 17:11). This was a strategic city commanding the passes into the hill country of Manasseh. There were still Canaanites living in this area, serving as slaves to the Israelites (Joshua 17:12,13).
 - Gezer – a few miles northwest of Jerusalem, in the lands of Ephraim (Joshua 16:10).

We should note something important about Gezer. The Israelites were not able to dislodge the Canaanites from this city (Joshua 16:10). When Solomon agreed to marry Pharaoh's daughter, Pharaoh decided to do something about that.

1 Kings 9:16,17 “(Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon’s wife. And Solomon rebuilt Gezer.)” (NIV)

This is a rather startling passage. It means Pharaoh took his army from Egypt, across the Sinai Peninsula, into the heart of Israel, and destroyed a powerful city. This demonstrates a very strong military capability. Pharaoh essentially did something the Israelites couldn't do for themselves since the conquest of the land about four centuries earlier.

Perhaps this is one reason Solomon feared Egypt and wanted to make the political marriage. It was certainly a clear, ominous message from Pharaoh to Solomon, veiled as a gift, that Solomon's new father-in-law had the military muscle to roll into Israel with a powerful fighting force, take a city, and murder all its inhabitants. Solomon better treat Pharaoh's daughter well!

- *Naval forces.* Related to this, we see Solomon built the only navy Israel ever had, to sail along the Red Sea.

1 Kings 9:26-28 “King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea (*“yam suph”*). And Hiram sent his men – sailors who knew the sea – to serve in the fleet with Solomon’s men. They sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.” (NIV)

“Red Sea” is *yam suph* in Hebrew. This is the same Red Sea Yahweh parted to allow the Exodus generation to escape from Egypt, which is likely the Gulf of Aqaba.

Yam suph is sometimes translated “Sea of Reeds,” and it’s suggested this was one of the small, shallow lakes east of Goshen in Egypt. But here we see Solomon built a fleet to sail the Red Sea, which means this body of water could never have been one of these landlocked little lakes in northeastern Egypt. There would have been no place to sail.

The port at Ezion Geber was in Edom, which was located just north of the Gulf of Aqaba. The passage also states Solomon’s ships sailed to Ophir and brought back gold. Ophir was in southwest Arabia, not somewhere in Egypt, so the only way to get to it by ship would have been to sail from the port in Edom at the north of the Gulf of Aqaba, down the gulf, past the Strait of Tiran (where the crossing of the Red Sea most likely occurred), into the Red Sea proper, and docking somewhere in Arabia. And so in these passages from Solomon’s life, we discover important information that helps us identify the Gulf of Aqaba as the “Red Sea” parted by Yahweh to rescue the Israelites from Pharaoh’s armies.

- *Other cities.* Solomon built other cities throughout the land from the southern desert in the Negev all the way up to Lebanon in the north, with some serving as store cities for his horses and chariots.
- *Releasing Israelite conscripted labor and consolidating Canaanite slave labor.* With the completion of the Temple and palace, the laborers conscripted from the Israelites were released, but all the slave labor from the Canaanites was embedded into the society.

1 Kings 9:20-23 “There were still people left from the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (these peoples were not Israelites). Solomon conscripted the descendants of all these peoples remaining in the land – whom the Israelites could not exterminate – to serve as slave labor, as it is to this day. But Solomon did not make slaves of any of the Israelites; they were his fighting men, his government officials, his officers, his captains, and the commanders of his chariots and charioteers. They were also the chief officials in charge of Solomon’s projects – 550 officials supervising those who did the work.” (NIV)

- *Faithful worship at the Temple.* To his credit, after construction was complete, Solomon initially ensured the people were careful to worship faithfully at the Temple according to the Law. He also followed the logistical plans for the operation of the Temple laid out by his father, David. We will see if this continues to the end of Solomon’s reign.

2 Chronicles 8:12-15 “On the altar of the LORD that he had built in front of the portico, Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings to the LORD, according to the daily requirement for offerings commanded by Moses for the Sabbaths, the New Moons and the three annual festivals – the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. In keeping with the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their duties, and the Levites to lead the praise and to assist the priests according to each day’s requirement. He also appointed the gatekeepers by divisions for the various gates, because this was what David the man of God had

ordered. They did not deviate from the king's commands to the priests or to the Levites in any matter, including that of the treasuries.” (NIV)

With these accomplishments, Solomon and the people reach what is likely the highpoint of Israel's history.

Zenith / The Queen of Sheba.

For a brief moment, Israel and her king do what they are supposed to do.

1 Kings 10:1-10 “When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan – with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones – she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, ‘The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.’ And she gave the king 120 talents (4 ½ tons) of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 9:12 “King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for; he gave her more than she had brought to him. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.” (NIV)

Where is Sheba? The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 lists two people named “Sheba,” one a descendant of Ham and the other a descendant of Shem (Genesis 10:7, 28). Generally the descendants of Ham settled in the middle regions of Mesopotamia, with the descendants of Japheth to the north and the descendants of Shem towards the south. See Genesis 10.

In speaking of this woman, Jesus calls her the “Queen of the South” and commends her for her desire to discover truth. This would suggest she is a descendant of Shem and therefore a distant relative of the Israelites, whose kingdom was in the south somewhere in Arabia. Many believe Sheba is likely the land of the Sabaeans (Job 1:15; Isaiah 45:14; Joel 3:8), which is in Arabia near modern day Yemen.

Matthew 12:42 “The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.” (NIV)

Regardless of where she came from, she is a truly remarkable woman. She is a queen of the ancient world, who is able to travel with a large retinue and tremendous wealth. This demonstrates a personal independence and command of significant military might, which would be necessary for protection on her journey. And when it was time to “test” Solomon’s wisdom, it was not her husband or counselor who posed the questions. She spoke for herself, monarch to monarch.

All this was very unusual in the ancient world, where the status of women – even royal women – was unfortunately low. Any queen who could solely wield this sort of power must have both *won it* through harsh struggle and *deserved it* through honorable decisions. Otherwise she would never have been able to travel far distances with great wealth and retain the loyalty of those around her. They would have robbed her blind, ditched her in the desert, and run off with the loot. It’s also notable Solomon receives her as an equal.

Pulling all this together, the Queen of Sheba is a *worthy examiner* of Solomon. She is uniquely qualified to see if this guy is legit. She’s brilliant, royal, savvy, and strong. And she’s female. It will not be a meeting between a couple of good-ole-boys, smacking each other on the behind and trading cock-and-bull stories over cigars and cognac. The magnificent Queen of Sheba brings with her the wiles of a woman, against which many men are simply defenseless.

She tests Solomon with “hard questions” and “talked with him about all she had on her mind.” That suggests a long, intimate conversation.

If two guys share all that’s on their minds, that can take about five minutes! But here, a woman travels a long distance to meet someone about whom she has heard implausible things. She tests him with her own skill and insight, which for a woman of her accomplishments must have been of the highest order; and she discovers everything she has heard about the king of Israel was not only true, but also an understatement of Solomon’s unparalleled wisdom. Then she has an opportunity to open her mind and heart to this man, who is able to genuinely hear her and respond with divinely inspired truth. And so this conversation between two of history’s most extraordinary people – one male and one female – must have been one for the ages!

She is impressed not only by Solomon, but also by the people. She meets the court officials, the servants, and the cupbearers, and she can tell Solomon is not the only blessed, remarkable person in Israel. Everyone is.

Then to cap it all off, she observes the offerings made at the Temple. She witnesses the people coming together and worshipping Yahweh. What’s her response? She is “overwhelmed,” literally in Hebrew, “there was no more spirit in her.” The word for spirit means “breath.” So she is left breathless by all she has seen and heard.

When the talking is over and the queen has had her fill, it’s interesting to note her response. She had “heard in her own country” about Solomon and Israel, and the report piqued her interest. So she travelled all the way to Israel to see if it was true.

In other words, the news about God’s nation was spreading, and it touched the hearts of those who heard it. Could there actually be a place where divine wisdom can be found, along with peace, prosperity, and security? Everyone longs for these things, and those who are able would go to any lengths to discover if the reports are true.

This is the way it was supposed to work! This was the purpose of God's covenant with Israel. They were supposed to follow His Law and worship at His Tabernacle (now Temple). Then He would bless them. The news would travel. And people would come to Israel, which was right in the middle of all the ancient trade routes, to see if what they heard was true. There they would learn of Yahweh and be able to bring His truth back to their own countries.

That's why this encounter represents Israel's zenith. It's the one moment we can point to when Israel and her king were truly acting as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." We see this in the queen's breathless exclamation, "Praise be to Yahweh your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of Yahweh's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness." She's praising Yahweh and His special relationship with Israel.

She also gives Solomon a ridiculous amount of gold, and perhaps of even more value, the spices of her land. Solomon already had plenty of gold, but these spices were rare and never again so abundant in Israel. They brought variety and flavor to this singular moment in Israel's history. Solomon meets the queen's generosity with his own, and she returns to her land with more wealth than she had when she left, along with something priceless – reverence for Yahweh and respect for His nation.

Earlier in the life of Solomon we had the story about the two prostitutes fighting over the baby, and the wisdom Yahweh gave Solomon to uncover the truth. The tales of this wisdom spread. As a result a brilliant, mighty queen of the ancient world comes to see if the tales are true. To her delight she discovers they are, and she returns to her land praising Yahweh.

It's interesting to note both of these pivotal moments in Solomon's life revolve around women. The first with prostitutes. The second with a queen. The stations of the women are very different, but through Solomon they are all changed for the better by Yahweh.

We will soon see how some other women change Solomon, but for now we should stop, take a beat, and appreciate this exalted moment between Solomon and the queen of Sheba. It's a beautiful example of how Israel was supposed to act in the world, which sadly will not endure.

Genesis 12:1-3 "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' " (NIV)

Exodus 19:3-6 "Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' " (NIV)

CHAPTER 5 – GROWING DEFIANCE.

POLITICS AND LUST.

The downward slope.

As we consider the arc of Solomon's life, the episode with the Queen of Sheba is perhaps the apex. Everything that preceded it – Solomon's request for wisdom, the building of the Temple and palace, and the ensuing blessings of peace and prosperity – all led up to this culminating moment, where the Queen of Sheba with her wisdom and royal perspective was able to truly appreciate all Yahweh has done in Israel through Solomon.

Unfortunately, it's all downhill from here, and not in the good sense. Yahweh rewards Solomon and the nation in spectacular fashion for fulfilling their purpose to be a light to the gentiles. But as their splendor grows, a paralleling self-indulgence grows just as quickly. Outwardly it appears the kingdom is healthy and strong, but inwardly a cancer steadily advances, rotting away the spiritual pillars that uphold both king and country.

Within Solomon, a tension builds between his service to Yahweh and his personal indulgences. The two cannot coexist indefinitely. Solomon must choose who he will serve, and one side must prevail over the other.

Conflict – Splendor, self-indulgence, and competing loyalties.

Following the visit from the Queen of Sheba, Solomon and Israel enter into a period of extraordinary prosperity.

1 Kings 10:14-29 “The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents (25 tons), not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the territories. King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred shekels (15 pounds) of gold went into each shield. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas (3 ¾ pounds) of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. Then the king made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. 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. 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. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. 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. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar

as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue – the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels (*15 pounds*) of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty (*3 ¾ pounds*). They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.” (NIV)

2 Chronicles 9:25-28 “Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from all other countries.” (NIV)

This passage is important to consider carefully, because it reveals both the blessings Yahweh poured out on Solomon, and what Solomon did with those blessings. There is splendor, and there is self-indulgence.

The amount of gold received annually is mindboggling. Twenty-five tons in current prices is about \$1.5 billion. He made large and small golden shields to decorate his palace. The larger shields were made from fifteen pounds of gold worth \$450,000 each. He made 200 of them, at a cost of \$90 million. The smaller shields were from 3 ¾ pounds of gold, worth \$112,000 each. There were 300 of them, for a total cost of about \$34 million.

So Solomon spent \$124 million on ornamental shields for his palace. That's quite a line item on Solomon's interior decoration budget. (But as a bit of foreshadowing of what will become of the splendor of Solomon, we should note within five years of Solomon's death, these shields were not hanging on the palace walls in Jerusalem. They were decorating Pharaoh's digs in Egypt. See 2 Chronicles 12:9-11.)

Solomon made a throne of ivory covered in gold. There were six steps leading to the throne, with golden lions at each end, so twelve in all. This is curious symbolism. There are twelve tribes of Israel, but the lion is the symbol of Judah (Genesis 49:9). So in a sense it is honoring the twelve tribes, but it is also exalting Judah.

The magnificence of Solomon's throne room was unparalleled in the ancient world. Nothing in the entire city of Jerusalem was made of silver because it was considered of little value, as common as stones in the street. The king's navy brought him a regular supply of exotic animals and other riches after three-year voyages.

Then we have two remarkable statements:

1. Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.
2. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

Here we see Yahweh's fulfillment of His promise to Solomon – to make him richer and wiser than all other kings; and Solomon's fulfillment of his part of the bargain – to share the wisdom of Yahweh.

Another remarkable thing to note about this moment in Israel's history is: Solomon's rule extended from the Euphrates in the north, through the land of the Philistines (west of Jerusalem), and all the way to the border of Egypt (the "wadi of Egypt," running along the eastern portion of the Sinai Peninsula down towards to Gulf of Aqaba). These are all the lands promised to Abraham about a thousand years earlier.

Genesis 15:18-20 "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.'" (NIV)

But then we also notice what Solomon began to accumulate – chariots and horses. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses, with entire cities dedicated to housing them. These horses were imported from Egypt and Kue (a region in the south of modern-day Turkey). Solomon also exported chariots and horses, acting as an arm's merchant.

It's interesting to note the parallels in pricing between the chariots and horses and the large and small palace shields. The weight of precious metal required for a chariot and large shield was 15 pounds, and for a horse and small shield was 3 ¾ pounds. But the deadly chariots and horses were paid for with silver, while the ornamental shields were paid for with gold. This is a perhaps a metaphor for Solomon's confused thinking. He pays far more for the useless and symbolic than for the useful and authentic.

And as we read all this, we should compare what is happening to God's warning to Israel during the time of Moses about the nation's future kings:

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 "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,' be sure to appoint over you a king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. 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.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. 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 Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel." (NIV)

If we reflect on these passages from 1 Kings 10 (paralleled in 2 Chronicles 9) in the light of these commands from Deuteronomy, it makes us wonder: What exactly was the intent of the writer of 1 Kings? On the surface, he seems to be exalting Solomon, and in a sense he is. But in another sense, when you map Deuteronomy 17 over 1 Kings 10, it's clear the writer is also condemning him.

Solomon accumulates massive hordes of gold and thousands of horses, brought in from Egypt, all in violation of Yahweh's commands. Then he exports his weaponry, instead of Yahweh's truth.

And look at what's absent. There is no mention of Solomon personally writing out a copy of the Law, keeping it with him, and reading it every day. Sacrifices are going on at the Temple, but as we shall see, evil has taken deep root in the palace, all because Solomon is cherry-picking the laws he wants to follow and ignoring the rest. In all his splendor, Solomon indulges himself.

It seems the writer of 1 Kings under divine inspiration is exposing the duality within Solomon. On one hand there are things he is doing that are very right. But on the other hand there are things he is doing that are very wrong. A tension is building within Solomon, and one side must win over the other. This conflict in 1 Kings 10 sets up the catastrophe revealed in the next chapter, 1 Kings 11.

Catastrophe – Solomon's 1000 wives and concubines.

Over the course of his reign, Solomon took 700 wives and 300 concubines – a total of 1000 women.

As we have seen, one of his wives was the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt. He entered into this marriage for political purposes, apparently to make nice with the king of Egypt whom he feared. His father David had defeated all the other nations surrounding Israel. Only Egypt remained as a potential threat.

But as we've already considered, Egypt is the one nation above all Solomon should have absolutely no concerns about whatsoever. It's the nation from whom Yahweh rescued them so spectacularly centuries earlier, by way of ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea – two of the defining moments of the nation.

Yet Solomon demonstrates a tremendous lack of faith in Yahweh and undeserved regard for his own political skills by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. He thought by entering into this union he could protect the nation from the threat of Egypt, since Yahweh obviously was not up to the task, and even built his Egyptian bride her very own palace to be sure everyone was happy.

This was his one marriage motivated by *politics*. The rest of his 699 marriages and 300 concubinages were motivated by *lust*.

An addiction has been growing within Solomon for many years. He's the king of Israel, yet he never married a Jewish woman. Instead, he made the political marriage to Pharaoh's daughter and collected Canaanite women like a kid collects marbles.

1 Kings 11:1-8 “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. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the

Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.” (NIV)

Why Solomon took only foreign women and never married a Jewish woman is not explained. It's left a mystery but reveals an incredibly arrogant, self-serving heart. He's the king of Israel, but his heirs will only be half-Jewish. That's not what a responsible king does. It sets up the kingdom for instability, while also demonstrating a prideful indifference to Yahweh's Law and plan for Israel to be different from all the other nations, as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

The numbers are staggering. Solomon reigned for forty years (1 Kings 11:42) and took 1000 pagan wives and concubines, which averages out to twenty-five a year, or a woman every two weeks. As we have noted before, that's like taking a new lover every time you pick up your paycheck, for half a lifetime.

This was in direct opposition to the Law (see Deuteronomy 17:17), yet Solomon "held fast to them in love." "Held fast" is *dabaq* in Hebrew, to cling or adhere. It's the same word used in Genesis 2:24 where it says a husband shall "leave his father and his mother, and be joined (*dabaq*) to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Instead of becoming one flesh with one woman, Solomon, king of Israel and heir of David, chose to become one flesh with 1000.

This is clearly a sexual addiction. Solomon knows what he is doing is wrong, but he clings to it, like a junkie to a loaded syringe. And like all addictions, it starts out fun and something he probably thought he could handle. You don't get addicted to something you don't enjoy, and you always start out thinking you are in control. But then as the years go by, the addiction takes its inevitable toll on body, mind, and spirit, until you are wholly under its dominion.

This is exactly what happened to Solomon. "As he grew old," these wives turned his heart towards other gods. It didn't happen right away. Solomon was able to resist their sway at first, even as he indulged in their bodies. But eventually they wore him down, and then an unprecedented catastrophe took place, which foundationally altered the course of the nation of Israel and set her careening down the road to destruction.

Solomon, the man who built the one dwelling of the living God on earth, took all those skills he had mastered constructing the Temple, and all the resources Yahweh had blessed him with, and started another project – a series of "high places," that is, centers for pagan worship, scattered throughout the nation of Israel dedicated to all the horrific gods of Canaan.

The passage says he built temples for "all his foreign (meaning Canaanite) wives." That suggests hundreds, if not thousands, of temples, constructed throughout the Promised Land in whatever regions his Canaanite wives told him would be nice. They were located upon "high places," meaning the beautiful, elevated regions throughout the land any person's eyes would naturally be drawn to, and where these temples historically had existed until Joshua destroyed them during the conquest of the Promised Land in obedience to Yahweh's command.

Think of the abhorrent message this sends to the people of Israel. They would see the construction going on in some lofty place. They would ask, “hey, what’s going on up there?” Answer: “Oh, our king is rebuilding the temples for the gods of his pagan wives. Apparently, Joshua got it all wrong when he destroyed them.” And then perhaps more quietly, “And you know what goes on in there right? The same thing that goes on in Solomon’s bedroom. We are going to have to check this out when it’s up and running.”

And that’s how Solomon, the man blessed with more wisdom, peace, power, and wealth than perhaps any man to ever live, and who built the Temple of God on earth, became the greatest peddler of idolatrous filth in the history of Israel, dealing religious prostitution and child sacrifice the way a pusher deals weed and heroin.

Why would he do that? He surrounded himself with 1000 pagan women and indulged himself with them night after night. You can’t spend that much time in close settings with a person or group and not be affected by them. These pagan women used their regular, intimate moments with the king to foundationally alter his character – whisper by whisper, plea by plea, crocodile tear by crocodile tear – with slow but steady insistence, reinforced and rewarded night after night, touch by touch.

Eventually Solomon not only gave in to them, but also utterly surrendered to them. In shocking language the passage states Solomon “followed Ashtoreth and Molek.” That means he actively worshipped them.

Who were these gods Solomon chose over Yahweh? Ashtoreth was a fertility goddess of the Sidonians in the north, thought to be the sister and sexual partner of Baal. So this one was all about having sex with temple prostitutes. Her worship was a bane to the people of Israel during the time of the judges.

Judges 2:11-13 “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD’s anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.” (NIV)

Judges 10:6-8 “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites.” (NIV)

1 Samuel 7:2-4 “... Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD. So Samuel said to all the Israelites, ‘If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.’ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.” (NIV)

Molek was a god of fire, worshipped by the Ammonites in the east. This is the deity infamous for his appetite for children, burned alive on his brazen altars.

Leviticus 18:21 “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.” (NIV)

Leviticus 20:1-5 “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: “Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek.” ’ ” (NIV)

Jeremiah 32:30-35 “The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but arouse my anger with what their hands have made, declares the LORD... They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline. They set up their vile images in the house that bears my Name and defiled it. They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molek, though I never commanded – nor did it enter my mind – that they should do such a detestable thing...” (NIV)

So in a sense, by abandoning Yahweh so spectacularly and publicly “following” these two particular gods of sex and murder, Solomon was for all intents and purposes announcing his approval – and indeed encouragement – for Israel to immediately take up the pagan practices of temple prostitution and human sacrifice. It was the absolute worst thing he could possibly have done.

Does that seem harsh? Then consider Solomon was not satisfied with only following these horrific gods and constructing high places throughout the land for the entire Canaanite pantheon followed by his 1000 wives and concubines. 1 Kings 11:7 states Solomon also specifically built temples for Chemosh (the Moabite god of war – see Jeremiah 48:7-47) and Molek (the Ammonite god of fire who liked to hear the screams of dying children writhing in flames) “on a hill east of Jerusalem.” That would be the Mount of Olives (where Jesus ascended to heaven and will one day return – see Acts 1:6-12 and Zechariah 14:4).

These two pagan temples would have been clearly visible from Yahweh’s Temple, which was only a few hundred yards away. Solomon’s message to the people was clear: Go do what you want in these temples; it’s all fine by me.

How did the people respond to Solomon’s actions, and more importantly, how did Yahweh respond?

CHAPTER 6 – ENSUING TRAGEDY.

IDOLATRY AND DIVISION.

The wholesale idolatry of the people of Israel.

Solomon has given himself over to idolatry at the insistence of his 1000 wives and concubines. But what about the people? Just because their king has decided it's cool to have sex with temple prostitutes and burn your children alive doesn't mean the people have to follow his lead. They have their own free will. It's not particularly difficult to perceive what Solomon now advocates is evil. Will they join him or reject him?

Unfortunately, the people of Israel not only join team Solomon on this one, they go on to exceed the Canaanites before them in their absolute devotion to these horrific pagan gods. Over time, the Israelites wholly abandon Yahweh and become worse than their predecessors in the Promised Land, except for a righteous few. And this leads to the destruction of the nation and exile into Assyria and Babylon.

How could this be? How could God's people get so lost, disregard everything Yahweh has done for them, and become the embodiment of evil?

To try to understand this, we need to go back in Israel's history and consider a very difficult question...

Why did (and how could) God command His people to kill every Canaanite man, woman, and child?

Let's start by going back about a thousand years to a vision given to Abraham. In a dream God foretold Abraham's descendants would leave Canaan and be enslaved in a foreign land. But God also swore they would return one day to claim the Promised Land as their own. However, this return would not happen for centuries because "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Genesis 15:12-16 "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'" (NIV)

The Amorites were descended from Ham (one of the three sons of Noah) through Canaan (see Genesis 10:16). By contrast, the Israelites were descended from Shem (one of the other sons of Noah). As a result, the Israelites and the Amorites were not considered close relatives. Noah also prophesied the descendants of Canaan would be cursed, while the descendants of Shem would be blessed.

Genesis 9:24,25 “he (*Noah*) said, ‘Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem.’” (NIV)

The Amorites were renowned for being tall and strong. They were also aggressive and warlike. As the second generation of the Exodus approached to conquer the Promised Land, the Amorites had recently pushed the powerful Moabites out of their land east of the Jordan river.

Amos 2:9 “... I (*Yahweh*) destroyed the Amorites before them (*the Israelites*), though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below.” (NIV)

Numbers 21:26 “... Sihon king of the Amorites... fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon.” (NIV)

At this time the Amorites had seven kings and two population centers. One population center was east of the Jordan river, ruled by two kings, Sihon and Og. The other population center was west of the Jordan in central Canaan, ruled by five kings.

That’s generally who the Amorites were. What was their sin? In a word, idolatry. But the Amorite form of idol worship was not what we may ordinarily think of when we imagine someone bowing down before an idol. They did not light candles or make benign offerings of some valuable. They had orgies with temple prostitutes and burned their children alive on pagan altars. And so their sin was idolatry expressed through temple prostitution and human sacrifice.

Within the Promised Land at the time of the conquest, there were seven different nations God commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy. These were the:

1. Amorites;
2. Canaanites;
3. Hittites;
4. Girgashites;
5. Hivites;
6. Jebusites; and
7. Perizzites.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you – and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.” (NIV)

Of these seven nations, the nation of Canaan was obviously directly descended from the Ham's son, Canaan, whom Noah prophesied would be cursed. Five other nations were descended from one of Canaan's sons. This is why the Promised Land is often referred to as the "land of Canaan," or just "Canaan," because the major nations living there were all descended in one form or another from Canaan.

Genesis 10:15-18 "Canaan was the father of... the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites... (NIV)

The seventh nation, called the Perizzites, appears to be a catch-all name for those who chose to forego the cities and live in open country. Perizzite means "villagers," and they lived in the fertile central portion of Canaan. And so this nation may simply be a collection of families from the other six nations who lived on their own outside the major population centers.

All of these seven nations practiced idol worship, including both the debased sexual aspects and the horrific sacrifice of living children in fire. However, it's clear from Scripture these abhorrent things all had their origins in one nation, the Amorites.

- As we will see in a moment, the seven nations worshipped many different gods, but these deities are collectively referred to in Scripture as the "gods of the Amorites." This means both the gods and the means of worshipping them began with the Amorites, then spread to the other nations.

Joshua 24:14,15 "... Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River (*where Abraham came from*) and in Egypt (*where they were enslaved*), and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me (*Joshua*) and my household, we will serve the LORD." (NIV)

Judges 6:10 "... do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live..." (NIV)

- In Ezekiel there is a particularly graphic and shocking passage, where Israel (which at this point in history had given herself wholly over to idolatry) is compared to a prostitute. The father of this prostitute is an Amorite, further suggesting the repulsive idolatrous practices of the region originated with the Amorites. They were its evil patriarch.

Ezekiel 16:1-45 "The word of the LORD came to me (*Ezekiel*): 'Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite... you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution... you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them... And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols... In addition to all your other

wickedness, you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square. At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, spreading your legs with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbors with large genitals, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity. So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied. I am filled with fury against you, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! When you built your mounds at every street corner and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!... Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your lust and exposed your naked body in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see you stark naked. I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring on you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. Then I will deliver you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you stark naked. They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry. Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices? Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: 'Like mother, like daughter.' You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite." ' ' (NIV)

- The Amorites tended to live in mountainous areas. This is notable because idolatry was often practiced in “high places” like mountains and hills, because the people foolishly believed this put them closer to their gods. People from the other nations may have come to the high places of the Amorites, attracted by the temple prostitutes and sexual licentiousness festering there, and then taken the practices home with them when they returned to their cities. This would explain how the worship of the gods of the Amorites spread to other nations within Canaan like a communicable disease. These “high places” were specifically identified by God to be destroyed when the people entered the land, so as not to infect the Israelites.

Numbers 13:28-29 "... the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large... we saw... the Amorites are living in the hill country..." (NASB)

Numbers 33:50-52 "On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: "When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places." ' " (NIV)

Deuteronomy 12:2 "Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods." (NIV)

- It also seems the Amorites were the most fanatical about the vile worship of these gods, because whenever an idolatrous person is singled out in Scripture as particularly detestable, he is always compared to the Amorites.

1 Kings 21:25,26 "(There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)" (NIV)

2 Kings 21:11 "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols." (NIV)

And so it was the Amorites who created gods delighting in orgies within their temples and the immolation of defenseless children. Then they infected the other nations with which they shared a bond of blood through their cursed forefather Canaan. All the while the Amorites followed these abhorrent practices most fervently, such that they were considered the "father" of these abominations.

This particular type of idolatry was called the sin of the "Amorites" (not Canaan or any of the other nations), because the Amorites started it, then spread it. They created a poisonous religion like an addictive drug, then pushed it throughout the region.

But their sin was enthusiastically received by all seven of the nations God commanded to be destroyed. They were all guilty of these monstrous practices, and all deserving of judgment. The sin was "of the Amorites," in the sense of origin, but it was not exclusive to them. It dominated and corrupted the cultures of each of the seven major nations within the land of Canaan.

Returning now to Abraham's vision, the wholesale surrender to temple prostitution and human sacrifice by the inhabitants of the Promised Land was the "sin of the Amorites" referred to in Genesis 15:16. God told Abraham this sin must "reach its full measure" before the descendants of Abraham returned to claim the land as their own.

Genesis 15:12-16 "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But... In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'" (NIV)

What does “reach its full measure” mean? The detestable Amorite religious practices had taken root in the Promised Land by Abraham’s time, but it took four centuries for this sin to grow to its full stature, like a grotesque tree bearing fruit of depravity and slaughter, until it finally reached its zenith right at the time the people of Israel arrived at the banks of the Jordan.

These four hundred years served two purposes:

1. *It provided time for Abraham’s descendants to grow* into a great people that would become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” From Abraham and Sarah came Isaac. From Isaac and Rebekah came Jacob. Jacob became Israel, and from him came twelve sons who went on to father twelve tribes totaling about 2.5 million people, finally ready to enter the Promised Land.
2. *It also gave the seven nations time to repent.* God loves everyone and desires all to be saved. He doesn’t want anyone to perish, and this includes the Amorites and other inhabitants of the land. So these four centuries were a gift of grace to the seven nations. It was a window of time during which they could turn from their despicable ways and find mercy before judgement finally arrived.

Isaiah 1:13-19 “... I cannot endure iniquity... Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean... though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey...” (NASB)

Jeremiah 3:12-15 “... I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious... Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God... Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.” (NASB)

Psalms 130:3,4 “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” (NIV)

As the people of Israel were liberated from Egyptian slavery and finally approached the Promised Land as a free people, these four hundred years were up. Abraham’s descendants have grown into a great nation, but the Amorites and others have not repented. On the contrary, they have plunged headfirst into a well of unspeakable cruelty and debasement, where they were willing to burn their own children alive to please their gods, after indulging in some gross sexual experience with one or more prostitutes. And so the sin of the Amorites had reached its “full measure,” and a time of reckoning had come.

The land of Canaan was in the middle of all the most important trade routes of the ancient world. God’s plan was to fill it with a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” so as travelers passed through it, they would see what a glorious thing God had done and spread the word throughout the rest of the world. It was a way of evangelizing the entire planet in the most positive and peaceful way possible.

However, in order to do this there was absolutely no way nations practicing temple prostitution and human sacrifice could coexist in the same land alongside a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” They were the total opposite of what God intended for the region. Instead of a pure nation of goodness and light, they were defiled nations of evil and darkness. They simply could not be allowed to exist in the land of the people of Yahweh.

If these had been marginal nations, committing more ordinary sins common to humanity, God's command to utterly destroy them would be hard to defend. But these nations were utterly devoted to the most abominable and abhorrent sins imaginable. They could not be rehabilitated, only eliminated.

Not convinced? Let's take a moment and look closer at the "gods" and "religious" practices of the Amorites.

As mentioned before, there were many different gods worshipped by the seven tribes of Canaan. Here are a few mentioned in Scripture.

- *Baal*. The god of the sun and weather, worshipped throughout Canaan. His name means "lord." He was thought to be the son of a creator god named El and the lascivious goddess Asherah. Although El was his father, El was considered weak and ineffective, and Baal was generally believed to be the most powerful god.

Jeremiah 19:4,5 "... they (*the Israelites*) have forsaken me (*Yahweh*) and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal – something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind." (NIV)

Baal can also be used in a more general sense to mean any local deity, such as the Baal of Peor, meaning the "lord" or god of Peor. And there were so many of these localized versions of Baal, they were sometimes referred to as "the Baals."

Numbers 25:1-3 "While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them." (NIV)

Judges 8:33,34 "No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side." (NIV)

2 Kings 1:1,2 "After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, 'Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.' " (NIV)

- *Asherah*. A fertility goddess of the moon, and mother of Baal. Her worship centered around "Asherah poles," which were large phallic shaped idols.

Exodus 34:10-14 "Then the LORD said: 'I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you."

Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.’” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 12:1-4 “These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess – as long as you live in the land. Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 16:21,22 “Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the LORD your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates.” (NIV)

1 Kings 15:11-13 “Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made. He even deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah...” (NIV)

- *Ashtoreth*. A fertility goddess of the stars, sister and lover of Baal, worshipped in northern Canaan.

Judges 2:11-13 “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD’s anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.” (NIV)

Judges 10:6-8 “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites.” (NIV)

1 Samuel 7:2-4 “... Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD. So Samuel said to all the Israelites, ‘If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.’ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.” (NIV)

- *Molek* – a god of fire, worshipped by the Ammonites in eastern Canaan.

Leviticus 18:21 “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.” (NIV)

Leviticus 20:1-5 “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: “Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek.” ’ ” (NIV)

Jeremiah 32:30-35 “The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but arouse my anger with what their hands have made, declares the LORD... They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline. They set up their vile images in the house that bears my Name and defiled it. They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molek, though I never commanded – nor did it enter my mind – that they should do such a detestable thing...” (NIV)

- *Chemosh* – a god of war, worshipped by the Moabites in southern Canaan.

1 Kings 11:4-33 “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians... On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.... So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates... Then he said to Jeroboam... I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes... I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 48:7-47 “ ‘Since you (*the Moabites*) trust in your deeds and riches, you too will be taken captive, and Chemosh will go into exile, together with his priests and officials. The destroyer will come against every town, and not a town will escape... Then Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh... Woe to you, Moab! The people of Chemosh are destroyed; your sons are taken into exile and your daughters into captivity. Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,’ declares the LORD.” (NIV)

- *Dagon* – a god of the sea, worshipped by the Philistines in western Canaan along the Mediterranean.

Judges 16:23 “Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate...” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 10:9,10 “They (*the Philistines*) stripped him (*the dead body of king Saul*) and took his head and his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news among their idols and their people. They put his armor in the temple of their gods and hung up his head in the temple of Dagon.” (NIV)

1 Samuel 5:1-5 “After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon’s temple and set it beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon’s temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.” (NIV)

Temple prostitution and human sacrifice were central to the worship of these gods. Though these practices may seem very different, the two were inextricably intertwined. The former led to the latter, while the latter insured addiction to the former. Let’s begin by looking at what must be considered one of the most contemptible deeds imaginable – the sacrifice of a human being to an idol.

In other cultures throughout history, human sacrifice was usually carried out against adults seized from enemy military forces or conquered territories. The Aztecs, for example, were notorious for this. From the tops of their pyramids four priests would hold on to the limbs of adult victims stretched across stone altars, as a fifth priest cut the beating heart out of the living sacrifice. The body was then tossed down long, temple stairs to a heap of cadavers below. Hundreds of thousands died this way. Sacrifices were captured in battle or required as tribute from subjugated tribes.

Not so with the nations of Canaan. They found their victims in the most unthinkable location imaginable – their children’s bedrooms.

These nations didn’t have the courage to go out and fight other grown adults to round up their grotesque offerings. Instead, they took the most innocent, vulnerable things they had and condemned them to terrifying, horrific deaths, all for their own deluded sense of gain. How unspeakably selfish and cowardly. They burned alive before a myriad of false gods the most precious gifts the one true God had given them – their children.

According to Rabbinical tradition and Greco-Roman accounts, the Canaanites built giant metal statues depicting their gods, often with the body of a man and the head of a bull. The arms were outstretched, forming a ramp leading into a hole in the idol’s abdomen. Within the image burned a furnace.

The inhabitants of the Promised Land would then take their infant children, place them in the arms of the idol, and allow them to roll through the hole in the god’s stomach and into the furnace, where they would die screaming in the flames. Other accounts of these horrific practices state the arms of the idol were heated red hot, and the baby was placed there and allowed to scald to death on the glowing metal.

How could any culture become so debased and cruel? And how could any newcomer ever be enticed into participating in something so unspeakably barbaric and undeniably wrong?

The answer is the other evil for which the Canaanites were known: Temple prostitution. This is the lesser evil that led to the greater evil. The seductive sexual aspects of temple prostitution formed a gateway that brought people into a culture culminating in the gruesome murders of children by their own parents.

Because you didn't begin your journey through idolatry burning your children alive on bestial altars. The practice was more subtle than that. You began by walking by a temple and seeing a beautiful, charming young woman sitting outside, welcoming those you know, respect, and admire inside. Then you find out that within this temple there were many more beautiful young women who had one purpose in life – to please men sexually. Their entire lives were devoted to bringing men's fantasies alive. They were brought up and trained for this very purpose. And they carried out their purpose most willingly.

The idea was you came in, paid your fee, got whatever sexual act you wanted, and this was supposed to be glorifying to the gods. Not only was this activity tolerated, it was expected and revered. One particularly sad practice was for fathers to take their virgin daughters to the pagan temple and allow their virginity to be sold to the highest bidder as a tribute to the gods. How cruel! How twisted and base!

And yet everyone went there, including your relatives and friends, and what stories they could tell. They encourage you to go there. It was expected of you to go there. You were ridiculed if you didn't. After all, it was your holy religious duty. So you go, and you like it. You can't help but like it. And then you're hooked.

Most men would probably stop at this point, taking one woman every now and then, but others wouldn't. Depending on their innate weaknesses and secret desires, they might try other things.

Some men would hire more than one female prostitute and experiment with them. But that's all. Other men might ask the women to demonstrate homosexual activity. But that's all. Fewer men might ask for male homosexual prostitutes, or under the influence of their favorite bi-sexual priestesses be pressured into it. Then after getting drunk and having an orgy at the temple with their buddies, witness a human sacrifice. They didn't begin by sacrificing their own children. It was somebody else's brat.

But being involved in this kind of degrading, filthy activity destroys your soul. You become cold, callus, and miserable. You can't do something like this and not become twisted and scarred on the inside. Then as the pressures of life, your own self-induced misery, and God's inevitable discipline catch up with you, desperation sets in and you start convincing yourself there might actually be some truth to this stuff. You want to believe, because when you consider all the despicable things you've done, the alternative is unthinkable. And as you become more and more desperate and some catastrophe hits your life and you need help, you would sacrifice your own child to the gods if it would bring you relief from the misery your life has become.

Then one day you do it. With the assistance and encouragement of all those you have built a life around at the temple, you place your child in the arms of Baal or Molek and watch as the flames

consume the precious thing the one true God gave you. A circle is complete, and now the only thing that can distract you from the horror show your life has become is the temporary relief the temple prostitutes can provide. And then you are utterly addicted to a lifestyle that can only bring you, your family, and your nation, destruction on every conceivable level.

All of this is to show how these practices grow and worsen over time, until they lead to an enthusiastic commitment to the most abhorrent act the human mind can conceive. It's shocking to us now, but not to those who were immersed in it slowly over the course of their lives as something normal and worthy. And the sexual allure of the industry of temple prostitution was so powerful, it was extraordinarily difficult for anyone to resist a first taste, which then led to what is in every sense a deadly addiction.

That's why God commanded His people to destroy every man, woman, and child within these seven nations. It was a complete anathema against the Canaanite culture, conveying in the most unambiguous and dramatic way possible Yahweh was not like Baal or any of these other gods. His people were going to be different than their people. His worship was going to be different than their worship. And it was His intention to bring the very existence of Canaanite culture to a complete and final end.

For this to happen, the seven nations of Canaan had to be completely wiped out. Otherwise they would become a "snare" to the Israelites. The sexual temptation would be too hard to resist, and in the end the Israelites would be no different than the Canaanite nations before them.

Exodus 23:24-33 "Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span. I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

Exodus 34:10-14 "Then the LORD said: 'I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you. Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.'" (NIV)

If all this still does not convince you God's command to utterly destroy the nations of Canaan was necessary and just, then you might be comforted to know something. *The Israelites didn't do it.*

Israel only partially carried out this command. While many of the Canaanites were destroyed, *every* tribe in Israel allowed strongholds of Canaanite survivors to live among them. They may have thought, as many do today, God's command was much too harsh. Perhaps one could argue the destruction of the fighting men was necessary, or even the adult women, but never the children.

After all, wouldn't the killing of Canaanite children by Israelite soldiers be just as bad as the Canaanites killing them as part of their cultural religious practices?

The answer to that question is a resounding "no." Why? Because wiping out the Canaanites, including the children, had a righteous purpose: To once and for all put an end to an abhorrent practice within the nation of Yahweh. It would have been a terrible thing to kill all those children, but what actually happened was *far worse*.

Those surviving little children grew up in the land of Israel, and instead of serving Yahweh, they served the gods of their parents. And slowly the seeds of idolatry began to grow within the Promised Land.

The Canaanite children were spared, but they did not spare their own children. They carried on the legacy of their mothers and fathers and rebuilt the temples of Baal and Molek, with their grotesque idols whose greedy flames took the lives of innocent children as their parents fornicated in unrestrained orgies amidst screams of death.

And in time it was not just Canaanite babies screaming in the flames. It was Jewish babies, even the sons of kings. Idolatry took root and spread like a cancer throughout Israel. Jewish men and women married the Canaanite survivors and under their influence bowed down to the gods of the pagans.

Judges 3:5-7 "The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs." (NIV)

All this was inevitable once the Canaanites were spared, because the sexual temptation of temple prostitution was too strong.

Think about it. To worship Yahweh, the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it took integrity. It took an understanding of the doctrines relating to the coming Messiah and the Law codified by Moses. It took courage to confess your sins and watch the blood of a lamb spilled symbolically on your behalf. And it cost you money to support the Temple and pay for the animal sacrifices, which represented the work of the Savior to come.

All it took to worship the gods of Canaan was a little spare change and a libido. Every normal male would be tempted by beautiful priestesses trained to obey every desire of a man with relish. Every normal man would have problems at home and work, from which he would love to escape even if for just a moment. And all the while those around him were whispering about what went on inside those pagan temples, until it was whispering no longer and just plain common practice.

That's exactly what happened in Israel. Idolatry spread through God's nation like wildfire. During the time of the Judges after the death of Joshua, it slowly but steadily increased (see Judges 2:11-23; 6:28-35; 8:33-35; 10:6). With David it diminished somewhat, only to resurface with new vigor under Solomon and especially after his death.

After Solomon dies, the nation will split into a Northern Kingdom of ten tribes called “Israel,” and a Southern Kingdom of Judah and Benjamin called “Judah.” The Northern Kingdom was especially bad. King Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom, personally made two golden calves and presented them to the people saying: “Behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). Idolatry became a matter of course. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of the Northern Kingdom were infamous for worshipping Baal (see 1 Kings 16 to 22). And Ahaz and Manasseh, two kings of the Northern Kingdom, are recorded as burning their sons alive to please the Canaanite gods (2 Kings 16:2-4; 21:1-6).

Not only did Israel fall into idolatry, Ezekiel tells us she became worse than both the nations that surrounded her and the seven Canaanite nations before her. The wholehearted idolatry of Israel is vividly and graphically summarized in Ezekiel 16 and 23. Israel, the nation which was supposed to be a light to the rest of the world, became the center of the darkness.

