

1 Kings 11: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Kings chapter 11. Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love. He had seven hundred wives who were princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech, the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded.

Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, Since this has been your practice, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father, I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant, and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen. And the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite.

He was of the royal house in Edom. For when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he struck down every male in Edom. For Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom. But Hadad fled to Egypt, together with certain Edomites of his father's servants, Hadad still being a little child. They set out from Midian, and came to Paran, and took men with them from Paran, and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, and assigned him an allowance of food, and gave him land. And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him in marriage the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tapanes, the queen. And the sister of Tapanes bore him Ganyubath his son, whom Tapanes weaned in Pharaoh's house. And Ganyubath was in Pharaoh's house among the sons of Pharaoh.

But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to my own country.

But Pharaoh said to him, What have you lacked with me, that you are now seeking to go to your own country? And he said to him, Only let me depart. God also raised up as an adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliadah, who had fled from his master Hadidiza, king of Zobah. And he gathered men about him, and became leader of a marauding band, after the killing by David. And they went to Damascus and lived there, and made him king in Damascus. He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon, doing harm as Hadad did. And he loathed Israel, and reigned over Syria.

[3 : 3 0] Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built the millow, and closed up the breach of the city of David his father. The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious, he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilohite

found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes. But he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. Because they have forsaken me, and worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the

Sidonians, Chemosh, the god of Moab, and Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. And they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight, and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it to you, ten tribes.

Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes, by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David. And I will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever. Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon. And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place. Solomon is at the center of a great new Eden. He is gathering riches from all around the world. He's built the temple with all of its garden imagery. He's established himself as the great power within the region. The queen of Sheba, like Eve, has been brought to him. And his kingdom is glorious and well-ordered throughout. However, much as in the Garden of Eden, when everything is at its height, a great fall occurs. He breaks the commandments that were given to the king in

Deuteronomy chapter 17. In each respect, he accumulates gold. He turns to Egypt for horses and chariots. And his political entanglement with Pharaoh and the Egyptians is far more extensive than mere horse trading. He seeks to forge multiple alliances with people round about by marrying many foreign women, most notable among them the daughter of Pharaoh. Solomon's love of his foreign wives, the real politic of international relations, and his policy of multiculturalism turns his heart away from the Lord. Rather than relying upon the Lord, he relied upon his shrewdness in playing the compromising game of regional politics with the idolatrous nations around him. One can imagine that to keep the nations that he had married into happy, he would be expected to provide shrines for the worship of their favoured gods. If he does not do this, then they will be displeased and will think that the women that they have given to Solomon as wives and concubines have been despised. Here is elsewhere political expediency takes priority over faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord had explicitly warned Israel against unfaithful covenants with the surrounding nations and intermarriage with them. In Deuteronomy chapter 7 verses 1 to 4,

Again in Exodus chapter 23 verses 32 to 33, Exodus chapter 34 verses 11 to 16, Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their asherim, for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous god. Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they hoar after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters hoar after their gods, and make your sons hoar after their gods. In scripture there is often a close association between marriage and faithfulness to the Lord. The danger of idolatry is the danger of false intermarriage, or the danger of adultery. There is also the danger of giving your heart and your strength to the wrong person. In marriage a man gives his heart to a woman, gives his heart and his strength and his abilities, and if he gives it to the wrong woman, he will be led astray.

