

UNIT 12

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IF YOU WALK

BEFORE ME

WITH A HEART

OF INTEGRITY

“The Lord Will Fulfill His Promise”

by Josh Hayes

“You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain.”

These are the words of Harvey Dent, the Gotham City District Attorney played by Aaron Eckhart in the 2008 blockbuster *The Dark Knight*. Though these words apply within the story to Batman, Commissioner Jim Gordon, and Dent himself, this memorable line also applies to the biblical figure of King Solomon.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Consider the range of descriptions the biblical authors use to describe this beloved yet notorious king:

- Solomon loved Yahweh, walking according to His statutes like his father David did, but he also offered sacrifices and burnt incense on the high places (1 Kings 3:3).
- Yahweh gave to Solomon a wise and understanding heart to the extent there has never been anyone like him before or since (3:12).
- Solomon led the people in a festival of worship after the dedication of the temple for fourteen days, and the people went home with happy hearts, rejoicing over the goodness that Yahweh had done for his servant David and for his people Israel (8:65-66).
- King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the world in wealth and wisdom. People all over the world wanted to meet Solomon and hear the wisdom that God had granted him (10:23-24).
- In addition to Pharaoh’s daughter, King Solomon loved many foreign women. These women came from the Canaanite nations that Yahweh had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry with because of the likelihood that they would turn the Israelites’ hearts away to follow other gods. Yet Solomon was deeply attached in love to these women, and when he was old, his many wives indeed turned

his heart away to follow other gods. He was not singularly hearted to Yahweh as his father David had been (11:1-4).

- In summary, Solomon was described as doing what was evil in God's sight; in contrast to David, he did not remain loyal to Yahweh (11:6).

A life of renown, a life of compromise, and at times, a life of outright arrogance and rebellion. That is what we see in Solomon—a mixture that, if we're being honest, we sadly and alarmingly see in ourselves.

As image-bearers, we have the capacity to live as wise stewards who seek God's fame and renown with our talents and resources, and yet, we also act as presumptuous tenants who so often squander the Lord's gifts on luxury and self-aggrandizement. Lest we esteem ourselves too highly, we should see ourselves in the Solomon story—the good, the bad, the ugly, warts and all. We see in Solomon a wise king, a worshiping king (sometimes worshiping the wrong thing), and a failed king.

In short, in Solomon's life, we observe not only a wide range of what it means to be a king but also of what it means to be a human. Solomon lived long enough to see himself act as both the hero and the villain. The king who humbly requested wisdom from the Lord for the good of his people was the same Pharaoh-like despot who resorted to mass forced labor in an effort to build the temple and also his own palace, among other ambitious projects (see 1 Kings 5:13-16; 9:15ff; cf. 12:14b). Because of Solomon's pride and waywardness, God would eventually tear the kingdom away from him (11:11). Out of God's forbearance, and according to His faithful regard for David, He nonetheless promised to preserve a Davidic line in some form (11:12-13).

Solomon confronts us with the reality that is human nature this side of the fall—and the fall affects everyone high and low, princes and paupers, CEOs and suburbanites. Mighty kings like Solomon are not the only ones who descend into the villain role. We do too. We, like Solomon, need someone to play the hero for us, someone to rescue us from our own villainy.

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WHERE IS DAVID'S GREATER SON?

All parents should want better for their children than for themselves. The same goes for kings. Sadly, this did not happen for Solomon, or at least not with any real longevity. In the covenant that God made with David, He promised that He would establish the throne of David's descendant forever (see 2 Sam. 7:12-16). And at points during Solomon's reign, it looked as if this promise might already be coming true. Indeed, after the consecration of the temple, God spoke to Solomon saying that if he walked before Him as David walked, doing what God commanded, He would establish Solomon's throne forever. Just as Yahweh had promised to David, the family would never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel (1 King 9:4-5).

As we have noted, however, Solomon would not remain faithful to God throughout his life, and this would result not just in the split of the kingdom within a generation but would set the course for the eventual exile of Israel and Judah. In other words, not only would Solomon become the villain, but so would Israel and Judah as collective nations. So what does this mean for God's promise? What about David's descendant?

Thankfully, something greater than Solomon would come (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31). And this descendant of David would remain the hero, even when being condemned to die like a villain (Isa. 53:12). In reading about the downward trajectory of Solomon, we should do so with a view toward the upward ascension of Jesus, the greater Son of David, King of kings and Servant-King, the Hero who died and rose again.

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