Ezekiel 5:5-9 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again.” (NIV)

Ezekiel 16:47,48 “You (*Israel*) not only followed their (*the pagan nations*) ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.” (NIV)

2 Kings 21:1-9 “Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years... did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put my Name.’ In the two courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger. He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them.’ But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.” (NIV)

All of this was of course Satanic. Indeed, all of these so called “gods” were in fact avatars of either Satan or one of the fallen angles who followed him.

1 Corinthians 10:20 “... the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons...” (NIV)

Psalm 106:33-38 “Because they (*the Israelites*) were rebellious against His Spirit... They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and learned their practices, and served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters... the land was polluted with the blood.” (NASB)

Deuteronomy 32:16,17 “They (*Israel*) made Him (*Yahweh*) jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons...” (NASB)

Baal was without a doubt a form Satan used to present himself to the ancient peoples. According to the mythology, Baal was the greatest son of the creator god El, who overthrows his father and becomes the “lord of heaven” towards whom all worship is directed. This closely parallels the actual rebellion of Satan, where he, the most blessed and powerful creature Yahweh ever created, led a rebellion against his Creator and to this day is attempting to usurp Yahweh’s throne.

Jesus also identified Beelzebul, the “prince of demons,” as Satan. This is significant, because Beelzebul is a Hebrew play on words, where Baal Zebul, meaning “lord of the dwellings of heaven,” is corrupted to Beelzebul, which means “lord of the flies.” By identifying Beelzebul as Satan, Jesus is essentially confirming all the Baals were in truth avatars of Satan.

Matthew 12:22-28 “Then they (*a crowd of people*) brought him (*Jesus*) a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David (*a title for the Messiah*)?’ But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.’ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.’ (NIV)

All the other gods would have represented Satan in another form or one of the fallen angels who serve him. This is why these “gods” were at times able to manifest some sort of genuine power on earth. They were evil angelic beings using their power to deceive mankind and ultimately bring death and destruction to the world.

John 8:44 “... the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (NASB)

2 Corinthians 2:10,11 “... I (*Paul*) have forgiven in the sight of Christ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:4 “The god of this age (*a name for Satan*) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (NIV)

1 Peter 5:8-11 “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)
Revelation 12:9 “... Satan... deceives the whole world...” (NASB)

The power of these demons, presenting themselves as gods to be worshipped, were often sought not only through temple prostitution and human sacrifice, but also through occult practices such as divination, where “omens” or divine guidance was sought through some sort of medium or spiritist. The people also bowed down and worshiped the “starry hosts,” meaning the multitudes of stars in the heavens, which were viewed as deities who could offer guidance through astrology. Indeed, Scripture sometimes refers to angels and even Satan as “stars,” and so this worship of the starry hosts was a corruption of the true nature of angelic beings in the heavens.

Job 38:4-7 “Where were you (*Job*) when I (*God*) laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars (*most powerful angels*) sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (NIV)

Isaiah 14:12 “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star (*“Lucifer” in the Latin Vulgate translation of the Hebrew word “helel”*), son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!” (NIV)

Revelation 12:3-9 “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon (*Satan*) with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky (*a third of the angels joined Satan*) and flung them to the earth... Then war broke out in heaven. Michael (*an archangel*) and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” (NIV)

2 Kings 17:16,17 “... They (*the Israelites*) bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.” (NIV)

2 Kings 21:1-7 “Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years... He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them... he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger. He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple...” (NIV)

2 Kings 23:4,5 “The king (*Josiah*) ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places

of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem – those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts.” (NIV)

This is one of many reasons all occult practices of any kind are strictly forbidden in God’s Word. They are simply a way of inviting demonic influence into your life, which will only lead to destruction and despair.

Deuteronomy 18:9-13 “When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 4:15-19 “... watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars – all the heavenly array – do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 17:2-5 “If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God in violation of his covenant, and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky, and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.” (NIV)

Leviticus 19:31 “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them...” (NIV)

Isaiah 8:19 “When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?...” (NIV)

Galatians 5:16-25 “... walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want... The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (NIV)

Why would Satan encourage temple prostitution and human sacrifice? Because these detestable practices attack the two things that bring the most stability to mankind – *marriage* and *family*. Temple prostitution destroyed marriages, while human sacrifice destroyed families. How could anyone grow close to a spouse who takes part in orgies at the local temple? And how could children trust and obey parents who burn their siblings alive?

By destroying marriages and families so effectively, Satan broke the ties of love that naturally exist between husbands and wives, and parents and children, which allowed the Canaanites (and ultimately the Israelites) to descend headlong into the uttermost pits of depravity and cruelty. There was nothing to stabilize individuals through the bonds of marriage and family, and so unstable men and women fornicated like mindless animals, then unlike mindless animals murdered their own children. This must have been very pleasing to Satan, the most evil being to ever exist, who comes to “steal and kill and destroy.”

1 Peter 5:8 “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (NASB)

John 10:10,11 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I (*Jesus*) came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” (NASB)

John 8:44 “... the devil... was a murderer from the beginning...” (NASB)

Satan’s focus is the same today. Temple prostitution and human sacrifice have become rare, but Satan’s relentless attack on marriage and family continues. If we are to avoid the instability and destruction that come from the breakdown of these institutions, we must protect our spouses and children at all costs.

Ephesians 5:21-33 “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (NIV)

1 Peter 3:1-9 “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. To sum up, all of you

be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” (NASB)

Titus 2:1-15 “You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us... so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive... For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach...” (NIV)

Proverbs 31:10-31 “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies... She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks... When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet... She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her... Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.” (NIV)

Colossians 3:18-21 “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.” (NASB)

Deuteronomy 6:6-25 “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates... In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?’ tell him: ‘... The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.’” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 11:18-28 “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so

that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth... See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.” (NASB)

Ephesians 6:1-4 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ which is the first commandment with a promise – ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (NIV)

1 Timothy 5:8 “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (NIV)

Joshua 24:15 “... choose for yourselves today whom you will serve... but as for me (*Joshua*) and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (NASB)

Nehemiah 4:14 “... Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” (NIV)

Although there were brief periods of repentance and hope, ultimately Israel’s surrender to idolatry was wholesale and unconditional. Their daughters became temple prostitutes, and so did their sons. The land became filled with Asherah poles and pagan temples where every sexual vice was practiced. Even the Temple itself was filled with Canaanite idols. And children throughout the land screamed in the flames as their murderous parents placed them in the arms of Baal and Molek.

Leviticus 19:29 “Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.” (NIV)

1 Kings 11:1-33 “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. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.... So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates... Then he said to Jeroboam... I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes... I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did.’” (NIV)

1 Kings 14:15-24 “And the LORD will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they aroused the LORD’s anger by making Asherah poles... Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.” (NIV)

1 Kings 15:11-13 “Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made. He even deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah...” (NIV)

Hosea 4:12-14 “My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner’s rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes – a people without understanding will come to ruin!” (NIV)

Jeremiah 19:4,5 “... they (*the Israelites*) have forsaken me (*Yahweh*) and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal – something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.” (NIV)

2 Kings 23:4-14 “The king (*Josiah*) ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem – those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes that were in the temple of the LORD, the quarters where women did weaving for Asherah... He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek.... He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the LORD. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption – the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god

of the people of Ammon. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles...” (NIV)

And that’s why God commanded His people to kill every man, woman, and child in the seven nations of Canaan – to prevent all this from happening. Yet in defiance of Yahweh’s command the Israelites spared a remnant of the Canaanites in every tribal land, and as a result subsequent generations for the next 700 years suffered from the scourge that could have been wiped out had God’s original Word been obeyed.

Israel’s total surrender to idolatry eventually led to the Northern Kingdom’s destruction by 722 B.C., and the Southern Kingdom’s destruction by 586 B.C. Her people were deported and scattered. The Temple built by Solomon was plundered and left in ruins. God’s gift of a holy nation failed not because God failed, but because the people failed to obey Him.

2 Kings 17:7-17 “All this *(the destruction of the Northern Kingdom)* took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns. They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that aroused the LORD’s anger. They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, ‘You shall not do this.’ The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets... But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, ‘Do not do as they do.’ They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.” (NIV)

This is why Solomon’s betrayal of Yahweh and defection to the gods of Canaan is such an indescribable tragedy. He was the one who could have led Israel into the most productive and meaningful period in her history, serving Yahweh as a “kingdom of priests and holy nation.” Instead, he ushered them into a downward spiral as a kingdom of idolaters and unholy nation.

Like all of us, Solomon and the Israelites have free will. They are free to choose to follow Yahweh or the gods of the pagans. But the consequences of these decisions are up to God. Let’s see what the consequences of idolatry were for king and nation.

The consequences for Solomon and Israel – three adversaries and a divided kingdom.

The consequences of Solomon’s actions are devastating.

1 Kings 11:9-13 “The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD’s command. So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.’ ” (NIV)

Yahweh has “appeared” to Solomon twice – once before beginning work on the Temple (1 Kings 3:5), and once after completion of the Temple and palace (1 Kings 9:2). This means He physically manifested Himself (as a pre-incarnate Jesus) to personally deliver a message of either great blessing or cursing, all depending on the choices Solomon would freely make.

The purpose of these extraordinary visits to Solomon was to make all of this perfectly clear and impossible to misunderstand, because the stakes were exceedingly high – for Solomon personally, the nation of Israel, and indeed the entire world. If Solomon got this right, tremendous blessings would flow to all. Yahweh would bless Solomon, in turn Solomon would be a blessing to Israel, and Israel would be a blessing to the rest of the world. But if Solomon got this wrong, the reverse would come to pass. Yahweh would withdraw His favor from Solomon, Solomon would lead Israel astray, and eventually, instead of being blessed by Israel, the other nations of the world would come and destroy Israel.

The divine visits didn’t work. God incarnate appeared before Solomon, and Solomon rejected everything He said in preference to the sexual favors of 1000 pagan women. And so Yahweh informs Solomon in this passage He will tear the nation in two and leave Solomon with only two tribes, not out of pity for Solomon, but because of the promise He made to David.

This is Yahweh’s discipline to both Solomon and the nation. Solomon the wise, builder of the Temple of God on earth, more blessed than any king before or after him, will be remembered with infamy as the one whose sin tore the nation he was supposed to serve literally in two. And this nation would afterwards have to limp along in two divided kingdoms, vulnerable to attacks from every direction, and often at war with one another, until they are destroyed by two incredibly barbaric nations to the north – Assyria and Babylon.

This division of the nation, into a Northern Kingdom of ten tribes called “Israel” and a Southern Kingdom of Judah and Benjamin called “Judah,” would happen after Solomon’s death. This again was not to spare Solomon from the indignity. It was to show respect for David.

But in the meantime, while Solomon was still alive, things immediately begin to unravel, as God allows the rise of three adversaries – one out of Egypt, one out of Syria, and one from Solomon’s most honored officials.

1 Kings 11:14-22 “Then the LORD raised up against Solomon an adversary, Hadad the Edomite, from the royal line of Edom. Earlier when David was fighting with Edom,

Joab the commander of the army, who had gone up to bury the dead, had struck down all the men in Edom. Joab and all the Israelites stayed there for six months, until they had destroyed all the men in Edom. But Hadad, still only a boy, fled to Egypt with some Edomite officials who had served his father. They set out from Midian and went to Paran. Then taking people from Paran with them, they went to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave Hadad a house and land and provided him with food. Pharaoh was so pleased with Hadad that he gave him a sister of his own wife, Queen Tahpenes, in marriage. The sister of Tahpenes bore him a son named Genubath, whom Tahpenes brought up in the royal palace. There Genubath lived with Pharaoh's own children. While he was in Egypt, Hadad heard that David rested with his ancestors and that Joab the commander of the army was also dead. Then Hadad said to Pharaoh, 'Let me go, that I may return to my own country.' 'What have you lacked here that you want to go back to your own country?' Pharaoh asked. 'Nothing,' Hadad replied, 'but do let me go!' " (NIV)

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's older twin (Genesis 25:30; 36:1), who lived in the south, below the Dead Sea and east of the Negev. Paran is in this same area, and Midian is just east of the Gulf of Aqaba. The decimation of the Edomites by David's army is recounted in 1 Chronicles 18:12,13.

It's notable Hadad fled to Egypt and was received so warmly by Pharaoh. He marries Pharaoh's sister-in-law, and their son was treated as a prince of Egypt. There are echoes here of the Moses story, except when Hadad wants to take his people and go back to the Promised Land, Pharaoh quickly acquiesces, after the mildest of protestations.

We also see here the total failure of Solomon's political alliance with Egypt through his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon thought this would protect him from the Egyptians, but the first adversary Yahweh raises up against him arises out of Egypt. Pharaoh could have stopped Hadad if he wanted to, but he didn't. He sent the guy married to his sister-in-law back to Israel to contend for power with his son-in-law.

This is a brutal betrayal of Solomon and humiliating defeat of his foreign policy, which was based upon a complete lack of faith in Yahweh. The implications were clear for all to see – Pharaoh neither respected nor feared Solomon. If a political rival wanted to advance from Egypt, it was fine with Pharaoh, and there was nothing Solomon could do about it.

So Egypt was no longer a friend, which placed an enemy to Israel's west. With Hadad back in Edom, that put an enemy to Israel's south. Next, Yahweh raised up an enemy in Damascus to Israel's north.

1 Kings 11:23-25 “And God raised up against Solomon another adversary, Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled from his master, Hadadezer king of Zobah. When David destroyed Zobah's army (see 1 Chronicles 18:3-8), Rezon gathered a band of men around him and became their leader; they went to Damascus, where they settled and took control. Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad. So Rezon ruled in Aram and was hostile toward Israel.” (NIV)

It's interesting to note, both Hadad and Rezon rose out of the ashes of devastating military defeats of their people, brought about by the victories of the armies of David. It's as if Yahweh is undoing all the things David did to secure Solomon's reign. What could be next?

1 Kings 11:26-40 “Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon’s officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah. Here is the account of how he rebelled against the king: Solomon had built the terraces and had filled in the gap in the wall of the city of David his father. Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the tribes of Joseph. About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did. But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon’s hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees. I will take the kingdom from his son’s hands and give you ten tribes. I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever.” ’ Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon’s death.” (NIV)

There are several fascinating things in this passage. Jeroboam was an Ephraimite, one of the two half-tribes originating from Joseph. He was an able young man who distinguished himself in the renovation of Jerusalem. Solomon essentially gave him authority over all the “tribes of Joseph,” meaning Ephraim and Manasseh. These two tribes were numerous and occupied wide, strategically located tribal lands on both sides of the Jordan river. The Ephraimites also generally considered themselves superior and entitled. See Judges 8:1-3; 12:1-6.

Solomon had exalted Jeroboam to a position of great influence. Then the prophet Ahijah comes along with quite an encouraging message for Solomon’s golden boy. Ahijah explains all that is going to happen, with an easily understood object lesson involving his wardrobe, then conveys an extraordinary offer. If Jeroboam will rule his ten tribes honorably, Yahweh will essentially give him the same deal He offered Solomon – an enduring dynasty to run parallel with David’s.

Jeroboam must have been thrilled, until Solomon tried to kill him. So he flees the country. Where does he go, confident he will be safe from Solomon? Egypt, of course!

This is another slap in the face to Solomon. As proven by Hadad, the safest place for anyone opposed to Solomon is at the side of his father-in-law, the Egyptian Pharaoh. Solomon tried to appease with political maneuvers he thought clever, when in truth all it conveyed was weakness and faithlessness. Solomon could have stood courageously against Pharaoh with faith in Yahweh, but his compromise only created a safe haven for his enemies.

Isaiah 30:1-5 “ ‘Woe to the obstinate children,’ declares the LORD, ‘to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh’s protection, to Egypt’s shade for refuge. But Pharaoh’s protection will be to your shame, Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace. Though they have officials in Zoan (*likely Tanis, an important city on the Nile delta*) and their envoys have arrived in Hanes (*another important city, possibly further south*), everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.’ ” (NIV)

Solomon’s attempt to murder Yahweh’s chosen leader of the Northern Kingdom demonstrates Solomon is now in total opposition to the God of Israel. Not only is he worshipping multiple pagan gods with his harem, he is now actively and treacherously trying to thwart Yahweh’s plan. There is no contrition. No remorse. No asking for forgiveness or tearing down the pagan temples being constructed all over Israel. Just a murderous hunt for anyone Yahweh might want to use to carry out His will.

As the end of Solomon’s life and reign draw near, how is the king of Israel feeling about now?

CHAPTER 7 – INEVITABLE MISERY AND DESPAIR.

FEAR AND HATRED.

The terminus of the arc.

Solomon began his life with such promise. His childhood was difficult, as the product of an infamous union surrounded by incredible family disfunction. But he was able to rise above it all, and when presented with both extraordinary opportunity and responsibility, he accepted the challenge, acted with humility and devotion (for the most part), and asked for wisdom, the treasure he needed to fulfill Yahweh's plan for his life.

God grants his prayer and blesses him beyond description. Solomon builds the Temple, then leads from his palace, sharing the wisdom God gave him with the world.

The nation is at peace. Prosperity explodes. Solomon's fame spreads and is finally tested by a worthy examiner, the wise and powerful Queen of Sheba, who is left breathless in her realization the God of Israel has finally brought to earth a righteous and just nation ruled by a divinely inspired leader.

This is the zenith of the arc of Solomon's life, the highpoint where everything is as it should be – except for certain compromises made along the way. A political marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh. A growing harem of Canaanite women. Forced labor. Horses and chariots from Egypt, collected in vast numbers and sold like the wears of an arms merchant. And in all this, not a single Jewish wife to bear a son to be the next king of Israel.

Each of these compromises are devastating in their own way, but the harem of Canaanite women becomes the critical fault that causes the spiritual direction of Solomon's life to invert, from ascending to descending. A point is reached where Solomon simply cannot continue to serve Yahweh while also indulging in 1000 pagan women. The two forces are diametrically opposed. One must defeat the other in the heart of Solomon.

Tragically, 1000 pagan women cram into the driver's seat of Solomon's life, and it's all downhill from there. The exalted trajectory created by devotion to Yahweh comes to a screeching halt. The wheel is violently turned, and course tragically reversed. The God of the universe who appeared to Solomon twice fades in the distance, as Solomon plummets towards the depths of depravity, enveloped in the flesh of 1000 pagan women.

Speeding towards the end of his life, the weight of Solomon's sin increases the velocity of his descent. He indulges his sexual addiction with so many women it must have been impossible to even remember their names.

But he knows the names of their perverted, vicious gods, and he uses all his talents and resources to be sure there are plenty of places to prostrate before them throughout the land entrusted to him by Yahweh. And just so everyone is clear on what Solomon is now all about as the end of his reign draws near, Solomon builds temples for Chemosh and Molek within site of the Temple of Yahweh, and bows down to gods who delight in peddling the flesh of adults and burning the flesh of children.

When Solomon discovers the devastating consequences of these disgusting, indefensible decisions, there is no remorse. He devotes the remainder of his energy to trying to murder the man chosen to lead the Northern Kingdom and thereby thwart the plan of the God of all creation.

Solomon's life can only end with a sickening thump as he accelerates along the downward side of his life's tragic arc. As the terminus speeds towards him, what is going on in Solomon's heart that allows a man of such promise to fall so far and stoop so low? As we witness his destruction, we are left bewildered with the worthy question: How could this have happened?

The mysteries of the human heart.

The innerworkings of the human heart are mysterious and complex. We don't always understand why we do what we do. And sometimes we make terrible decisions, knowing full well what we are doing is wrong.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (NIV)

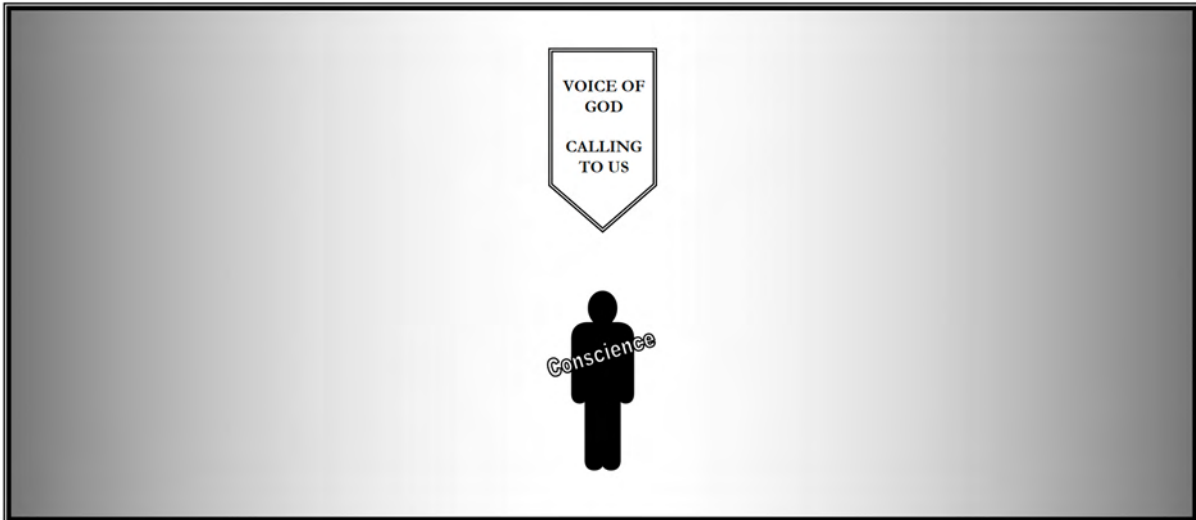
Romans 7:15-25 "I (Paul, one of the greatest men to ever live) do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!..." (NIV)

That being said, there are many principles in God's Word to help us understand, at least in broad strokes, what our basic motivations are, how they affect our thoughts, words, and deeds, and whether we will come to know happiness and fulfillment in this life, or unhappiness and discontent.

This is the subject of the book *Knowing Joy and Peace in a Fallen World*, available as a free download at JoyAndPeace.net. For a more in depth look at these themes, please consider reading this book. For our purposes, let's look at the core ideas, then apply them to Solomon.

We will include a diagram of these principles as a way to help us pull all these concepts together. This is certainly not an attempt to capture all the complexities of the human experience in a little diagram. That's impossible. It's simply a visual tool meant to provide a broad perspective on the major influences that lead to Joy and Peace, or misery and despair.

One universal experience: Every conscience encounters the voice of God (where it all starts).



Every Conscience Encounters God's Voice
The one universal experience
Where life truly begins

Within every person, there is a place we can think of as our “conscience.” It’s a place within our soul where God deposits the foundational truths of life. No lie can be entertained there, and as a result, when we violate these truths our conscience “hurts,” and when we accept these truths our conscience is “soothed.”

Proverbs 20:27 “The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being.” (NIV)

Romans 2:14,15 “... when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law... They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 4:2 “... we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.” (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:18,19 “... fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck...” (NIV)

Psalms 36:1 “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart...” (NASB)

1 Timothy 4:1,2 “... in later times some will abandon the faith... Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” (NIV)

2 Samuel 24:10 “David was conscience-stricken after he had... sinned greatly...” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22 “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience...” (NIV)

Acts 24:16 “So I (*Paul*) strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:12 “Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity.” (NIV)

Every human life is different in so many ways, but there is one universal experience we all share: The voice of God calls to our conscience, letting us know that He exists and He cares.

Psalm 97:6 “The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory.” (NASB)

Romans 1:18-23 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man...” (NASB)

Acts 17:26-28 “and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth... that they would seek God... and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist...” (NASB)

Psalm 19:1-6 “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun... and there is nothing hidden from its heat.” (NASB)

Revelation 3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (NASB)

John 10:2-28 “My (*Jesus*)’ sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (NIV)

Job 37:5 “God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways...” (NIV)

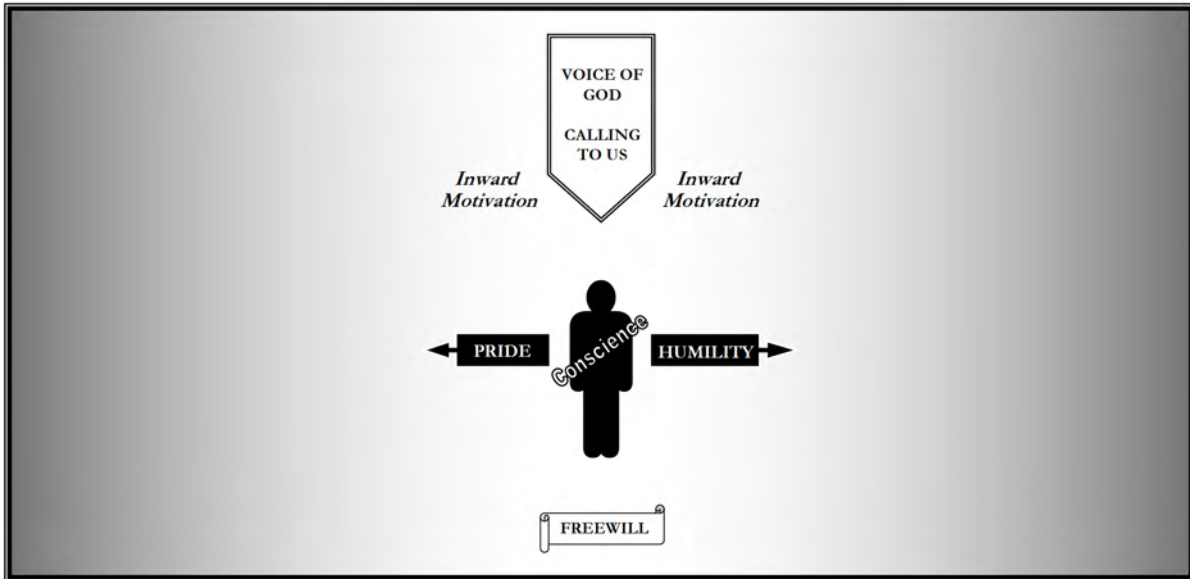
This voice is not necessarily heard, but rather felt within our conscience. Every human being, no matter the time or place of birth, at some point encounters the voice of God calling out to us that He is, He loves us, and He will provide if we will let Him. This is where life truly begins.

Note: These are far reaching themes that beg many questions. For example, what about children that die young, or men and women with mental health issues. These worthy questions are unfortunately beyond the scope of this brief overview, which will only touch on the core ideas. For more on this, and all that follows in this section, please refer to “Knowing Joy and Peace In A Fallen World,” which expands on all of these ideas.

The purpose of the gift of conscience is to ensure God is fair with us. God holds us eternally responsible for the decisions we make, and He can justly do that because we each possess within us a conscience guarding foundational truths upon which every decision is made. Everything we think, say, and do is thought, said, and done in light of the unequivocal knowledge that there is a holy God in heaven who loves us, who cares, who knows, and who will provide if we will only let Him.

This is the voice of God that calls out to us and is clearly heard in the conscience of every man and woman on the planet. It is from this one universal experience every life's journey originates. And as we set forth on our journey, we discover there are only two paths to choose between.

Two inward motivations: Humility or Pride (our internal response).



Pride	Humility
The two internal responses to God's voice	
The inward motivations that influence each of our choices	

Scripture describes our inward motivations in two broad categories: Humility and Pride.

James 4:6 “... GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” (NASB)

As the voice of God calls to us, we respond to the knowledge of His existence and love with one of these two inward motivations. We either embrace the voice motivated by a humble desire to know and serve our Creator, or we reject the voice motivated by a prideful desire to submit to no one, not even the One who gave us life.

Hebrews 4:7 “... just as has been said before, ‘TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.’ ” (NASB)

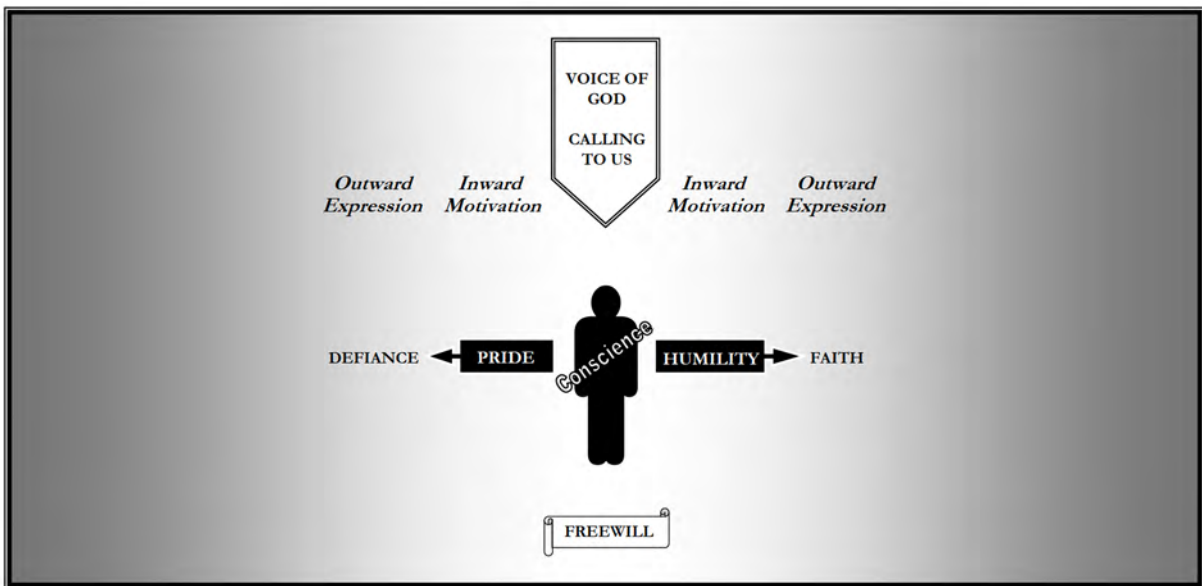
Proverbs 21:2-24 “Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts... Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, is sin... ‘Proud,’ ‘Haughty,’ ‘Scoffer,’ are his names, who acts with insolent pride.” (NASB)

Proverbs 16:18-20 “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.” (NASB)

Micah 6:8 “... what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (NIV)

As we discover the one truth universal to all mankind (that a holy God loves us), we must choose whether to return His embrace or squirm from His grasp. The inward motivation for this choice will be one of two things – humility or pride. We will either humble ourselves before our Creator and choose to walk with Him, or in our pride turn aside to a path of our own choosing. This is the internal response of our free will to the universal experience of encountering the voice of God.

Two outward expressions: Faith or Defiance (our external response).



Defiance	Faith
The two external responses to God's voice	
The outward expressions of our choices	
<i>Trusting in ourselves & defying God</i>	<i>Trusting in God & defying the world</i>
<i>Rebelling against God's will</i>	<i>Submitting to God's will</i>
<i>Seeking to be the highest authority</i>	<i>Seeking to follow the highest authority</i>

If humility and pride are the *inward motivations* for our choices once we encounter the voice of God, then faith and defiance are the *outward expressions* of these choices. We feel the voice of God calling to us that He is and He cares, and either humility or pride inwardly motivates choices that are outwardly expressed in lives characterized by either *faith in* or *defiance of* God's grace. Faith or defiance becomes our external response to the universal experience of encountering the voice of God.

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (NIV)

1 Chronicles 28:9 "... the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever." (NIV)

Through faith we express trust in God and reject the things of the fallen world. We humbly chose to submit to God's will, and seek to follow Him as the highest authority in our lives.

Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (NIV)

Psalm 73:24-26 "With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (NASB)

Titus 2:11-14 "For the grace of God... teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (NIV)

Through defiance we express trust in ourselves and rejection of God. We pridefully rebel against His will, and chose to be the highest authority in our lives.

Isaiah 3:8,9 "... their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence... they parade their sin like Sodom... Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves." (NIV)

Romans 2:8 "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:18,19 "... fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." (NASB)

Defiance is in a sense the opposite of faith. Faith is submitting to the will of God, because we trust Him more than ourselves. Defiance is rebellion against the will of God, not because we don't trust Him (our conscience recognizes He is trustworthy), but because we want to *be* Him. We want to be the highest authority in our lives, so we adamantly refuse to submit to any authority higher than ourselves, even our own Creator who formed the universe and everything in it.

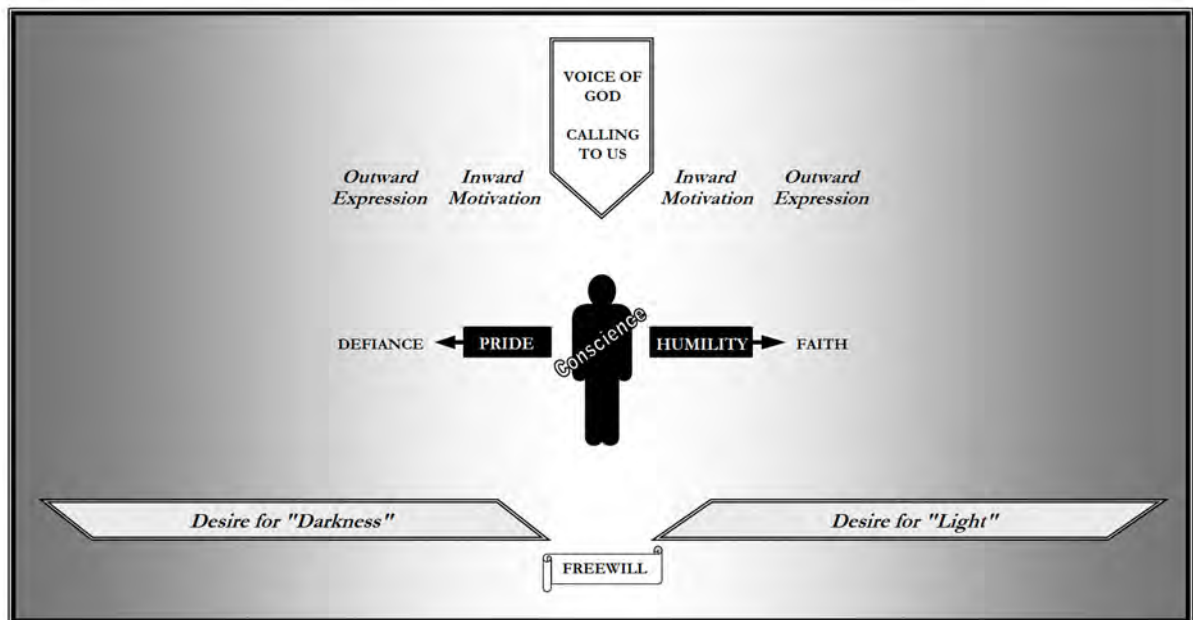
Job 22:21 "Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you." (NIV)

Romans 8:7-9 "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit..." (NIV)

Job 24:13-25 "There are those who rebel against the light, who do not know its ways or stay in its paths. When daylight is gone, the murderer rises up, kills the poor and needy, and in the night steals forth like a thief. The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed. In the dark, thieves break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light. For all of them, midnight is their morning; they make friends with the terrors of

darkness. Yet they are foam on the surface of the water... As heat and drought snatch away the melted snow, so the grave snatches away those who have sinned. The womb forgets them, the worm feasts on them; the wicked are no longer remembered but are broken like a tree. They prey on the barren and childless woman, and to the widow they show no kindness. But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like heads of grain. If this is not so, who can prove me false and reduce my words to nothing?" (NIV)

Two heart's desires: Light or Darkness (the underlying current).



Darkness	Light
The two desires of the heart...	
... that become the underlying current drawing us towards either God or the world	
<i>Represents the things of the world</i>	<i>Represents the things of God</i>
<i>We are born into & called from</i>	<i>We are created for & called to</i>
<i>Helps us (attempt to) hide from God</i>	<i>Helps us find God</i>
<i>Ultimately, we are devoured by it</i>	<i>Ultimately, we become it</i>
<i>One or the other becomes our treasure, and presents the clearest reflection of who we truly are</i>	

Why do we obey God? Why do we rebel against Him? Why do we sometimes accept God's grace with tremendous gratitude, and other times reject this same grace and choose instead to live in defiance of Him, relying as a (cheap) substitute on our own wisdom and power to forge a path through the evil that darkens a fallen world?

The answer has to do with the desires of our hearts. The Bible uses the image of the “heart” to describe the truest reflection of who we are as men and women blessed with the freedom to choose between good and evil. It’s our moral center, the residing place of our free will, and from it flows everything we think, say, and do.

1 Peter 3:4 “... the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit... is precious in the sight of God.” (NASB)

1 Samuel 16:7 “... for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (NASB)

Matthew 15:10-19 “Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them... Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person...’ ” (NIV)

The multitude of choices flowing from our hearts over the course of our lives is ultimately determined by one overriding decision we make that controls our very destiny. It is perhaps the most foundational choice of all, upon which every other decision we make is based, the choice of: What shall we desire? In other words: What is it we will place value upon as we travel through the journey of life? What will we choose to treasure?

Proverbs 11:6 “... the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires.” (NIV)

Matthew 12:34,35 “... For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.” (NASB)

Luke 12:34 “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (NASB)

We have only two alternatives – “light” or “darkness.” God’s Word makes it very easy for us, and uses metaphors of the most elemental nature to distinguish between the two divergent paths from which we may choose. They are easy to understand and mutually exclusive. Where one exists, the other cannot be. They are the only two treasures upon which we may set our heart’s desire.

Light represents the things of God. It’s what we are created for and even called to be. It helps us find God, and if we choose to follow Him, we become vessels of His light in a fallen world.

1 John 1:5 “... God is light...” (NIV)

1 Timothy 6:13-16 “... God... alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.” (NASB)

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (NIV)

John 12:46 “I (*Jesus*) have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” (NIV)

Matthew 6:19-24 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (NASB)

Philippians 2:14-16 “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:6-10 “For God... has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves... that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (NASB)

Isaiah 42:5,6 “This is what God the LORD says – the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you... a light...’ ” (NIV)

Darkness represents the things of the world. We are born into it, and called from it. We use darkness as a means to attempt to hide from God, and if we do not repent, ultimately we are devoured by it.

Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but... against the world forces of this darkness...” (NASB)

Micah 7:7,8 “But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me.” (NASB)

John 3:17-21 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him... This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (NASB)

Isaiah 29:15 “Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, ‘Who sees us? Who will know?’ ” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 4:5 “... the Lord... will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” (NASB)

In a very real sense, a battle rages within us between light and darkness. Both wish to be the substance that surrounds and influences our every decision, and the treasure upon which we set our heart’s desire. Which treasure we seek impacts at the most foundational level the journey we eventually experience. If we delight in the light of the living God, then God can grant the inmost longings of our heart’s desire. If we delight in the darkness of the fallen world, then God allows us to walk down our own ruinous path to its bitter end.

James 4:1 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (NIV)

Psalm 37:4 “Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.” (NASB)

Isaiah 50:10,11 “... Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.” (NIV)

What we desire is our most foundational choice, which then manifests itself in our motivations (humility or pride), and everything that springs from our motivations (faith or defiance, and as we shall see, hope or fear, and love or hate). It is the undercurrent that draws everything we think, say, and do towards either God or the temporary distractions of the world.

These desires present the truest reflection of our free will, painting an unflinching portrait of the man or woman we actually are. *If you don’t understand yourself and wish to discover why you do what you do, ask: What are truly the desires of my heart?* When you truthfully answer this simple question, you will be able to see yourself in an unclouded mirror and better understand the choices you make. And if you don’t like what you discover, the solution is equally simple: Turn from the darkness and set your heart’s desire upon the light. This will set into motion a chain of events whereby God’s Spirit and God’s Word can transform you into the man or woman you desire to be.

Proverbs 27:19 “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.” (NASB)

Colossians 3:1,2 “... set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God... not on earthly things.” (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:22 “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (NIV)

Acts 26:18 “... turn... from darkness to light, and... receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (*Jesus*).” (NIV)

Romans 7:15 to 8:38 “I (*Paul*) do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!... because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death... Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ... what, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

Ephesians 5:8-16 “... you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible... Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil...” (NIV)

Romans 13:12-14 “... let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (NIV)

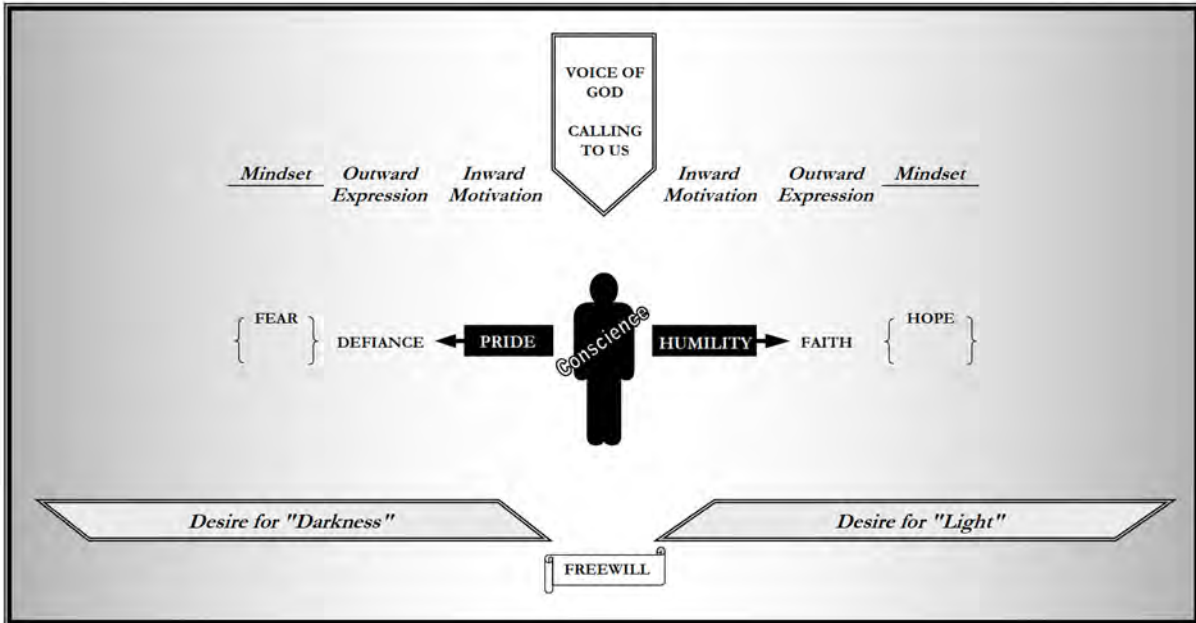
So far we have discovered that everyone’s conscience experiences the voice of God calling out that God is and God cares. We choose to set our heart’s desire upon either the light of God or the darkness of the world, and this most foundational of all choices becomes the undercurrent that draws us towards our life’s end – the fulfillment of God’s purpose or the abandonment of it.

If we desire the light, then the choices flowing with this desire will be inwardly motivated by humility and outwardly expressed through lives characterized by faith. If we desire the darkness, then the choices flowing with this desire will be inwardly motivated by pride and outwardly expressed through lives characterized by defiance.

How do lives characterized by faith or defiance affect us? What can we expect if we desire the light and humbly choose to have faith in God? What can we expect if we desire the darkness and pridefully choose to defy God?

These fundamental decisions shape and mold our every thought, word, and deed. They create the environment within which our minds rest (or crumble), and the footing upon which our actions are grounded (or destabilized). We’ll look first at how faith or defiance affect our thoughts, and then at how they affect our words and deeds.

Two mindsets: Hope or Fear (the effect on our thoughts).



Fear	Hope
The effect of Defiance or Faith upon our minds	
The "mindsets" that determine how we interpret and respond to the challenges of life	
<i>Hearts & minds in discord</i>	<i>Hearts & minds in harmony</i>
<i>Unhealthy & Debilitating</i>	<i>Healthy & Empowering</i>
<i>Plagues with Insecurity & Cowardice</i>	<i>Imparts Confidence & Courage</i>
<i>Curse of a guilty conscience</i>	<i>Gift of a clean conscience</i>
<i>Causes us to freeze up and/or lash out</i>	<i>Provides complete assurance - not wishful thinking</i>
<i>Known in both prosperity & adversity</i>	<i>Known in both prosperity & adversity</i>
<i>Only antidote is: Faith</i>	<i>Something the world cannot provide</i>

When we desire the light and choose to place our trust in God, this act of faith in our hearts fills our minds with hope. This is not hope in the worldly sense, which is essentially wishful thinking. It's hope in the spiritual sense, which means a powerful confidence in God that inspires courage towards our circumstances.