[9 : 52] Much of the book of Proverbs, ironically, is about the question of to whom do you give your heart? The young man must decide for whom to leave his father and mother. He should give his heart to the wise wife, to the woman who shows the character of lady wisdom herself, not to lady folly or to the adulterous woman. If he gives his heart to the right woman, he will be built up and glorified, but if he makes the wrong choice, he will be destroyed. In the case of Solomon, he made the wrong choice. Peter Lighthouse observes the way that the author of Kings presents this as a compromise of Solomon's own identity. The word used for wholly devoted puns on Solomon's name, as does the word for the mantle that Ahijah tears apart. Solomon himself is only truly Solomon when he is wholly devoted to the Lord, and his sin leads to him being torn apart in various ways. Solomon was so involved with Egypt that he himself became like Pharaoh. The startling transformation can be seen in the stories of Hadad the Edomite and Jeroboam the son of Nebat. The story of Hadad the Edomite is told in a manner that is powerfully reminiscent of the story of Moses. As an infant, much of Moses' life was threatened by

Pharaoh's slaughter of the Hebrew boys. Hadad's life was placed in peril when Joab killed every male in Edom, and some of Hadad's family servants fled with Hadad to Egypt. Pharaoh treated Hadad well, giving him food and land and his own sister-in-law as a wife. Like Moses, Hadad turned his back on the privileges of the Egyptian court and sought to return to his own people, asking Pharaoh, again in a manner reminiscent of Moses, to let him depart. Rezon's story should also be familiar to us. Like David, he flees from his Lord. He gathers a band of men around him like David did in the cave of Adullam, and then he becomes king in Damascus, like David became king in Hebron over Judah. Like Pharaoh, Solomon was committed to the non-stop construction of vast building projects, establishing a standing labour force in order to do so. Amos Frisch observes some of the parallels. He writes, In the description of Solomon's works, it is possible to discern echoes of the first stage of the Israelite enslavement at the hands of Pharaoh. They set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens, and they built for Pharaoh store cities, Python and Ramses. Exodus chapter 1 verse 11. In a similar fashion, we find vis-à-vis Solomon, Solomon rebuilt, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen. In 1 Kings chapter 9 verses 17 to 19, he notes that the term for burden appears within the narrative of Solomon, when he gave Jeroboam the son of Nebat charge over all the forced labour of the house of Joseph.

Indeed, later in the narrative, the people talk about the heavy yoke and the hard service that Solomon had placed upon them, in chapter 12 verse 4. All of this is languished with troubling echoes of Pharaoh's treatment of the Hebrews, in Exodus chapter 1 verses 11 to 14. And by this point then, the rich cluster of Eden themes in the opening chapters of the book has thoroughly curdled.

In chapter 11 verses 9 to 13, God confronted Solomon concerning his sin, much as he had confronted Adam in Genesis. The kingdom would be torn away from him, much as Adam was thrust out of the garden.

It is against this background that the figure of Jeroboam first comes into the frame. Jeroboam was an officer over Solomon's labour force. The prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam that the Lord was going to tear the kingdom from Solomon's hands, leaving only two tribes to him. Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon, who sought to kill him. Jeroboam, like Hadad before him, flees to Egypt for refuge, where he remains until the death of Solomon. Once again, we see themes reminiscent of Moses and the Exodus here, but they have been twisted, distorted and inverted. Jeroboam should also be a character who reminds us of David. In such characters, the Lord is establishing mirrors in which Solomon and Israel can reflect upon their sins and how they are compromised by them. The character of Jeroboam is a sort of parody of Israel.

[14 : 03] Like David, he is a valiant warrior who rises in the service of the royal administration. He meets a prophet who tells him that he will be king, much as Samuel told David that he would be king. The tearing of the cloak, representing the tearing of the kingdom, should remind us of Samuel's symbolic action to Saul.

Like Saul with David, Solomon tries to kill Jeroboam when he finds that he has been set apart as his successor. Indeed, even the promises that are given to Jeroboam might remind us of the promises that are given to David. However, the Lord has purposes still for David's house. He will not entirely extinguish it.

He will leave to David one tribe, and when the time comes, he will restore the kingdom. A question to consider. The theme of the self is a prominent one throughout this chapter, whether in the way that sin fractures and undermines identities, leading us to transform into our opposites, or the way that giving our hearts to the wrong thing or to the wrong persons can tear us apart. How might the lessons of this chapter be related to other teachings of scripture regarding the effects of sin and of grace upon the self?