Psalm 25:1-3 “In you, LORD my God, I put my trust... No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame...” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

Psalm 71:1-14 “In you, LORD, I have taken refuge... my rock... to which I can always go... you are... my fortress... you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth... as for me, I will always have hope...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 3:12 “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.” (NIV)

Isaiah 40:31 “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (NIV)

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope...” (NASB)

Hope is healthy and empowering, because there is a harmony between the truth in our conscience and the choices we make. We know God is. We know God cares. We choose to trust Him. And faith beats in our hearts in rhythm with the hope filling our minds. Hope becomes the gift of a clean conscious acting in faith.

Psalms 62:1-5 “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken... Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22-36 “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful... Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (NIV)

Psalms 42:1-6 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God... Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” (NIV)

Psalms 33:1-22 “Sing joyfully to the LORD... For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does... the eyes of the LORD are on... those whose hope is in his unfailing love... We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (NIV)

Romans 5:1,2 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (NASB)

An amazing thing about hope is: It exists both in good times and bad. Even in times of adversity we trust that God is “working all things together for good,” and experience the blessing of hope. This is something the world simply cannot provide.

Romans 8:28 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (NASB)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope...” (NIV)

When we desire the darkness and choose to place our trust in ourselves, this act of defiance fills our minds with fear. This is unhealthy and debilitating, because there is now disharmony between

the truth in our conscience and the choices we make. Defiant hearts acting in opposition to foundational truths can produce only fear, which will manifest itself in insecurity and cowardice, freezing up like a soldier afraid to fight, or lashing out like a soldier committing atrocities upon the innocent. Fear is the curse of a guilty conscience acting in defiance.

Psalm 14:4 “Will evildoers never learn... There they are, overwhelmed with dread...” (NIV)

Job 8:13,14 “... the hope of the godless will perish, whose confidence is fragile, and whose trust a spider’s web.” (NASB)

Deuteronomy 28:62-67 “... because you did not obey the LORD your God... the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’ – because of the terror that will fill your hearts...” (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 4:13 “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to... grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” (NIV)

Job 15:20-26 “... the wicked man suffers torment... Distress and anguish fill him with terror; troubles overwhelm him... because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty, defiantly charging against him...” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:26-31 “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment... For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (NIV)

Genesis 3:9,10 “But the LORD God called to the man (*Adam*), ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I... was afraid... so I hid.’” (NIV)

1 Samuel 15:24 “Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them.’” (NIV)

Mark 8:36 “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (NASB)

Like hope, fear also exists in both good times and bad. No matter how much worldly blessing a person might have, he or she still lives in a state of fear. All distractions are at best temporary. The only antidote is repenting from our defiance and choosing faith instead.

Psalm 56:3,4 “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid...” (NIV)

Isaiah 57:20,21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” (NIV)

Ezekiel 12:19 “... They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair... because of the violence of all who live there.” (NIV)

Romans 2:9-11 “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil... but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good... For there is no partiality with God.” (NASB)

Matthew 8:26 “... You of little faith, why are you so afraid?...” (NIV)

Job 11:13-18 “... if you devote your heart to him (*God*)... if you put away the sin that is in your hand... then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear... You will be secure, because there is hope...” (NIV)

Psalm 46:1-3 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.” (NASB)

Isaiah 41:10-14 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand... For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid...” (NIV)

Joshua 1:9 “... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (NIV)

Isaiah 35:3,4 “Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God... will come to save you.’” (NIV)

Isaiah 43:1-5 “But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you... he who formed you... ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you... Do not be afraid, for I am with you...’” (NIV)

Isaiah 12:2 “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD... is my strength and my song...” (NIV)

Hope and fear become the two mindsets that determine how we interpret the changing circumstances of life. We either meet them with the hope that comes from faith, or the fear that comes from defiance.

Lamentations 3:21-25 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.” (NASB)

Hebrews 6:19 “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure...” (NIV)

Psalm 112:4-8 “Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous... Surely the righteous will never be shaken... They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear...” (NIV)

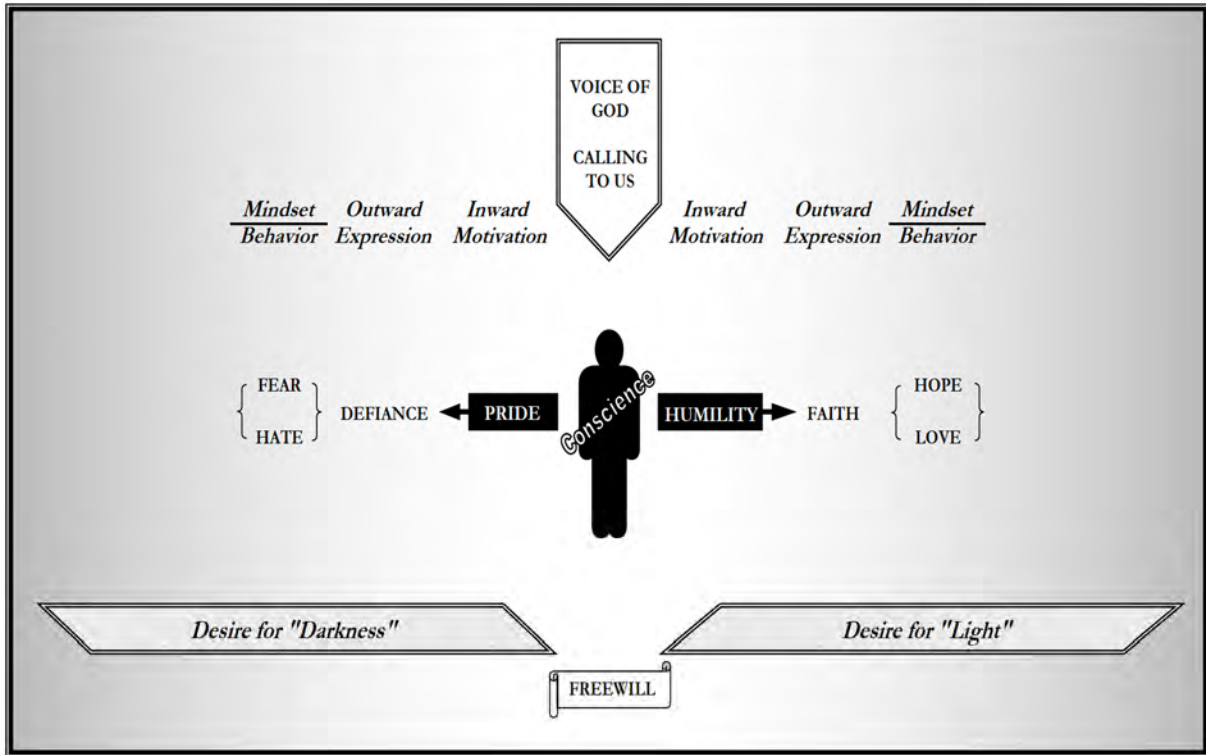
Jeremiah 29:11 “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (NIV)

Romans 15:4 “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (NASB)

Ephesians 1:18,19 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe...” (NASB)

We’ve seen the effect of faith and defiance on our thoughts. Our minds are lifted up by hope or dragged down by fear. How do these things in turn affect our behavior?

Two behaviors: Love or Hate (the effect on our words and deeds).



Hate	Love
The effect of Defiance or Faith upon our behavior	
<i>Born from defiant hearts and fearful minds</i>	<i>Born from faithful hearts and hopeful minds</i>
<i>Directed towards both God & others</i>	<i>Directed towards both God & others</i>
<i>Leaves us isolated & unfulfilled</i>	<i>Builds lasting, fulfilling relationships</i>

Faith-filled hearts create hope-filled minds, and when the heart and mind are filled with faith and hope, what spills over into our behavior is: Love. This is a Christ-like love with two complementary but very different expressions – love for God and love for our fellow mankind. Faith bathes the mind in God’s light, and the result is a mental state of hope. A mind set on hope instructs the body to speak words and carry out deeds modeled after the love of Jesus.

Colossians 1:3-5 “We give thanks to God... for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have... because of the hope... which you previously heard in the word of truth...” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:1-16 “... we do not lose heart. Rather... by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God... For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from

us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body... Therefore we do not lose heart..." (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:5 "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (NASB)

We are to love God in the sense we trust Him, because He is worthy of our trust. In both good times and bad, we trust God will be faithful to His promises, and this helps us overcome the various problems we encounter with our changing circumstances.

Matthew 22:35-39 "One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.'" (NIV)

Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (NIV)

Psalm 37:3-40 "Trust in the LORD and do good... Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light... Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him... the humble will... delight themselves in abundant prosperity... the LORD sustains the righteous. The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever... Wait for the LORD and keep His way, and He will exalt you... the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him." (NASB)

In contrast to this type of trusting love for God, we are called to love our fellow mankind even if they are distrustful, in the sense we are merciful and forgiving. We treat others with a Christ-like love whether they deserve it or not, and this helps us overcome the various problems we encounter in our relationships.

Matthew 22:35-40 "One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" (NIV)

Romans 12:10-21 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor... rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep... Never pay back evil for evil to anyone... If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord. 'BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (NASB)

Colossians 3:12-15 “... put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...” (NASB)

Our love for God motivates our love for others. Our love for others demonstrates our love for God. One cannot exist without the other. They are two sides of the same coin, the coin of the love of Jesus.

1 John 4:11-21 “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” (NIV)

To love as Jesus did is a high calling, and on our own strength it is impossible. But when we humbly allow God’s Word and Spirit to light and guide our way, our hearts become full of faith and our minds become full of hope, and from this foundation of faith and hope the love of Jesus quite naturally springs. A faithful heart and hopeful mind empowered by God’s Word and Spirit can bear no other fruit.

2 Peter 1:2-10 “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him... For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins... as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;” (NASB)

Romans 8:6-37 “... the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace... And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who live God, to those who are called according to His purpose... in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” (NASB)

Love for God and others can be expressed in many forms. The “Fruit of the Spirit,” described in Galatians 5 summarizes well the words and deeds of a man or woman who by God’s Spirit emulates the love of Jesus – patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What better portrait do we have of the love that grows from a heart full of faith and a mind full of hope?

Galatians 5:19-22 “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like... But the

fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (NIV)

What grows from a heart full of defiance and a mind full of fear? It can only be the opposite of love: Hate. We feel the voice of God calling to us, and we see His light in the distance. But instead of running to it, we choose to retreat deeper into the darkness, because therein lie the things we desire. In our pride, we harden our hearts with defiance of the living God, and as a result, fear begins to seep into our minds like water through a leaky hull. And as our ships ride progressively lower in the water, our fearful minds become increasingly insecure about ourselves and cowardly in considering the alternatives presented by our circumstances. The end results are words and deeds full of hate.

John 3:19,20 “... Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.” (NIV)

Matthew 24:10 “... many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,” (NIV)

Proverbs 18:3 “When wickedness comes, so does contempt...” (NIV)

The love that comes from pursuing God’s light can be expressed towards both God and our fellow mankind. In the same way, the hate that comes from descending into the world’s darkness can be expressed towards both God and our fellow mankind, with hate for God motivating hate for others, and hate for others demonstrating hate for God. They become the heads and tails of hate, the currency of darkness.

1 John 2:6-11 “Whoever claims to live in him (*God*) must live as Jesus did... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” (NIV)

We hate God in the sense we reject Him in favor of the things of the world. This rejection does not necessarily begin with an ill will towards God. We’ve got nothing against Him. We’re just much more interested in the loot to be had in a fallen world. This is where our journey begins, with a cozy relationship with the ways of the world and a comfortable distance from God.

James 4:4 “... don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?...” (NIV)

As we sail out into the darkness seeking plunder, the temporary distractions of the world become our gods and masters, and we worship faithfully at their feet, praying for good weather and fair winds. If a little storm comes up, we respond with a compromise here and an indiscretion there, until we learn to sail the waters of the fallen world with ease and precision.

Philippians 3:18,19 “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose

god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” (NASB)

Titus 3:3 “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.” (NIV)

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (NASB)

The problem is: The compromises and indiscretions required to keep our ship moving forward breed like rats in a cargo hold. Their number and size increase exponentially with every voyage, until they overrun the ship. The fuel that empowers men and women who successfully pillage the dark seas of a fallen world is sin, and the miles per gallon we enjoy steadily decrease with every journey, such that it takes more and more fuel to go the same distance, until the sins we are capable of committing in order to find some temporary distraction are unimaginable.

Psalms 73:3-8 “... the wicked... pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice...” (NIV)

Over time this turns our tender hearts to defiant stones and our unsullied minds to fearful jelly, and what may have begun as an indifferent rejection of God in favor of a passionate embrace of the material finally becomes a vicious antagonism towards God as the emptiness of the darkness overwhelms us. We have our way with the world. Then the world has its way with us. And the change wrought upon our ears transforms the gentle voice we playfully dismissed at the beginning (so we could eagerly explore the unknown darkness) into an all-knowing, holy God we utterly despise.

Proverbs 14:2 “He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him.” (NASB)

Romans 8:7 “the sinful mind is hostile to God...” (NIV)

This underlying disrespect and antagonism towards God inspires an outward disrespect and antagonism towards our fellow man. Just as love for God motivates love for others, so hate for God motivates hate for the unfortunate men and women who cross our paths. Defiant hearts and fearful minds come to hate the God against whom they have rebelled, and express their hatred for God in the way they treat His creation.

Psalms 50:16-20 “But to the wicked person, God says... ‘You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You sit and testify against your brother and slander your own mother’s son’ ” (NIV)

Psalms 10:2-7 “In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart... In his pride... there is no room for God... His mouth is full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.” (NIV)

This hatred is expressed most virulently towards those who are seeking the light. Prideful, defiant hearts see a man or woman following Jesus, and it stings their conscience and stirs their fears, so with hateful cowardice they strike, attempting to destroy the symbol of their ultimate defeat. This is how they treated Jesus, and how they will treat those who follow Him.

Proverbs 29:10 “The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright.” (NIV)

Amos 5:10 “There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth.” (NIV)

John 7:7 “The world... hates me (*Jesus*) because I testify that its works are evil.” (NIV)

Matthew 10:22 “You (*the disciples*) will be hated by everyone because of me (*Jesus*)...” (NIV)

Sometimes, those who hate do so overtly, with the torch, cudgel, and noose. But many times hate is carried out covertly, with quiet words like slow poison or sniper bullets. As is true with fear, hate can wear many disguises. Hate lives perhaps most comfortably behind passive faces and easy smiles.

Psalms 28:3 “... the wicked... speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts.” (NIV)

Notice the dramatic effect our desire for either darkness or light has on our hearts, minds, and behavior. When our desire is for the things of the darkness, we develop *hard (defiant) hearts* and *weak (fearful) minds*, and this gives birth to words and deeds of hate. When our desire is for the things of the light, we develop *tender (faithful) hearts* and *strong (hopeful) minds*, and this gives birth to words and deeds of love.

Proverbs 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB)

Matthew 13:15 “For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I (*Jesus*) would heal them.” (NIV)

Hebrews 3:12,13 “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (NIV)

Ephesians 4:1-32 “... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor... be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (NASB)

2 Chronicles 34:27 “Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words... and because you humbled yourself before Me... I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD.” (NASB)

If love for others can take many forms (such as patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), so can hate for others. Our impatience, unkindness, malevolence, faithlessness, harshness, and rashness are simply different faces of the hate we sometimes harbor for our fellow man. All of these things – from the destructive words of the local gossip, to the

unfaithfulness of the adulterous spouse, to the crimes of the hardened criminal – are ultimately an expression of the primeval hate that boils up from the churning waters of a defiant heart and fearful mind.

Mark 7:14-22 “Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them... Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body... What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.’ ” (NIV)

These many different expressions of hate for our fellow mankind are ultimately demonstrations of the hate we have for God (just as our love for others is a demonstration of our love for God). When we choose to set our hearts and minds in defiance of God, we come to hate Him, and this hate for God opens the floodgates to hate for others in all of its various guises. We give in to the desire for the temporary distractions of the fallen world and become enslaved to the darkness, with hearts hardened by defiance and minds diseased by fear. Darkness masters a rebellious heart and twists every thought with insecurity and cowardice, so every word and deed becomes an avatar of hate.

Romans 1:21-31 “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.” (NIV)

2 Peter 2:9-19 “... the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment... This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant... these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off... These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” (NIV)

Ironically, the person a defiant man or woman ends up hating the most is: Themselves. Those who choose to live their lives in defiance of the living God receive from the darkness they embrace

fearful minds and hateful words and deeds. In the beginning, this hatred is expressed towards God and other people. But hatred is a boomerang that never fails to return to its master with a vengeance. We throw it out there, and even if it strikes its target, it comes sailing back to clobber us just as hard right between the eyes.

Ezekiel 20:43 “... you will remember your conduct and all the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done.” (NIV)
Ezekiel 6:9 “... They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices.” (NIV)

While love allows us to build lasting, fulfilling relationships with both God and others, hate leaves us cold, alone, and desperately unsatisfied. Hate becomes a cancer that eats us up from the inside, until there is nothing left but an empty shell. It burns hot for a finite period of time, but once all that is good is consumed, all that is left is a gaping, vacuous emptiness. Hate is an unsatisfying meal that creates a destructive hunger. And so God calls us to rid ourselves of hate, along with each and every one of its alter egos, so we can be filled with something better and something more.

Ephesians 4:31,32 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (NIV)

Colossians 3:5-16 “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (NIV)

Ezekiel 18:30-32 “... I (*God*) will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!” (NIV)

Haggai 1:5,6 “Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’ ” (NIV)

Isaiah 9:18-20 “Surely wickedness burns like a fire... On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of their own offspring:” (NIV)

1 Peter 2:1 “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” (NIV)

But how? How do we do this? These embodiments of hate – selfishness, greed, anger, and lust – are so thoroughly ingrained in us by the darkness of a fallen world, to rid ourselves of them is not

like giving up Monday Night Football on the weekends. It's more like kicking a smack habit when we're surrounded by junkies, free dope, and a government sponsored needle program. How can we rid ourselves of the things of the fallen world and fill ourselves with the things of the living God?

Faith, Hope, and Love create Joy and Peace (in a selfless, discerning, servant of God and others).

Faith fills with hope and love, which drive out fear and hate.

When we humbly choose to set our desires upon the things of the light and place our trust in the living God, this faith fills our thoughts with hope and colors our words and deeds with love. As hope pours into our minds and love pours out of our actions, we are purged of fear and hate. Where there is faith, hope, and love, there can be no fear. Where there is no fear, there is no hate. Faith fills with hope and love, which drive out fear and hate.

1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” (NIV)

Setting the palette with faith (where it all ends).

Before an artist attempts a new work, he (or she) envisions the finished piece in his head, and from this he extracts the colors he will need to fulfill his vision. Will he paint with oil, gouache, or watercolor? Will the tones be bright, neutral, or muted? Will the reflectance of the medium carry a glossy or matte finish?

All of these things and more must be considered so the palette may be set with the colors the finished piece will require. A palette set with dull shades of gray will not be much use if you want to capture a garden in bloom on a sunny afternoon. Shiny primary colors do not ordinarily lend themselves to images of night. Of course there are exceptions to every rule, but the principle is this: Your painting is doomed from the start if you set your palette with the wrong colors.

Your life is doomed from the start if you set your character with the wrong qualities. You may desire true happiness. Passion and contentment may be the vision you have for life when you set off on the journey. But if your subsequent choices fill your heart and mind with the things of darkness, you haven't got a chance.

The qualities of your character are set by the things you choose to treasure. If you treasure the things of darkness, if your prideful desire is for the temporary distractions of a fallen world, then this foundational choice limits the colors from which you may paint the portrait of your life to the shades of darkness – defiance, fear, and hate. And with only these things in which to dip your brush, you cannot reasonably expect to paint a pretty picture.

Luke 12:34 “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (NASB)

Proverbs 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB)

A painter decides what he wants his painting to be, then he sets his palette accordingly. We have to decide what we want our *lives* to be, then set our hearts and minds accordingly. Our goals determine the tools we assemble in order to achieve our objectives. And so we must first determine

our goals, and then select the tools befitting our objectives. If we choose the wrong tools, our commission is doomed from the start.

A painter will never capture a vision of the rising sun, with all the colors of the dawn shattered across the horizon, if he begins his work by squeezing only black, brown, and gray onto his palette. We will never realize a vision of a happy life, full of Joy and Peace, if we begin our journey with characters oozing defiance, fear, and hate. If our brush is loaded with black, brown, and gray, we can only expect to paint the dark. If our soul is loaded with defiance, fear, and hate, we can only expect to experience the darkness.

To paint the dawn, we need the colors of light set upon a palette, and a black background to paint over. We are born into a fallen world, and this provides the dark canvas against which we live out our lives. But our portrait begins, not with the first stroke of the brush, *but with a setting of the palette*, with either faith, hope, and love, or defiance, fear, and hate. These become the wheel of primary colors we mix to create the spectrum that will illustrate the journey of our lives. Faith, hope, and love create one set of colors with which we can only capture light, while defiance, fear, and hate create a totally different set of colors that can only capture darkness.

These colors are oil and water. They do not mix. Faith cannot be mixed with defiance, to create a blend of the two. Likewise there is not a hopeful shade of fear, or a hateful shade of love. They stand like fighters at opposite sides of the ring, and at the end of the contest only one team will be left standing.

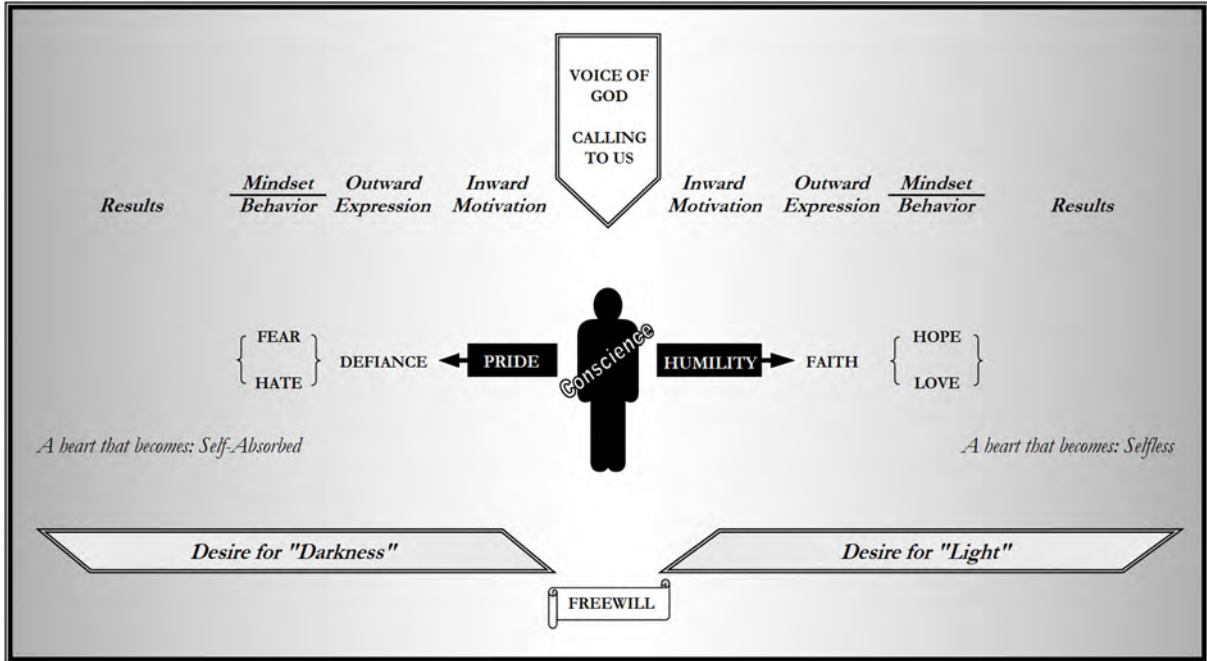
If we truly wish to rid ourselves of the different embodiments of hate – the selfishness, greed, anger, and lust (among other things) that plague our lives – and if we truly wish to be free from the fear that cripples our thoughts and is the impetus for our hate, there is a way: We stop everything we’re doing and reset our palettes. We humbly choose to receive the light flowing from the Word of the God who calls to us. And by placing our trust in Him, we get out a fire hose and blast every last drop of defiance, fear, and hate from within us, so no residue of darkness remains. Then we reset the fresh, clean palette with the things of light – a faithful heart, a hopeful mind, and loving words and deeds.

With wells of faith, hope, and love set on our palette, we are now prepared to realize the vision of life that is our dream. We possess the rare and precious colors required to capture the passion and contentment we envision for the portrait of our lives. And with faith, hope, and love splashed across the canvas with every stroke of the brush, there can be only one end to our creation.

A fundamental transformation.

The Joy and Peace we long for are the results of humbly choosing to live our lives with faith, hope, and love. These three things utterly transform us at the most foundational levels, the way a painting is changed forever by altering the colors set on the palette. And it is through this transformation we are able to experience Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension.”

Faith transforms the heart: From Self-Absorbed to Selfless.



From Self-Absorbed	To Selfless
The transformation of the heart by Faith	
<i>Focus on the self</i>	<i>Focus on God & others</i>
<i>Grows to a blinding Self-Obsession</i>	<i>Brings a clear & accurate perspective to all things</i>
<i>Enslaves the heart</i>	<i>Liberates the heart</i>

We are born into the darkness of a fallen world, and in our natural state, before we choose to walk humbly with God in His light, it is our natural instinct to be selfish. Our eyes are focused on ourselves and in satisfying self-led desires without regard for others. We can think of this as being *self-absorbed*. Our primary motivation is to gratify ourselves without consideration for the interests of other people.

Ephesians 2:1-3 “... you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” (NIV)

Romans 2:6-11 “God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done’... for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil... but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good... For God does not show favoritism.” (NIV)

Left unchecked, self-absorption can turn to *self-obsession*. What begins as a narrow focus on the self and a negligent disregard for others, becomes an exclusive focus on the self and a reckless disregard for others. Our vision degenerates from near-sightedness to blindness; and we tear through life like a wrecking ball, destroying anything and anyone who stands in our path.

James 3:14-16 “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it... For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” (NIV)

1 John 2:11 “But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 13:4,5 “Love is... not self-seeking...” (NIV)

Faith transforms the self-absorbed heart into a *selfless* heart. Our focus shifts from gratifying ourselves to pleasing the God in whom we have placed our trust, and (as part of our trust in Him) to showing consideration for all of God’s creation. Our vision expands from a narrow tunnel of self-interest to a wide panorama that encompasses the interests of God, our fellow mankind, and our own legitimate hopes and dreams.

Romans 8:5,6 “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;” (NIV)

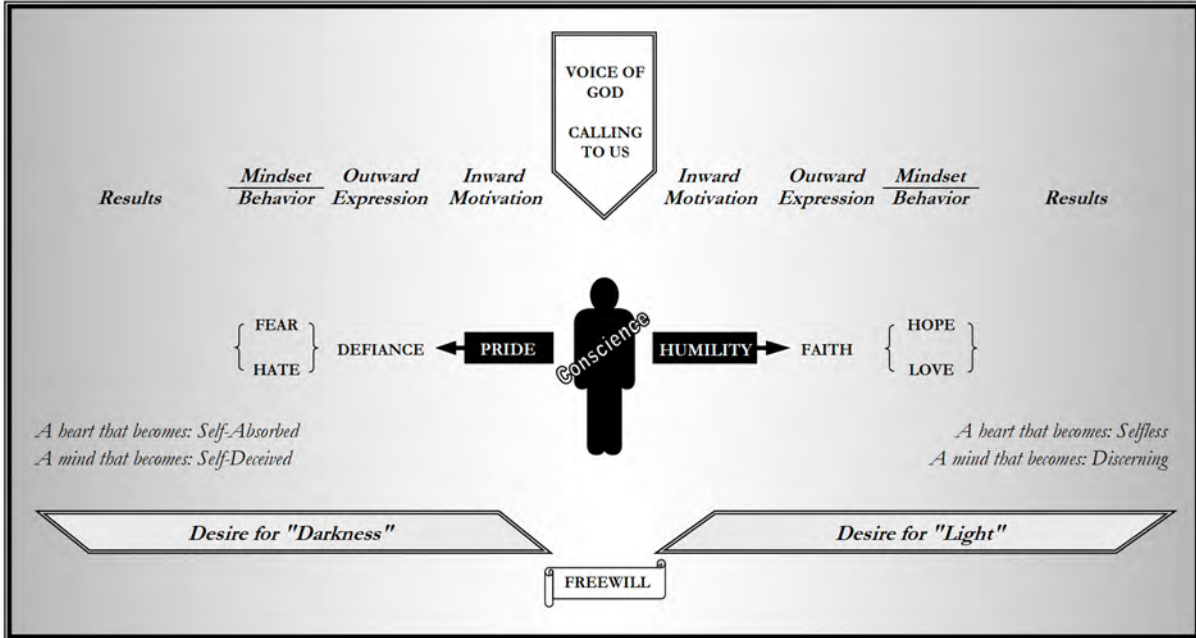
Philippians 2:3,4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:” (NIV)

In trusting God to keep His Word, our faith frees our hearts to set aside the selfish desires we so often cling to, and this new selfless perspective enables us to walk boldly into God’s light with confidence and courage. We choose to trust God. This transfers the focus of our hearts from within to without. Our desire is to please God, not ourselves, and we are released from the chains of self-absorption that bind us to sinful behavior. Faith frees our eyes from an unblinking stare into a distorted mirror, and redirects them to a balanced, clear, and accurate perspective of God, ourselves, and the world around us. A selfless heart is a liberated heart.

Galatians 5:1-26 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love... So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature... The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (NIV)

John 8:31,32 “... Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ ” (NIV)

Hope transforms the mind: From Self-Deceived to Discerning.



From Self-Deceived	To Discerning
The transformation of the mind by Hope	
<i>The relief sought by a fearful mind</i>	<i>The wisdom gained by a hopeful mind</i>
<i>Begins with Self-Justification...</i>	<i>The ability to distinguish between right & wrong...</i>
<i>... and ends with Self-Righteousness</i>	<i>... and the inability to be deceived</i>
<i>Limits the mind</i>	<i>Empowers the mind</i>

A self-absorbed heart creates a *self-deceived* mind. When we defiantly choose to remain in the darkness, and the inevitable fear begins to seep into the cracks in our minds, we have to deal with the resulting insecurity and cowardice somehow. As our defiant hearts become more and more self-absorbed, our fearful minds struggle increasingly to find anything that will offer relief. And in the darkness our only options are the lies and deceptions of the fallen world.

Hebrews 3:12,13 “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 3:18,19 “Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become ‘fools’ so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 11:3-15 “But I (*Paul*) am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches... a different gospel... such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...” (NASB)

Matthew 24:4,5 “Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name... and will deceive many.’ ” (NIV)

2 Peter 2:1-20 “... there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies... Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words... forsaking the right way they have gone astray... For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires... promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.” (NASB)

And so we latch on to all manners of falsehood in order to prop up our burdened minds. The process often begins with *self-justification*. We bite into various philosophies and false religions that provide us with excuses to do things we know deep down inside are wrong. This provides us with a psychological band-aid to stem the tide of blood flowing from a wounded conscience, and essentially buys us a little time to indulge ourselves in whatever petty distraction suit our fancy, until God inevitably kicks our crutches out from under us.

2 Timothy 4:3,4 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” (NASB)

Colossians 2:2-23 “... be encouraged... attaining to all the wealth that comes from full assurance of understanding... so that no one may delude you with persuasive argument... See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ... Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize... why... do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’... in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion... but are of no value...” (NASB)

Romans 16:17,18 “... watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 29:8,9 “Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 8:5-17 “Why then have these people turned away?... They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. None of them repent of their wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Each pursues their own course like a horse charging into battle... Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?... They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when

they are punished, says the LORD... ‘See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you,’ declares the LORD.” (NIV)

A next step can be *self-righteousness*. We’ve justified the wrongs our conscience knows we are committing, and so we falsely conclude all of our ways are worthy and good. Based upon a foundation of distortions and lies we convince ourselves we are just and right. From here, there are no boundaries, and accordingly, absolutely no end to the wrongs we will cheerfully commit without remorse. In becoming absorbed with ourselves we deceive ourselves, and lose ourselves in the darkness of a fallen world.

2 Timothy 3:2-17 “... men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant... holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind... their folly will be obvious to all... But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

John 16:1-3 “These things I (*Jesus*) have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.” (NASB)

Psalms 73:3-8 “... the wicked... pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice...” (NIV)

Jeremiah 49:16 “ ‘The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle’s, from there I will bring you down,’ declares the LORD.” (NIV)

A selfless heart creates a *discerning* mind. When we faithfully choose to live in God’s light, and hope begins to pour into our minds, we gain tremendous wisdom and insight. The selfless act of placing our faith in God causes us to look outside of ourselves for truth, and so God’s guiding Spirit is allowed to lead us to God’s infallible Word. Then, with God’s Word as our light and God’s Spirit as our guide, we are granted a true, accurate understanding of who God is, who we are, how we relate to one another, and how the fallen world around us works. This knowledge entwines with the hope that comes from faith, and our darkened eyes are opened. We see things as they truly are, and through hope we have a confidence and courage that our holy, loving Heavenly Father will enable us to fulfill His plan and purpose. Together all of this grants us the wisdom we need to know right from wrong.

Proverbs 30:5,6 “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” (NIV)

Romans 12:2,3 “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” (NIV)

Isaiah 48:17 “This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.’ ” (NIV)

Philippians 1:9,10 “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” (NIV)

We also have the discernment we need to know when we are being taken for a ride. You can’t fool a selfless heart of faith working in harmony with a discerning mind of hope. We have the tools we need to see through all of the smoke the fallen world blows into our face. We are not so absorbed with ourselves that we cannot detect the lies and deceits so subtly woven into the fabric of darkness. The selfless heart looks outward with an accurate perspective on all things and cannot be deceived.

Colossians 2:2-4 “... be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” (NIV)

Proverbs 2:3-11 “indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will... find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding... Then you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.” (NIV)

This is extraordinarily empowering! The selflessness of faith *frees* us. We are no longer bound to the chains of selfishness. The discernment of hope *empowers* us. We are no longer limited by the false leadings of self-deception. The selfish fool becomes a selfless man or woman of discernment. Now we are ready for action!

Titus 3:1-8 “... be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.” (NIV)

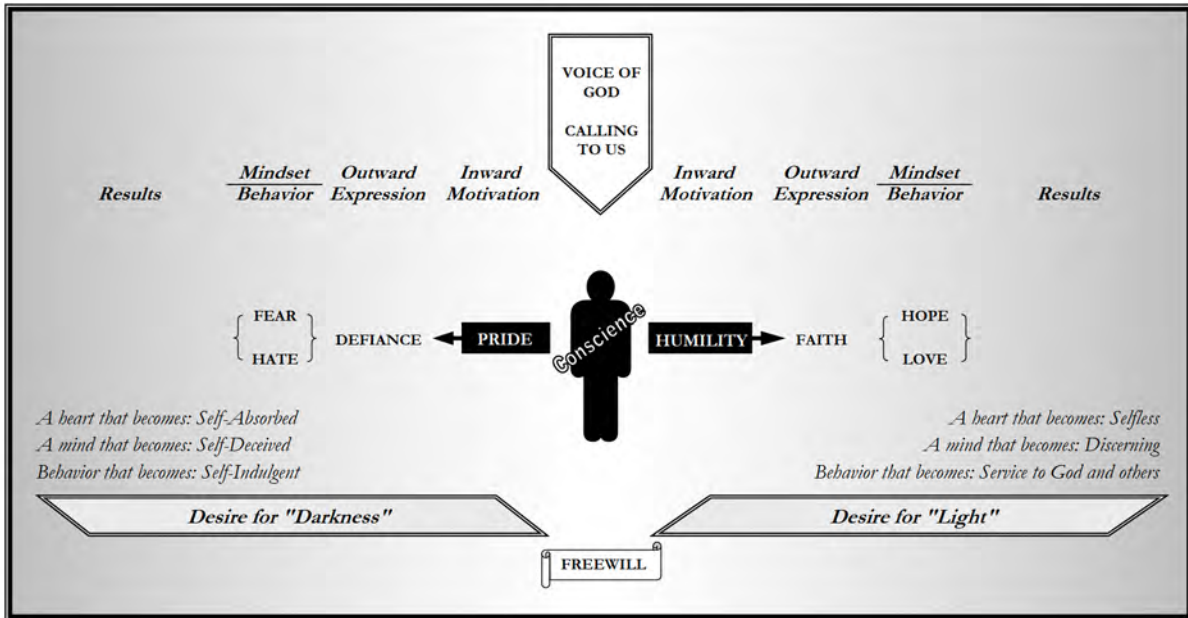
2 Corinthians 3:3-18 “... you are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts... Now

the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord..." (NIV)

Isaiah 52:2-12 "Shake off your dust... Free yourself from the chains on your neck... Burst into songs of joy together... for the LORD has comforted his people... the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (NIV)

Psalm 130:3,4 "If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you." (NIV)

Love transforms behavior: From Self-Indulgent to Serving God and Others.



From Self-Indulgent	To Serving God & Others
The transformation of behavior by Love	
<i>Provides temporary distraction from unhappiness</i>	<i>Brings lasting Joy & Peace</i>
<i>Forges the chains of the slavery of Pride...</i>	<i>Breaks the chains of the slavery of Pride...</i>
<i>... to which we become addicted...</i>	<i>... to which we were addicted...</i>
<i>... completing our bondage to...</i>	<i>... completing our escape from...</i>
<i>... the Darkness of the fallen world...</i>	<i>... the Darkness of the fallen world...</i>
<i>... preventing us from discovering God's purpose</i>	<i>... allowing us to fulfill God's purpose</i>

A heart absorbed with the self creates a mind deceived by the self, and this volatile mixture manifests itself in behavior that is intended for only one purpose – to indulge the self. We care only about ourselves. We learn to justify any action and believe what we are doing is righteous before God and man. The results are *self-indulgent* words and deeds intended to satisfy our longing for Joy and Peace, but in truth only providing temporary distractions from the inescapable unhappiness bred by selfish hearts and deluded minds.

Ephesians 2:3 “... we... all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” (NASB)

Matthew 23:25,26 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” (NIV)

There is a slavery to pride. It limits the choices we can make to only those that indulge the self. The prideful heart is self-absorbed, without the freedom to look outside the self for truth and meaning. This impedes the mind, restricting its focus to a narrow group of deceitful teachings (in the forms of philosophy, false religion, atheism, etc.) that justify and approve thoughts, words, and deeds that deep down inside injure our conscience like a lead pipe to the side of the head.

Titus 3:3 “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.” (NIV)

Romans 16:17,18 “... watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” (NIV)

2 Peter 2:9-19 “... the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment... This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant... these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off... These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” (NIV)

We are left with lives enslaved to the pursuit of the temporary distractions of a fallen world. We need these indulgences the way a junkie needs a fix. If we don't have them, the totality of our lives is devoted to getting them. If we have them, the high momentarily distracts us from our misery, until we inevitably come crashing down. Then we are faced with the awful truth that in order to get that same high, we need more than we got the last time – more money, more fame, more power. We are bound to our addictions with chains as powerful as any narcotic, and from this place there is no escaping the darkness of the fallen world.

Ephesians 4:18,19 “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” (NIV)

When we choose to give in to our desires for the things of darkness, we begin to indulge ourselves in all of the temporary distractions to be found in a fallen world. We then become addicted to these indulgences, which wrap themselves around us like shackles and bind us to the slavery of pride. These acts of self-indulgence complete our bondage to the darkness of the fallen world, which began when our defiant hearts became self-absorbed and our fearful minds became self-deceived. And it is this bondage to the darkness that prevents us from ever discovering and fulfilling God’s plan and purpose for our lives.

Love, born from a heart of faith and a mind of hope, liberates us from all of these things. Our selfless hearts are free to seek outside ourselves for truth. Our discerning minds are free to recognize truth in the Word of God and receive wisdom from the Spirit of God, so we can tell right from wrong, even when faced with all the smoke and mirrors the fallen world can angle at us. Then when we choose to love, the way Jesus loved God and His fellow mankind, the chains of self-indulgent behavior to which we were once addicted are broken, and we are free, able to escape the darkness of the fallen world.

Psalm 116:1-16 “I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me... I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD... The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion... For you, LORD, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I trusted in the LORD... Truly I am your servant, LORD... you have freed me from my chains.” (NIV)

But what are we freed for? For what purpose has God prepared us? The act of faith transforms our hearts, from self-absorbed to selfless. The gift of hope (received from faith) transforms our minds, from self-deceived to discerning. For what use is a selfless, discerning man or woman best suited in the plan and purpose of God?

The answer can only be: *Serving God and others*. Humbly placing our faith in God breaks the pride that binds us to selfish desires for the things of darkness. The hope we gain when we discover all God is and all He has done for us pierces through the deceptions of the fallen world. Our hearts and minds are released from the insatiable need to indulge ourselves in temporary distractions.

A transformation at the most foundational level takes place. We become selfless. We become discerning. We no longer desire the darkness. Our desire is for the light, and the One who created it. As faith and hope grow within us, our hearts and minds become equipped with wisdom and courage, which allow us to go out into the world and speak the truth in love. God grants us faith and hope so through the love they inspire we can serve Him and all He has created.

Galatians 5:1-13 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love...” (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:19 “... If you repent, I (*God*) will restore you that you may serve me...” (NIV)

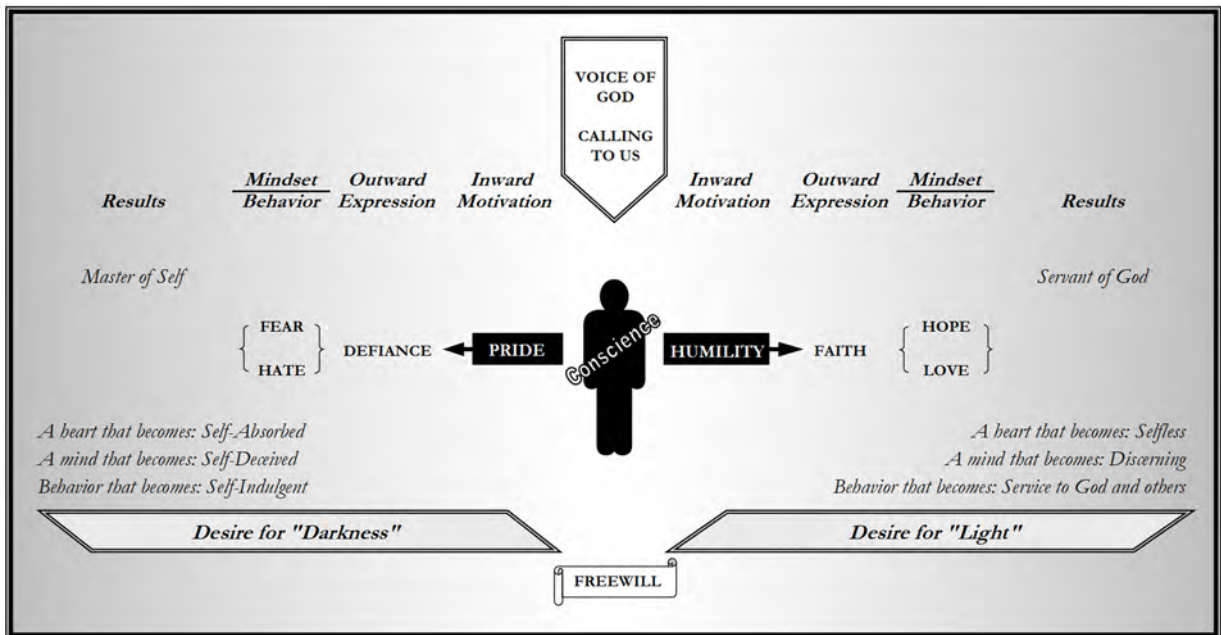
The choice to love transforms our behavior, from self-indulgent to serving God and others. We serve God, who brought us into the light and fills us with faith, hope, and love. We serve others, and become a part of the light that defeats the darkness that holds the world in its destructive grip. This is what love is designed for, not to indulge the self, but to bless other people.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...” (NIV)

Luke 9:23-48 “Then he (*Jesus*) said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?’... An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.’ ” (NIV)

And in setting aside the self and “taking up our cross” and following Jesus (by emulating His love for God and our fellow mankind) something utterly miraculous happens...

The transformation’s purpose: From Master to Servant (true greatness).



From Master	To Servant
The transformation's purpose (true greatness)	
<i>Of no use in God's plan</i>	<i>Of great use in God's plan</i>
<i>Able only to force and break</i>	<i>Able to offer and mend</i>
<i>Focus is on the messenger</i>	<i>Focus is on the message</i>
<i>Follows own leading</i>	<i>Follows God's leading</i>
<i>Achieves meaningless, temporary wealth & recognition...</i>	<i>Achieves true, lasting greatness...</i>
<i>... from a fallen world that is passing away</i>	<i>... from the holy, loving God who endures forever</i>

... a self-absorbed, self-deceived, self-indulgent man or woman is transformed into a selfless, discerning *servant* of God. A servant! Not a fictional super-hero able to leap tall buildings and shoot laser beams from his eyeballs, but a humble follower of Jesus who serves God and his fellow mankind through selfless, discerning acts of love.

At first blush, that might seem somewhat anti-climactic or even downright disappointing. Why would God transform us into servants? And if we are being truthful, who really wants to be one? If we are going to reject the things of the world and devote ourselves to Christ, shouldn't we be transformed into giants among men, able to stride across the face of the earth and wipe out evil without ever breaking a sweat? Shouldn't the world break into spontaneous, thunderous applause every time we enter a room? Shouldn't we become masters of the fallen world who beat the darkness into submission?

Over and over again in Scripture we find "God's ways are not our ways" and "His thoughts are not our thoughts." What is "valued among men" is worthless, even detestable, in the eyes of God. His way of doing things is nearly always exactly the opposite of our way of doing things.

Isaiah 55:8,9 " 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' " (NIV)

Isaiah 29:16 "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'You did not make me?' Can the pot say to the potter, 'You know nothing?' " (NIV)

Luke 16:15 "He (*Jesus*) said to them (*the Pharisees*), 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.' " (NIV)

1 Corinthians 3:19 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight..." (NIV)

Isaiah 29:16 "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'You did not make me?' Can the pot say to the potter, 'You know nothing?' " (NIV)

God does not choose to transform us into titans capable of reshaping the foundations of the earth through super-human powers because God has no use for titans in His plan. That's not His way. God's way is to use simple, humble servants to reshape the foundations of the human heart through the power of love. We don't storm across the globe, wrestling evil to the ground like a long horn

steer. We stand firm wherever God plants us and speak the truth in love, and when evil inevitably rages up against us, we love as Jesus did and bring light to a fallen world.

2 Corinthians 10:3,4 “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world...” (NIV)

Romans 13:12-14 “... let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light... clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ...” (NIV)

Ephesians 6:10-17 “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might... take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (NASB)

Romans 12:21 “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (NIV)

Luke 6:27,28 “... love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (NIV)

Proverbs 25:21,22 “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” (NIV)

1 Peter 3:8,9 “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” (NASB)

Why does God use humble, loving servants to carry out His work, rather than the spiritual equivalent of a goon squad? The answer has to do with free will. It's not God's way to *force* goodness and light on the world, whether the world likes it or not. It's His way to *offer* goodness and light to the world, and then let His creation choose. Since force is not God's way, God has no use for the (in the worldly sense) powerful. He's not trying to *break* anything, so He doesn't need muscle bound henchmen.

God's way is to freely offer His grace to a world that desperately needs it and frequently refuses it. He's trying to *mend* something, so what He needs are humble servants who will take their stand and speak the truth in love, often in the face of injustice and ingratitude, so if the world will respond to God's offer of grace it can be healed and restored.

The power is therefore in the *message*, not the messenger, which only a selfless heart and discerning mind can genuinely and effectively deliver. It takes a servant's heart, not a master's ego, to illuminate the darkness of the fallen world through the love of Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-21 “... you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)... Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 5:5-23 “You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness... Therefore encourage one another and build each other up... Live in peace with each other... encourage the disheartened, help the

weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus... hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil... May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (NIV)

It is in our nature to want to be the *master*. We want control – of ourselves, others, the world, and even God above – so we can order all things around us to our liking and thereby be happy. But the truth we must humbly come to accept is: At the end of the day, *we are incapable of bringing order to anything in a way that will make us happy*. Only God has the wisdom and power to do that. And so we must choose to turn over the ordering of all things in our lives to God if we are to find happiness; that is, the Joy and Peace for which we all long. The great irony of life we must all come to understand and accept is: *It is not the masters who find Joy and Peace in this life. It is the servants*.

Luke 9:24 “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me (*Jesus*) will save it.” (NIV)

This is the fundamental transformation God seeks in each of His children. He wants us to forego the mastery of our lives and willingly become servants of Him, so He can through His all-encompassing wisdom and power order our lives in keeping with His perfect plan and use us to fulfill His great design for human history. God can use the selfless, discerning servant to accomplish His perfect will for both all humanity and each individual life, because a servant will choose to follow God's leading. A master will follow only his or her own.

Joshua 24:14,15 “... serve him with all faithfulness... But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...” (NIV)

Romans 6:13 “... offer every part of yourself to him (*God*) as an instrument of righteousness.” (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:21 “Those who cleanse themselves... will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” (NIV)

So what happens to the servants? Are they used and abused throughout this life, then forgotten and tossed aside to wither in the dust? Absolutely not! It's just the opposite. Servants achieve (in God's eyes) *true greatness*. Not the fleeting nonsense this world passes off as greatness, but everlasting, genuine greatness as described in God's eternal, inerrant Word.

In this fallen world, people get rich or people get famous and they are called “great.” But that mighty equalizer called death strips the earthly fortunes from every man and woman, and not a penny remains to carry into eternity. Earthly fame is equally fleeting and worthless to those who pass through the door of death. Heirs (and tax collectors!) receive our wealth and time consumes our fame, until nothing remains of what made us “great” in the eyes of the fallen world.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (NIV)

1 Timothy 6:7-19 “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it... Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish

and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith... Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (NIV)

Proverbs 11:7 “When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes; all he expected from his power comes to nothing.” (NIV)

In eternity, when this world and everything in it is gone forever, there will be a new ordering of the great and the small. The “great” will be those servants who turned the mastery of their lives over to God and thereby accomplished His purpose. *Servanthood* is the key to greatness in this life, and in eternity greatness receives its due reward.

Matthew 23:11,12 “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (NIV)

Matthew 18:1-5 “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’” (NIV)

Mark 9:33-35 “They (*Jesus and the Disciples*) came to Capernaum. When he (*Jesus*) was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’” (NIV)

Luke 22:24-27 “A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.’” (NIV)

Matthew 20:20-27 “Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ‘What is it you want?’ he asked. She said, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom... When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” (NIV)

In our heart-of-hearts, nearly everyone wants to be great and somehow recognized. And in order to achieve these things we step all over each other, desperately trying to claw our way to the top of the heap. This is what the fallen world teaches us to do.

But in God's eyes, true greatness and recognition do not reside at the top of the heap. They reside at the bottom, deep down in the lowest echelon of the world's caste system. Almighty God, who will one day make all things new and all things right, recognizes greatness where it truly resides, with the humble servants of His kingdom, and when God finally brings all creation before Him for eternal judgment, this greatness will be recognized and rewarded. The "heap" will be turned on its ear, and the "first will be last, and the last will be first."

Matthew 19:27-30 "Peter answered him (*Jesus*), 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.'" (NIV)

Matthew 10:32,33 "Whoever acknowledges me (*Jesus*) before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." (NIV)

Matthew 6:1-4 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I (*Jesus*) tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (NIV)

We have to be careful in considering the biblical ideal of servanthood. As we read through the Bible, we find stories of great, servant-minded men who rose to the highest level of authority in the land, and also those who lived out their lives in unassuming positions. Being a servant does not necessarily mean being the "low man on the totem pole." Presidents and CEOs can be great servants, and buck privates can be conniving scoundrels. And it can also be the other way around. Being a servant has to do, not with the level of authority we are granted on earth, but with the level of value we choose to place on the well-being of others and our willingness to put the welfare of others above our own. These are the qualities of a true servant that befit men and women of every station.

We should seek to be servant-minded wherever God sets us in life, and use our natural abilities and God-given passions for the benefit of one another. In our efforts to be servants of God, we should never be unappreciative of the gifts God has given us, or reluctant to excel or take up positions of leadership that rightly come to us, because we want to be "servants." Job descriptions and pay scales are not what make us servants or masters. Christ-like thoughts, words, and deeds make us servants of the living God.

Colossians 3:23,24 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (NIV)

Romans 14:13-19 “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way... for the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” (NASB)

1 Peter 4:10 “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (NASB)

Romans 12:5-8 “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly... he who teaches... he who exhorts... he who gives... he who leads... he who shows mercy...” (NASB)

We can choose to retain the mastery of our lives, embrace the world’s darkness, and seek greatness and recognition through the self-absorption, self-deceit, and self-indulgence that come from pride. Or we can choose to become God’s servants, seek the light, and achieve greatness and recognition through the selflessness, discernment, and service that come from humility. In the end, we attain the same thing – greatness and recognition. The difference is where they come from – the fallen world that is passing away, or the holy, loving God who endures forever.

1 John 2:17 “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” (NIV)

God’s ways test the human heart. Our natural pride often recoils at the thought of becoming a servant in order to know Joy and Peace. We have no natural desire to serve. Instead, we want some sort of magic pill we can take that instantaneously transforms us into men and women who suddenly know Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension.” To choose to become a servant is a lifetime commitment, a long and perhaps difficult journey towards the elusive qualities of true happiness.

Proverbs 17:3 “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts.” (NASB)

Jeremiah 17:10 “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” (NASB)

Deuteronomy 8:2-16 “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands... He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions... to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.” (NIV)

James 1:2-4 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (NASB)

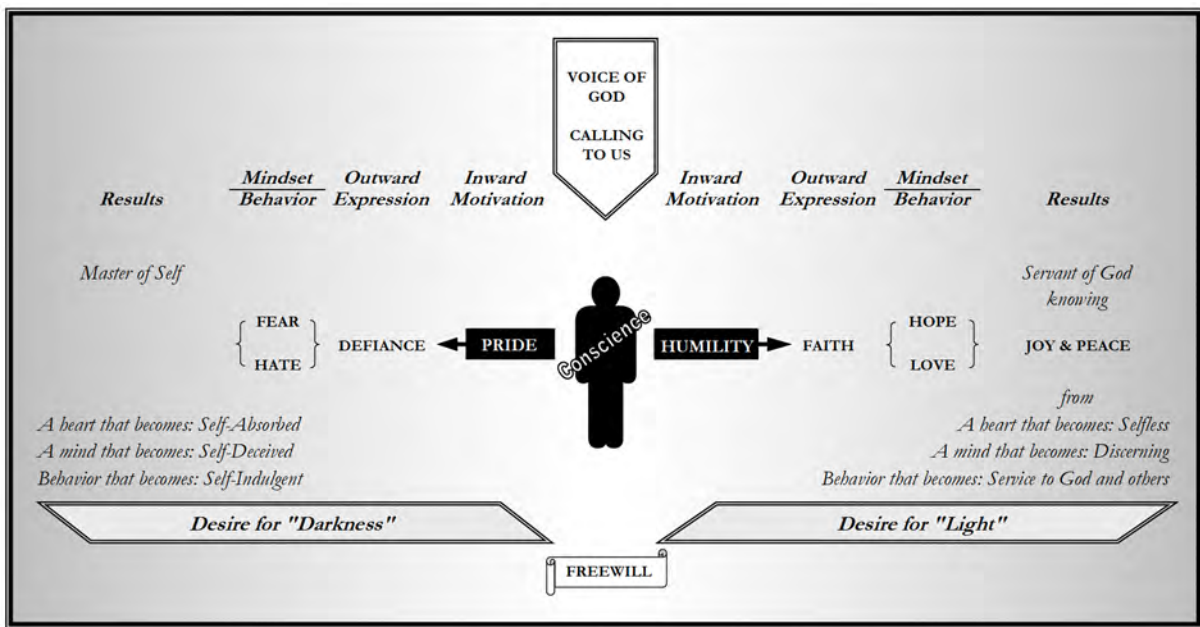
Job 23:10 “... when he (*God*) has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (NIV)

This realization is a “gut check” that forces us to choose between two very different paths – the path of the master or the path of the servant. Which road we elect to take unequivocally illustrates who we truly are and what we truly desire as we live out our lives in a fallen world.

1 Chronicles 28:9 “... serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you...” (NASB)

1 Peter 2:10-17 “... you are the people of God... Live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God... For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men... live as servants of God...” (NIV)

The transformation’s results: Joy and Peace.



At some point in our lives, our conscience “feels” the voice of God calling to us. We sense that God is and God cares, and we either humbly decide to seek God and follow Him into His light, or in our pride we decide to reject God and descend into the world’s darkness seeking its temporary distractions.

If we decide to place our trust in God, this faith in Him fills our minds with hope. We believe a holy God exists. We believe a holy God loves us. And we believe this holy, loving God rewards those who seek Him.

This confidence in God gives us the courage we need to face life in a fallen world. We know God has a plan for our lives that is specific, vital, and designed for our good. We know God will never leave us, nor will He ever forsake us. He will guide and direct us through good times, bad times, and everything in between, so we are able to fulfill His perfect plan. And no matter where the journey of life takes us, we know our ultimate destiny is to spend an eternity with almighty God enjoying the blessing and reward of a divine inheritance that will never pass away.

Because we believe these things, our hearts become selfless. Our focus is on pleasing the holy God who loves us, not on our own selfish interests. Our minds also become discerning. We are filled with the truth of God's Word and the power of God's Spirit, instead of the lies and half-truths of a fallen world.

All of this imparts to us an *enthusiasm for the adventure of life*; that is: Joy. We are excited to meet each day, knowing the Creator of the universe and everything in it is guiding us towards His ultimate plan and purpose. He cares for us as a father for his child, except that He is a *perfect* father who will *always* do what is *exactly* right for us *every* time according to His *flawless* plan, even if we do not always understand exactly what He is up to. We therefore have every reason to live life with passion.

Isaiah 40:28-31 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (NIV)

Proverbs 3:5,6 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22-36 “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful... Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (NIV)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

Psalms 33:1-22 “Sing joyfully to the LORD... For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does... the eyes of the LORD are on... those whose hope is in his unfailing love... We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:16 “... Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart...” (NASB)

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (NIV)

We also gain a *contentment with the outcomes of life*; that is: Peace. No matter what each day brings, whether it is a tremendous victory or a spectacular defeat, we know God is working all things together for our good. Our loving Heavenly Father is always there by our side, and He is using us

in both good times and bad to further His perfect will. We therefore have every reason to live life with satisfaction.

Romans 8:28 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (NASB)

Proverbs 16:4-20 “The LORD works out everything to its proper end – even the wicked for a day of disaster. The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished... blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.” (NIV)

Isaiah 26:3,4 “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.” (NASB)

John 16:33 “These things I (*Jesus*) have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (NASB)

Philippians 4:11-20 “I (*Paul*) have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me... And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

Proverbs 3:13-26 “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed... My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” (NIV)

Isaiah 58:11 “And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (NASB)

Words and deeds of love then confirm and seal the Joy and Peace we gain from faithful, selfless hearts and hopeful, discerning minds. We love God and one another the way Jesus loved God and others, and this ensures nothing we say or do causes us to lose through hateful behavior the Joy and Peace we gained from trusting God. Love becomes the *completion* of faith and hope, and the covering that protects their legacy of Joy and Peace.

1 John 2:10 “The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” (NASB)

John 15:10-12 “If you keep My (*Jesus*) commandments, you will abide in My love... These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” (NASB)

Colossians 3:14 “Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” (NASB)

We begin as our own masters, with self-absorbed hearts and self-deceived minds, whose desire is only to indulge ourselves in the temporary distractions offered by the darkness of a fallen world. We become servants of God, with selfless hearts and discerning minds, whose desire is to serve God and others and bring light to a fallen world. Through this transformation, from defiance, fear, and hate to faith, hope, and love, we are brought out of the world’s darkness and into God’s light, and there we receive from God His gift of Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension.”

2 Corinthians 3:3,18 “... you are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts... And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord...” (NIV)

Romans 12:1-18 “... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is... Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope... as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (NIV)

Psalms 119:105-111 “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path... Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.” (NIV)

1 Peter 1:8 “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” (NASB)

Philippians 4:6,7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (NASB)

Why is Joy sometimes described as “inexpressible” and Peace as “surpassing comprehension?” Part of the answer is: They exist where (from the world’s perspective) they should not be. From the world’s perspective, we are taught we will know satisfaction and contentment when we get rich, famous, or powerful, and when we are then able to possess the things wealth, fame, and power can afford – the house, the car, the vacations, the parties, the alcohol and drugs, the sexual partners, and on and on and on. These are the things “masters” devote their lives to achieving and possessing, and where we expect to find happiness.

The truth is: *None of these things* ultimately bring true happiness. You can sift through all the wealth, fame, and power the world has to give, and you will *never* find Joy and Peace. They simply do not reside there.

Nor do they exist in other more noble places where we expect to find happiness, like marriage, children, or in accomplishing some great and worthy deed. Of course this does not mean Joy and Peace cannot be experienced in marriage, parenthood, or personal accomplishments. It just means these things are not the *source* of Joy and Peace. (If they were, every spouse, parent, and accomplished person would be happy, and we all know this is not true.) These things are wonderful

vehicles through which Joy and Peace can be *expressed*, but they are not what *imparts* these elusive qualities.

Joy and Peace reside in the most unlikely place imaginable – in the heart and soul of selfless, discerning servant of the holy, loving God. This is the exact opposite of what the world would have us believe. We are taught if we “look out for number one” and go out and conquer the world, we’ll be happy. But the opposite is true. We find true happiness only when we look out for others and serve God and our fellow man.

Another reason God’s Joy is “inexpressible” and His Peace “surpasses comprehension” is: They exist *when* (from the world’s perspective) they should not be. We just saw Joy and Peace are not *where* the world tells us to look (with the masters of fame, fortune, and power, etc.). It’s also amazing to recognize God grants Joy and Peace during times of both great prosperity and when you would least expect it – during tremendous adversity.

The world tells us we will be happy when we know a life of ease. We want to find smooth waters and a luxury yacht to sail aboard. Then, as we sip cocktails in the stern with a supermodel, we’ll be happy.

As you read this there are multi-millionaires sitting next to goddesses and martinis on floating five star hotels drifting along glassy seas, and they are absolutely miserable. There are also humble servants of God holding on for dear life in dingy row boats caught in typhoons, who are full of Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension.”

Romans 2:9-11 “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil... but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good... For there is no partiality with God.” (NASB)

Ecclesiastes 6:2 “God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them...” (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 5:19 “Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil – this is a gift of God... because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.” (NIV)

Psalms 128:1,2 “How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you.” (NASB)

Acts 5:40-42 “... They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” (NIV)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

Philippians 4:11-20 “I (*Paul*) have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going

hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me... And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 7:4 “... in all our troubles my (Paul’s) joy knows no bounds.” (NIV)

The Joy and Peace God grants to His faithful servants exist wherever the servant is at all times. It doesn’t matter what (from a worldly perspective) you achieve or possess, and it doesn’t matter if times are good or bad. What matters is that your humble desire for God’s light manifests itself in faith, hope, and love – the hallmarks of a selfless, discerning servant of God and others – because it is through these qualities God grants His divine Joy and Peace, regardless of where or when you find yourself in a fallen world.

Romans 14:17-19 “For the kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (NIV)

Perhaps the greatest reason God’s Joy is “inexpressible” and His Peace “surpasses comprehension” is this: *They simply cannot be described or comprehended by someone who has not felt them.* God’s Joy and Peace cannot be shared through descriptive words or even the highest expressions of music or art. God’s Joy and Peace must be *experienced* to be truly understood. God Himself must grant to you His Joy and Peace (resulting from a close relationship with Him that deepens through the journey of your life together as heavenly Father and earthly child) before you will ever be able to truly comprehend it, let alone attempt to describe it.

Joy and Peace, these most elusive of all human desires, are ultimately gifts granted to us by the grace of the One through whom each of us and all that is exists. They are bestowed to God’s faithful children as a natural result of growing close to Him, as we trust Him and serve Him through emulating the love so dramatically embodied in His Son and our Savior. We walk with Him, and then become more like Him, and then work in harmony with His extraordinary design. Finally, we become a living instrument through which God brings His glorious, holy light to a fallen world shrouded in darkness.

Romans 6:11-14 “... count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus... do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires... rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master...” (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:21 “Those who cleanse themselves... will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” (NIV)

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (NIV)

Then, just as Jesus knew true Joy and Peace as He navigated the often treacherous waters of life in a fallen world, we come to know true Joy and Peace. In the act of walking humbly with our God, we come into sync with the melody, harmony, and rhythm of God’s perfect design, and our hearts,

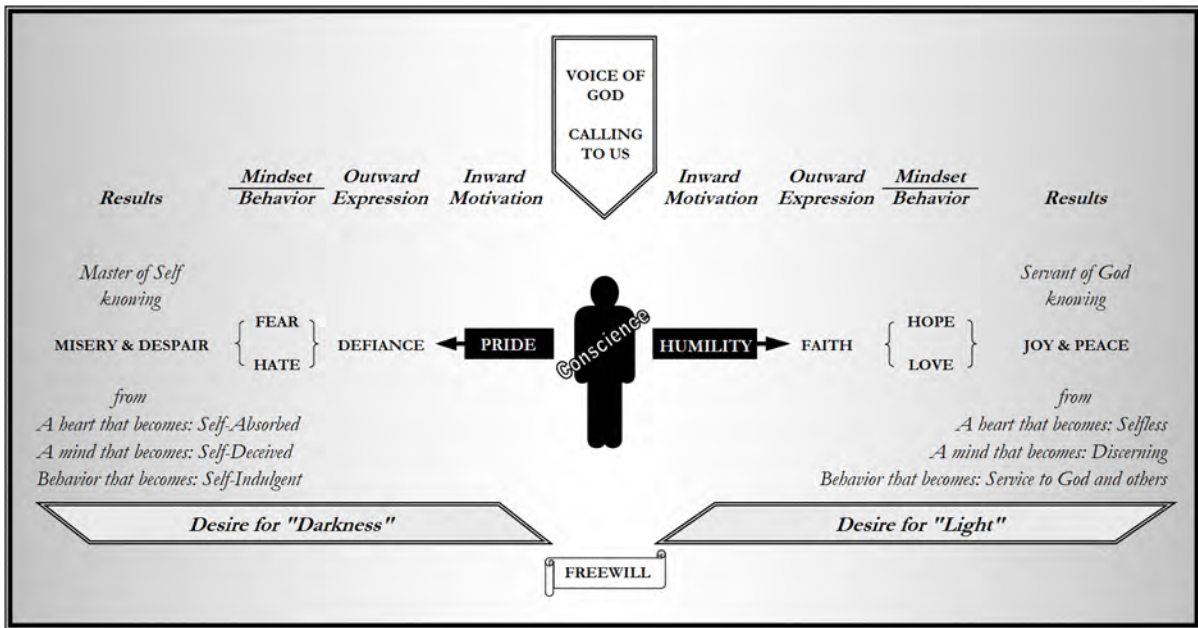
minds, and souls fill up to overflowing with the music of God’s inexpressible Joy and all-surpassing Peace.

Psalm 89:15-17 “Blessed are those who have learned to... walk in the light of your presence, LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength...” (NIV)

Now let’s look at the flip side.

Defiance, Fear, and Hate create Misery and Despair (in a self-absorbed, self-deceived, self-indulgent master).

The alternatives: Misery and Despair.



When our conscience first “feels” the voice of God calling to us, we arrive at the first true crossroads of our lives. We sense that God is and God cares, and as we have seen, we either humbly decide to seek God and follow Him into His light, or in our pride we decide to reject God and retreat into the world’s darkness seeking its temporary distractions.

If we decide to reject God and instead place our trust in ourselves, this defiance of God eventually fills our minds with fear. Deep down inside, we know a holy God exists. We know He loves us. And we even know this holy, loving God rewards those who seek Him.

But in order to seek God we must *obey* God, and obedience is something our prideful hearts will not allow us to do. So we plunge headlong into the darkness, and with each step a nagging fear begins to grow stronger and stronger, as our injured conscience reminds us that one day when the journey of life is over we will stand before the God we have defied and give an account for the decisions we have made.

John 16:8 “And He (*the Holy Spirit*), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;” (NASB)

Romans 1:18-32 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man... Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions... receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness... and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.” (NASB)

Psalm 14:4 “Will evildoers never learn... There they are, overwhelmed with dread...” (NIV)

This fear naturally breeds a mental state of insecurity, and insecurity has only one tool to deal with the challenges of life in a fallen world: Cowardice. We plan cowardly acts and omissions that become a two-edged sword with which we carve out our place in the darkness, and therein we seek to collect and hold on to as many of the world’s distractions as we can.

Because of these choices, our hearts become self-absorbed. Our focus is on pleasing our own selfish interests, without regard for others, let alone God. Our minds become self-deceived. We reject the truth of God’s Word and the power of God’s Spirit, and instead build a house of cards upon the lies and half-truths of a fallen world that give us excuses to do what our conscience continually reminds us is wrong.

1 Timothy 4:1,2 “... in later times some will abandon the faith... Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” (NIV)

Titus 1:15,16 “... both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him...” (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:18,19 “... fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck...” (NIV)

In the end, all of this imparts to us a *repulsion for the burden of life*; that is: Misery. When we choose to live our lives in defiance of the living God, and our fearful minds are overrun with insecurity and cowardice, life ceases to be an adventure and becomes a burden. Instead of being excited to meet each new day, we are repulsed by the prospect. The spark in our eyes becomes an emptiness. The spring in our step becomes a punishing forced march. We live out our lives with passionless loathing.

Job 20:4-8 “Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since mankind was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though the pride of the godless person reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’ Like a dream he flies away, no more to be found, banished like a vision of the night.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 28:62-67 “... because you did not obey the LORD your God... the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’ – because of the terror that will fill your hearts...” (NIV)

Job 18:5,11 “The lamp of the wicked man is snuffed out... Terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step.” (NIV)

We also develop a *despondency with the outcomes of life*; that is: Despair. No matter what each day brings, even if it is a great victory, it is never enough. Each and every distraction of this world is temporary and ultimately unfulfilling, and so eventually the depth of our eyes becomes painfully shallow. The firmness of our step becomes increasingly unstable. We live out our lives with perpetual discontent.

Isaiah 57:20,21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” (NIV)

Ezekiel 12:19 “... They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair... because of the violence of all who live there.” (NIV)

Isaiah 9:18-20 “Surely wickedness burns like a fire... On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of their own offspring:” (NIV)

Haggai 1:5,6 “Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’” (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 2:1-20 “I (*Solomon*) said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’ But that also proved to be meaningless... what does pleasure accomplish? I tried cheering myself with wine... I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards... I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well – the delights of a man’s heart... I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom... Then I said to myself... ‘What then do I gain by being wise?... This too is meaningless.’ So I hated life... All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for... So my heart began to despair...” (NIV)

Words and deeds of hate then take the misery and despair we receive from defiant, self-absorbed hearts and fearful, self-deceived minds and burn them into our souls like a brand. When we are defiant and fearful, we end up hating God, others, and even ourselves, and through this hatred we

become entombed in an inescapable misery and despair. Hate becomes the completion of defiance and fear, and the disfigurement that perpetuates their legacy of misery and despair.

Job 15:20-26 “... the wicked man suffers torment... Distress and anguish fill him with terror; troubles overwhelm him... because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty, defiantly charging against him...” (NIV)

Psalms 73:3-8 “... the wicked... pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice...” (NIV)

Habakkuk 2:4-17 “See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright... he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied... You will be filled with shame instead of glory... The violence you have done... will overwhelm you, and your destruction... will terrify you.” (NIV)

Notice for every quality that comes from humbly seeking God, there is a counterpart that comes from pridefully seeking the distractions of the world; and these opposing qualities propel us towards the alternative ends of Joy and Peace, or misery and despair.

God calls out to us, and we either humbly desire His light or pridefully desire the world’s darkness. Our course is then set in one of two opposite directions, and we develop hearts that are either faithful and selfless, or defiant and self-absorbed. Our minds become either hopeful and discerning, or fearful and self-deceived. Our behavior becomes either loving and of service to God and others, or hateful and self-indulgent. And as a result of all of this, we come to know either Joy and Peace, or misery and despair.

Pride takes us on a *journey through the self*— led by the self-absorption of the defiant, through the self-deception of the fearful, to the self-indulgence of the hateful. In this pride we take up the mastery of our lives, and we lead ourselves through darkness into self-induced misery and despair.

Humility takes us on a *journey through grace* – led by the selflessness of the faithful, through the discernment of the hopeful, to the service of the loving. In this humility we forgo the mastery of our lives, and we are led by God through light into His Joy and Peace.

What triggers these diametrically opposed journeys and determines which road we choose is our foundational, underlying desire for either the things of God’s light or the things of the world’s darkness. We set our sights on one of these two beacons, and they lead us down two entirely different paths.

John 3:17-21 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him... This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (NASB)

Proverbs 5:21-23 “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths. His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin... in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.” (NASB)

Isaiah 59:4-8 “No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil... Their deeds are evil deeds... Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.” (NIV)

Proverbs 11:6 “... the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires.” (NIV)

2 Timothy 3:2-17 “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control... You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of... and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

Psalms 119:161-165 “... my heart stands in awe of Your words. I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great spoil... Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.” (NASB)

1 John 2:6-11 “Whoever claims to live in him (*God*) must live as Jesus did... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” (NIV)

Jude 1:24,25 “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (NASB)

A desire for light, which is essentially a desire to know and please God, ignites and then fuels a process whereby our fundamental being is transformed, from a raw piece of clay into the image of God. In serving God, we become like God, because His commandment to us as His servants is to follow the example of His Son, the ultimate servant of God and all humanity. Our selfless, faithful hearts and discerning, hopeful minds live to serve God and others with loving acts of mercy, compassion, faithfulness, patience, kindness, and forgiveness – the very behaviors that make God who He is. Then, just as God knows Joy and Peace, we know Joy and Peace.

Isaiah 64:8 “Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (NIV)

Ephesians 4:17-23 “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more... put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (NIV)

2 Peter 1:2-4 “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him... He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature...” (NASB)

1 Peter 1:15,16 “But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ ” (NIV)

Ephesians 5:1,2 “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us...” (NASB)

1 John 3:1-24 “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... This is how we know who the children of God are... Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth... this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.” (NIV)

1 John 4:16,17 “... God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:2-10 “... we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 3:3,18 “... you are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts... And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 6:16 “... For we are the temple of the living God...” (NASB)

Absent this change, we eventually become incapable of even envisioning a life where something like passion and contentment might truly exist. And so instead of pursuing the things that will create true, lasting happiness, we settle for anything that will make life just a little bit less miserable, and in desperation we turn to the temporary distractions of the world.

This desire for darkness, which is essentially a desire to hide from God and please ourselves, ignites and then fuels a process whereby our fundamental being is transformed, from a raw piece of clay into a distortion of the man or woman God created us to be. All of the abilities and passions God gave us as part of His plan for our lives grow abnormally into something they were not intended, because they are nurtured in darkness instead of light. We use the talents and opportunities God gives us, not to serve Him and His plan, but to defy Him and indulge ourselves. From the perverted soil of self-absorbed hearts and self-deceived minds we grow misshapen limbs that carry out acts of hateful self-indulgence. In the world's eyes we might look like a superstar, but in God's eyes we appear as a heartbreaking corruption of who we were meant to be, and the end result is eventually always the same: A man or woman lost in the darkness, full of misery and despair.

Revelation 3:17 “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (NIV)

Isaiah 45:9 “Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands?’ ” (NIV)

1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or anything in the world... For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” (NIV)

Pulling it all together and applying it to Solomon.

If we take these things and apply them to Solomon, we can better understand why someone could start out so good and end up so bad.

Solomon certainly heard the voice of God calling to him. Yahweh physically appeared to him twice. And initially Solomon showed tremendous humility and faith. Despite the infamy of his parentage and disfunction within his father's house, Solomon rose to the occasion when the responsibility of the throne fell upon him. He asked God for the wisdom to lead Israel well. That was certainly a selfless act, given he could have asked for anything. God granted him wisdom and every other blessing he could have asked for, and Solomon served Yahweh faithfully to the extent he built the Temple according the plans laid out by David.

But Solomon's devotion to God had its limits. He didn't trust Yahweh for the security of the nation, and he had no intention of limiting the number of women he took to his bed. So he defied God in these areas. In acts of appalling self-absorption, he schemed politically and married Pharaoh's daughter to protect himself from Egypt, then indulged himself sexually in 999 pagan women. He did this because in his pride he deceived himself into thinking his political maneuvering would be more effective in protecting the nation than trusting in the God who visited ten supernatural plagues on Egypt and drowned her armies in the Red Sea. Then to celebrate his cleverness he hopped into bed with 999 women whose idea of going to church was to have sex with temple prostitutes and burn their children alive.

This type of sustained defiance of God, motivated by unspeakable pride, can only lead to increasing fear and hatred, as the powerful undercurrent of a desire for the darkness of a fallen world draws Solomon into the jaws of misery and despair. He locks Pharaoh's daughter away in her palace,

which is nothing more than a gilded cage for a political hostage, and makes the rounds with his 999 pagan wives and concubines. But there is no scenario where these things brought the mighty king of Israel any semblance of Joy or Peace. His political web and nightly indulgences might have temporarily distracted him from the carnage going on in his soul, but eventually misery and despair have their way with him, the way he had his way with a thousand women. And he is left with a joyless, meaningless, existence, like an abused woman sent outside in the cold after giving herself to an evil man.

Frustration overpowers him. Fear consumes him. He lashes out in acts of hatred towards God and others. He builds hundreds of temples and high places for the nauseating gods of Canaan, some within sight of the Temple of Yahweh, so the screams and smells of burning infants can drift over the walls of Jerusalem. He seeks to murder the man chosen by God to succeed him in the north, with none of this easing his pain, and yet absolutely no desire to repent. He becomes the embodiment of misery and despair. All that's left is for him to die.

Solomon's death and Israel's division.

When we last observed Solomon, he was just outside the beautiful walls of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, busy putting the finishing touches on places of worship for his new gods Chemosh (Moabite god of war) and Molek (Ammonite god of fire, who really liked it if you burned your children alive in his honor, see Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5; Jeremiah 32:30-35). So Yahweh told him this:

1 Kings 11:7-13 “On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD’s command. So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.’ ” (NIV)

You would think if you had the long history with Yahweh Solomon had, you would want to repent, seek mercy, and try to live out the remainder of your days with obedience and faith. Not Solomon. We have no record of any sort of humility or remorse. This is perhaps why God then rose up three adversaries, Hadad, Rezon, and Jeroboam. See 1 Kings 11:14-40.

Hadad was an Edomite (descendant of Esau), who fled to Egypt as a boy during the time of David. Pharaoh took a liking to him and gave him a sister-in-law to marry. When David died, Hadad returned to Edom, towards the south of Israel, and rebelled against Solomon.

Rezon was a Canaanite. He gathered an army and took Damascus, north of Israel.

Now Solomon has an adversary to his north (Rezon) and his south (Hadad). To the east there is only the Arabian desert, and to the west is Pharaoh, who betrayed him by harboring Hadad. As a result of his defiance of Yahweh, Solomon is now essentially surrounded by enemies. But at least he can feel secure within his borders, right?

Wrong. Because within Israel, there is a young Ephraimite named Jeroboam, who has distinguished himself as one of Solomon's officials. Jeroboam is young, popular, capable, and in command of the entire labor force of both Ephraim and Manasseh on behalf of Solomon. Then one day, as we have seen, while Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, he is met by a prophet with a startling message.

1 Kings 11:29-39 “About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did. But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon’s hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees. I will take the kingdom from his son’s hands and give you ten tribes. I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever.” ’” (NIV)

There is much in this passage to consider. Note the extraordinary offer being made to Jeroboam. If he will be faithful, he will be granted a dynasty as enduring as David's. That's a breathtaking opportunity. Unfortunately, Jeroboam's rule is devastating for the Northern Kingdom. He chooses to lead them into idolatry, but that is, as they say, another story.

Solomon learns of Yahweh's plans. A ruler has been chosen for the Northern Kingdom. It must have been a devastating blow and a final confirmation God meant what He said when He told Solomon He was going to tear the nation in two. How does Solomon react?

1 Kings 11:40 “Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon’s death.” (NIV)

This was essentially Solomon's last chance to repent. When he learned of the prophet's words to Jeroboam, Solomon could have accepted God's will and transferred power gracefully, for the good

of the nation. Instead, he hardens his heart and actively tries to thwart God's will, by attempting to murder God's chosen.

And where does Jeroboam run? To Egypt of course, which serves as a final condemnation of Solomon's failed attempts at foreign policy through political nuptials. The guy who will take ten tribes away from Solomon finds refuge at the side of Solomon's father-in-law.

Solomon's futile attempt on Jeroboam's life is the last recorded act of Solomon's reign. What a sad, desperate scene. Solomon could have spent his final days looking back on a satisfied life. He could have been filled with Joy, Peace, and gratitude for the unprecedented blessings he has enjoyed, while also looking forward to the future blessings sure to fall upon his children and the nation he has ruled justly on Yahweh's behalf. Instead, Solomon wallows in despair on a fragile throne, knowing his murderous plots have failed and his heir will be stripped of nearly all his kingdom.

After reigning forty years, Solomon dies miserable and alone. His 1000 wives and concubines do not mourn his passing, nor do his children or people. He just dies. His riches, power, and celebrity do not follow him into eternity. He arrives in a place where "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first," and assumes his appropriate spot in the eternal order of things.

Matthew 19:28-30 "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.' " (NIV)

After Solomon's death, a son named Rehoboam succeeded him.

1 Kings 11:42 "Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. Then he rested with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king." (NIV)

No other sons of Solomon are recorded in Scripture, which is a bit of a mystery since he had 1000 wives and concubines. It may be these women were unable to conceive, or Solomon lost his ability to father, or he became like a man who collects cars in a warehouse but never drives them. There is also no record of any sort of struggle over who would be Solomon's heir or how he was chosen.

Scripture does reveal Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, an Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 12:13). In his pride Solomon never married a Jewish woman, so Rehoboam was half Jewish and half Ammonite (descendants of Ben-Ammi, Lot's son through his younger daughter, see Genesis 19:38).

Naamah is one of only two queen mothers in the history of Israel who was not Jewish, with the other being an infamous woman named Jezebel. Never producing an heir through a Jewish woman is further evidence of Solomon's arrogance and defiance of God's plans for Israel.

What sort of son did Solomon and Naamah raise? Did he inherit Solomon's wisdom and insight? Did he ever have a chance to keep Israel united as one nation?

After Solomon's death, all Israel gathered together in the historic city of Shechem, and they were actually prepared to recognize Rehoboam as king. This even included Jeroboam. They just had one simple and reasonable request.

1 Kings 12:1-4 “Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam, and he 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 labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.’ ” (NIV)

If you are Rehoboam, this is fantastic news. The entire nation, including the guy prophesied to take ten tribes away from you, is gathered together in one place and prepared to accept you as their sovereign. All you have to do is promise not to be a jerk.

If he has inherited his father's wisdom and insight, Rehoboam would recognize this as a reasonable request. His dad had essentially enslaved much of Israel to make the Temple and royal palace. That work was now done, and there were still plenty of Canaanites running around in the land who had been subjugated for hard labor. There was no good reason to continue conscripting labor from the people of Israel.

So this is an easy “yes,” and then it's party time. How did Rehoboam respond?

1 Kings 12:5-11 “Rehoboam answered, ‘Go away for three days and then come back to me.’ So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. ‘How would you advise me to answer these people?’ he asked. They replied, ‘If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.’ But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. He asked them, ‘What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, “Lighten the yoke your father put on us?”’ The young men who had grown up with him replied, ‘These people have said to you, “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.” Now tell them, “My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.”’ ” (NIV)

Rehoboam gets some great advice from his father's counselors. It's not their first rodeo, and they know this is a fantastic deal.

But then Rehoboam turns to the young punks who have grown up with him in the royal court and never dealt with a real-life problem, and they give him the type of advice you would expect from young, sheltered aristocrats, who want to impress the new king with how tough they are. Whose advice will Rehoboam take?

1 Kings 12:12-15 “Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, ‘Come back to me in three days.’ The king answered the people

harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men and said, ‘My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’ So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.” (NIV)

Rehoboam foolishly takes the advice of the young punks instead of the wise elders, because this was “from Yahweh.” This is a good example of God directing the king’s heart “like channels of water.” God didn’t force Rehoboam to do something stupid by stripping him of his free will. But God did surround Rehoboam with a bunch of idiotic friends, and He knew Rehoboam would arrogantly follow their guidance, like banks of a river guiding the water to a smelly bog.

Proverbs 21:1 “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (NASB)

Ironically this is one of Solomon’s proverbs, so it’s a shame his son didn’t give it some thought.

How did the people react to Rehoboam’s promise to “scourge them with scorpions?”

1 Kings 12:16,17 “When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: ‘What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!’ So the Israelites went home. But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.” (NIV)

Basically, all the people of the northern ten tribes, collectively known as “Israel,” waived to Rehoboam and said “bye, bye,” while the people in the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, collectively known as “Judah,” remained faithful to Rehoboam, just as Yahweh said they would. How does Rehoboam react?

1 Kings 12:18-20 “King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David. When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin – a hundred and eighty thousand able young men – to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon. But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: ‘Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to all Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, “This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.”’ So they obeyed the word of the LORD and went home again, as the LORD had ordered.” (NIV)

Rehoboam sends the guy in charge of forced labor after the departing Israelites. They say, “hi, we remember you,” and stone him to death. Next they go after Rehoboam, who barely escapes to the fortified walls of Jerusalem with his life. Then they make Jeroboam their king.

Even though his emissary got his brains bashed in with a pile of rocks, and he had to take off in a chariot to avoid the same fate, Rehoboam is undeterred, and between the men of Judah and Benjamin, he raises an army 180,000 strong. But Yahweh sends a prophet who calls for both armies to stand down. They obey, and the division of the nation is complete.

The ten tribes to the north are called “Israel” or the Northern Kingdom, with Jeroboam as their king. The two tribes to the south (Judah and Benjamin) are called “Judah” or the Southern Kingdom, with Rehoboam as their king.

Benjamin was generally a small tribe because of its decimation at the beginning of the period of the Judges, but it remained loyal to the house of David. Jerusalem was also a part of Benjamin’s tribal lands, so it remained the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

We should quickly note, when the Promised Land was divided between the different tribes, Simeon was allotted a small region within the tribal lands of Judah (see Genesis 49:5-7; Joshua 19:1-9). This would lead us to believe Simeon must have been part of the Southern Kingdom along with Judah and Benjamin.

However, Simeon is always counted among the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom. The reason seems to be Simeon never occupied its tribal lands and instead settled throughout the northern portion of Israel.

This was foretold by Jacob, when he prophesied over his sons. Both Simeon and Levi were known for their violence (tracing back to the vengeance taken upon Shechem for the rape of Dinah, see Genesis 34), and Jacob said they would be “scattered and dispersed” in Israel. This was certainly true for the Levites, who eventually became the priestly tribe and had no lands assigned to them. It also appears to be true of the Simeonites, who never seem to have claimed the lands given to them and instead dwelt scattered throughout the north.

Genesis 49:5-7 “Simeon and Levi are brothers – their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.” (NIV)

Simeon also appears to be the smallest of the ten tribes. It was one of the larger tribes at the time of the first census by Moses, with 59,300 men of military age (see Numbers 1:23; 2:13). This count was of the first generation of the Exodus, taken at Mount Sinai.

But by the time of the second censuses, Simeon’s count dropped almost 63%, down to only 22,200 (see Numbers 25:14). This count was of the second generation of the Exodus, taken on the plains of Moab before entering the Promised Land, and it made Simeon the smallest tribe by far, the next smallest tribe being Gad with 40,500 (see Numbers 26:18).

No reason is given for the decline in the population of Simeon. It may have been their tribe was disproportionately rebellious during the forty years of wandering in the desert, and as discipline produced fewer heirs, but no clear reason is provided in Scripture.

Simeon may have preferred the northern lands, much of which was beautiful hill country, to the southern lands so near the Negev desert. Or their sympathies may have been more akin to the rebellious and idolatrous north. Regardless, Simeon chose to integrate with the ten tribes in the north, rather than claim their lands in the south within the tribal lands of Judah.

The capital city of the Northern Kingdom was Shechem, in the tribal lands of Ephraim, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

Shechem had a rich history for the Israelites. It's where Abraham first stopped and received God's promise of the land (Genesis 12:6,7), where Jacob built an altar (Genesis 33:18-20), where Dinah was raped (Genesis 34:1-29), where the "blessings and curses" were read during the time of Joshua (Joshua 8:33), where the covenant was reaffirmed after the conquest (Joshua 24:25-28), where Joseph's bones were buried (Joshua 24:32), and where the rebel Abimelek once ruled (Judges 9). So both good and bad things happened at Shechem. The future will lean towards the latter.

You might have noticed the similarity between the names of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam means "he enlarges the people," which is ironic, because he loses authority over nearly all of the people he could have ruled.

The meaning of Jeroboam is debated. Some believe it means "he contends for the people," while others believe it means "he opposes the people." This name is more fitting, because while he represents the people who rebelled against the house of David, he also becomes the father of their ruin, leading the Northern Kingdom into idolatry. See 1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:1-33.

And so Solomon dies, and the nation splits. It's a devastating moment in the history of the "kingdom of priests and holy nation" God desired to bring to a planet in such need of spiritual light.

Israel was supposed to follow the Law and worship at the Tabernacle with Yahweh as their King. Instead, they ignored the Law, went through the motions at a Temple Yahweh never asked for, and wind up here with two kings (both of whom will turn out rotten) leading two different kingdoms towards a perpetual cold war, with idolatry spreading through the land like an infectious disease, and the prospects of fulfilling their covenant with Yahweh slim to none. This is the unfortunate legacy of Solomon.

Which leads us to ask: Why Solomon? David had a lot of sons. Why did Yahweh choose Solomon, whose sin was the catalyst for the disaster that tore the nation in two? Would things have turned out differently if Yahweh had chosen a different heir?

Why Solomon?

The ignoble circumstances of Solomon's parentage must have been common knowledge. Everyone knew of the sin of David and Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. It was no secret. It made its way into Scripture, and it led to divine discipline that caused David to flee Jerusalem and go on the run from Absalom. This makes Solomon an unlikely choice for the heir to the throne. Why would you choose the child produced by the woman David committed adultery with and whose husband David murdered?

Another thing that made Solomon an unlikely choice is: He was not the oldest surviving son. Here are seven sons of David mentioned by name in Scripture, according to their birth order:

1. Amnon, the firstborn, son of Ahinoam of Jezreel, killed by Absalom (2 Samuel 13:29).
2. Kileab, son of Abigail, the widow of Nabal.
3. Absalom, son of Maakah, pagan daughter of Talmai king of Geshur, killed by Joab (2 Samuel 18:14).
4. Adonijah, son of Haggith, killed by Solomon (1 Kings 2:25).
5. Shephatiah, son of Abital
6. Ithream, son of Eglah
7. Solomon, son of Bathsheba.

Solomon is actually the youngest son of David mentioned here (although David had other sons by his wives and concubines), and Solomon had two living brothers when he became king. The eldest surviving son of David was Kileab, whose mother was Abigail.

If you will recall, Abigail was a tremendous woman, both virtuous and wise (see 1 Samuel 25), who would have made an extraordinary queen for David, had he not been such a fool and lecher when it came to women. With Abigail as his mother, it's reasonable to suspect Kileab was a wise and honorable man. But we discover nothing about him in Scripture, and he was not the one Yahweh chose to inherit the throne.

So why did Yahweh choose Solomon? When Solomon was born, Scripture says this:

2 Samuel 12:24,25 “Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah (*“loved by Yahweh”*).” (NIV)

God is omniscient. He knew even before Solomon was born this child would grow up to betray Him and build temples for the gods of his 1000 pagan wives and concubines. So why would Yahweh “love him,” choose him to be king, and even give him a name meaning “loved by Yahweh?”

There is much to consider here. First, God loves everyone, even though we are all sinners. Perhaps in His love for Solomon, God is trying to encourage us all. If God can love this guy, He can love you and me, too.

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (NIV)

Ephesians 2:1-7 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... All of us also lived... gratifying the cravings of our flesh... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

Romans 8:31-39 “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall

separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

1 John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.” (NIV)

We should also perhaps be less critical and more understanding of Solomon. He had more wealth, fame, and power than perhaps any person in all of history. Of course he was corrupted by it! Who wouldn't be corrupted by it? He was honorable enough to ask for wisdom as a youth, which is certainly a reason to love and respect him. Would you or I have done the same? Perhaps in his story we are supposed to learn not to desire these worldly things, because *if they can corrupt a man as honorable and wise as Solomon, what would they do to us?*

Proverbs 30:7-9 “Two things I (*Agur*) ask of you, LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ ” (NIV)

Nehemiah 13:23-27 “Moreover, in those days I (*Nehemiah*) saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: “You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?” ” (NIV)

Finally, perhaps God chose Solomon because he was the best reflection of the people of Israel. Like Solomon, they all became fabulously wealthy and secure, and like Solomon, their hearts turned from God. As Solomon began construction on all those pagan temples, did anyone in Israel stand up and say what he was doing was wrong? No. They all stood aside, until construction was complete, then poured in.

Consider the words of the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam.

1 Kings 11:29-33 “... Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh... said to Jeroboam, ‘... this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes... I will do this because they (*meaning the people of Israel, not Solomon*) have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon's father, did...” ’ ” (NIV)

Notice Yahweh says He is splitting the nation because “*they have* forsaken Me,” not “*he has* forsaken Me.” In other words, it wasn’t just Solomon who was turning to Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Molek. It was the entire nation. And so Yahweh was dividing the country in two as discipline for the collective decisions of the people as a whole to turn from Him, not only because of the decisions of one man.

If God had made Abigail’s son Kileab king, would things have turned out differently? If Kileab had been a virtuous leader, would the people have been virtuous as well?

Who can say? While a virtuous leader can certainly have a positive effect on a nation, there is only so much he or she can do. At the end of the day, the people will do what they desire, and no amount of good leadership will stop them. Jesus was a good leader, but that didn’t stop us from crucifying Him.

Sometimes God gives us the leaders we deserve, as punishment for our sins. He gives us leaders who are simply a reflection of our own rotten values, and we suffer as a result. Had the people of Israel not approved of Solomon’s betrayal of Yahweh, they would have stood in the way of the workers building those pagan temples, and they would have burned anything the workers’ built to the ground (as later generations of Israelites did, see 2 Kings 23).

Instead, they watched, waited, and then indulged themselves. They were no better than Solomon. If anything, they were worse and bear more blame, because they did not have the all the baggage Solomon carried around by virtue of his ignoble parentage and the corrupting influence of fame, fortune, and power. They should have known better and rebuked him for his own good. In the proverbs below, those were Solomon’s instructions to his people.

Proverbs 27:5,6 “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” (NIV)

Proverbs 17:10 “A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool.” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:23 “He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.” (NASB)

Galatians 6:1-10 “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load... Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (NIV)

Ephesians 4:25 “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor...” (NIV)

Leviticus 19:17 “... Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.” (NIV)

Yet it appears more like they encouraged him, congratulated him, and then came to the same misery as him, as you will observe if you study the history of Israel following the reign of Solomon.

Conclusion.

Saul, David, and Solomon were the first three kings of Israel. They never should have been. They should have been just three average dudes living out their lives in the nation of Israel. With the possible exception of David, their lives would likely have been much more fulfilling.

Why? Because what we learn from each of them in their own way is: *No one can handle the authority and responsibility that goes along with the throne, except Yahweh.* That's why He was supposed to rule over Israel from the Tabernacle, not these men or any other. The power of the throne corrupts *any* mere mortal who sits on it. So *only* Yahweh should be seated there. And no man will be up to the challenge, until Yahweh becomes a man Himself named Jesus. Yet the way He comes to the throne, and how He rules from it, will be utterly unique and totally unforeseen.

Saul was the people's choice. He was everything they wanted in a king, simply because he looked the part – tall, handsome, and physically powerful. And a total disaster. The throne literally drove him mad. He spent his last night on earth consulting with a demon possessed occultist, then threw himself on his own sword the next morning, surrounded by the dead bodies the sons he foolishly led into battle.

David was Yahweh's choice. He was the opposite of what the people wanted – a lowly shepherd from an obscure family. Yet he had the qualities of humility and faith Yahweh was looking for in a leader. David did better than any other king (until Jesus), but he couldn't handle the throne either. He succumbed to polygamy and doomed his family to the lethal infighting sure to follow, committing adultery and murder along the way for good measure. Even a "man after God's own heart" fell desperately short of what a king should be.

Solomon inherits the throne, asks for wisdom, and is showered with unprecedented blessing. Yet for all his wisdom, he too was corrupted by the power of the throne. Instead of emulating David's best qualities, Solomon emulated David's worst, and took polygamy to a new level. Then he allowed the women he abased himself with to lead him away from the source of his blessing to the source of unspeakable cursing. And the man who built God's holy Temple on earth ended his life building unholy dens for prostitution and infanticide.

The future kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms will be no better. To the north, each and every one without exception were complete failures, getting steadily worse with each generation. To the south, most were disasters, with only a few attempting to get Judah back on the right path.

During the period of the judges, the people essentially refused to be ruled by anyone. They all "did what was right in their own eyes," which generally involved all of humanity's worst propensities.

The Israelites then asked for a king other than Yahweh, as if this would make things better. But of course things only get worse. Their kings couldn't handle the power. Each was destroyed by it,

one way or another, while the people continued to refuse to fulfill their covenant with Yahweh to be a “kingdom of priests and holy nation.”

All along the people should have been submitting to Yahweh as their King, but they rebelled instead. Eventually, Yahweh will “tabernacle among them” (John 1:14) in the form of Jesus, but most will reject Him as well.

In a sense, all history from the conquest of the Promised Land onward is the story of whether Israel will accept Yahweh as her King, in the form of Jesus the Messiah. This is the only way she can fulfill her covenant to be a “kingdom of priests and holy nation,” blessing all other nations and completing God’s purpose.

Within the long arc of Israel’s history, Solomon is perhaps her most tragic figure. He rises out of parental infamy and extreme family disfunction, with a true desire to humbly serve Yahweh in the high position for which he has been chosen. His prayer for wisdom is granted, and along with wisdom he is blessed with every material blessing we could possibly imagine.

Yet these blessings are too much for Solomon. They become the treasure he hoards, in place of his desire to serve the One from whom his blessings flowed. He makes foundational compromises, in the forms of politics and sex – politics to protect what he has, and sex as a means to enjoy it.

Yet his political maneuvers could not make him secure, and his sexual exploits could not make him joyful. Instead, they lead him into the depths of depravity, and Solomon ends up losing everything he treasured. His kingdom is ripped from him, and he ends his life a miserable, despairing, enemy of God.

And all of these conflicting motivations, with their resulting thoughts, words, and deeds, are reflected in the writings attributed to Solomon.

Part 2: The Writings Attributed to Solomon.

PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, AND THE SONG OF SONGS.

INTRODUCTION.

There are three books of the Bible closely associated with Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (sometimes called the Song of Solomon).

These are fascinating and somewhat enigmatic books from Scripture, because while they are all connected to Solomon in some fashion, their messages are often conflicting, which can lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

The key to unraveling these paradoxes is to consider these writing against the backdrop of Solomon's life. His path did not follow a straight line. It was an arc, with a steep ascension, dramatic turn, and terrible descent. The writings come from different points along this curve, and therefore reflect different seasons in Solomon's life. The writings are volatile because Solomon was volatile. Knowing this, it would be suspicious if they all said the same thing.

Keeping this in mind, we discover:

- *Proverbs* is about life *principles* (which Solomon understood but ultimately chose not to follow). This would be from early in Solomon's reign, towards the beginning of his ascent.
- *Ecclesiastes* is about life *realities* (about which Solomon draws self-absorbed, faithless conclusions). This would be from late in Solomon's reign, towards the end of his descent.
- *Song of Songs* is about life *choices* (not by Solomon, rather a woman who rejects him for a shepherd). This would be from the apex of the curve, as Solomon was at the crossroads of his life.

Together these books present a multifaceted look at the mysteries of life in a fallen world. Let's take a look at them, consider how they relate to the life of Solomon, and from this juxtaposition gain wisdom so our lives do not follow the same tragic path.

CHAPTER 8 – PROVERBS.

PROPOUNDED AND IGNORED.

What's a proverb?

In Hebrew, “proverb” is *masbal*. At its core it means “comparison.” It compares an action to a consequence, in order to impart wisdom. When you know what is likely to happen if you make a certain choice, then you should be able to make better decisions.

However, it's important to understand: *Proverbs are not promises*. They are not a series of binding contracts with the God of the universe, whereby He agrees to do something if you will first do something else. If they were, they would be called promises not proverbs.

Instead, proverbs convey life *principles*. They teach what is likely to happen if we make a certain choice. They are little bursts of common sense.

Some confuse proverbs with promises, then get confused and discouraged when they do the right thing but get a bad result, or do the wrong thing but get a good result. This is why the book of Proverbs should be read in parallel with the book of Job, where a guy does all the right things but suffers terribly, because God had a purpose in his suffering.

For now, understand what proverbs are – life principles meant to steer us towards good decisions that will ordinarily bring about good consequences in our lives. It's advice for living life in a way that gives us the best chance to prosper, while avoiding the things that eventually lead to ruin.

Solomon's role.

It's clear Solomon wrote many of the proverbs recorded in the book of Proverbs. After Solomon's request for wisdom, Yahweh certainly equipped him for the job.

1 Kings 4:29-34 “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite (*who wrote Psalm 89*) – wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.” (NIV)

But as we shall see, Solomon was not the only contributor to the book of Proverbs.

- Solomon's sayings are collected in the first 22 chapters of the book.

- Then starting with Proverbs 22:17, we have the “sayings of the wise.” This would be a collection of proverbs considered valuable and preserved by the people, but likely of unknown or forgotten authorship.
- In Proverbs 25, we switch back to proverbs written by Solomon, but which were compiled during the reign of king Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kings 18) circa 700 B.C., about 250 years after Solomon’s reign. Hezekiah was one of the few good kings, who tried to get the Southern Kingdom back on the right track after the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria circa 722 B.C.
- Proverbs 30 collects proverbs from a man named Agur (which means “gatherer” or “convener”) son of Jakeh (“obedient), addressed to Ithiel (“God is with me”) and Ucal (“powerful”). We do not know anything about any of these people. Their names may be symbolic.
- Proverbs 31 collects the sayings of King Lemuel (“belonging to God”), which in turn were taught to him by his very wise but unnamed mother. We do not know anything about this king or his mom either.

And so the book itself was not written down by Solomon. Instead, all these sayings were collected and compiled by an anonymous person (or group of people). An analogy would be putting together a quilt, collecting old and new pieces of material, then sewing them all together into one treasured blanket.

This does not at all mean Proverbs is not the inspired Word of God. It is. It just means there was a divinely appointed process where people used their divinely imparted gifts to put together God’s divinely inspired Word.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

Structure of the book, with samples.

Proverbs can be broken down into the five major sections:

- I. Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 1:1 to 22:16)
- II. Wisdom of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34)
- III. More Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 25:1 to 29:27)
- IV. Wisdom of Agur (Proverbs 30:1-33)
- V. Wisdom of King Lemuel’s Mother (Proverbs 31:1-31)

While it would be wonderful to go through the entire book, we will just include a few samples. However, everyone would benefit from a daily reading of the wisdom found in this marvelous book of Scripture.

I. Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 1:1 to 22:16).

This section breaks down into three parts: (a) a preface; (b) advice to a son and the call of lady wisdom; and (c) traditional proverbs.

a. Preface – Proverbs 1:1-7.

The book begins with a short preface, letting us know we are going to start with wisdom from Solomon.

Proverbs 1:1-7 “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (NIV)

b. Advice to a son and the call of lady wisdom – Proverbs 1:8 to 9:18.

Here we get a long discourse from Solomon as a father to a son (and sometimes “sons”). It also includes “your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8). Neither the mother nor any specific son is identified. This may be simply a literary device, rather than Solomon’s actual teachings to a son.

Proverbs 1:8-19 “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them... These men lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush only themselves! Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the life of those who get it.” (NIV)

Intermixed with these passages, wisdom is personified as a woman, calling out for everyone to follow her teachings and be blessed, and warning of destruction if she is rejected.

Proverbs 1:20-33 “Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech: ‘How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings... For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.’” (NIV)

In these passages, Solomon commands his son to love a lady named wisdom. If he will do so, she will “exalt him” and save him from “wicked men” and “adulterous women.” Then he will dwell “blameless in the land,” while those who reject wisdom will be “cut off from the land.” More on the sad irony of this in a moment.

Proverbs 4:1-9 “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction... Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you... Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.” (NIV)

Proverbs 2:1-22 “My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding – indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver

and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding... Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men... Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words... Thus you will walk in the ways of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.” (NIV)

Proverbs 5:3-5 “... the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.” (NIV)

These beautiful passages overflow with profound, life-altering wisdom, for those who will listen and obey.

Proverbs 3:5,6 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (NIV)

Proverbs 3:9,10 “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” (NIV)

Proverbs 3:11,12 “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” (NIV)

Proverbs 3:13-18 “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.” (NIV)

Proverbs 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB)

Proverbs 6:9-11 “How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.” (NIV)

Proverbs 6:16-19 “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.” (NIV)

Proverbs 9:13-18 “Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way, ‘Let all who are simple come to my house!’ To those who have no sense she says, ‘Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!’ But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.” (NIV)

c. Solomon’s proverbs – Proverbs 10:1 to 22:16.

Here is where we find the actual proverbs of Solomon, presented in two-line refrains. There are 375 of them in this section, covering a wide range of topics. They are all brilliant bursts of common sense.

Proverbs 10:1 "... A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother." (NIV)

Proverbs 10:4 "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." (NIV)

Proverbs 10:12 "Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." (NIV)

Proverbs 11:2 "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." (NIV)

Proverbs 11:22 "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." (NIV)

Proverbs 12:16 "Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult." (NIV)

Proverbs 12:26 "The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray." (NIV)

Proverbs 13:11 "Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow." (NIV)

Proverbs 13:20 "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." (NASB)

Proverbs 13:24 "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." (NIV)

Proverbs 14:23 "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." (NIV)

Proverbs 14:30 "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." (NIV)

Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (NIV)

Proverbs 15:22 "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (NIV)

Proverbs 16:2 "All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives." (NASB)

Proverbs 16:9 "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." (NASB)

Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (NIV)

Proverbs 16:28 "A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends." (NIV)

Proverbs 16:32 "Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city." (NIV)

Proverbs 17:1 "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife." (NIV)

Proverbs 17:3 "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts." (NASB)

Proverbs 17:12 "Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly." (NIV)

Proverbs 17:28 "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues." (NIV)

Proverbs 18:2 "Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions." (NIV)

Proverbs 18:14 "The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" (NIV)

Proverbs 18:22 "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD." (NIV)

Proverbs 19:3 “A person’s own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD.” (NIV)

Proverbs 19:11 “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.” (NASB)

Proverbs 19:13 “A foolish son is destruction to his father, and the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.” (NASB)

Proverbs 19:14 “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.” (NIV)

Proverbs 19:21 “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.” (NIV)

Proverbs 20:1 “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” (NIV)

Proverbs 20:5 “The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.” (NIV)

Proverbs 20:19 “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.” (NIV)

Proverbs 20:22 “Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:2 “Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts.” (NASB)

Proverbs 21:3 “To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:6 “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:9 “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:13 “Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:19 “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.” (NIV)

Proverbs 21:21 “He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor.” (NASB)

Proverbs 21:27 “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!” (NASB)

Proverbs 22:1 “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” (NIV)

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (NASB)

Proverbs 22:14 “The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; a man who is under the LORD’s wrath falls into it.” (NIV)

II. Wisdom of the Wise (Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34).

These are collections of proverbs from unknown authors, as brilliant as the wisdom of Solomon, beginning with a collection of thirty sayings, followed by a collection of six more sayings.

Proverbs 22:22,23 “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life.” (NIV)

Proverbs 22:24,25 “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.” (NIV)

Proverbs 23:26-28 “My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways, for an adulterous woman is a deep pit, and a wayward wife is a narrow well. Like a bandit she lies in wait and multiplies the unfaithful among men.” (NIV)

Proverbs 24:3,4 “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.” (NIV)

Proverbs 24:17,18 “Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 24:23-25 “These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good: Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent,’ will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come on them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 24:26 “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.” (NIV)

III. More Wisdom of Solomon (Proverbs 25:1 to 29:27).

These are more of Solomon’s proverbs, compiled during the reign of king Hezekiah of Judah circa 700 B.C., about 250 years after Solomon. There are more than 100 of these, depending on what method you use to count them.

Proverbs 25:4,5 “Remove the dross from the silver, and a silversmith can produce a vessel; remove wicked officials from the king’s presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness.” (NIV)

Proverbs 25:15 “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.” (NIV)

Proverbs 25:21,22 “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” (NIV)

Proverbs 25:28 “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:9 “Like a thornbush in a drunkard’s hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:11 “As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:17 “Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:20 “Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:23-26 “Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. Enemies disguise themselves with their lips, but in their hearts they harbor deceit. Though their speech is charming, do not believe them, for seven abominations fill their hearts. Their malice may be concealed by deception, but their wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.”

Proverbs 26:27 “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 27:5,6 “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” (NIV)

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (NIV)

Proverbs 27:19 “As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.” (NIV)

Proverbs 27:22 “Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding them like grain with a pestle, you will not remove their folly from them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:1 “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:6 “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:13 “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:23 “Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:6 “Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:15 “A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:26 “Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the LORD that one gets justice.” (NIV)

IV. Wisdom of Agur (Proverbs 30:1-33).

Rather than crisp, two-line refrains, these are presented in poetic paragraphs of different sizes, sometimes comparing three or four seemingly dissimilar things.

Proverbs 30:5,6 “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” (NIV)

Proverbs 30:18,19 “There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.” (NIV)

Proverbs 30:21-23 “Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a godless fool who gets plenty to eat, a contemptible woman who gets married, and a servant who displaces her mistress.” (NIV)

V. Wisdom of king Lemuel’s mother (Proverbs 31:1-31).

This chapter contains very practical advice from a mother, whose son happens to be king, mostly revolving around the dangers of alcohol and women and the need to rule the people with justice. It ends with a famous passage about a “wife of noble character,” which is a *tour de force* of what a man should look for in a wife, and what a wife should strive to be to her husband and children, presented as an acrostic poem in the Hebrew.

Proverbs 31:1-30 “The sayings of King Lemuel – and inspired utterance his mother taught him. Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb! Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers! Do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings. It is not for kings, Lemuel – it is not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights. Let beer be for those who are perishing, wine for those who are in anguish! Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up

and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy... A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.... She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue... Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” (NIV)

Women in the Proverbs.

It's interesting to note the exalted place women occupy in Proverbs. Wisdom is personified as a woman, and the book ends with a chapter full of a female's wisdom, along with praise for the "wife of noble character." This is unusual for writings from the ancient world, where women were often shamefully treated as second-class citizens (at best), and sometimes below livestock (or worse).

We should also carefully note the compiler of this book was inspired by God to end it with the words of an incredibly wise and articulate mother to her son, who happens to be king, warning him of the dangers of the wrong type of woman, and describing in detail exactly what sort of woman he should be looking for and why.

This is perhaps one way the compiler addresses the great big honkin' elephant stomping through every page of the book he just carefully stitched together.

The sad irony of Proverbs: Solomon defies his own advice and suffers the ruin he warned us about.

Solomon goes on and on about how you should love "lady wisdom," who will "exalt you" and "save you" from "wicked men" and "adulterous women," so you can "dwell blameless in the land" and not be "cut off from the land" – all of which is emphatically true.

Then he hooks up with 1000 pagan wives and concubines, and under their influence, takes the blessings Yahweh gave him and uses his power and wealth to build hundreds of places to have sex with temple prostitutes and, if you are so inclined, burn your children alive. The people say, "thank you very much for your awesome leadership oh great king" and dive in. So Yahweh rips the nation in two.

Let's consider again the words of Solomon:

Proverbs 5:1-20 "My son, pay attention to my wisdom... the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it... Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel... Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman." (NIV)

Proverbs 12:4,21 “A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones... No harm overtakes the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble.” (NIV)

Proverbs 22:14 “The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; a man who is under the LORD’s wrath falls into it.” (NIV)

Solomon talks a lot about “adulterous” women here, meaning a woman willing to cheat on her husband. Maybe he thought his 700 wives and 300 concubines were all faithful to him, and that made them wives of “noble character.” But that’s the tortured logic of a man determined to do what he knows is wrong.

In a sense, every one of these 1000 women were cheating on the other 999. And Solomon was of course the worst offender by far, as he was cheating on all of them. Solomon should have written a few proverbs about adulterous *men*, and then perhaps he would not be remembered with infamy by those who understand the disastrous arc of his life.

Instead, Solomon goes on and on about the dangers of disgraceful wives. What could be more disgraceful than a wife who worships a god who’s into prostitution (which is a form of adultery) and lighting your kids on fire?

Solomon speaks highmindedly about “rejoicing in the wife of your youth” and being “intoxicated by her,” in other words, being satisfied with one, good, Yahweh-fearing woman. Then with unspeakable hypocrisy he ends his lecture and slinks off to his harem.

How would this affect a son, who, after listening to these words from his father, knows his dad is going to hop into bed with one (or two or three) of his 1000 kept women? You will find out if you read up on Solomon’s heir and see what sort of man he turns out to be. It did not go well. See 1 Kings 12 & 14.

Solomon understood the importance of a father and king setting a good example. He writes about it frequently.

Proverbs 16:12 “It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness.” (NASB)

Proverbs 20:28 “Loyalty and truth preserve the king, and he upholds his throne by righteousness.” (NASB)

Wouldn’t using Yahweh’s blessings to build Molek’s child-burning altars be considered a wicked, abominable act? Is a man who takes 1000 women “loyal” in any sense of the word?

Proverbs 28:6 “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.” (NIV)

“Rich” and “perverse” perfectly describe a man who spends untold riches to construct monstrous temples for promiscuous sex and child immolation. Did it ever dawn on Solomon he would have been better off poor?

Proverbs 25:28 “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.” (NIV)

If anyone lost self-control towards the end of his life, it was Solomon. He’s the poster boy for self-indulgence. As a result, according to his own proverb, his life and legacy were invaded and sacked, “like a city whose walls are broken through.”

Proverbs 21:30 “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.” (NIV)

Finally, this would have been a good one for Solomon to consider as he ends his life’s journey, trying to kill the guy Yahweh has already told him will rule the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was torn from Solomon like pieces of the prophet’s robe.

Final thoughts.

It’s not enough to be wise. There are lots of wise people in the world. Satan himself was granted unparalleled, divinely inspired wisdom, and he still chose to become the father of all evil.

Ezekiel 28:12-17 “You (*Satan*) had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the ruby, the topaz and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I (*God*) placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.” (NASB)

John 8:44 “... the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (NASB)

Wisdom reveals right and wrong. It illuminates the crossroads of life, clearly labeling separate paths towards blessing or destruction.

But as we stand at the fork in the road, understanding the choice before us, wisdom is no longer what’s required. At that point what we need is: The humility to obediently step towards the “path of righteousness” (that is, the road of God’s choosing), keep walking, and never look back.

Psalms 25:4-14 “Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good. Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he

instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant... Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose... The LORD confides in those who fear him..." (NIV)

Psalm 23:1-6 "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (NASB)

Psalm 16:11 "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence..." (NIV)

Psalm 119:9-133 "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word... do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you... Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things... Turn my eyes away from worthless things... Teach me knowledge and good judgment... I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word... Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path... The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts... The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple... Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me." (NIV)

Deuteronomy 30:19,20 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days..." (NASB)

Perhaps this is what the compiler of the book of Proverbs wanted to show us, by ending the book with the wisdom of king Lemuel's mother. As we read through the book we are struck by two mighty things: Solomon's wisdom and folly. He said all the right things, but ended his life doing none of them.

So we are left, not with the words of the hypocritical, fallen king Solomon, but with the words of the wise, godly mother of a different, unknown ruler. She reiterates all the principles necessary to lead honorably, and what to look for in one, single partner, who, by her wisdom and grace, will encourage a man to walk the right road, with someone by his side who makes the journey a blessing and delight.

Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, *but he never knew the love of a good woman*. It's a pathetic tragedy on multiple levels – a vivid portrait of wisdom without obedience. What better warning to us all, as we read through the book of Proverbs.

Hitting the fast forward button.

Solomon likely spoke his proverbs early in his reign, after Yahweh had filled him full of divinely inspired wisdom. It was a time a tremendous promise. The future was bright. Everything was looking great. And Solomon shared all these fantastic life principles, which we all should follow.

Let's now fast forward to the end of his reign and see where we find him.

CHAPTER 9 – ECCLESIASTES.

INSIGHTFUL OBSERVATIONS AND FAITHLESS CONCLUSIONS.

Life's train wreck - principles vs. realities.

Proverbs is about life *principles*. Ecclesiastes is about life *realities*.
Consider these proverbs.

Proverbs 11:21,31 “Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free... If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!” (NIV)

Proverbs 12:7 “The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm.” (NIV)

Proverbs 14:11,14 “The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish... The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good rewarded for theirs.” (NIV)

Generally speaking, and certainly from an eternal, divine perspective, these things are true. Unrepentant, bad people usually get theirs in the end. Conversely, consistently good people usually experience lives with some level of peace and prosperity. These are trustworthy *principles* of life.

But the hard *realities* of life are: There are truly horrible people who seem to live pretty fabulous lives (at least from a worldly perspective), while there are truly wonderful people who suffer terribly, unjustly, and seemingly without reason. This leads to a train wreck of sorts, where hopeful principles collide with harsh realities, and we are left bewildered and disillusioned, digging ourselves out of the rubble.

What Ecclesiastes is.

The book of Ecclesiastes is like Solomon showing up at this crash site, investigating the wreckage, and turning in a report. He arrives with pomp and ceremony, has a look around, then does two things: (1) make observations, and (2) draw conclusions – all of which in turn get recorded in Ecclesiastes... but not by Solomon. Instead, the author is a father writing a letter to his son, *warning* him about the conclusions found in Solomon’s report. More on this later.

What we have to remember, and what we will discover.

As we consider Solomon’s report (that is, his reflections on the harsh realities of life recorded in Ecclesiastes), we have to *remember who wrote it*. It’s Solomon, the incredibly wise man, who, despite his wisdom, chose to use his extraordinary blessings from Yahweh to build hundreds of pagan temples throughout Israel, so his 1000 foreign wives and concubines and their buddies would be sure to have a place to go to worship the gods of Canaan, by fornicating with temple prostitutes and burning their children alive.

We must have this perspective on the author of the report, if we expect to understand what he wrote. *It's the musings of a wise but faithless man, confronted by the harsh realities of life, who retains the ability to observe, but has lost the ability to reason based upon truth.*

With this in mind, as we read his report we should expect:

- Wise, true observations about what happened; and
- Faithless, false conclusions about the purpose, meaning, and final resolution of it all.

Solomon's wisdom never left him. Throughout Ecclesiastes he will show keen insight into the harsh, vexing complexities of life in a fallen world.

But his integrity was utterly lost. And with it he lost the ability to draw faith-filled, doctrinal conclusions, based upon his respect for and obedience to Yahweh.

We shouldn't expect wise conclusions from a man who completely betrayed the God who had blessed him beyond measure. Solomon began his reign building the one Temple for the one God of all the earth, with all the holy things for which it was designed. He ended his reign building hundreds of temples for the pantheon of the Canaanites, with all the unholy things for which they were designed. That's about as severe and defiant a turn as you can make.

As we have seen, defiance of God produces fear within, and this fear twists the lens through which we see life, like flame warping glass. Then all our conclusions become distorted and treacherous, in truth only grotesque perversions of reality.

And so as we work our way through this book, what we will discover is: The purpose of Ecclesiastes is not to *adopt* Solomon's conclusions, but rather to *avoid* them, when we are confronted by the harsh realities of life.

The *observations* of Solomon within Ecclesiastes are full of insight, because of his God-given wisdom. But his *conclusions* are full of unjustified and unnecessary despair, because of his lack of faith. And as you will see, his conclusions are also self-indulgent, contradictory, and sometimes just plain silly.

They are so drawn because Solomon's eyes are on himself, not Yahweh. And these faithless conclusions are exposed for what they are the moment we move our attention away from the words of Solomon in favor of the rest of Scripture, especially the words of Jesus, who came to save us from the despair we find consuming Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

John 15:11 "These things I (*Jesus*) have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." (NASB)

John 16:33 "These things I (*Jesus*) have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (NASB)

The author of the book, and why he is so often misunderstood.

Solomon is ordinarily presumed to be the author of Ecclesiastes. He is not. The book is actually written by an unnamed father, *warning* his son about the sayings of a person called the *Qobelet*, which the father has recorded within the book.

Qobelet is usually translated “Teacher” or “Preacher.” The root of the word means an “assembler,” someone who gathers people together. The book’s title, “Ecclesiastes,” is simply the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word *Qobelet*.

This warning from father to son about the sayings of the *Qobelet* recorded within Ecclesiastes comes at the very end of the book. The father then points his son to the life principles found in the collected *proverbs* as far better sources of guidance and stability, even though many of these proverbs were actually written by this same *Qobelet*.

In other words, the father warns his son: The *Qobelet* came to some really bad conclusions about the harsh realities of life, which I have recorded for you here in this book so you will know to avoid them. But the *Qobelet* also contributed to our collection of proverbs, and those are true, trustworthy, and ultimately from Yahweh.

All this is made clear at the *end* of Ecclesiastes, as the unnamed author reflects back on the book.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-12 “Not only was the Teacher (*Qobelet*) wise, but (*literally, “moreover, because the Qobelet was wise”*) he also (*literally, “still”*) imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs (*emphasis added*). The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote (*referring to his proverbs*) was upright and true (*as compared to the faithless, despairing conclusions of the Qobelet within Ecclesiastes*). The words of the wise (*again referring to proverbs*) are like goads (*tools for guiding livestock*), their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails (*a source of stability*) – given by one shepherd (*ultimately from Yahweh*). Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them (*that is, be warned of anything in addition to the proverbs, such as the conclusions of the Qobelet within Ecclesiastes*)...” (NIV)

The father then shares some wisdom of his own with his son, which in one fell swoop brilliantly contradicts and corrects all the false conclusions of the *Qobelet* that preceded it.

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (NIV)

This vital point, that the author of Ecclesiastes is recording the sayings of the *Qobelet* as a means to warn his son of their error, is nearly always missed by readers. Why?

First, the warning is at the very end of the book, and by the time you get to it, you have been emotionally carpet bombed by a series of true observations about the harsh realities of life, followed by false conclusions about what it all means. And these false conclusions are cynical, dark, and incredibly depressing. As a result, by the time you get to the author’s warning at the end of the book, you are feeling dejected and uninspired, and just want the experience to be over with, so you gloss over the most important part of the book.

The Hebrew in the final passage from father to son is also a bit tricky, and not at all what you might expect. You would think the *Qobelet* is the hero of the piece, especially if he is the wise, rich, powerful, famous king Solomon of Israel, and expect the author to praise him at the end of the work, not correct him. So when confronted by what is in a sense a *surprise ending*, the translators have tended to take the sharp edges off the author's warning to better serve the narrative of the "wise" Solomon.

In other words, the translators approach the final passage with the preconceived notion of the uber-wise Solomon firmly implanted in their psyches, and they expect him to have something profound to say about the harsh realities of life. They bring this prejudice to the translation, and then muddle up the Hebrew at the end of the book, which is clearly criticizing all the faithless conclusions that preceded it. And this makes the author's intention for the entire work more difficult to see.

Similarly, if a reader knows nothing about Solomon, other than he was the guy who asked for wisdom from God and got it, he or she reads the book with this mindset:

- Solomon is the *Qobelet*.
- Solomon was super smart.
- His observations within Ecclesiastes are insightful and true.
- So his conclusions within Ecclesiastes must likewise be insightful and true.

But then as we read Solomon's conclusions, excitedly hoping to learn something that will help us deal with the uncertainties and disappointments of life, we realize Solomon's conclusions are horrible! They are one dreary, despairing, hopeless declaration after another. And we start to think, "Is this really what it's all about?"

The answer is: No! Emphatically not! That's why this father wrote the book – to make sure his son doesn't fall for the utterly ridiculous conclusions of the *Qobelet* (Solomon) that must have been floating around during his final days. Dad doesn't want his son to be misled by the *Qobelet* and come to the same place of despair, so he collects all these sayings in one place as a repository for all the faithless conclusions his son should *avoid*.

All of this will quickly become apparent as we go through Ecclesiastes and take a moment to really think about what the *Qobelet* is saying, then compare it to what the rest of Scripture and Jesus Himself says. The stark contrast between Solomon's despairing conclusions and the hope-filled Gospel ("good news") of Jesus will leap off the page. Suffice it to say, the *Qobelet's* conclusions are not the conclusions the God who sacrificed His Son for our sins would want us to reach.

Romans 8:31,32 "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (NIV)

2 Corinthians 7:4 "... in all our troubles my (*Paul's*) joy knows no bounds." (NIV)

Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (NIV)

But that's the thing. We have to *think* when we read this book, and do so in light of the totality of God's Word and what we know about the life of the one drawing these dark conclusions. If we do this, it's easy to swiftly and decisively reject the warped, breathtakingly faithless conclusions of the *Qobelet*, and see the book for what it is – *a cautionary tale about the despair that overcame a man who had everything in life except faith.*

Without this background and perspective, readers of Ecclesiastes can quickly go off the rails and become a casualty in the inevitable collision of divine principles with harsh realities, in a world where we are granted the freedom to choose between good and evil. God's will and our own collide, and the impact throws out debris like shrapnel. We all get hit, participants and bystanders alike, and question why.

But here's what's vital to understand: In Ecclesiastes, we get all the *wrong* answers why from the *Qobelet*, until the author straightens us all out at the very end of the book.

It takes maturity and wisdom to recognize this, because, in a sense, the *Qobelet's* conclusions *feel* right. In other words, his faithless conclusions accurately capture how we sometimes feel when confronted by the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, and before we are encouraged by the extraordinarily good promises in God's Word. This is another reason people tend to get the interpretation of Ecclesiastes wrong.

But while the *Qobelet's* conclusions might *feel* right, they *are* wrong. And as we meditate on God's Word and start to realize this, God's Spirit will use the exercise to show us mighty things from Solomon's errors we may never have otherwise perceived.

Jeremiah 33:3 “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (NASB)

Is Solomon the Qobelet?

There is much debate about whether Solomon is the *Qobelet*.

The name “Solomon” does not appear in the book of Ecclesiastes. Instead, the *Qobelet* is described as:

- Son of David (Ecclesiastes 1:1)
- King in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:1,12)
- Exceedingly wise (Ecclesiastes 1:16)
- A great builder (Ecclesiastes 2:4)
- Fabulously wealthy (Ecclesiastes 2:8)
- The possessor of a large harem (Ecclesiastes 2:8)

These things all describe Solomon well. Conversely, they do not describe any other historical figure well. In other words, only Solomon fits this description in the roster of the kings of Israel. So although Solomon is not named, the book is most likely a collection of his sayings, heard by someone and written down for the benefit of the anonymous author's son and posterity.

There is a view these are the musings of an author writing through the literary device of a Solomon-like character, rather than Solomon himself. This verse is cited...

Ecclesiastes 1:16 “... I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me...” (NIV)

... then it's noted Solomon was only the third king of Israel, so this is not much of a claim. It's then suggested these must be the fictional reflections of a Solomon-like character or perhaps a later king of Israel.

But no later king of Israel could make these claims. Scripture is clear, there was no one wiser than Solomon, either before or after his reign (see 1 Kings 3:12). And although Solomon was only the third Israelite king, Jerusalem was already an ancient city at the time of Solomon. For centuries many Jebusite kings had ruled there before Solomon (see Joshua:15:63; Judges 19:10; 2 Samuel 5:6); and going back about 1000 years to Abraham's time there was a king named Melchizedek who ruled over the city when it was called Salem (Genesis 14:18).

And so we will rule out these are the reflections of some later king of Israel, since no later king of Israel fits the *Qobeleth's* description. It's either Solomon, or a divinely inspired figure meant to mirror Solomon's thinking.

It's also entirely possible the author used the figure of the *Qobeleth* as a way to write about Solomon, while preserving his skin. Remember towards the end of Solomon's life, God started to raise up powerful adversaries because of Solomon's rebellion, and Solomon sought to kill those who opposed him. Perhaps the author wrote of the *Qobeleth* as a way to shield himself from Solomon's wrath. Would you have written a book, expressly chronicling Solomon's declining mental health, as the king scoured the country looking for opponents to destroy?

What will become clear as we go through a bit of Ecclesiastes is: The book is a window into the mind of *anyone* – whether Solomon, you, or me – who attempts to make sense of the harsh realities of life without faith. What the *Qobeleth* concludes, we would conclude, if we refuse to trust in God's plan, purpose, and goodwill.

For our purposes, we will treat the *Qobeleth* as Solomon, simply because he is the only person in history who fits the description. And as we examine his thinking, we will discover powerful clues as to why the man who began his reign building Yahweh's Temple ended it building hundreds of factories for prostitution and child sacrifice.

A note on “bevel.”

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon uses the Hebrew word *bevel* multiple times to describe “all the things that are done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:14), meaning the things we both desire and condemn, including:

- Sex (Ecclesiastes 2:8)
- Career (Ecclesiastes 2:11,17)
- Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 2:15)

- Wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:26)
- Power (Ecclesiastes 4:4)
- Fame (Ecclesiastes 4:16)
- Promises (Ecclesiastes 5:7)
- Revelry (Ecclesiastes 7:6)
- Injustice (Ecclesiastes 8:14)
- Health (Ecclesiastes 11:10)

Hevel is usually translated “meaningless,” “vain,” or “futile.” But that’s not what it means. *Hevel* means “smoke” or “vapor.”

In a sense, Ecclesiastes is a documentary of Solomon’s spiritual nervous breakdown, as he looks back on his life towards the end of his reign through the eyes of a man who has turned his back on the holy God he once served, and chosen instead to bow before the bloodthirsty gods of the pagan nations. He considers the uncertainty, injustice, and absurdity populating the earth. Divine principles collide with earthly realities, and from a distance Solomon sees a plume of smoke rising from the wreckage. Then he just shakes his head in bewilderment and despair, because he has no faith.

And this is perhaps why the author uses the image of smoke or vapor to describe all these things. It’s a metaphor for the many paradoxical feelings we all experience as we struggle with the abundant perversities endured in a fallen world.

The use of *hevel* – smoke or vapor – is an artistic choice the speaker made to describe his feelings in a way we can all understand. A floating, ethereal mist is part of our common experience, yet at the same time, really difficult to describe with words. The same is true of our reaction to the harsh realities of life. We all experience it, but often can’t explain it.

Smoke looks solid, but it’s not. If you try to grab it, it slips through your fingers. Even when you can’t see it, you can smell it. Its presence indicates something else is going on to create the smoke, and that “something” is often perilous. You can try to corral and control it, and perhaps succeed for a moment, but eventually it goes where it will, as if it has a mind of its own, or is being guided by forces we can’t see or explain. Too much of it will kill you. And yet despite its dangers, it can also be beautiful.

These exasperating, amorphous qualities of smoke describe well our maddening, awkward attempts to understand the mysteries of life. That’s why Solomon uses it so many times throughout the book. It’s an expression of his frustration. And when something is described as *hevel*, it’s then often followed up by the phrase “a chasing after the wind,” reinforcing the idea that *hevel* is something elusive, and any attempts to control it are futile.

Unfortunately, instead of just translating *hevel* as “smoke” and allowing this wonderful image to speak to us, the translators take it upon themselves to decide what the image should mean and then force-feed it to us with translations like “meaningless” or “vanity.”

That is a mistake. It strips divinely inspired artistry from the work, and substitutes the translator’s narrow view of how the image should be understood in the mind of the reader. Instead of allowing

God's Spirit to take a beautiful artistic image He inspired the writer to employ and use it to speak to the reader in the way only artistic images can, the translators deny the reader this experience in favor of their own mandated interpretation of what the image should mean.

The issues raised in Ecclesiastes are legitimately difficult to reconcile. They have vexed humanity for millennia. And one limited adjective cannot adequately express the impact these things have on the human heart.

But an image can. The abstraction of smoke or vapor communicates far better what Solomon is expressing than the concrete "meaningless" or "vain." Think about it. Smoke is not meaningless. It's bursting with meaning. Neither is it vain nor futile. It is powerful, deadly, uncontrollable, and beautiful, all at the same time.

That's why "meaningless" and these other words are such unfortunate translations. They impose limited meaning on a rich metaphor, and in so doing, deny the reader the opportunity to grasp the grandeur and complexity the writer was inspired to communicate through a powerful and meaningful literary device.

And so when you read Ecclesiastes, you should substitute the actual word "smoke" or "vapor" any time you see *hevel* translated as anything else. It will open up the book to you in a brand-new way. God's Spirit will be able to speak to you through it, the way He originally intended. And you will be much more likely to understand what Solomon was saying, and determine for yourself whether he is correct.

Because...

Not everything Solomon says in Ecclesiastes is true.

As you read through Ecclesiastes, it's very clear Solomon is freaking out. He's having a spiritual nervous breakdown, because for all his wisdom, he can't understand the ways of Yahweh.

To a humble heart, this should not be surprising. Why should any of us finite, mortal beings think for one second we are somehow capable of understanding how the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator of the universe chooses to exercise His infinite abilities on a planet where He has granted His creation free will? Why should we suppose we are either capable or deserving of such knowledge?

Only a prideful, arrogant heart demands answers from the Almighty, because the truth is: The answers the questioner seeks are beyond the ability of his (or her) finite mind to comprehend, which he would realize if he would settle down and remember his place in the universe. For more on this, read the book of Job.

There are a lot of arrogant demands in this book from Solomon, along with a dazzling display of faithlessness. What we read in Ecclesiastes are the musing of a prideful heart, who thinks God is screwing everything up. And when Solomon comes to terms with the fact he can't usurp God's place in the cosmos and do something about it, he is beset by fear, primarily of death (because that's when he will have to stand before the God he belittles and defies).

It's from this perspective we should read Ecclesiastes. Someone close to Solomon observes his breakdown, records what he heard, and then at the end (as we shall see) offers in just a few brief lines wisdom to his son that is pure gold – an extraordinary display of common sense and a description of the anchor upon which all our hopes are fixed.

Solomon goes on and on about all the things he can't understand, which to him are just “smoke” and “chasing after the wind.” And we can relate, because we often feel the same way when presented by life's injustices and disappointments. We raise our fists and cheer for Solomon as he rails against these things, but also share in his despair when neither Solomon nor we can offer a satisfactory resolution.

Then when Solomon's tirade is exhausted, this very wise father, who has chronicled Solomon's descent for his son, steps in and shows us what we should have been pondering all along, which is how infinitely worthy Yahweh is of our trust and worship.

With this in mind, let's now look at the structure of the book with some samples from the different sections.

Structure of the book, with samples.

First an overview.

As you read through Ecclesiastes, it begins with a startling admission from Solomon, the wisest, wealthiest, and most blessed man of his day, perhaps of all time: None of his material things made him happy (Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 2:11).

With this realization, three general fears begin to take their toll (Ecclesiastes 2:12 to 12:8):

1. The passage of time;
2. The (apparent) power of chance; and
3. The inevitability of death.

As Solomon reflects on these things, his mind darts back and forth, with a vast array of observations from many different perspectives. These observations are true, but his conclusions are false, because for all his wisdom he lacks faith. The result is a panic-induced, spiritual nervous breakdown, from the man who had everything.

The book ends with the extraordinary insight of the author, warning his son to reject Solomon's conclusions and look instead to the proverbs for direction and stability. The author then closes by offering the antidote if you don't want to end up like Solomon – trust and obey Yahweh (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14).

And so, we can structure the book as follows:

- I. Solomon's candid admission: The impotence of material things (Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 2:11).
- II. Solomon's increasing burdens: The fears that result from defiance (Ecclesiastes 2:12 to 12:8).
- III. The author's warning to his son: Trust and obey Yahweh, so you don't end up like Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14).

With this overview, let's now look at some examples.

I. Solomon's candid admission: The impotence of material things (Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 2:11)

He starts like this.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14 “The words of the Teacher (*“Qobelel”*), son of David, king in Jerusalem: ‘Meaningless! Meaningless! (*“hevel” – smoke*)... Everything is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*)... I, the Teacher (*“Qobelel”*), was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*), a chasing after the wind.’ ” (NIV)

So he's exceedingly rich, powerful, and smart, and from his seat of privilege he figures out life in a fallen world is hard. What's a fella to do?

Ecclesiastes 2:3-11 “I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly – my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well – the delights of a man's heart (*literally, “the pleasures of the sons of men”*). I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*), a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” (NIV)

Solomon parties down and indulges in everything his:

1. Super-smart brain can imagine;
2. Super-fat wallet can afford; and
3. Super-exalted position can facilitate.

Basically booze, buildings, and broads.

Note how he refers to his harem – the “delights of a man's heart.” In Hebrew, this is: “the pleasures of the sons of men.” He's saying sex with a bunch of women you barely know is the stuff guys like and an acceptable way to treat women. Females are just men's playthings, something to enjoy, discard, and then replace with the next disposable unit.

This reveals so much of what went wrong with Solomon. His attitude is primitive, callous, unspeakably self-indulgent, and totally at odds with what he writes about in Proverbs, where he rightly proclaims:

Proverbs 12:4 “A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown...” (NIV)

Proverbs 18:22 “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.” (NIV)

Proverbs 5:1-20 “My son, pay attention to my wisdom... the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it... Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel... Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man’s wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman.” (NIV)

Solomon knows the value of one good wife to one good husband. The union becomes a kingly gift directly from God, within which one man can rejoice and be satisfied with one intoxicating woman.

Solomon also knows the dangers inherent in treating women as nothing more than “the pleasures of men.” Guys might think they can use women sexually and move on with impunity, but it never ends up that way. The women so used resent the treatment, become increasingly angry and vindictive, and exact revenge upon their abusers at every available opportunity. Eventually, there is a bitter cup for the promiscuous man to drink like gall, with lost honor and dignity leading to an ignoble grave.

This is exactly what happened to Solomon. He used all those women, and then they used him. He got his temporary thrills, then they got him to build lasting temples to their horrific gods. Solomon lost all honor and dignity, and went to the grave a miserable failure in every respect.

Returning to the passage, Solomon seemed to enjoy his work the most, but that wasn’t enough either. At the end of the day, it was *hevel*, just a wisp of smoke, like chasing after wind, with nothing to really to be proud of, and “nothing gained under the sun.”

Solomon is discovering the difference between:

- Chasing after things that will *temporarily distract him from unhappiness*; and
- Chasing after things that will *bring lasting, genuine happiness* (that is, the biblical promises of Joy and Peace).

But sadly, he's only focusing on the first part. He goes for all the typical things we think will make us happy – money, fame, power, sex – and discovers at best they can only temporarily distract us from unhappiness. And eventually, their power to distract wears off, and we are left in more misery and despair than when we started.

Isaiah 57:20,21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’ ” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 28:62-67 “... because you did not obey the LORD your God... the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’ – because of the terror that will fill your hearts...” (NIV)

Isaiah 9:18-20 “Surely wickedness burns like a fire... On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of their own offspring.” (NIV)

Solomon is right. These things are *bevel*. He's been chasing after temporary, fleeting distractions, like a puff of smoke in a gust of wind, and for all his efforts he's left with nothing. All he's done is pursue empty things, which present an illusion of substance. But like a cloud in the distance, once possessed these things are revealed to be nothing more than mist vanishing in the breeze.

Right here is where Solomon should have moved forward in faith and started pursuing the things that will bring a lasting, genuine happiness, that is, the biblical promises of Joy and Peace.

Joy is enthusiasm for life. It's the spring in your step and the light in your eyes. It's waking up each morning and being glad you are alive. It's living life with *passion*.

Isaiah 60:1-9 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you... Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy... to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” (NIV)

Jeremiah 15:16 “... Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart...” (NASB)

Jude 1:24,25 “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (NASB)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 7:4 “... in all our troubles my (*Paul's*) joy knows no bounds.” (NIV)

Peace is satisfaction with life. It's the firmness of your step and the depth of your eyes. It's going to bed each night feeling safe and secure, not matter what the day has brought. It's living life with *contentment*.

Psalms 4:8 “In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 14:33 “for God is not a God of confusion but of peace...” (NASB)

Romans 2:9-11 “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil... but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good... For there is no partiality with God.” (NASB)

Philippians 4:11-20 “I (*Paul*) have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me... And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

Isaiah 26:3,4 “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.” (NASB)

These are the *two sides* of the *one coin* of true happiness, because you can't have one without the other. You can't be enthusiastically dissatisfied, or dispassionately content. Each complements the other and can't exist without its counterpart, because they both sustain and express one another.

Depending on what's going on in your life, one quality may be at the forefront, with the other in the background. You can only see one side of a coin at a time. But the coin must possess both sides, the head and the tail, or it's not legal tender. It's a fake. In the same way, true happiness must produce both Joy and Peace, or it's not true happiness.

In a fallen world, these qualities can seem elusive or downright unattainable. But what's interesting as we read through Scripture is: Joy and Peace are actually the *only* things God promises to provide us with in this life. He doesn't promise wealth, power, fame, long life, marriage, parenthood, a satisfying job, or any other blessing. It all depends upon what He's up to in your life.

But God does promise to fill you with Joy and Peace as you trust in Him and love as Jesus did, in the light of His Word and by the power of His Spirit, regardless of your circumstances, whether good or bad. As we have seen, this is one reason why God's Word describes these things as “Joy inexpressible” and “Peace surpassing comprehension.” They exist where they shouldn't be.

1 Peter 1:8 “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” (NASB)

Philippians 4:6,7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (NASB)

If you are interested in these things, go to JoyAndPeace.net and download the book mentioned previously, *Knowing Joy and Peace in a Fallen World*, which as you might guess from the title is about all these things. It's free and develops these ideas more completely.

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (NIV)

For now, let's just recognize Solomon has learned the hard way pursuing temporary distractions from unhappiness leaves you empty and unfulfilled. That's good. But he hasn't turned to God and pursued the things that will bring him Joy and Peace. That's bad.

Because learning the first lesson without the second leaves you nowhere to go, except into the pits of despair. Solomon has figured out what he's doing is a dead end. But he's not willing to humble himself before God, trust, obey, turn around, and move forward.

So he sits down in the dirt and starts to pout. He spends a lot of time pondering and pontificating about life in a fallen world. Then he's absolutely shocked to discover he can't find the answers in his towering intellect and vast store of wisdom.

Why is he failing? Because he's arrogant and therefore unwilling to go to the One who has the answers and trust Him. And since he's defying Yahweh, something inevitable occurs, as we have seen. He is beset by fear, which will drive him towards hate.

When we are *humble*, we trust God. This *faith* in our hearts produces *hope* in our minds that manifests itself in *love* towards God and others.

James 4:6 "... GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." (NASB)

1 Peter 5:6,7 "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22,23 "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:5 "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (NASB)

1 Corinthians 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (NIV)

When we are *proud*, we don't trust God. This *defiance* in our hearts produces *fear* in our minds that manifests itself in *hate* towards God and others.

Proverbs 29:23 "A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor." (NASB)

Isaiah 3:8,9 "... their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence... they parade their sin like Sodom... Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves." (NIV)

John 3:19-21 "... men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (NASB)

Psalms 14:1-5 "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile... They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on the LORD. But there they are, overwhelmed with dread..." (NIV)

As mentioned before, all these ideas are developed more fully in *Knowing Joy and Peace in a Fallen World*.

The remainder of Ecclesiastes is essentially this fear tightening its grip and overwhelming Solomon's mind, as the result of his defiant heart, which refuses to trust Yahweh. And it will be this fear that defines the rest of Solomon's life, expressed in acts of hatred towards God and others. What is the building of hundreds of pagan temples to enable prostitution and human sacrifice, if not an expression of hatred for Yahweh and the rest of mankind?

Let's now move on and observe Solomon's sad surrender to fear. He'll put up a fight now and then, desperately turning to his wisdom to try and make sense of it all, but never seeking Yahweh. In the end he will collapse in a heap, a man broken by his own defiant lack of faith, who after a quick rest will collect himself and head out resolved to begin a series of new building projects for his 1000 pagan wives and concubines.

Keeping all this in mind, here is a pretty good description from the book of Job of what we are about to hear from Solomon:

Job 15:20-26 "... the wicked man suffers torment... Distress and anguish fill him with terror; troubles overwhelm him... because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty, defiantly charging against him..." (NIV)

II. Solomon's increasing burdens: The fears that result from defiance (Ecclesiastes 2:12 to 12:8).

Now we get served a smorgasbord of all the things that freak Solomon out. He starts with a big one: Death.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16 "Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly... I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both... The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?... This too is meaningless ("*hevel*" – *smoke*). For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!" (NIV)

It dawns on Solomon that even though he is really smart, rich, famous, and powerful, he's gonna die. And before long, nobody is going to remember him and think he's awesome, just like nobody remembers all those common fools out there after they die.

As Solomon sits on his super-cool throne, surrounded by inconceivable wealth, a fawning court, and hundreds of harem girls waiting to see if their services will be required that night, this astonishes him. So he concludes wisdom, and all the good things that come from her, are *hevel*.

That's nonsense! Does anyone remember what he said about wisdom in the Proverbs?

Proverbs 3:13-26 "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more

precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her... My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” (NIV)

Proverbs 2:3-11 “indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will... find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding... Then you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.” (NIV)

Now none of this matters, because Solomon is afraid he’s going to lose his fan club after he dies. His words are those of an insecure man who is concerned about all the wrong things. His focus is on people, not God. He cares about the approval of people, not God. Indeed, after he dies, he wants to be remembered by people, not God. He’s driven by ego, and a need to take the blessings he’s enjoyed on earth with him beyond the grave.

From this, we can start to develop a paradigm for Solomon’s thinking.

- *He begins with a perfectly true observation:* Celebrity fades and a day comes when today’s superstar is utterly forgotten.
- *But then he draws a wrong conclusion:* A life lived by God’s wisdom is meaningless.
- *Because his focus is self-centered and not God-centered:* Boohoo, nobody is going to remember how awesome I am after I’m gone.

Here’s how Solomon should have thought about these things:

- *Begin with a true observation:* Celebrity fades and a day comes when today’s superstar is utterly forgotten.
- *Draw the right conclusion:* Who cares! After I die, it’s not how my life is remembered by a bunch of strangers that matters. What matters is how my life is remembered by my Creator when I die and go to see Him. Did I love Him? Did I trust Him? Was He able to bring good things into the world through me as a part of His plan, because I was willing to set aside my selfish desires and trust Him (because He deserved it) and love other people (especially when they didn’t deserve it)?
- *Because your focus is on God not yourself:* The only way to draw the right conclusions after observing life’s uncertainty and brevity is to get your eyes off yourself and fix them on our Creator. The comfort and assurance we need can only come from Him, no matter how smart, rich, famous, or powerful we are.

This all boils down to choosing humility over pride. When life in a fallen world clobbers us, we must have the humility to go to the Author of life for the hope we need, not arrogantly try to find it within ourselves.

Jeremiah 33:3 “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (NASB)

Psalm 25:8-14 “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant... Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose... The LORD confides in those who fear him...” (NIV)

1 Timothy 6:17-19 “Command (*them*)... to put their hope in God... to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (NIV)

John 10:10 “... I (*Jesus*) came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (NASB)

Job 8:13,14 “... the hope of the godless will perish, whose confidence is fragile, and whose trust a spider’s web.” (NASB)

Job 27:8 “For what is the hope of the godless when he is cut off, when God requires his life?” (NASB)

Job 8:12-19 “... they wither more quickly than grass. Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless. What they trust in is fragile; what they rely on is a spider’s web. They lean on the web, but it gives way; they cling to it, but it does not hold. They are like a well-watered plant in the sunshine, spreading its shoots over the garden; it entwines its roots around a pile of rocks and looks for a place among the stones. But when it is torn from its spot, that place disowns it and says, ‘I never saw you.’ Surely its life withers away, and from the soil other plants grow.” (NIV)

Psalm 25:1-3 “In you, LORD my God, I put my trust... No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame...” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope...” (NASB)

And we have to be prepared to *trust God in the absence of answers*. There are certain apparent paradoxes in this life our finite minds are simply not capable of unraveling. The answers are there. God has them. But He can’t explain them to us within the confines of this material world and the limitations of our mortal bodies.

In these cases, we have to ask, not for *answers beyond our understanding*, but for *comfort amidst our grief*. And this comfort can only be received when we humble ourselves and choose to receive it, even in the absence of answers.

2 Corinthians 1:3-24 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles... For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows... We (*Paul and his friends*) were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God...

On him we have set our hope... Now it is God who makes... you stand firm in Christ. He... set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come... because it is by faith you stand firm.” (NIV)

Isaiah 50:10 “... Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God.” (NIV)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

This sort of comfort is a supernatural thing, which can only be imparted by a supernatural being. It's the Joy “inexpressible” and Peace “surpassing comprehension” God grants to those who trust Him, despite unspeakable heartbreak.

1 Peter 1:1-17 “... To God's elect, strangers in the world... Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” (NIV)

Philippians 4:4-20 “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!... Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me (*Paul*), practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you... for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me... And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

Psalms 30:1-12 “I will exalt you, LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths... I called to you for help, and you healed me... To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy... You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever.” (NIV)

Psalms 147:1-3 “Praise the LORD!... He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (NASB)

How can anyone do this? Because (among others) God makes this promise:

Revelation 21:3,4 “... God Himself will be among them (*in eternity*), and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” (NASB)

Some answers are simply beyond us in this fallen world. But they are not beyond us in the next! A day is coming when Yahweh Himself will sit at our side and dry every tear. The only way He can do that is to finally provide the answers we seek, when we are free of this world and the limitations of this life.

There, in a new body and a new place, God is going to make everything right. He'll show you all the “whys” and “hows;” that is, *why* things had to happen the way they did, along with *how* He used your faith to do mighty things, most of which you were probably unaware.

This appointment with God is not a patronizing pat on the head, with a “there, there, dry those tears.” That would be an unreasonable demand. Instead, it's a detailed explanation of all we didn't understand on earth but had to suffer through. It has to be, otherwise our tears would never dry. They might pause for a moment, but they would return, along with resentment for unresolved heartaches.

And note this comfort comes from God Himself. It is not delegated to some lesser being. An angel with a clip board is not going to come up to you and say, “hi, I'm Bob. I'll be drying your tears today.” It is the one and only, holy, loving, almighty, all-knowing, Creator and Sustainer of the universe who will sit down at your side, and wipe away every tear, both literally and figuratively. That's when you will get your answers, and His answers will be something more and something better than we can even begin to imagine.

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (NIV)

Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (NASB)

Ephesians 3:14-21 “For this reason, I (*Paul*) bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 2:9 “but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ ” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

Our hope (meaning “confident assurance” not “wishful thinking”) is: One day, when this life is done, God is going to make all things new and all things right. This fills us with confidence in God that motivates courage towards our circumstances.

Philippians 3:8-21 “... I (*Paul*) count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 “... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable... the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality... then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ... thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (NIV)

Revelation 21:1-4 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ ” (NASB)

2 Peter 3:13,14 “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,” (NASB)

Hebrews 6:19 “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 3:12 “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.” (NIV)

Psalms 33:1-22 “Sing joyfully to the LORD... For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does... the eyes of the LORD are on... those whose hope is in his unfailing love... We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (NIV)

Romans 5:1,2 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (NASB)

This hope, which produces confidence and courage, is everything Solomon lacks in Ecclesiastes. And so this book (until the author sets us straight at the end) is one long rambling documentary of the insecurity and cowardice of a person with misplaced faith in himself, and no faith in God. It’s a record of what happens to the most blessed and gifted among us when we refuse to believe God is going to be faithful to His Word.

Revelation 3:17 “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (NIV)

Deuteronomy 28:62-67 "... because you did not obey the LORD your God... the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' and in the evening, 'If only it were morning!' – because of the terror that will fill your hearts..." (NIV)

Ezekiel 12:19 "... They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair... because of the violence of all who live there." (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 4:13 "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to... grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope." (NIV)

If for all our bluster, at the end of the day we do not believe (or refuse to learn) God's magnificent promises of all He has in store for those who love Him, we are doomed to end up as scared and miserable as Solomon.

2 Peter 1:2-4 "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world..." (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:1-18 "... we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (NIV)

Isaiah 57:20,21 "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'" (NIV)

And so it is vital to recognize: These words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes are not something we are supposed to admire or follow. The man's life, and therefore a large portion of his writings, are a *cautionary tale*, not an instruction manual. We are certainly meant to learn from Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes, but the lesson is what to *avoid*, not what to emulate. We are to be *different* than him, not like him.

With all this in mind, let's see what else Solomon has to say, this time about possessions.

Ecclesiastes 2:17-23 “So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*), a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*). So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*) and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*).” (NIV)

Here is another perfectly true observation: You can't take it with you. But the conclusions are all wrong. That doesn't make wealth *hevel*, and it shouldn't make you hate your work or your life. It should just make you more attentive to your estate planning.

Got crazy kids who can't handle an inheritance? Make a conditional bequest. Or give some of that sweet moolah to charity before you go ten toes up. Or spend more time with your kids and teach them how to handle blessings. There are plenty of good options other than self-pity.

Here Solomon just seems really upset he can't load all his wealth in a wagon and pull it behind him into the afterlife. Why? Because he's completely self-absorbed. It's all about him, and never about Yahweh or all the people out there whose lives he could instantly change for the better, if he would be more generous with his stuff.

Moving on, Ecclesiastes presents a famous passage about the flow of time.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” (NIV)

This is a poetic, truthful reflection on the seasons of life, but still only an observation. Unfortunately, Solomon follows it with scattered and sometimes contradictory musings about toil, eternity, and injustice, and then this:

Ecclesiastes 3:17-22 “I also said to myself, ‘As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*). All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?’ So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?’ (NIV)

Correct observation: God tests people. *Ridiculous conclusion:* God wants us to see we are no different than animals.

Come on. We all know better than this. Men and women are made in God’s image, intended to care for this good earth and shepherd the animal kingdom as God’s co-rulers (see Genesis 1:26-31), and as it relates to one another, “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8).

Platypi can’t do that. Neither can cows, crocodiles, frogs, flamingos, buzzards, beetles, or any other animal. And while both human and animal species die, that does not mean we share the same fate. Again, a correct observation but a silly conclusion.

We start to get to the bottom of what’s really bothering Solomon when he talks about death and his uncertainty about what happens after we die. But we have to ask: *Is he serious?* Didn’t God Almighty appear to him in bodily form twice? Didn’t Yahweh rain down fire on Solomon’s offerings at the Temple? Hasn’t God been faithful to every promise He ever made, to Solomon personally and to Israel? After all this, does Solomon *really* doubt Yahweh’s intentions beyond the grave, or is Solomon just throwing a tantrum because he’s not God and can’t conquer the grave on his own?

It’s true the Old Testament Scriptures are not as explicit about what happens after death as the New Testament Scriptures. But God did not just leave people hanging on this rather foundational issue.

First, remember we can’t tell exactly what people knew about particular doctrines at any given moment in history, because the Old Testament Scriptures are not presented as an instruction manual issued to each person at birth from the beginning of time as a handy reference when they have questions about any specific issue related to life or death. Thousands of years went by without anything written down at all. It wasn’t until the time of Moses things started to get reduced to a written form, and then it was more a collection of stories and song lyrics, rather than some kind of textbook.

Yet from these stories and songs, we see people understood that when they died, Yahweh had good things in store for those who put their faith in Him. God also frequently spoke to people through angels, dreams, visions, and His own voice, and it’s reasonable to presume what transpired after death was a part of these miraculous communications.

Job 19:25-27 “I (*Job*) know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (NIV)

2 Samuel 12:21-23 “His (*David’s*) attendants asked him, ‘Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and

eat!’ He answered, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.” But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.’ ” (NIV)

Psalm 23:1-6 “The LORD is my (*David’s*) shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” (NASB)

Psalm 16:7-11 “I (*David*) will bless the LORD who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” (NASB)

Psalm 49:15 “But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.” (NIV)

Isaiah 26:3-19 “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal... your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise – let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy – your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.” (NIV)

Isaiah 25:6-8 “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.” (NIV)

So there is no good reason for Solomon, who had twice met Yahweh face-to-face, to be so prickly and uncertain about death. In truth, Solomon’s fear is a reflection of his lack of humility and faith, not Yahweh’s lack of love or assurance. It’s Solomon’s pride and resulting defiance of God that makes him so fearful.

Deuteronomy 28:62-67 “... because you did not obey the LORD your God... the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’ – because of the terror that will fill your hearts...” (NIV)

Job 15:20-26 “... the wicked man suffers torment... Distress and anguish fill him with terror; troubles overwhelm him... because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty, defiantly charging against him...” (NIV)

Next we get this happy little ditty from Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-4 “Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors – and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless (*“hevel” – smoke*), a chasing after the wind.” (NIV)

Here Solomon goes off about how horrible injustice is (which is absolutely true), but did it ever occur to him he was king of Israel? If he didn’t like what he saw, wasn’t he in a pretty good position to do something about it, instead of droning on and on about how it would have been better to never have been born?

If you are the fabulously wealthy king of a nation at peace, it seems like you could do an awful lot about the “tears of the oppressed.” But Solomon is too self-absorbed to even consider this. It never even occurs to him. Instead, he impugns the motivations of those who work hard and achieve, and chocks it all up to envy, without ever lifting a finger to comfort the afflicted himself. And by the way, didn’t Solomon corral a bunch of slave labor together to build his palace?

This is what happens when our eyes are on ourselves and not Yahweh. We see people hurting, and blame it all on God, never considering our own responsibility to help those in need. We attack those who might be prospering despite all the injustice in the world, and spread a little blame in their direction for good measure. Then we make disingenuous statements about being better off dead (which is an odd thing for someone so dreadfully afraid of death to say), or unborn.

What if Solomon had said this: “I saw the tears of the oppressed – and I went out to comfort them. In fact, I rounded up all the oppressors, sent them packing, then opened up the royal coffers and made sure everyone had food, shelter, and a job. Then I put laws into place to make sure this never happened again. (I am the king after all!) And finally I went to the Temple and worshipped like crazy, thanking Yahweh for blessing me with the opportunity to help these people. You know, when you help other people, it makes life so meaningful and has wonderful repercussions, both in this life and in eternity. Everyone should try it!”

Sadly, Solomon never did that, because as we saw before, when your pride leads you to defy your Creator, you become fearful, hateful, and despairing. Then you say stupid things like, “we would all have been better off if we had never been born.”

As you read through Ecclesiastes, here is a good way to evaluate the validity of Solomon’s conclusions. Ask yourself: *Would Jesus agree with him?*

Solomon observed everyone dies and is eventually forgotten, and concludes a life lived according to divine wisdom is meaningless. What did Jesus say?

Revelation 2:10-28 “Do not fear what you are about to suffer... that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation... Be faithful until death, and I (*Jesus*) will give you the crown of life... The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service

and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first... he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.’ ” (NASB)

Revelation 3:4-21 “... you have a few people... who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments... and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels... He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God (*temple pillars were often carved with historical accounts of heroic people*)... He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (NASB)

Solomon observed you can't take it with you, and concludes hard work is meaningless. What did Jesus say?

Matthew 19:28-30 “Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.’ ” (NIV)

Matthew 10:42 “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my (*Jesus*) disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (NIV)

Luke 6:35-38 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men... Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (NASB)

Matthew 6:5-21 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you... Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (NIV)

Solomon observed humans and animals both die, and concludes they are no different. What did Jesus say?

Matthew 6:26-33 “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?... So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (NIV)

Matthew 10:29-31 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (NIV)

Solomon observed “the tears of the oppressed,” and concludes there is no comforter and it’s better to have never been born. What did Jesus say?

Matthew 5:1-45 “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.’” (NIV)

Luke 16:19-31 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” (NIV)

John 14:1-27 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me (*Jesus*). My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (NIV)

Hopefully, you are starting to get the hang of how to think about Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes. Expect a keen, true observation, followed by a foolish, false conclusion, because Solomon, for all

his blessings, has no faith in the One who blessed him. The purpose of Ecclesiastes is therefore to *learn from Solomon's folly and avoid his ruin.*

It is this type of thinking that led to Solomon's downfall. If you want to know how someone could go from building Yahweh's Temple in Jerusalem to building Molek's temple directly outside Jerusalem's wall (see 1 Kings 11:7), where in ensuing years thousands of Israelite children would be burned alive, with their dying screams echoing across the city (see 2 Kings 21:6; 23:13), as their parents fornicated with temple prostitutes, look no further.

It's surrender to all the faithless, unjustified anger and despair expressed in Ecclesiastes that allows the walls of decency within us to be torn down, so our worst instincts can run amok and towards unrestrained sex and murder. As defiance of God consumes our souls, it destroys our conscience, which would otherwise stand guard over our behavior. Then there are absolutely no limits to the atrocities we will gladly commit.

1 Timothy 1:18,19 "... fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." (NASB)

1 Timothy 4:1,2 "... some will abandon the faith... Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." (NIV)

Titus 1:15,16 "... both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him..." (NIV)

Romans 1:18-32 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools... Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts... Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." (NIV)

Ephesians 4:18,19 "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." (NIV)

Ezekiel 12:19 "... They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair... because of the violence of all who live there." (NIV)

This is one reason Ecclesiastes is included in God's Word. It warns us about the sort of nihilistic thinking that leads to despair and then destruction. It's meant to prevent us from becoming like Solomon.

We could go on. There are several more chapters of this, but you get the picture. A good exercise is to continue on through the book, look at each of Solomon's observations, but draw your own conclusions based on the words of Jesus and the rest of Scripture. Then compare your doctrinal conclusion to Solomon's conclusion. A humble, faith-filled conclusion will fill you with hope and lead you towards Joy and Peace, despite the harsh realities of this world, while a prideful, defiant conclusion will fill you with fear and lead you towards misery and despair, as it did Solomon.

John 16:33 “These things I (*Jesus*) have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (NASB)

Solomon goes on and on for many chapters, sounding like some old, rich, bitter, drunk uncle at a family reunion, slurring his words and complaining to any unwary soul unfortunate enough to cross his path. He ends his tirade with this dark reflection, targeted at the vulnerable young people in the room, then collapses:

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’ – before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him – before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ‘Meaningless! (*“hevel”* – *smoke or vapor*) Meaningless (*“hevel”*)!’ says the Teacher (*“Qobehet”*). ‘Everything is meaningless (*“hevel”*)!’ ” (NIV)

Let's put a blanket around Solomon and let him sleep this one off. And as he starts to snore in the corner, let's give ear instead to the author of Ecclesiastes, who has been recording all these sayings of Solomon, and see what he has to say, to whom, and why.

III. The author's warning to his son: Trust and obey Yahweh, so you don't end up like Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14).

After recording all these things, the author of Ecclesiastes sits down next to his wide-eyed son, who, if the boy had any sense, must have been horrified by the bleak, despairing words of the king. With a comforting arm around his son, dad says this:

Ecclesiastes 12:9-12 “Not only was the Teacher wise, but (*literally, “moreover, because the Qobelet was wise”*) he also (*literally, “still”*) imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many **proverbs** (*emphasis added*). The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote (*referring to his proverbs*) was upright and true (*as compared to the faithless, despairing conclusions of the Qobelet within Ecclesiastes*). The words of the wise (*again referring to proverbs*) are like goads (*tools for guiding livestock*), their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails (*a source of stability*) – given by one shepherd (*ultimately from Yahweh*). Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them (*that is, be warned of anything in addition to the proverbs, such as the conclusions of the Qobelet within Ecclesiastes*)...” (NIV)

We have to consider this passage very carefully. The Hebrew literally begins, “moreover, because the *Qobelet* was wise, he still imparted knowledge to the people.”

Dad is saying, “look son, despite all that drivel, this guy was still really insightful and able to pass along some very worthwhile things.” Then he goes on to say how – by writing out many *proverbs*, which were carefully constructed, upright, and true.

So he’s directing his son’s attention, not to all that came before within Ecclesiastes, which is essentially Solomon’s nervous breakdown resulting from his lack of faith, and saying “yeah, I know that was crazy talk, but the guy did write some really valuable proverbs.”

Then dad describes the usefulness of the “words of the wise,” again meaning proverbs (not the sayings in Ecclesiastes), because, as we have seen, Solomon’s *conclusions* in Ecclesiastes are the *opposite* of wisdom. But proverbs are like:

- Goads (sharp sticks used to move sheep in the right direction); and
- Embedded nails (a source of stability);
- From one shepherd (ultimately from Yahweh).

Dad is saying, “proverbs will point you in the right direction, like a goad, and provide a firm foundation for your life, like a secure nail. And at the end of the day, no matter who wrote them, they ultimately represent the wisdom of Yahweh.”

Note these things could *never* be said about the contents of Ecclesiastes. They don’t point you towards any direction, because Solomon is saying everything is like smoke in the wind. There is absolutely nothing stabilizing about that. And it’s in direct opposition to everything Yahweh comforts us with in the rest of Scripture.

The author then warns his son to be wary of “anything in addition to them,” with “them” referring to proverbs, and “anything in addition” referring to Solomon’s erroneous conclusions within Ecclesiastes. Any other interpretation would suggest all the utterly ridiculous, faithless conclusions arrived at by Solomon are somehow supposed to be Yahweh’s means of pointing us in the right direction and providing us with firm footing for the journey forward. Hopefully you can see what a foolish and destructive interpretation that would be.

This is certainly a minority opinion of these closing passages of Ecclesiastes, but take a moment and think independently about this on your own. Do the following conclusions Solomon offered up in Ecclesiastes fill you with direction and confidence, or apathy and cynicism?

- No one is going to remember you when you are gone, so wise living is meaningless.
- You can't take it with you, so hard work is meaningless.
- You are no better than an animal, because death is scary.
- There are no comforters for the oppressed, so it's better to have never been born.
- You are going to get old, everything will be awful, and then you will die, so everything is meaningless.

Do those conclusions sound like they come from the heart of a faithful person, or a faithless person? Is that really God's instruction for you to follow, or God's warning for you to avoid?

Next ask yourself: How do these conclusions compare to what we read in Proverbs?

- As it relates to being wise and remembered.

Proverbs 8:17-21 "I (*wisdom*) love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full." (NIV)

Proverbs 20:7 "The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them." (NIV)

Proverbs 21:21 "He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor." (NASB)

Proverbs 22:1 "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." (NIV)

- As it relates to hard work and eternal rewards.

Proverbs 14:23 "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." (NIV)

Proverbs 10:4 "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." (NIV)

Proverbs 13:11 "Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow." (NIV)

Proverbs 24:3,4 "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." (NIV)

Proverbs 11:7-20 "Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing... Truly the righteous attain life, but whoever pursues evil finds death. The Lord detests those whose hearts are perverse, but he delights in those whose ways are blameless." (NIV)

Proverbs 23:17,18 "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." (NIV)

Proverbs 24:14 "Know also that wisdom is like honey for you: If you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." (NIV)

- As it relates to our comparison with animals and attitude towards death.

Proverbs 12:10 “The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.” (NIV)

Proverbs 17:12 “Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly.” (NIV)

Proverbs 11:22 “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:11 “As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.” (NIV)

Proverbs 26:17 “Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.” (NIV)

Proverbs 10:6 “The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.” (NIV)

Proverbs 13:14 “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.” (NIV)

Proverbs 14:27,32 “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death... When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous seek refuge in God.” (NIV)

Proverbs 12:28 “In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.” (NIV)

- As it relates to being comforted and the value of the gift of life.

Proverbs 22:22,23 “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life.” (NIV)

Proverbs 24:23-25 “These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good: Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent,’ will be cursed by peoples and denounced by nations. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come on them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 25:21,22 “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:26 “Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the LORD that one gets justice.” (NIV)

Proverbs 30:5,6 “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” (NIV)

Proverbs 11:18 “A wicked person earns deceptive wages, but the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.” (NIV)

Proverbs 12:14,20 “From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward... Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.” (NIV)

Proverbs 13:21 “Trouble pursues the sinner, but the righteous are rewarded with good things.” (NIV)

Proverbs 14:14 “The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good rewarded for theirs.” (NIV)

- As it relates to growing old.

Proverbs 3:1-18 “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity... Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight... Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.” (NIV)

Proverbs 14:30 “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:6 “Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad.” (NIV)

Proverbs 9:10,11 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.” (NIV)

After you have considered the Proverbs, expand your palate and ask yourself: How do Solomon’s conclusions compare to what we read in the rest of Scripture? We’ve already looked at some applicable verses. Here are more.

- As it relates to being wise and remembered.

James 3:13-18 “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom... the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” (NIV)

Romans 16:19,20 “... be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” (NIV)

Matthew 10:32 “Whoever acknowledges me (*Jesus*) before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” (NIV)

Hebrews 6:10-12 “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them... We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:7,8 “I (*Paul*) have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (NASB)

Isaiah 49:23 “... those who hope in me (*God*) will not be disappointed.” (NIV)

Matthew 10:26 “... for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” (NASB)

- As it relates to hard work and eternal rewards.

1 Timothy 6:7-19 “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith... Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (NIV)

Colossians 3:23,24 “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:17,18 “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (NASB)

Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (NASB)

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (NIV)

- As it relates to our comparison with animals and attitudes towards death.

Psalm 8:1-9 “LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (NIV)

Romans 8:31-39 “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

Hebrews 2:14,15 “... he (*Jesus*) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (NIV)

- As it relates to being comforted and the value of the gift of life.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me (*Jesus*), all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)

Luke 6:22,23 “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven...” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:22-36 “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful... Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (NIV)

Revelation 21:1-4 “Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ ” (NIV)

- As it relates to growing old.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven... we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 “... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable... the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’... thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 2:9 “but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ ” (NASB)

Finally, take Solomon’s conclusions and try to put them in the mouth of Jesus. For example, at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said this:

Matthew 5:1-48 “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ ” (NIV)

Would anyone have wanted to follow Jesus then if He had stood on that mountain and instead recited the passage from Ecclesiastes below? Would you want to follow Him now?

Ecclesiastes 1:1 to 12:8 “... Meaningless! Meaningless!... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless... What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind... with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief... the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die! So I hated life... As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless...the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is the one who has never been born... who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?... I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all... No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning... Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless... Meaningless! Meaningless!... Everything is meaningless!”

With all this in mind, now decide for yourself: What is the author of Ecclesiastes encouraging his son to value – the conclusions of Solomon, or the principles in Proverbs and promises in the rest of Scripture?

Finally, let's look at the author's conclusion of the book.

Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 “... Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (NIV)

The author tells his boy, “I could keep going and put together a whole series of books like this, with all the crazy conclusions people without faith come up with when confronted by the hard realities of life, but that would totally wear me out.” So he gets to the bottom line and provides his son with perhaps the greatest bit of fatherly advice in all of recorded history:

- Fear God (meaning respect and revere Him).
- Follow His Law (He did, after all, tell us exactly how He wants us to live).
- Because this applies to everyone – rich or poor, smart or stupid, famous or obscure, powerful or powerless. In other words, no excuses.

Then dad tells his son why, and *in one sentence discredits every conclusion Solomon erroneously reached throughout Ecclesiastes*, and at the same time teaches all of us what we should have been focused on all along – *God is going to judge everyone for everything.*

Let's break this down. God will judge:

- *Every deed.* That means everything everyone has ever done throughout all of history.
- *With nothing hidden.* When the author says “every,” he means “every.” There will be no exceptions – no cleverly disguised, intentionally disregarded, or accidentally forgotten acts. God saw it all, He and will judge it all.
- *Whether good or evil.* God will stand in judgment of both the good stuff and the bad stuff.

If you are humble and have chosen to follow Yahweh, this is tremendous news of the highest order. It means no matter how obscure you may consider your life, or how unseen you may believe your efforts, Yahweh was watching. This can be a very dark world, but nothing escapes the eyes and ears of the Creator of the universe and everything in it. And sooner or later, in this life or the next, He is going to reward those who chose to follow Him, *because He is a righteous Judge.*

2 Chronicles 16:9 “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...” (NASB)

1 Peter 4:19 “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (NASB)

2 Timothy 4:1-8 “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach

the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (NIV)

1 Peter 2:21-23 “... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 4:5 “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” (NASB)

If you are proud and have chosen to defy Yahweh, this is the worst news imaginable. Nothing should be more terrifying than this. It means no matter how smart you may consider yourself, no matter what lengths you have gone to cover your tracks, Yahweh was watching. The darkness of the world you may have been counting on is powerless to protect you. And sooner or later, in this life or the next, God is going to punish those who chose to defy Him, *because He is a righteous Judge.*

Hebrews 4:13 “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (NIV)

Isaiah 2:12-22 “For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty, and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased... The pride of man will be humbled, and the loftiness of men will be abased, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day... Men will go into caves of the rocks, and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD, and before the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble... Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed?” (NASB)

John 3:17-21 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him... This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (NASB)

Hebrews 10:26-31 “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment... For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (NIV)

Notice a vital part of this is the belief that God is a righteous Judge. If you believe this, it brings good people great comfort and bad people great distress. But if you don't believe it, fear, anger, and selfishness consume you like a pack of hungry wolves, because your central belief is: There is ultimately no justice. No one will be either blessed or punished, so do whatever you want. This faithlessness is the gateway to every vice ever conceived since the beginning of time.

Ephesians 4:18,19 “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” (NIV)

2 Peter 3:3-18 “... understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’... But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him... Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (NIV)

In a sense, this is where Solomon went wrong. At the end of the day, he didn't believe Yahweh was a righteous Judge. If he had, he would never have reached a single one of his faithless conclusions in Ecclesiastes. Because he didn't, he indulged his worst instincts, in bed with 1000 pagan women, and under their influence, in the temples he built for their horrific gods.

Compare the author's one, simple, faith-filled conclusion to all the wacky, despairing, faithless conclusions of Solomon we had to endure in the previous twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes. If Solomon had possessed the same faith as the author, his conclusions would not have been that everything under the sun was “meaningless, meaningless,” a “chasing after wind,” but rather “meaningful, meaningful,” an “investment in eternity!”

1 Peter 4:12-19 “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed... Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (NASB)

Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (NASB)

Hebrews 6:10 “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 4:1-18 “... we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (NIV)

1 Peter 1:6-8 “... you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” (NASB)

Also consider this: Even if we defy God, our lives still are not *bevel* or somehow meaningless. They have tremendous impact, both in this life and in eternity.

Evil people stain the world. Their hatred causes injustice and sorrow everywhere they go. Their decisions directly affect the lives of other people in profound and far-reaching ways. That’s not insubstantial or meaningless.

But because God is who He is, He can (in His remarkable and mysterious way) bring good into the world through the evil decisions of defiant people, when people of faith choose to trust Him and love others, no matter what. This again, is in no conceivable way meaningless. It’s *extraordinarily* meaningful, infusing life with purpose and hope.

Hebrews 10:22-36 “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful... Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the

confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (NIV)

Genesis 50:20 “... you (*the brothers of Joseph*) meant evil against me (*Joseph*), but God meant it for good...” (NASB)

Proverbs 16:4-20 “The LORD works out everything to its proper end – even the wicked for a day of disaster. The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished... blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.” (NIV)

Romans 8:28-39 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose... What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?... Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NASB)

In eternity, it is highly unlikely anyone who lived a defiant, faithless life will consider their decisions meaningless, especially the decision to reject a Savior. Why? Because they will be the decisions that condemn them to an eternity separated from God and His grace, which will give them time to reflect on just how profoundly meaningful their decisions were.

Revelation 20:11-14 “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it... And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds (*that is, good works*)... And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life (*from accepting Christ as Savior*), he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (NASB)

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 “... those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus... will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,” (NASB)

2 Thessalonians 2:10 “... They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (NIV)

John 3:16-36 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has

been done in the sight of God... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.” (NIV)

In the opening section of Ecclesiastes (1:1 to 2:11), where Solomon describes all the material things he discovered could not make him happy – like sex, money, possessions, power, and fame – he was right to call these things *hevel*. They are temporary distractions, not permanent foundations.

But going forward, throughout the rest of the book until the author speaks to his son (2:12 to 12:8), when Solomon describes the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, he's totally wrong to conclude the choices we make are *hevel*. The decisions we make in this life are in no way insubstantial, meaningless wisps of smoke, leaving no lasting trace. *It's exactly the opposite*. They leave permanent marks on history, either for good or evil, depending on whom those choices honor – our Creator or ourselves.

Galatians 6:7-10 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people...” (NIV)

And so when Solomon describes “all things under the sun” as meaningless, he's doubly wrong. Good choices have meaning and lead to good consequences. Bad choices have meaning and lead to bad consequences. Regardless of our faithfulness or faithlessness, our lives are not *hevel*, a vapor fading into oblivion. Rather they form a solid braid of decisions God will one day judge righteously and then bestow with either vindication or condemnation.

1 Peter 1:1-17 “... To God's elect, strangers in the world... Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:52-58 “... the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed... For this perishable must put on the imperishable, this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?’... thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (NASB)

If Solomon had believed “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil,” is there any way he (or anyone else) could conclude we will all eventually

be unremembered, unrewarded, and uncomforted, no different than an animal, after having lived a life with no meaning, no matter what we did? Of course not! That was his great error. May none of us repeat it.

Final thoughts.

The Old Testament Scriptures are sometimes referred to as “Jewish meditation literature,” meaning they are writings we have to carefully think about, in light of all of Scripture and all our understanding of who God is and how He behaves. Modern concepts of meditation generally revolve around purging and emptying the mind, but Biblical meditation is the opposite. It’s about filling and occupying the mind with truth – learning and pondering, questioning and applying, all over the course of a lifetime.

This is important to recognize, because Hebrew Scriptures are not written like an instruction manual, where you start with a blank slate, then move forward in a linear fashion, building up your knowledge in an ordered, methodical way. Instead, you jump into Genesis, and it’s as if you’re expected to already possess an intimate, encyclopedic knowledge of the entirety of Scripture, understanding the intricacies of all the symbolic language, historical background, future ramifications, and deeply intertwined themes.

The Hebrew Scriptures are also nothing like a modern novel, where detailed histories of the characters are explored, along with clear trails leading to how these experiences impact the characters’ thoughts, words, and deeds. There is no eavesdropping on inner dialogues, revealing the motivations for actions or conclusions, nor do the authors ordinarily pass judgment on what is said or done. They just tell it like it is, then we are required to draw our own conclusions as to whether the people portrayed within were wise and faithful, or foolish and faithless, as we meditate on what God is trying to teach us through the stories, poems, and songs.

This places a high responsibility on the reader. It requires mature, careful, and prayerful consideration over time to humbly extract truth from the pages. And sometimes it’s a real struggle, like getting useful testimony from an enigmatic and somewhat uncooperative witness.

But perhaps that’s why God inspired biblical authors to write this way. It forces us to think, choose, and grow – or give up. It weeds out those who ultimately don’t really care, then refines those who refuse to quit. It tests motivation and awards effort.

If you read some of this stuff, and making sense of it just seems like too much work, you’ll peel off and look for things providing more immediate gratification and requiring less exertion, because at the end of the day, you don’t really care. But if you genuinely do care, you’ll keep digging until you strike the motherload. You’ll “seek” until you find, and you’ll “knock” until the door is opened, because your desire for the light will allow you to do nothing less.

Jeremiah 29:13 “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” (NASB)

Luke 11:9-13 “So I (*Jesus*) say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an

egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give... to those who ask him!" (NIV)

James 1:5 "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (NASB)

John 3:17-21 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him... This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (NASB)

And here is the key: It's in this exhausting wrestling match God can speak most profoundly to you, as you humbly learn to think for yourself about what you are reading, in the light of the rest of Scripture and by the power of God's Spirit. You will struggle and strain, and perhaps – like Jacob wrestling with God (see Genesis 32:22-32) – dislocate a hip and limp around afterwards on a gimp leg. But like Jacob, the experience will forever change you for the better, because, in a sense, it was something for which you had to sacrifice and work.

Philippians 2:12 "Therefore, my dear friends... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling," (NIV)

Eyes glass over when we read instruction manuals, but when we read a compelling story, it inspires us to think and reflect with bright, clear eyes. And the lessons stay with us much longer. So we are called to meditate on the stories we find in Scripture, considering them from every angle, like a carved jewel turning in our hands so we can appreciate every facet.

And if there was ever a book requiring careful, mature meditation, it's Ecclesiastes. We must have strong minds and tender hearts to get the message.

A *strong mind* is filled with all the truths contained in Scripture necessary to have authentic wisdom. Knowing truth begets a free and independent mind, able to strain out the lies of the world and avoid corruption. You can't be deceived or unintentionally enslaved.

1 Peter 1:13-22 "Therefore, prepare you minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.'... Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (NIV)

Romans 12:2 "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:4 "... the god of this world (*Satan*) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ..." (NASB)

Romans 16:17,18 "... watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such

people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” (NIV)

John 8:31,32 “... Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ ” (NIV)

Galatians 5:1-26 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love... So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature... The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (NIV)

Philippians 1:9,10 “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” (NIV)

Lamentations 3:21 “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.” (NASB)

Isaiah 26:3 “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.” (NASB)

A *tender heart* is filled with the humility and compassion necessary to have authentic wisdom. At a foundational level, you accept you are not God, so you are not in charge, and you need His help to find the Joy and Peace you long for in life and can experience no other way. And you genuinely care for other people, because you’ve experienced the same or similar hurts, and desire to help others the way God has helped you.

Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (NASB)

2 Chronicles 34:27 “Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words... and because you humbled yourself before Me... I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD.” (NASB)

Hebrews 3:12,13 “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (NIV)

Matthew 13:10-16 “The disciples came to him (*Jesus*) and asked, ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’ He replied... ‘This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.” In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.’ ” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.” (NIV)

Proverbs 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB)

Without these qualities, we quickly go off the rails in an orgy of self-indulgence. Because the tricky things about Ecclesiastes are:

- You start with keen, truthful insights about the harsh realities of life.
- So you think the *Qobelet* is going draw equally keen, truthful conclusions.
- Then his conclusions are ridiculous, but in order to realize this, you have to know the rest of Scripture and what God is truly like, otherwise you are ripe for manipulation.
- After his dark conclusions, the *Qobelet* calls life *bevel*, translated as “meaningless.”
- And that sounds about right, because of the absurdity of his conclusions. In other words, if you accept the *Qobelet’s* conclusions as true, then life truly is meaningless.
- But the truth is: *It’s the Qobelet’s conclusions that are meaningless*, not life, or hard work, or our eternal destinations, or any of the other things the *Qobelet* sounds off about but doesn’t really understand.

This is what we are expected to meditate upon, and these are the spiritually mature conclusions we are supposed to be able to reach on our own, after reading Ecclesiastes.

The problem people run into is: They see the initial observations are true, then wrongly assume the corresponding conclusions are true. And as a result they experience the same despair as the *Qobelet*.

God expects more from His children. He doesn’t want us to remain gullible or easy to manipulate. He wants us to carefully consider what people like the *Qobelet* say, then compare it to His Word, and develop the spiritual skills necessary to divide the true from the false, or said another way, to discern when there are lies mixed in with truth.

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (NASB)

2 Timothy 3:16,17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

2 Timothy 2:15 “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (NASB)

Romans 15:4 “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (NASB)

We will meet many *Qobelets* in our lives, who mix the truth with lies in order to manipulate and deceive. This is Satan's most favored tactic. It's rare he tells a straight up lie. Those are too easy to sniff out. Instead, he tells lies mixed with truth, hoping the poisonous concoction will appeal to whatever pride dwells within us, and induce us to drink the cup to its dregs.

John 8:44 "... the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (NASB)

2 Corinthians 4:4 "The god of this age (*a name for Satan*) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (NIV)

2 Corinthians 11:13,14 "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (NASB)

2 Corinthians 2:10,11 "... I (*Paul*) have forgiven in the sight of Christ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." (NASB)

Genesis 3:1 "Now the serpent... said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"' " (NIV)

Revelation 12:9 "... the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world..." (NASB)

The bitter conclusions of Solomon have a strong appeal to those who resent the fact we are required to exist in a world where people's will is free and choices between good and bad are allowed for a length of time we call history, until a final judgment puts an end to the test.

If we harbor resentment against God for some unfulfilled desire, the true observations within Ecclesiastes give us an excuse to drink the cup of false conclusions. But the end is the same despair Solomon endured at the end of his life, as he resented Yahweh, constructed pagan temples, and attempted to murder the one Yahweh chose to reign in his stead in the Northern Kingdom.

2 Timothy 4:3,4 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." (NASB)

2 Timothy 3:2-7 "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant... holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (NASB)

Jeremiah 14:14-16 "... The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My (*God's*) name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them or spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds... I will pour out their own wickedness on them." (NASB)

Obadiah 1:3,4 " 'The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to earth?" Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' declares the LORD." (NASB)

And so we must always remember: *Ecclesiastes is a cautionary tale*. It chronicles what happens to you when you have everything in life except faith. No matter how rich, successful, or powerful you may be, if you do not trust and obey Yahweh, life becomes meaningless and you sink into an abyss of despair.

Putting it in reverse.

But what if you *do* trust and obey Yahweh, even when life is unfair and there seems to be an easy but dishonorable way out?

To discover the answer to this question, we have to put the vehicle of Solomon's life in reverse and travel backwards in time, from the low point at the terminus of the arc, back up to the apex of the curve, to the central, decisive tipping point in his life. This would be after Solomon's ascendancy (when he blessed us with the truths recorded Proverbs), but before his decline (when he cursed us with the falsehoods recorded in Ecclesiastes).

We have to meet the heroine of the Song of Songs.

CHAPTER 10 – THE SONG OF SONGS.

A RAY OF HOPE.

Introduction.

Proverbs is about life *principles*. Ecclesiastes is about life *realities*. Song of Songs is about life *choices*, specifically as related to romantic love.

Solomon's life choices, especially in his love life, are important to examine, because they are the ones that destroyed him. He married Pharaoh's daughter and built her a huge palace in Jerusalem near the Temple and his own palace in defiance of the Law, and we have considered what a disaster this was on multiple fronts. Then he took 999 other wives and concubines from the women of Canaan in further defiance of the Law, and together all these choices related to women are what turned the honorable young man who asked Yahweh for wisdom into the evil monster who built pagan temples for prostitution and child sacrifice.

But the Song of Songs is not really about Solomon's choices, which is good, because that song would be quite depressing and only mildly instructive. It's not particularly hard to figure out Solomon's choices were evil, so at the end of the day there is not that much to learn from them, other than don't be stupid.

At the same time, a song about Solomon's life choices would be the ultimate downer. Thinking overlong about all the dehumanizing effects of prostitution (on both the prostitute and the client), and the sickening, painful deaths suffered in flames by the children of Israel for centuries, leads to a quick descent into dark places.

Solomon's life choices are simply not good fodder for a piece that will enlighten, inspire, and point us towards the right path. A song about him could only warn us of the wrong path, and Ecclesiastes already does that.

The good news is: Within this song, there are life choices made by someone from whom we can absolutely learn and be encouraged. The decisions this person makes are difficult but right, and they light the way for us all to follow. However, they are made, not by a man called Solomon, but by a woman called the Shulammitte. And she becomes a ray of hope to all of us in the darkness of the tragic life of Solomon.

Four characters and four interpretations.

As you read the Song of Songs, it's clear there are four important characters portrayed within:

1. *Solomon* – the king of Israel.
2. *The Shulammitte* – a young, beautiful, common woman from Shunem, southwest of the Sea of Galilee.
3. *The Shepherd* – a young shepherd, likely also from Shunem.

4. *The Dancer* – a female dancer in Solomon’s court.

So there are two men and two women. There is also a chorus, called the “Daughters of Jerusalem,” who would be the young virgin females working within the royal court, who primarily interact with the Shulammitte.

There are generally four different interpretations of what these four characters are up to in the Song of Songs.

1. *Solomon marries the Shulammitte.* According to this interpretation, the Song of Songs is a record of Solomon’s successful courtship of the Shulammitte, and she becomes one of his 1000 wives and concubines. It’s also usually believed the Shepherd is Solomon in disguise.
2. *An allegory of Yahweh’s love for Israel.* Solomon represents Yahweh, the Shulammitte represents Israel, and the song describes the love between the two.
3. *A collection of different love poems.* There is no story. This is just a collection of poems about the power of romantic love.
4. *The Shulammitte marries the Shepherd.* The Shulammitte rejects Solomon in favor of the Shepherd.

There is much debate over which of these interpretations is correct. At the end of the day, the answer is something over which reasonable minds can differ, and we shouldn’t worry too much about opinions different than our own. The interpretation of the Song of Songs is not essential to the faith, but loving one another is!

1 John 4:7-21 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love... And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.” (NASB)

Proverbs 3:3,4 “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.” (NASB)

Philippians 2:14,15 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (NIV)

1 Peter 3:15,16 “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (NIV)

Titus 2:1-8 “... speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure... kind... that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in

speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.” (NASB)

1 Thessalonians 5:5-28 “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled... Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus... Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil... May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (NIV)

Romans 14:1-19 “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions... Who are you to judge...? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand... But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.’ So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way... For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” (NASB)

1 Corinthians 4:5 “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” (NASB)

1 Peter 1:22-25 “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER...’ ” (NASB)

John 15:9-12 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (NIV)

With that said, here are some thoughts about the different interpretations.

1. *Solomon marries the Shulammitte.*

There are several problems here.

If this is just the record of how Solomon bagged one of his 1000 babes, what exactly is special about that? Why is that story the setting for the “Song of Songs,” meaning the greatest of all songs?

If this interpretation is true, then it's not the greatest song, it's just one of a thousand songs. More precisely, it's number 141 of 1000, because Song of Songs 6:8 tells us Solomon had sixty wives and eighty concubines at the time of this story. That would make the Shulammitte 141st on the list, with 859 women to go, whom Solomon either married or took as a concubine after the Shulammitte.

This would mean there is no way this song is about "love." It can only be about lust. If Solomon actually loved the Shulammitte, he wouldn't have taken 859 women after her. Would the "Song of Songs" really be about some girl Solomon was super hot for, until he got bored and moved on to the next conquest?

Another problem with this interpretation is: The Shulammitte is Jewish. "Shulammitte" means someone from Shunem (the letters "l" and "n" are often interchanged in translating Hebrew), a town in the tribal lands of Issachar (Joshua 19:18), southwest of the Sea of Galilee. So the Shulammitte is a nice Jewish girl, not a girl from one of the pagan nations of Canaan.

Why is that a problem? Because Solomon didn't marry any Jewish women or take them as concubines. He only went for Pharaoh's daughter and 999 Canaanite daughters.

All of this rules out Solomon ever loving, marrying, or even taking the Shulammitte as a concubine. The only thing she could be to him is some random sexual partner, used and then discarded. Does that sound like a good backdrop for the "Song of Songs?"

We should also note: Shunem is the hometown of Abishag, the beautiful virgin brought in to keep the elderly David warm at night, and whom Adonijah wanted to marry as part of his failed bid for the throne (1 Kings 1:3). Some believe Abishag is the Shulammitte in the Song of Songs, but that is unlikely.

Abishag was living in Jerusalem and already known to Solomon, whereas the Shulammitte is in northern Israel, discovered by Solomon there, and then brought to Jerusalem. The time periods do not line up particularly well. Abishag had been with David for years before he died. Solomon collects a 140 wives and concubines by the time he met the Shulammitte. If Solomon had genuinely felt the passionate love expressed in this song for the Shulammitte, he would have acted sooner. And so it seems the connection between Abishag and the Shulammitte is simply that Shunem was the place to go if you wanted to meet a pretty girl.

2. *An allegory of Yahweh's love for Israel.*

The problems with this interpretation are: If this is an allegory about Yahweh's love for Israel, Solomon is a really lousy choice to represent Yahweh, and the Shulammitte is an equally lousy choice to represent Israel.

Solomon was an extremely promiscuous and selfish sex addict. His addiction was his downfall, and his choices ended up literally tearing Israel in two. He knew absolutely nothing about love, except love for himself. In the area of romantic love, he was an absolute failure of the highest order. So if you are looking for someone to stand in for Yahweh in a love story, Solomon is emphatically not your guy. Choosing him would be an insult to Yahweh.

The Shulammitte is an equally bad substitute for Israel, because as we shall see, she has tremendous integrity and loyalty to the man she loves. She is not perfect, but she is ultimately faithful and true.

Israel, as we have seen, was consistently unfaithful and disloyal to Yahweh, right from the very start. Beginning with Exodus and continuing until the nation's destruction, Israel was constantly turning away from Yahweh and following other gods. The language often used to describe Israel's attitude towards Yahweh was that of an unfaithful wife cheating on her husband, or even as a prostitute offering herself to anyone. So once again (but for the opposite reason), if you want someone to stand in for Israel in a love story, the Shulammitte is emphatically not your gal. Choosing the Shulammitte would be an insult to her.

Ezekiel 16:1-45 “The word of the LORD came to me (*Ezekiel*): “Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite... you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution... you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them... And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols... In addition to all your other wickedness, you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square. At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, spreading your legs with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbors with large genitals, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity. So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied. I am filled with fury against you, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! When you built your mounds at every street corner and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!... Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your lust and exposed your naked body in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see you stark naked. I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring on you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. Then I will deliver you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you stark naked. They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to

your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry. Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices? Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.” ’ ’ (NIV)

Hosea 4:12-14 “My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner’s rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes – a people without understanding will come to ruin!” (NIV)

We should also note there is already an allegory of Yahweh’s love for Israel in Scripture. It’s the story of the prophet Hosea. God tells Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman named Gomer. She continually cheats on Hosea and runs away, and God tells Hosea to go find her and take her back every time (see Hosea 1-14).

Hosea 1:2 “When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.’ ” (NIV)

This is a picture of Yahweh’s love for Israel. Yahweh is like a loyal husband who will take back a cheating wife every time she returns to him, because he loves her. It’s a story of the faithful loving the faithless, even though this love is undeserved and often unreturned.

Jeremiah 3:6-14 “During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me (*Jeremiah*), ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries (*referring to the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria*). Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense,’ declares the LORD. The LORD said to me, ‘Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt – you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,’ declares the LORD. ‘Return, faithless people,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I am your husband...’ ” (NIV)

As we shall see, the Song of Songs is absolutely nothing like that. It's about the faithful, loyal, and passionate love the Shulammitte and the Shepherd have for one another. It's a reciprocal love, expressed through difficult but good life choices, which unfortunately bears no resemblance to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

Solomon is nothing like faithful Yahweh. The Shulammitte is nothing like unfaithful Israel. And the relationship within the Song of Songs is nothing like the relationship between God and His rebellious people. And so if you want to call this an allegory, it can only be an allegory representing what things *ought to have been*, not what things *actually were*. And that's quite a stretch.

3. *A collection of different love poems.*

Many have noted all these problems, so a fallback position is: There isn't any story. This is just a collection of semi-erotic ancient Hebrew love songs, with no common thread other than romantic attraction.

The problem with this interpretation is: Then why is it in Scripture? If there is no story to learn from or allegory to decipher, for what reason would God include this in His eternal Word? Why would it be called the "Song of Songs" and put on such a high pedestal?

This is not to disparage the value of a good love song. Everyone likes a nice romantic ballad. But there is no reason to canonize this one in Scripture, if it's nothing more than a collection of unrelated lyrics about different couples who are hot for each other. Those types of songs are commonplace, and a compilation of them would be unremarkable in every way.

Also, why call it the "Song of Songs" if it's actually a bunch of different songs? Why not call it "A collection of songs about nookie," or something like that? It would be a more accurate title.

And then you have more problems related to whom the lovers are in these different pieces. If you break the "Song of Songs" down into unrelated episodes about different couples, and presume they are all hooking up, then you've got:

- Sleazy Solomon and an easy Shulammitte.
- This same Shulammitte and a stupid Shepherd that doesn't know she's already been with Solomon.
- Sleazy Solomon with a woman most politely described as an "erotic dancer."

Does that sound like the means by which God would want to communicate with you about the importance and purpose of romantic love?

4. *The Shulammitte marries the Shepherd.*

In a sense, the Song of Songs suffers from the same interpretational bias as Ecclesiastes. If you don't know the tragic arc of Solomon's life, you expect him to be the hero. He's the king. He's healthy, wealthy, and wise. He made a great decision to ask for wisdom in his youth, and then

grows up to be the most rich and powerful man of his day, perhaps of all time. In a song about romance, what woman wouldn't want Solomon to be the suitor?

Answer: The Shulammitte, that's who! Because if you read through the Song of Songs carefully, it's pretty clear two men are vying for the affections of the Shulammitte – a king and a shepherd. The Shulammitte gets to choose, and she picks the shepherd, because at the end of the day, she decides it's better to be the one true enduring love of a humble shepherd, than one empty temporary distraction of an arrogant king as he expands his harem from 140 to 1000.

But to see this, you have to set aside the shallow view of Solomon most people grow up with, recognize who he truly was, objectively consider the Shulammitte's voice, and pay close attention to what's going on. Then you have to think carefully about all this, and with humility prayerfully ask: "how is this song supposed to move me?"

Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things..." (NIV)

This is the "Song of Songs" because – other than whether to receive the gift of salvation – it is about perhaps the most important life choice we make: Whom to marry. When you marry someone, the two "become one flesh" in the sight of God. You are not two individuals anymore. You are one couple.

Genesis 2:21-24 "So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." (NIV)

Matthew 19:4-6 " 'Haven't you read,' he (*Jesus*) replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.' " (NIV)

Obviously, this has profound and far-reaching effects on the totality of your life. It affects you spiritually, emotionally, and physically, in everything from the practical, day-to-day aspects of life, to the highest and deepest influences on the direction and quality of life's journey.

That's why this is the "Song of Songs." It's the one you better listen to carefully and learn to sing on your own. Because getting this one right determines whether your song is going to be a stirring anthem or a heartbroken lament.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy (*like your heart*) to dogs, and do not throw your pearls (*also like your heart*) before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." (NASB)

That's why it's so important to thoughtfully meditate on this song and really consider what it means. Romantic love is certainly a mystery, but how you interpret the riddle will reveal much about how you view the ways of God, this fallen world, and the love between one man and one woman.

Proverbs 30:18,19 “There are three things that are too amazing for me (*Agur*), four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.” (NIV)

Before you read the song, ask yourself: Is there anything to be learned or gained by celebrating Solomon's conquest of one of his 1000 women? Or from a grossly miscast allegory? Or from a bunch of random ditties about different people getting down, sometimes with the same girl?

Or from a humble young woman, presented with a choice to join a king's harem and live in the indescribable luxury of a royal palace, or cleave to a young shepherd and build a life together in the indescribable beauty of the rural lands of Israel?

The choice is yours, but for purposes of this study, we are going with the Shulammitte and the Shepherd.

Note: This is certainly a minority view of the book, but it has been taught for centuries. See: J.S. Jacobi, *Das durch eine leichte u. ungekunstelte Erkl. von seinen Vorwürfen gerettete Hohelied*, (1771); William Elliot Griffis, *The Lily Among Thorns, A Study of the Biblical Drama Entitled "The Song of Songs,"* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890); Andrew Harper, *The Song of Solomon*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1907); Walter F. Adeney, *The Song of Solomon and the Lamentations of Jeremiah*, (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948); William Pouget and Jean Guitton, *The Canticle of Canticles*, (U.S.A.: The Declan X. McMullen Company, Inc., 1948); Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Cobeleth (Commonly called the Book of Ecclesiastes)*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1970); John Phillips, *Exploring the Song of Solomon*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1984). In the 12th century, Ibn Ezra also held to this view. See: S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1892), page 410.

Solomon's role in the composition.

The Song of Songs begins with this (or something similar in other translations):

Song of Songs 1:1 “Solomon's Song of Songs.” (NIV)

A literal translation from the Hebrew would be: “The song of songs that of Solomon.”

Let's start with the “Song of Songs” part. This is the way the ancients indicated the highest and most powerful of something, like the “Holy of Holies,” “King of Kings,” or “Lord of Lords.” So it's saying this is the greatest of songs.

Exodus 26:33 “You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.” (NASB)

Revelation 19:11-16 “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His

eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” (NIV)

The Hebrew then calls this Song of Songs “of Solomon.” Some take this to mean “authored by” Solomon, while others take this to mean “about” Solomon.

It’s entirely possible Solomon wrote this song about “the girl that got away.” It’s him reflecting on how this is the woman he should have married, but she wouldn’t have him, because he’s an arrogant lecher and there was this nobody of a shepherd who got her instead. This would be consistent with Solomon’s personality. Look at Ecclesiastes. That’s an entire book about his frustrations and failures.

It’s also conceivable this rejection was the traumatic crossroads in Solomon’s life, which sent him careening down the wrong path. He couldn’t get the honorable Jewish girl, who wisely said “no thank you” when presented with an opportunity to be girl 141 in Solomon’s ever-expanding harem. That would be a sharp sting to his pride, and rather than be humbled by it, he doubled down on his propensity for pagan women and ran headlong down the path of ruin.

This would be the apex in the disastrous arc of Solomon’s life – the vital crossroads that would profoundly influence the success or failure of his reign. It could have been the point where he humbly repented from his previous sins and renewed his dedication to Yahweh. But that never happened, so it must have been more like the pivot towards his dreadful end, the starting point for his terrible decline.

It’s also possible this was written by someone other than Solomon, and the song is “of Solomon” in the sense it draws your attention to the tragic but dangerous figure who sets the story in motion, by taking a girl from the fields and shepherd she loves, intent on adding her to his harem. The central theme is whether the Shulammitte will succumb to all the temptations presented by Solomon, or remain faithful to the Shepherd with whom she is already in love. By calling the song “of Solomon,” it’s an ironic and somewhat sardonic way of saying it’s the greatest song about resisting all the *enemies* of love, personified in Solomon.

There can be no definitive answer. There is no other source to clarify the meaning. At the end of the day, it doesn’t really matter. What matters is: Will you cheer for Solomon as the hero when he appears on the stage, or boo him as the villain?

Structure of the book, with samples.

Unfortunately, it’s beyond the scope of this work to get into the details of the Song of Songs. To truly understand what is going on, you need to attend carefully to every word – in Hebrew. It can be difficult to decipher who is singing and whom the singer is singing to or about. As a result, how different phrases get translated into English depends on how the translator understands the story.

In other words, the translation will conform to whether the translator believes the Shulammitte loves Solomon or the Shepherd, and whether it's believed the piece contains a story at all or is just a random collection of love songs. That's why if you compare different translations, you get some pretty wide swings in how things are translated.

That being said, here is a general outline of the song, if you are part of the audience rooting for the Shepherd.

Act One: Northern Israel, near a vineyard (Song of Songs 1:1 through 3:5).

From reading the entire piece, we gather the background of the story is this: The Shulammitte is a young, beautiful Jewish woman working in a vineyard in northern Israel. Her brothers discover her love for the Shepherd and do not approve, likely because shepherding was considered about the lowliest job you could have in the ancient world. Shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the social ladder. So the brothers send their sister away from her home in Shunem, southwest of the Sea of Galilee, to a vineyard in the north to keep her away from the Shepherd.

Solomon is traveling in the north, and his eyes fall upon the beautiful Shulammitte. He has her brought into his "chambers," meaning brought into his traveling entourage, so he can take her back to Jerusalem and marry her.

The song opens with the Shulammitte's declaration of love for the Shepherd to the Daughters of Jerusalem. These are the young virgins of the court, who function like a Greek Chorus in the piece, questioning the Shulammitte and commenting on her life choices. Then the Shulammitte calls for the Shepherd to come rescue her from the king's chambers.

Song of Songs 1:4-7 "Draw me (*the Shulammitte*) after you (*the Shepherd*) and let us run together (*in other words, "get me out of here"*)! The king has brought me into his chambers... Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where do you pasture your flock, where do you make it lie down at noon (*questions you ask a shepherd, not a king*)?" (NASB)

Again, it's hard to tell exactly who the different characters are referring to in the song. You have to understand the piece as a whole, before you can understand the parts. That being said, it's clear from the start the Shulammitte has been taken to the king's chambers and she wants to get out. We can also tell her love is directed towards a shepherd, not a king, because her longing is expressed towards the keeper of a flock, not the keeper of a harem.

Later in this section, Solomon chimes in, attempting to sweet talk the Shulammitte.

Song of Songs 1:9,10 "I liken you, my darling, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariot horses. Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels." (NIV)

Notice the language Solomon uses. He has a real thing for Egyptian horses, and compares the Shulammitte to one of Pharaoh's prize mares. Not necessarily a compliment from the woman's perspective, even in the ancient world. He sees her only as something to be possessed, stabled, and occasionally ridden, alongside his other women, like a herd of broodmares. But in his

arrogance, Solomon is blind to this. Then he goes on about earrings and jewels, which probably worked pretty well with his 140 other wives and concubines.

One reason we are able to tell there are two different men vying for the Shulammitte is the difference in their use of language. Solomon will talk like a king, and as we shall see, the Shepherd will talk like a shepherd. Here, Solomon is definitely talking like royalty, with an unhealthy interest in Egypt. This demonstrates his unfaithfulness to Yahweh, who forbade the purchase of Egyptian horses (Deuteronomy 17:16; Isaiah 31:1), and foreshadows Solomon's unfaithfulness to each and every woman shallow enough to marry him or become his concubine.

The Shulammitte does not consider herself anything special. When she speaks, she does not use lofty, royal language, but rather words expressing her love for the simple but profound pleasures of rural life among ordinary people.

Song of Songs 2:1-17 “I am a rose (*literally “crocus,” which is a common but beautiful flower*) of Sharon, a lily of the valleys... Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love... Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag... Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom. My beloved is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.” (NIV)

This section ends with a dream where the Shulammitte goes looking for “whom my soul loves” throughout city streets and squares at night. It's clear she is worried and anxious about the future, which leads us into the next Act.

Act Two: Jerusalem, near a gate in the city wall (Song of Songs 3:6-11).

This short act describes Solomon's return to Jerusalem from his trip to the north. He brings the Shulammitte with him. The scene is Solomon's procession going through Jerusalem, described as being very glamorous. The Shulammitte rejected Solomon in the north, so he brings her to his palace to try his luck there. He is arrogantly wearing a wedding wreath, which indicates he will soon marry her, when she doesn't want anything to do with him. The bystanders sit around talking about how great this is, when it isn't great at all.

Act Three: Solomon's palace in Jerusalem (Song of Songs 4:1 through 7:9).

The Shepherd comes to the Shulammitte and declares his love for her, with the words of a shepherd.

Song of Songs 4:1-7 “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples (*cheeks*) behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate... Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain

of myrrh and to the hill of incense. You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you.” (NIV)

These are pastoral images evoking the beauty of the hill country of Israel. “Goats descending a hill” might not seem very romantic, but from the perspective of a shepherd viewing a flock gently moving down a mountainside from a distance, the language suggests the fall of a woman’s hair along her shoulders and back. We should note goat’s hair was generally brown, so the Shulammitte is a brunette, which becomes important later.

Newly shorn sheep are brilliantly white, so the Shulammitte’s teeth are white and not yellowed, unusual for the ancient world. Each with a twin means none are missing, again a rarity during this period in history. Cheeks like pomegranates have a healthy, rosy glow. And you can use your imagination for the bit about the fawns.

The Shepherd calls for the Shulammitte to run away with him in the night, but they have a quarrel, where he knocks, but she delays, then opens the door, but he is gone. She goes after him but is discovered by the city watchmen.

The Shulammitte then sits down and cries it out with the Daughters of Jerusalem. They ask her, “what kind of beloved is your beloved?” And she describes him as “dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand” (Song of Songs 5:9,10).

The Daughters of Jerusalem ask, “where has your beloved gone?” And the Shulammitte replies, “down to his garden... to pasture his flock... I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine, he who pastures his flock among the lilies” (Song of Songs 6:1-3). Notice all this language is about a shepherd, not a king. The Shulammitte thinks the Shepherd has gone back to his fields, but retains hope he will return for her. And he does.

Song of Songs 6:4-9 “You are as beautiful as Tirzah (*a famous city in the north of Israel*), my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awesome as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they have confused me; your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes which have come up from their washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost her young. Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate behind your veil. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique...” (NASB)

The Shepherd basically says, “you are better than Solomon’s 140 wives and concubines.” They reconcile in an orchard outside of the city and leave together in this verse:

Song of Songs 6:12 “Before I was aware, my soul set me over the chariots of my noble people (*literally “made me as the chariots of my noble people.”*)” (NASB)

This is a poetic way of saying as she sets out with the Shepherd she felt like a chariot – strong, secure, and invincible. And we know she is skipping town because the Daughters of Jerusalem call to her as she departs.

Song of Songs 6:13 “Come back, come back, O Shulammitte; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!...” (NIV)

Next we get an exchange between Solomon and a female dancer. As the Shulammitte leaves, the Dancer asks Solomon:

Song of Songs 6:13 “... Why would you gaze on the Shulammitte as on the dance of Mahanaim (*a host of angels*)?” (NIV)

Mahanaim means “two camps.” It’s the name Jacob gave to the place where a group of angels met him on his way to meet Esau, after Jacob left his father-in-law Laban (Genesis 32:2). So the Dancer is saying, “why are you staring after her like you just saw a bunch of angels dancing around? Why don’t you look at me instead?”

Solomon complies, and this is what he sings to the Dancer:

Song of Songs 7:1-9 “How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince’s daughter! The curves of your hips are like jewels, the work of the hands of an artist. Your navel is like a round goblet which never lacks mixed wine; your belly is like a heap of wheat fenced about with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like a tower of ivory, your eyes like the pools in Heshbon (*the capital city of king Sihon of the Amorites in Transjordan, so a royal city – see Numbers 21:25-27*) by the gate of Bath-rabbim (*“daughter of a multitude,” meaning the most important and frequently traveled gate, where the most beautiful pools would have been located*); your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces toward Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like purple (*dark red*) threads; the king is captivated by your tresses. How beautiful and how delightful you are, my love, with all your charms! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks.’ Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine!...” (NASB)

All of this language is suggestive of a woman dancing for Solomon. She mentions a dance, as something Solomon is intent on watching. Then Solomon talks about her feet, hips, navel, belly, and breasts, starting at the floor and working his way up her body.

Also notice two things that distinguish this woman from the Shulammitte. The Dancer is called “prince’s daughter,” and much of the language used to describe her suggests royal blood. By contrast, the Shulammitte was not royalty. She was a common girl from the fields of Israel. The Dancer is also a redhead, while the Shulammitte, as previously noted, was a brunette.

Solomon indulges himself in this woman as a way to forget the Shulammitte, as if drinking wine until oblivion overtakes him. And the Dancer is happy to oblige.

Song of Songs 7:9 “It goes down smoothly for my beloved, flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep.” (NASB)

Solomon and the Dancer drift into sleep and are not heard from again in the song. But what of the Shulammitte and Shepherd?

Act Four: On the road to Shunem (Song of Songs 7:10 through 8:4).

This act occurs as the couple flees Jerusalem and heads toward the Shulammitte's hometown of Shunem. They anticipate the happiness and fulfillment they will enjoy as a married couple.

Song of Songs 7:10-13 "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us rise early and go to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine has budded and its blossoms have opened, and whether the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes have given forth fragrance; and over our doors are all choice fruits, both new and old, which I have saved up for you, my beloved." (NASB)

Notice all this language is pastoral and rural. It is not the language of big city royalty. The Shulammitte is going to give what she has saved to her beloved in the places shepherds dwell, not kings.

Act Five: The return to Shunem (Song of Songs 8:5-14).

The people of Shunem see the Shulammitte and Shepherd return.

Song of Songs 8:5 "Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?" (NASB)

The Shulammitte declares her love in some of the song's most poetic and powerful words.

Song of Songs 8:6,7 "Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it; if a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised." (NASB)

In the last phrase, the Shulammitte essentially explains why she didn't choose Solomon. You can't buy love. It's something that must be earned, not purchased.

The Shulammitte's brothers show up and express brotherly concerns about their little sister arriving unchaperoned with this shepherd.

Song of Songs 8:8,9 "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts; what shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver; but if she is a door, we will barricade her with planks of cedar." (NASB)

They are basically saying, "our sister better have been virtuous with this guy, or there is going to be trouble." The Shulammitte answers them.

Song of Songs 8:10 "I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace." (NASB)

She says, “I was plenty virtuous, but I’m grown up now, so butt out. This is my man, and I’m at peace with him.”

Then she provides the background for the whole saga.

Song of Songs 8:11,12 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon (*lord of the multitudes*); he entrusted the vineyard to caretakers. Each one was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit. My very own vineyard is at my disposal; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit.” (NASB)

Baal-hamon is Hebrew for “lord of the multitudes.” It’s likely not a place, but rather a poetic play on words. She’s saying, “Solomon has this vineyard where I was working, because he’s the bigshot in charge of everybody. The vineyards are making him rich, along with those who are in league with him. They can keep the money. I don’t care about that. But my vineyard (meaning her body and soul) are hers and hers alone to give, and Solomon can’t have that. He’s going to have to be satisfied with his material wealth.”

Then she issues a challenge.

Song of Songs 8:13 “O you who sit in the gardens, my companions are listening for your voice – let me hear it!” (NASB)

She’s saying, “likewise, everyone else has their own garden, which is theirs alone to do with as they will. Make good choices so you can have a story as compelling as mine. I can’t wait to hear it!”

Then she’s done talking to all these people and turns her attention to one person only. She invites her beloved to come claim what is his.

Song of Songs 8:14 “Hurry, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.” (NASB)

Common themes, regardless of interpretation.

The interpretation of the Song of Songs will always be debated by people with strong opinions about what the book is meant to communicate to God’s people. It’s also often used as a springboard for a biblical study on romantic love and marriage.

Regardless of how the Song of Songs is interpreted, here are a few common themes any good study on these topics should include.

Surprisingly little instruction is provided in Scripture about marriage.

While there are certainly key passages, there really isn’t a place to go for a newlywed’s instruction manual within God’s Word. Why?

Marriage is not the ultimate the source of happiness or unhappiness in life.

Perhaps the reason there is not more on marriage in Scripture is: That's not what God wants us focused on. He wants us focused on Him.

Popular culture would have us believe romantic love is the best and most important thing in life, and the only thing that will make us truly happy and fulfilled. We have songs telling us "all you need is love," and "the greatest thing you will ever learn is to love and to be loved in return," all referring to romantic love.

None of that is true. That might sound rather unromantic, but the truth is: These sentiments are the death of true romance. It puts romantic love high upon an unattainable pedestal, and when our relationships inevitably let us down, we become bitter and despondent, kick our partners to the curb, go looking for someone better, and wind up a divorce statistic.

God never meant it to be that way, because He never intended us to consider romantic love a *source* of happiness. Only *He* is the source of true happiness in this life. Anything else – whether it's marriage, children, work, money, power, fame, sex, etc. – is just an idol we elevate higher than God and worship the way the ancients worshiped golden calves.

(Note: In the discussion that follows, "happiness" or "happy" refers to the divine Joy and Peace we all long for in this life, not momentary amusement or temporary distraction from unhappiness. See *Knowing Joy and Peace in a Fallen World*, available to download for free at JoyAndPeace.net.)

Taking it further, romantic love is ultimately not the source of unhappiness if life. If you are miserable, it's not because your relationship with your lover is out of whack. It might seem like it, and whatever is going on may genuinely hurt. But there is something deeper going on: You are miserable because you are disconnected from God, the only source of true happiness in this life, not because you are disconnected from your partner.

Your relationship with your lover might be inflicting legitimate pain, but if your relationship with God was real and alive, you would still know Joy "inexpressible" and Peace "surpassing comprehension," that is, true happiness, despite the pain, because that's what divinely imparted Joy and Peace are all about.

1 Peter 1:6-8 "... you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory," (NASB)

Philippians 4:6-9 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things... and... practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (NASB)

If marriage is not the *source* of happiness or unhappiness, what is it?

Marriage is a magnifying glass.

Marriage is a vehicle through which both our happiness and unhappiness can be shared, expressed, and amplified. It's a magnifying glass, which will *intensify* these things but not *create* them.

Think about it. If marriage made people happy, all married people would be happy, and we know that's not true. Similarly, if marriage made people unhappy, all married people would be unhappy, and we know that's not true either.

But we can see how God uses the institution of marriage like a scientist uses a magnifying glass. We discover things about ourselves much easier, because everything is amplified. We experience things more intensely for the same reason. And God can use these powerful insights and passions to make us more like Jesus.

We can also see how Satan uses the institution of marriage like a mean little brat uses a magnifying glass. In the hands of a sadistic child, the intense rays of the sun running through a magnifying glass become a red-hot laser beam, used to start fires and end the lives of whatever is at the focal point, like ants fleeing from a hill.

Satan uses the magnifying effect of marriage to destroy families. He gets couples focused on all that's imperfect and wrong, and causes them to view these things as *an excuse to breakup*, rather than *a revelation of where we need to be more Christlike*. This destroys the marriage and (if there are kids involved) also the family, and creates all the instability and bitterness that perversely delight Satan, who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.

John 10:10,11 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I (*Jesus*) came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” (NASB)

And so marriage is a tool God can use to purify us and make us more like Jesus, or Satan can use to cripple us and make us more like him.

That's why it is so important to understand what marriage is and is not. When we understand it is not the source of our happiness, but rather a divinely ordained vehicle through which happiness can be expressed and magnified, then it comes down from its wrongful pedestal as a false idol above our relationship with God, and assumes its rightful (but still important and wonderful) position below.

This realigns our priorities. It's God first, then our spouse, kids, family, friends, and community. In that order.

Then we discover: When our relationship with God is vibrant and alive, everything below eventually falls into its correct place. And when our relationship with God is dead and bloated, everything below will eventually fall to pieces.

This realization is incredibly liberating. While it might seem unromantic to say, “marriage is not my source of happiness in life,” once you accept this truth, it releases you to have a truly wonderful

and fulfilling romantic relationship that will stand the test of time, because your relationship with God will provide you with the strength you need to be a good, lifelong partner. And you will not be demanding something from your partner (like true happiness) that they were never intended to give and are therefore unable to provide. More on this in a moment.

Now that we know what marriage is and is not, we can see what it takes to have a happy marriage.

A happy marriage occurs when two happy people get married.

Here are two steps towards a happy marriage:

1. Learn to be happy on your own; and
2. Marry someone who is happy without you.

This is counterintuitive but essential.

If you want to experience happiness *within* marriage, then you must first learn how to experience happiness *without* marriage. You have to develop a happiness (that is, Joy and Peace) based solely upon your relationship with God first, because things only get more complicated after you get married. Then you have two sets of problems to deal with, not one, and since the other set is not your own, it will likely be somewhat foreign and mystifying to you.

And so you need the foundation of your own happiness from your relationship with God as the “solid rock” upon which you build your marriage. As we shall see, this is what will allow your marriage to survive the disappointments inevitable when you join yourself with another imperfect person.

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine (*Jesus*’) and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall.” (NASB)

Related to this, don’t expect to have a great marriage if you marry a miserable person. The marriage will not make it better. *It will only amplify what is already there.*

This is one reason “missionary dating” is so foolish. If you get involved with someone whose foundation is anything other than Jesus, their foundation is going to crumble at some point, and they are going to go running to you to make it better. In other words, they will run to you expecting you to make them happy, and you will fail.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (*a name for Satan*)? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there

**between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God...”
(NIV)**

Why? Because you are not capable of making another person happy (in the sense of knowing Joy and Peace, not being temporarily amused). Nor is another person capable of making you happy. Only God can make either one of you happy. And if you go into marriage expecting the other person to play a role only God can fulfill, you are going to end up very disappointed and want to run.

But if both partners have learned to find their Joy and Peace in God while they are alone, then when they come together in marriage they can experience Joy and Peace together, in an amplified form, and express their Joy and Peace in all the exciting and lovely ways God intended for one man and one woman in marriage.

Bottom line: A happy marriage only emerges when two people, with a pre-existing happiness they have developed on their own through their individual relationships with Jesus, join their lives together.

With this in mind, if you are single...

What should you seek?

For a marriage to work, you need two things:

1. Spiritual compatibility (to make it last); and
2. Personal compatibility (to make it fun).

Spiritual compatibility means you share the same core values. What is most important to you, must be what is most important to your spouse. You must share the same ultimate goal in life, and most simply put, that should be to follow Jesus.

Spiritual compatibility is what provides common *direction* in life. It means you are both heading the same way, not out following two divergent paths. You have the same common goal, so you are heading in the same unified direction.

When that goal is Jesus, it means *your relationship will last*. Not only are you heading towards the same Person, but also because you love Him, you will be able to forgive each other when you fail each other.

And you are going to fail each other. In the bloom of romance, it can be hard to imagine a day when things won't smell like roses, but that day is coming. Your spouse is going to fail you, and you are going to fail your spouse. You are both fallen, imperfect, sinful human beings, and any other conclusion is naïve.

But if Jesus is the center of your lives, both as individuals and as a couple, then your love for Him will motivate you to grant forgiveness, or receive it (which can be equally difficult). The pre-existing happiness you had before marriage will kick in, because your Joy and Peace is not based on your spouse, but rather your Savior.

This can only happen if you have the spiritual compatibility that comes from a passionate love, not for each other, but for Jesus. It's what will carry you through the inevitable hard times. It's what equips you for the journey.

But God does not want marriage to only be a disciplined forced march through a combat zone. He also wants it to be fun. And that's where personal compatibility comes in.

Personal compatibility means you genuinely like the other person. You enjoy the little things each day brings. There is a chemistry between the two of you, or more precisely, an *alchemy*, where the union creates magical things.

There is a big difference between spiritual and personal compatibility, and yet they also complement one another.

- Spiritual compatibility is *admiring* one another. Personal compatibility is *adoring* one another.
- Spiritual compatibility is *respecting* who the other person *chooses to be*. Personal compatibility is *delighting* in who the other person *can't help but be*.
- Spiritual compatibility makes a relationship *last*. Personal compatibility makes it *fun*.

You don't want one without the other. Don't marry someone you are compatible with on a spiritual but not a personal level. You might make it to journey's end, but you will miss out on the journey's delights. It won't be any fun.

Don't marry someone you are compatible with on a personal but not a spiritual level. It won't last. Once the honeymoon is over, your journey will be a constant struggle to command the helm. You will spend your marriage fighting over the steering wheel, both intent on reaching different destinations. The fun will fade, and all too often the journey will end with bitterness, resentment, and a quick parting of ways.

But if you have *both* spiritual *and* personal compatibility, there will be no serious contention over the wheel. When you get off course, your shared spiritual goals will help you read the map the same way and quickly right your path. And with a harmony in where you are heading, you can make the most of the journey, delighting in the calm waters, working as a team in the storms, and arriving at your destination hand-in-hand, with a deeper love than when you boarded the ship.

Bottom line: Marry someone with whom you can enjoy following Jesus.

What should each partner bring to the marriage?

Each marriage is different, and there are exceptions to most rules, but God's Word is clear about a couple of things:

1. The husband should love the wife the way the Messiah loves the church.
2. The wife should respect the husband.

Ephesians 5:22-33 “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (NIV)

Colossians 3:18,19 “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.” (NASB)

1 Peter 3:1-9 “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” (NASB)

Volumes have been written about these Scriptures, and rightly so. There is so much to be gained by humbly receiving their truths, and so much to be lost by proudly distorting their meaning.

It’s beyond the scope of this work to dive too deep into these waters, but here are some basic points we should all receive with humility and care.

- Husbands should lead, provide, and protect, creating a “home.”

This is essentially what Jesus did for His “bride” the “church,” meaning those who receive Him as Savior (see Revelation 19:7; 21:2-17). He *leads* by both His Word and example. He *provides* everything we need to accomplish His purpose. And He *protects* us with His very life.

If husbands are to love their wives as Jesus loves the church, remember Jesus died for His church. He thought of her first and laid down His life for her.

Husbands are to be this same type of servant-leader for their wives and families, because when they lead, protect, and provide, they create an environment within which they all can thrive that we will just call the “home.”

This home far transcends a house. It’s an environment of love, respect, fairness, and forgiveness. In other words, it’s a place that honors Jesus.

- Wives should take this home and fill it with good things.

How can wives “respect their husbands?” Instead of making the husbands’ job difficult, make it easy. Take the environment they create, and fill it with love and laughter. Be the woman we saw in Proverbs 31.

Proverbs 31:10-31 “An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight. She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesmen. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her, saying: ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.’ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.” (NASB)

Of course the biggest controversy is the idea the husband is called to lead. That means the wife is called to follow. *But what’s the alternative?* A marriage cannot ultimately be a democracy, because there are only two people. Disagreements are a 50/50 tie, and if one is not the designated leader, there is nothing left to do but fight it out until there is only one left standing. That’s not a marriage. That’s a cage fight.

Of course a couple should talk things through and try to find common ground. Look back at the wife in Proverbs 31, where “the heart of her husband trusts in her” and “she opens her mouth in wisdom.” The biblical idea of a man leading *does not mean he isn’t listening*. A good leader listens to those he leads, and a good husband listens to his wife. His wife, as a female, will have insight into things the husband, as a male, will never have, and he would be a fool not to seek and benefit from her wisdom.

In a marriage, two become one, but the simple fact is: Someone has to make the final call when there can't be consensus. God gives this duty to the man. Why?

It's certainly not because the man is any better than the woman. It comes down to the Fall. Eve was decisive but deceived. Adam was insightful but weak.

As punishment, the roles were reversed. Eve, who led the couple but excused her behavior by blaming the serpent's deception, was commanded to follow. Adam, who knew better but blamed his wife's influence, was commanded to lead.

Essentially, God said to Eve, "You were deceived? Okay, I'll put the man over you, so you will be protected from deception." Then God said to Adam, "She made you to do it? Okay, you are in charge now, so she can't boss you around anymore."

God takes their excuses and uses them to craft their punishment. Eve didn't want to be responsible for her decision because she was deceived, so she lost authority to someone charged to watch over her. Adam didn't want responsibility for his decision because Eve told him to do it, so he was given authority over her.

Prior to the Fall, none of this was necessary. Sinless Adam and Eve were to co-rule the earth. But once sin entered the world, a system of authority and accountability had to be put into order, so God used the excuses of Adam and Eve for sin to craft their punishment.

And it is a punishment, for both genders. The woman must submit and loses authority. And her husband, no matter how noble he might be, is still just a flawed, sinful person like the rest of us, so eventually he is going to make some bad decisions. Here, the woman is going to have to be prepared to forgive and help renew.

This is one reason the woman is commanded to submit "as unto the Lord." It's not because the man is better or deserves it, but rather because the Lord commands it and will bless her humility if she will obey.

**Ephesians 5:22 "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord."
(NIV)**

**Colossians 3:18-24 "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord... Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."
(NASB)**

You might be wondering how this is a punishment for the man, but that's pretty simple. The man must lead as Jesus did, and that means thinking of the needs of your bride and family first, over your own. Leading this way, as a servant-leader, is in truth a *loss of independence*. Even though you lead, you can't just do what is in your selfish best interests. You must do what is selfless and in the best interests of your family, according to the wisdom God's Word and Spirit provide, after talking things through with your wife, who will hopefully have the wisdom and integrity of the woman in Proverbs 31.

Every relationship will have its own subtleties and nuances, and each couple is going to have to humbly figure this out with God's help. But these principles remain, and they are ignored at our peril.

Couples can just fight it out when they disagree, or the guy can submit to the girl. But ultimately you are going to wind up a discontented couple. The girl is going to get bored with a guy she can push around, because she will never respect him. And the guy is going to resent the girl who dominates him, because she's emasculated him.

God is a God of order. From page one of the Bible, He is bringing order out of chaos. And this structuring of the relationship between a husband and a wife is how God brings order out of the chaos of marriage.

In some way, unique to each couple, the husband will need to find a way to lead, provide, and protect, creating a Christ-centered environment within which his wife and children can thrive. The wife will need to find a way to allow him to do this, then fill that home with all the love, joy, and beauty God placed within her.

That's a home that will sing, endure, and be replicated by the children produced within, as God intended when He put man and woman on this planet and told them to "be fruitful and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

What not to expect.

One of the biggest threats to a marriage is: Unrealistic expectations.

We often go into marriage with expectations of what it's going to be, then we are shocked to discover we had it all wrong. The newness of it all melts away, the realities of life reveal themselves, and all too often we are left wondering: What we have gotten ourselves into?

There are many of these unrealistic expectations. Let's look at four.

Don't expect your spouse to ultimately be the one who makes you happy.

We've already looked at this one, but it bears repeating. If you are feeling unhappy, go to the source of Joy and Peace in your life and make sure your relationship with Him is vibrant and alive. Be certain you are right with God, before you go to your spouse.

When you do go to your spouse, don't expect him or her to be the one to make it better. You and your spouse should go to God as one couple and ask *Him* to make it better. Work together as a team to seek guidance and blessing from the One who can fill you with Joy "inexpressible" and Peace "surpassing comprehension" and faithfully expect Him to answer. And always keep in mind: Your spouse is someone to *enjoy happiness with*, not *demand happiness from*.

Of course you need to treat each other well. Don't abuse one another. This is common sense and a vital part of following Jesus. And if you have an abusive spouse, get help immediately.

But at its core, an abusive spouse is an *abuse* problem, not a *happiness* problem. You are suffering at the hand of a dishonorable person. That legitimately hurts and needs to be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

But the amazing thing about the Joy and Peace God promises is: They will follow you anywhere you go, even into the darkest valley, if you will trust and obey Him. And without Him, even the highest mountaintop will ultimately become unimpressive and unfulfilling.

Isaiah 50:10 “... Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God.” (NIV)

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 “... we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain... but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses... in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God... as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.” (NASB)

2 Corinthians 7:4 “... in all our troubles my (*Paul's*) joy knows no bounds.” (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” (NIV)

Isaiah 57:15-18 “For this is what the high and exalted One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite... I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort...’ ” (NIV)

Micah 7:7,8 “But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me... Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me.” (NASB)

Isaiah 58:2-11 “... seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways... Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am...’ Then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (NASB)

Isaiah 57:20,21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’ ” (NIV)

Revelation 3:17 “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (NIV)

Haggai 1:5,6 “Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough.

You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.' ” (NIV)

Isaiah 9:18-20 “Surely wickedness burns like a fire... On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of their own offspring:” (NIV)

Obadiah 1:3,4 “ ‘The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to earth?” Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,’ declares the LORD.” (NASB)

Psalms 73:21-26 “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (NIV)

Bottom line: Your spouse is not God. He or she does not have the power to fill you with Joy and Peace. Only God can do that. Your spouse can bring you pleasure or pain, but ultimately these sensations are superficial and fleeting, while the Joy and Peace God provides reaches to the deepest part of our being and cannot be dislodged, when we trust and follow Jesus.

1 Peter 1:1-17 “... To God’s elect, strangers in the world... Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” (NIV)

Philippians 4:6-9 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things... and... practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (NASB)

Psalms 62:1-12 “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken... Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge... One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.” (NIV)

Isaiah 26:3,4 “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.” (NASB)

So look to God for your happiness, and look to your spouse for someone to share this happiness with. You will seek from the right source, and no longer make demands from someone who cannot provide what you desire. You will get what you want, then be able to enjoy it with the one you love. And this will liberate you both from the chains of unrealistic expectations.

Galatians 5:1-13 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love...” (NIV)

Psalms 116:1-16 “I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me... I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD... The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion... For you, LORD, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I trusted in the LORD... Truly I am your servant, LORD... you have freed me from my chains.” (NIV)

Isaiah 52:2-12 “Shake off your dust... Free yourself from the chains on your neck... Burst into songs of joy together... for the LORD has comforted his people... the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” (NIV)

John 8:31,32 “... Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ ” (NIV)

Don't expect your spouse to fulfill the place of your same-sex friendships.

Guys need guy friends, and girls need girl friends.

Guys need dudes they can hang out with and be rowdy, irreverent, and stupid. They need to do things together, which usually involve very little speech but lots of action. And what speech exists is generally coarse, oblivious to the other person's feelings, and often intentionally insulting, because that is considered fun and a sign of friendship.

Girls need gals they can hang out with and be open, honest, and vulnerable. They need to share things together, which usually involve hours of talking about nothing in particular but lots of emotion. And their speech is generally careful, considerate, and insightful, because that is considered fun and a sign of friendship.

Where we get into trouble in marriage is when we think our spouse can sub in for our same-sex friends, fulfill the role they play in our lives, and/or be treated in the same way they are treated. These are very unrealistic expectations, doomed to failure and certain to cause problems.

For example, the wife expects her husband to take the place of her girl friends, spending hours together talking about their feelings and accomplishing essentially nothing else. Emotions must be

liberally shared. Words must be selected with extreme care. And tone of voice will be scrutinized like a crime suspect offering an alibi.

This is torture for the average male – not because he doesn't care about his wife, but because he's not designed to do this. It's not how God made him. It's a rare male who can spend hours talking about his or anyone else's feelings without crumbling under the pressure.

What a man can and should do is talk to his wife about his or her feelings for about half an hour. He can do this without succumbing to a panic attack. And during this half-hour he can and should be an attentive, considerate, active participant.

But once this half hour is over, unless he is very unusual, he's done all he can genetically do. It's unrealistic and unfair to expect more. Once this period expires, and assuming there is some sort of problem being discussed, the only thing he is still capable of doing is figuring out how to fix the problem, or if it can't be fixed, join his wife in giving the problem to God.

This is usually where hostilities break out because the wife doesn't want her problem "fixed," she just wants to be "heard." This is totally alien to a man's nature. It is part of his being to want to fix problems. It's how God made him. Telling a man not to fix a problem, and instead talk about it for hours on end, is like telling a lion to look at a raw steak for hours and never eat it. It's not going to happen.

It's also not love, and women need to understand this. It's not love to sit there and try to force your husband to listen to you complain about your problem for hours and then do nothing about it. It's emotional bullying. It's an attempt to guilt him into submitting to something that is excruciating for him.

That's not how wives treat husbands they love. It's how wives stay in touch with their girl friends, sisters, and moms. It's a wonderful and joyful thing for women to do with other women. But it's a destructive thing to do to a husband. He is just not built for it.

It's appropriate and important for husbands and wives to spend regular, quality time talking, listening, and connecting. But the length of this time must be realistic given the man's innate limitations. He can and should have consistent, open, honest, heart-felt conversations with his wife about all things important to her and to them both as a couple.

But the wife must also recognize and appreciate her man will have an internal, genetically implanted timer as a male of the species that will shut down his ability to effectively contribute to these conversations. His battery will run down far sooner than hers – not because he doesn't care, but because that's all God gave him.

Wives, accept this as the way of things between a man and a woman. Then go to your girl friends for the marathon talks, and to your husband for shorter events. They will be far more fulfilling and fun, without being frustrated by unrealistic expectations.

Now let's look at the husbands. One of the biggest mistakes men make is: They treat their wives the way they would treat a roommate at a frat house. Guys are short, coarse, and generally unfeeling in the way they address a same-sex roommate, and often look for creative ways to insult him.

And their roomie would have it no other way. In fact, it becomes a game they both look forward to, like a comedy roast. It's considered a sign of affection and friendship.

But it's the opposite to a wife, and husbands all too often forget this. They treat their wife the way they treated the dude they used to share a dorm room with, and then are mystified when their wives get their feelings hurt on a regular basis.

A wife needs attention, affection, and tenderness, in words and in deeds. When it comes to words, both vocabulary and tone are critical. She will detect indifference and insincerity with the nose of a bloodhound. Same warning applies to deeds. She will scrutinize motivations, because they are legitimately and rightly important to her.

Men need to understand this and learn not to treat their wives like college roommates. Treat her with genuine consideration and tenderness, and she will reward you for it (if she has a good heart). Treat her with indifference or discourtesy, and you will genuinely regret it.

1 Peter 3:7 calls for husbands to "live with your wives in an understanding way, as with (literally in Hebrew) a weaker vessel." In this verse, "weaker" does not mean "inferior." It means "delicate."

Men are like clay pots two inches thick. They are hard to damage, and can be treated roughly.

Women are like fine porcelain. They chip much more easily, and should be handled with care.

Husbands need to realize this and treat their wives with the same tenderness and care they would give a priceless, finely crafted piece of art, and remember the delicacy is what makes it valuable. Treat her like something you treasure, and she will shine. Treat her like a clay pot, or your college roommate, and she will break. Any other expectation is unreasonable.

Men and women need to accept each other for who they are and how God made them. Guys should go to other guys to do guy things, like watch wrestling and talk smack. Girls should go to other girls to do girl things, like talk for hours about anything and everything. Then husbands and wives should come together and do guy/girl things – talk for a while, do something you both enjoy, make a baby, or practice doing so.

Every couple will be different. There will be overlap and there will be extremes. But each must find the right balance of all these things. Then your expectations will be fulfilling instead of frustrating.

Don't expect your spouse to never change, and don't expect to change your spouse.

Many go into a relationship with one of two unrealistic expectations – either you think your partner will never change, or you think you will be able to change your partner.

People grow and evolve over the course of their lives. Change is inevitable. So it's naïve to think your partner will never change. He or she will. And that's okay, even a good thing. It can be one of the ways to keep a relationship fresh, so long as it's not their *values* that are changing.

In other words, change on the “personal compatibility” side of the relationship is inevitable and often beneficial, but changes on the “spiritual compatibility” side are disastrous. It’s one thing to develop an interest in art or sports that wasn’t there before. It’s another to develop an interest in voodoo. Evolving hobbies are great. Devolving values are fatal.

That’s why it is so important to be certain you share the same spiritual values before you marry. They will provide the ballast that allows your ship to sail straight and true through the ever-changing weather patterns of life. Without them, your marriage is too easy to upset and shipwreck.

1 Timothy 1:18,19 “... fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck...” (NIV)

Another naïve notion is to think you will be able to change your spouse after you get married. You think he or she has some sharp edges, but you will be able to reshape them once rings are on fingers and vows are exchanged before a minister.

The more likely result is the edges will get more pronounced, as the newness of marriage wears off and real-life sets in. Then you are going to have to learn to live with those edges, or at best, pray for erosion over time. It’s very unlikely you will be able to grind deeply rooted habits down quickly or easily.

When you are single, you are in control, because it’s just you and God. You can count on God, and you can control yourself. All the stability in life is in your own hands.

When you get married, you lose much of this control, because you are now joined to another person and one flesh with him or her. You have introduced an influence in your life you cannot ultimately control. You can encourage and inspire (which is recommended), or deceive and intimidate (which is discouraged), but you can’t control.

Your spouse will change over the years, whether you like it or not, but you will never control how, whether you like it or not. Do not go into marriage expecting otherwise. Instead, go into marriage knowing you have picked someone with a rock-solid faith in Jesus, which will bring stability and direction to your ship, and let the changes that inevitably come be to how you *dress* your ship, not to where you *point* your ship.

Don’t expect accurate forecasts from limited data.

Of course there are no guarantees someone’s faith in Jesus is going to last. People turn away from their faith all the time. But it happens far less with people who have a long, consistent track record of “walking the walk.”

In other words, if a man or woman has spent years of their lives genuinely following Christ, not just talking about it, but living it, then he or she is far more likely to continue on this same path after marriage and be a partner you can trust. So you want to look for this spiritual track record, or take time to develop it, *before* you get married.

On the other hand, if a man or woman has spent little time genuinely following Christ, or has spent a lot of time straddling the fence between faith and defiance, then you have no idea what to expect

after marriage. Faith may run hot or cold or somewhere in the middle. The waters might flow, or they might not. The well might run dry this week, and it might be a gusher next week. It will be a spiritual crapshoot.

That's why you shouldn't rush into marriage. You should take your time, and date long enough to have shared enough experiences together to know what you can reasonably expect if you were to team up for life.

Like an analyst working on a forecast, gather enough data to arrive at a well-reasoned prediction. You want enough data points on the graph to establish whether there is a clear direction where things are headed or an indecipherable scattering of conflicting events.

That might seem like a cold way of evaluating the person you are dating, but it's not nearly as cold as the marriage will be if you expect to know the future direction of your marital ship without a clear understanding of where the person you are inviting aboard comes from and how he or she arrived at the present harbor. Take time to accurately evaluate and gain confidence in the spiritual direction of your partner, before you hop on the same boat. And don't expect to arrive at the correct answer without first doing your research.

What should you do while you are waiting?

In a phrase: *Redeem the time.*

Make the most of your time as a single person. Enjoy this season of your life. Develop your own spiritual track record of faith in Jesus, so you will have something to show your potential partner when he or she finally arrives.

Stay out of trouble. Don't be promiscuous. Treat the person you are dating like someone else's future spouse. Someone out there will be dating your future spouse, so behave like you want your opposite to behave.

For the guys, never write anything to a girl in a text, direct message, email, etc. you would not want her father to read while cleaning his shotgun. For the girls, same principle, including photos, with the guy's mom reviewing the contents while having tea with your mom. Avoid Snapchat and similar apps like the plague Satan designed them to be.

Being single is the time to build up your personal relationship with Jesus from which you draw your Joy and Peace. It's the time to shape and cement the spiritual values that will become the foundation of your marriage.

It's also the time to discover and explore whatever passions God has instilled within you that make you interesting and unique. These are the qualities on a personal level you will want to share and enjoy with your spouse. What's fun for you? Get good at it. Be ready to share it.

And remember: *If you are not happy as a single person, you won't be happy as a married person.* Why? Because marriage can't make you happy. Only Jesus can. But if you will develop Joy and Peace as a single person, then you will have something to take with you into the marriage and share with your

partner, who (if you have chosen wisely) will have a Joy and Peace of his or her own to share with you in return.

Then marriage will be what it is supposed to be: A way two happy people can come together and amplify the happiness they already know in Christ through marriage. As we have seen, and at the risk of sounding like a broken record: A happy marriage happens when two happy people get married, not when two unhappy people get married, because marriage is a magnifying glass.

Redeem the time you are single. Do things and make memories you can cherish from this unique season of your life. Seasons change. Each have their joys and sorrows, what's good about them and what's bad about them. Learn to enjoy each for what they are, while effectively meeting their distinct challenges.

Enjoy the independence of being single. Use the time wisely to develop spiritually and personally. Develop a sound spiritual foundation and a fun personality to offer the right person when he or she finally arrives. Then as your season of being alone passes into a season of being together, independence will give way to unity with a grace that delights rather than frustrates.

What should you do while you are dating?

In a phrase: *Take your time.*

Don't rush it. Passions will urge otherwise, but wisdom calls for time sufficient to reveal to whom you are offering your heart. Far too many have rushed into passion, only to discover to their horror they have given what is precious to an undeserving person with no appreciation for what you have tendered.

Matthew 7:6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (NASB)

Just about any of us can keep it together long enough to momentarily appear spiritually mature and personally alluring. But *time exposes truth*. It weathers away artificial facades and uncovers true natures.

You want to know the true nature of the person you are going to marry. That's not going to happen over of few weeks or months. There's no rule in Scripture, but two years would be smart. Date a year. Be engaged for another.

You need to circle around the sun at least a couple of times together before you can get a clear picture of what the future might hold. You need to go through the ups and downs of seasons and holidays, and see if you enjoy the ride.

And you need to get into some fights along the way. You don't know if your relationship will last until you learn whether you can get into a really good scrap, and after the dust settles, still love each other. Think about this famous verse:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it

keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (NIV)

None of that is about having the hots for someone. All of it applies to learning to forgive and be renewed after the pain of failure inevitable when two imperfect people try to stay together for life. Which leads us to...

What should you do when you want to quit?

In a word: *Don't*.

At some point, every couple is going to want to quit. It's inevitable. You are two sinners. Eventually, there will be times when you get on each other's nerves. Passions will ebb and flow. Seasons will be plentiful and then wanting.

If you bail and take up with someone else, it will ultimately be "same song, second verse." Eventually, the new person will also get on your nerves. At best they will only tweak a different set, but the irritation will be just as annoying. You will still have ebbs and flows, maybe in different rhythms, but just a disconcerting.

Because happiness in marriage is not about your relationship with the other person. It's about your relationship with Jesus. Keep that vibrant and alive, and you will sail through the storms and make it to the clear weather. Keep the spiritual strong, and the personal will come around.

In 1 Corinthians 13, love is: Patient, kind, without envy or arrogance. It's selfless, slow to anger, keeping no record of wrongs. It focuses on truth, which empowers protection, trust, and hope. These are all the virtues necessary to: (1) avoid unnecessary conflict; (2) forgive failure; and (3) experience renewal – the trifacta required for enduring relationships.

In other words, the virtues necessary to persevere. So in a sense, the essence of romantic love is: Don't quit. Instead, keep your eyes humbly on Jesus when you want to ditch your partner. Love as Jesus did. Give your partner time to repent. Give your urge to run time to pass. You will need this same grace when you are the one screwing up. Then you can make up with your partner and be *stronger than* before, not *where you were* before.

Where were you before you got married? For all too many of us, we were alone, hoping to find fulfillment in some future, perfect lover, constructed head to toe by our imagination, who does not actually exist in this fallen world. Then we pass from partner to partner, never finding what we are looking for, because we are looking for the wrong thing.

The truth is: That man or woman you think will bring you happiness in marriage is a phantom designed by Satan himself, meant to keep you from Christ. It's the false idol at whose feet Satan wants you to worship. Satan wants you to believe there is a mate out there somewhere who will bring you the Joy and Peace for which you long, so when you are inevitably disappointed by whomever you happen to be with, you will dump him or her and embark on a never-ending search for the nonexistent. *You will spend your whole life searching and yearning for someone who exists only in fantasy.*

This is a waste of the gift of life, which can only be avoided if you realize the happiness you seek can only be found in Jesus, and the purpose of your marriage is to share a mutual delight in Him. And when He is first, you can then delight in each other as often as possible, forgive each other as often as necessary, and never quit.

Practical tips on how to treat each other well.

So by now we should understand a few vital things. Happiness can only come from Jesus. A happy marriage occurs when two happy people get married. Marriage is a magnifying glass, which will amplify either the Joy and Peace you find in Jesus, or the misery and despair you find without Him.

The other side of the coin is: You can't ignore your spouse and just say, "our happiness is in Jesus, so I don't have to worry about how I treat you. If you are unhappy, that's not on me, even though I treat you like dirt."

That, of course, would be a selfish distortion of all these principles. You can't love Jesus and mistreat other people. Your love for Jesus *motivates* your love for others, and your love for others *demonstrates* your love for Jesus. They are two sides of one coin.

1 John 2:3-17 "We know that we have come to know him (*Jesus*) if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them... Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." (NIV)

1 John 4:11-21 "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister." (NIV)

All this is especially true when it comes to how we treat our spouses. We must love them with a selfless, thoughtful love.

But men and women are so different. What fulfills a man can be quite different from what fulfills a woman. What are some practical tips on how to make your spouse feel loved?

What follows is based more upon common sense than Scripture, so feel free to take it or leave it. And of course each couple will be different. But here are some general ideas, worth giving a try, with four tips for each gender.

Let's start with men, because they tend to be more straightforward in what pleases them.

1. *Feed him.* There is an old adage that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." It's an old adage, because it's true. Men like good food, and when they don't get it on a somewhat regular basis, they can get quite grumpy.
2. *Make the home pleasant.* This is the most subjective of the four. It doesn't necessarily mean tidy, unless that's your man's thing. And it's not about the décor, but setting aside room for a man cave is not a bad idea. It's just about whether it's fun to come home or a drag. Is the home warm and welcoming, or cold and forbidding? And that's greatly influenced by the attitudes of the homemaker.
3. *Be supportive of his work.* You don't have to understand it or contribute to it. Just support it, because you love him.
4. *Be an enthusiastic lover.* Self-explanatory. Make it fun to go to bed at night – something to look forward to, not something to wish was otherwise. Don't come to bed in curlers and face cream complaining about your day and how long it's been since you've had a shower. Come loaded for bear, at least now and then. You will both enjoy the results.

Now let's look at women. These tend to be far more subjective.

1. *Make her think.* Try stimulating her mind, instead of her matter. Be a leader in the relationship, and give her something to think about. Her mind will dwell on something. Help guide those thoughts towards good, godly things. She will come to respect you for it.
2. *Make her laugh.* You don't have to be a comedian every time you walk in the door, and you don't have to go out and buy a joke book. But have a sense of humor about life that infects all you do. She will come to adore you for it.
3. *Make her feel beautiful.* This is ordinarily by far the most difficult, even if you are married to a supermodel. And it's not only about the exterior. Help her see she is beautiful inside and out. It will arouse good things.
4. *Make her feel safe.* This takes time. You have to be consistent. And unfortunately, steps forward are usually small, while steps backwards are usually giant leaps. But don't quit. If you can make it to this point, it seals the deal.

Maybe these all seem like clichés, but things become cliché because they are ordinarily correct. If these things don't work for your relationship, find things that do. Have a short list, and refer to it regularly. Then put time and effort into pleasing your spouse, without thinking about yourself. If both of you will do so, your efforts will be richly rewarded.

How should you parent?

This is frequently a point of contention, most often when the couple is not on the same spiritual page. The spiritual compatibility is off, so values are different, and parenting methods point towards different destinations.

This is of course a huge topic and beyond the scope of this work. But here is some food for thought:

Be to your kids what Scripture is to us all.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Do you want to “be useful” as a parent? Then:

- *Teach them what is right.* You can’t expect your children to know right from wrong if you never taught it to them. So spend time instructing your kids. Others will be aggressively trying to fulfill this role, and if you don’t do it, they will. And their intentions for your children will be very different than your own.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 “Fix these words of mine (*Yahweh’s*) in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.” (NIV)

Judges 2:10-13 “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD’s anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.” (NIV)

- *Rebuke them when they are wrong.* Don’t let things slide. Call them out. It’s no use teaching them right from wrong and then living like it doesn’t matter. Discipline your children, reasonably and fairly. In this area, peril awaits the fainthearted.

Proverbs 27:5,6 “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” (NIV)

Proverbs 13:24 “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” (NIV)

Proverbs 19:18 “Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.” (NIV)

Proverbs 22:15 “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” (NIV)

Proverbs 29:17 “Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.” (NIV)

Psalms 141:1-10 “I call to you, LORD, come quickly to me... Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let

me eat their delicacies. Let a righteous man strike me – that is a kindness; let him rebuke me – that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it... Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.” (NIV)

- *Correct their behavior.* Don’t just tell them what they did wrong. Show them what would have been right. In other words, don’t just say, “you really screwed that up,” then stomp away. Say, “okay, that was not the way to handle this. Here is what you should have done instead.” Kids need to be shown how to do things right.

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (NASB)

Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (NIV)

- *Train them how to avoid the problem in the first place.* Arm you kids with good values and habits that will help them avoid unnecessary heartache. Teach them how to make good decisions that will prevent problems, not just resolve them.

Hebrews 12:5-11 “... DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES... God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline... He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (NASB)

And always, always, always remember: *Set a good example.* Whether you know it or not, your kids are watching you like a hawk, and they learn far more from your example than your words. Make sure your example is one you want them to follow.

Titus 2:1-8 “... speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure... kind... that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.” (NASB)

Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (NASB)

A musical metaphor.

Let’s wrap up this quick survey of romantic love and marriage with a musical metaphor.

Go listen to Bach's Goldberg variations. Glen Gould's 1955 and 1981 analog recordings are good ones, tape hiss and all...

Now that you're back, you will have noticed the two hands play very different things. The melodies are different. They are not always in unison. Sometimes one hand carries the tune, and sometimes it's the other. But they play at the same tempo, and they come together to play one transcendent, beautiful song.

This is called counterpoint, and in a sense, it's what a good marriage should be.

The hands play and do different things, but they always complement one another. Sometimes one hand will take the forefront, and sometimes the other. But they are never in competition, never annoyingly dissonant, and never out of sync.

If you play one hand and not the other, it might sound sort of okay and somewhat interesting on its own. But at the end of the day, it's only half the music. It's only when the two hands come together and play the magic happens.

Make your marriage like that.

Final thoughts.

Notice none of these things about marriage can be learned from the life of Solomon. He did the opposite of all this stuff.

That's why, at the end of the day, the Song of Songs can't be "about" Solomon. It can only be "of" him. He could have written it, or it could have been written because of him. But it can't be "about" him, or it would be about a guy who treated women as nothing more than disposable flesh containers with which to gratify himself, then stable like an insecure has-been who needs a trophy room to show the people unfortunate enough to visit what a big shot he is.

Solomon's attitude towards women was despicable and pathetic. So if the Song of Songs is about him, it should be renamed the Fraud of Frauds, or Loser of Losers, or Predator of Predators, because when it comes to romantic love, that's all Solomon was.

The only way this could be the "Song of Songs" is if it's about the Shulammite and her enduring love for the Shepherd, despite anything Solomon, the Daughters of Jerusalem, her brothers, or anyone else could say or do. Then she becomes a picture of the enduring love we should have for Jesus, despite anything Satan, this fallen world, or anyone else can say or do. And that truly deserves to be praised as the Song of Songs.

2 Corinthians 11:3-15 "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully... such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises

himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...” (NASB)

Romans 16:18 “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” (NASB)

2 Peter 2:1-20 “... there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies... Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words... forsaking the right way they have gone astray... For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires... promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.” (NASB)

2 Timothy 3:2-17 “... men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant... holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind... their folly will be obvious to all... But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

Philippians 3:8-21 “... I (*Paul*) count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (NASB)

Ephesians 3:14-21 “For this reason, I (*Paul*) bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

CONCLUSION.

The “Wisdom Literature.”

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are considered part of the “Wisdom Literature” of the Old Testament. These three books can be read together, to get important insights into life in a fallen world, from different perspectives.

- *Proverbs* offers divinely inspired life principles, with an optimistic tone. It teaches you *how to live* in a fallen world.
- *Ecclesiastes* offers faithless conclusions about the harsh realities of life, with a pessimistic tone. It teaches you *what to avoid* in a fallen world.
- *Job* offers spiritual perspective about the mysteries of life (like why good people suffer), with a realistic tone. It teaches you *how to endure* in a fallen world.

Song of Songs is not considered part of the wisdom literature, but it should be. When understood for what it is, it offers romantic encouragement in life, with a dramatic tone. It teaches you *who to marry* in a fallen world.

When you read these books together and carefully meditate upon them, you gain a kaleidoscope of wisdom with which to meet the myriad challenges of life in a world where we are all free to choose between good and evil.

2 Peter 1:19 “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” (NASB)

Solomon’s life in three acts.

In Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, we have three books closely related to Solomon.

The proverbs Solomon contributed to the book of Proverbs were likely spoken early in his life, soon after his petition for wisdom and God’s answer to Solomon’s humble prayer. Solomon asked for wisdom. He got it. And his proverbs were one result of God’s gift.

Then Solomon became fabulously rich, famous, and powerful, very quickly at an early age. And he clearly couldn’t handle it.

He feared Egypt, the one nation David didn’t conquer, which is shocking given Yahweh’s miraculous and total defeat of Egypt during the Exodus. He didn’t trust Yahweh for his security in life, so he turned to the cheap substitute of self-devised political machinations and married Pharaoh’s daughter. We saw how that turned out, as all his political adversaries either ran to or came from Egypt, with Pharaoh’s blessing.

Solomon didn't fear the Canaanite nations, because David conquered them. Instead, Solomon lusted after them. He saw the licentiousness and debauchery of the nations which rejected Yahweh in favor of their pagan gods and desired the same surrender to decadence. So he grabbed 999 of their women.

Solomon didn't trust God for his Joy and Peace, so he turned to the cheap substitute of promiscuity. This became an addiction he had to feed, which could eventually only be satisfied by constructing the pagan temples his harem demanded. As a result, the nation was torn in two and both pieces descended headlong into idolatry.

The events portrayed in the Song of Songs likely took place at the top of this tragic arc, providing the now hypocritical writer of so many proverbs with a shocking refusal that should have humbled him and brought repentance. And in a sense, the Shulammitte's rejection of Solomon is a picture of how Israel should have rejected her dishonorable, deteriorating king. But sadly, Solomon (and indeed most of those in Israel) chose the opposite path, succumbing to lust and the inevitable fear that comes from defiance of God.

As Solomon's life turns sharply and spirals downward, his anxiety, frustration, and despair accelerate with his descent. The sayings collected in Ecclesiastes would have been blurted out towards the end of this path, when he could still make accurate observations about the world around him but was wholly incapable of arriving at doctrinal conclusions. He abandoned his faith, so his conclusions could only be faithless and baseless assaults upon the trustworthy God he had forsaken.

Solomon couldn't handle his blessings. He gave in to pride, which motivated defiance and a desire for darkness, which created fear, which expressed itself in hatred of Yahweh and others, and resulted in the misery and despair captured in Ecclesiastes.

In a sense, these three books present a three-act portrayal of the dramatic arc of Solomon's life.

- *Act One – Proverbs* represents the *hopeful beginning* of Solomon's life, showing us how to live, through life principles worth following;
- *Act Two – The Song of Songs* represents the *defiant middle* of Solomon's life, showing us what to reject (the descent of Solomon), through life choices worth emulating (those of the Shulammitte); and
- *Act Three – Ecclesiastes* represents the *tragic end* of Solomon's life, showing us what we will become (as miserable as Solomon), if we meet life realities without faith in our Creator.

What a sad, cautionary tale.

Hebrews 10:26-31 “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment... For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (NIV)

Epilogue.

From Wisdom to Despair: A Tragic Life, Conflicting Writings, and a Ray of Hope.

Most consider Solomon as a wise, benevolent, fabulously wealthy king. And he was all this. For a while.

But then something happened to him that, if we are honest, would have happened to us as well. The overwhelming fame, fortune, and things that go along with them, led to a prideful heart, which brought out his worst qualities.

Solomon's worst qualities might be different than our worst qualities, but we, like him, would have been corrupted by too much good stuff. That is unfortunately the human condition. Only one Person can handle these things without being corrupted by them, and His name is Jesus.

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (NIV)

Hebrews 4:14-16 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (NIV)

Solomon's pride leads to inevitable misery, which no amount of worldly blessing could abate. All such distractions are temporary and increasingly impotent. He remains wise, in a worldly sense, but refuses to obey, and winds up in despair.

Revelation 3:17 “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (NIV)

Isaiah 57:20,21 “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’ ” (NIV)

From this tragic life conflicting writings are produced – hopeful life principles (Proverbs), dramatic turning points (Song of Songs), and faithless expressions of despair (Ecclesiastes), each in turn from the ascent, pivot, and decline of his journey. The only ray of hope comes not from him, but the woman who rejected him for a simple life with the shepherd she loves.

Psalms 37:16-18 “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous. The blameless spend their days under the LORD's care, and their inheritance will endure forever.” (NIV)

Is that depressing? Somewhat. This is indeed a cautionary tale. But it is a powerful one, actually full of tremendous encouragement, if we care to see it.

At the end of the day, what do we learn from Solomon?

- Regardless of the infamy of your birth or the disfunction of your family, you can rise to the highest heights when you put your faith in Yahweh.

Psalm 68:4-20 “Sing to God, sing in praise of his name... rejoice before him – his name is the LORD (*Yahweh*). A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing... Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves...” (NIV)

- God rewards humble prayers, and when we seek to fulfill His plan and purpose, God provides all we could ever need, and often much, much more.

2 Corinthians 9:8 “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (NIV)

Ephesians 3:20,21 “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (NASB)

- Although we all have a natural desire for material things, it’s all meaningless if we don’t put God first.

Mark 8:36 “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (NASB)

- And when we do put God first, we can find tremendous Joy and Peace, along with someone to share it with, even if we have little to none of these material things.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength...” (NIV)

Psalm 89:15-17 “Blessed are those who have learned to... walk in the light of your presence, LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength...” (NIV)

Every time we wish we had more money, fame, or power, we should pause, remember Solomon, and be content with what we have. The lack of it may be a mercy from God protecting us from Solomon’s fate.

Proverbs 30:7-9 “Two things I ask of you, LORD (*Yahweh*); do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD (*Yahweh*)?’ ” (NIV)

And every time we are thankful for what we have, we can smile and think of the life the Shulammitte shared with her Shepherd. They lived, not in a place surrounded by the creation of man, like a gaudy palace in a corrupt capital city, but likely in a humble dwelling in a rural land. Yet they were

surrounded by the beauty of nature, the creation of God, and drank from the cup of blessings He poured out for them and were glad.

Psalm 128:1,2 “How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD (*Yahweh*), who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you.” (NASB)

For all these pages on Solomon, let’s be like the Shulamite and Shepherd.

Song of Songs 7:10-13 “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us rise early and go to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine has budded and its blossoms have opened, and whether the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes have given forth fragrance; and over our doors are all choice fruits, both new and old, which I have saved up for you, my beloved.” (NASB)

Song of Songs 8:6-10 “Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD (*Yahweh*). Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it; if a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised... but... I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.” (NASB)