

**1Kings 11:1-13 (1984 NIV)**  
***Solomon: Good Start, Bad Finish***

**Introduction**

When the editor of a newspaper was short of material to fill his columns one week, he asked his typesetter to fill in with the 10 Commandments in the Bible.

After that week's issue had been circulated, the editor received a letter from one reader. The reader wrote: "Cancel my subscription. You are getting too personal."

I believe that very much sums up the fact that we live in a world of many influences. And often, bad influences that lead us to do things that are wrong when examined under the searching light of God's Word.

King Solomon was a victim of bad influences. 1 Kgs. 1-11 is a record of his rise and fall.

- 1:1-2:12 records the ascension of Solomon as king after the death of his father David.
- 2:13-Chap. 4 records Solomon's wealth and wisdom as he seeks to rule according to God's way.
- Chap. 5-8 records Solomon building and dedicating the temple to God.
- Chap. 9-10 records the "golden age" of Solomon's rule.
- But just as things are expected to be going up and up for Solomon, Chap. 11 bursts that bubble of optimism by recording for us the decline and death of Solomon.

We see in Solomon the story of someone who had started well but ended dismally. Why? Deut. 11:26-28 diagnoses for us the root cause of Solomon's tragic problem—"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."

This is given to the people of Israel, and the king of Israel is representative of the nation before God. When we apply this to King Solomon, what it means is that he is to keep the commands of the LORD as he rules. If he does, both the king and nation will be blessed. If he doesn't, then both the king and nation will be judged. In Solomon's case, he finished dismally because he turned away from the commands of the LORD and followed other gods in his later years. As a result, he and the nation were judged.

Christians as human beings have the tendency to enjoy the blessings of God, and as time goes by, take His blessings for granted. In other words, we think

God will continue to be faithful to us, and so we slowly but surely begin to slacken our faithfulness to Him.

Our text today is a solemn call to us—exhorting us not to allow ungodly influences to turn our hearts away from God, but to live a good and blessed life with faithful obedience to God. Today, we will see in Solomon how a blessed king ended up dismally as a judged king because he had succumbed to the ungodly influences of others.

What then can initiate this negligence in being faithful to God, even as we enjoy His grace, goodness, and blessings? Three answers.

### **I. A clear-minded defiance of the Word of God (vv. 1-3).**

1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabitesses, Ammonitesses, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. 2 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. 3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

In vv. 1-2, we read that Solomon married many foreign wives, defying the commands of God. Also, Solomon clearly violated and ignored what God said through Moses concerning the king in Deut. 17:17a—"He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray."

But this does not mean that God is racist—that He loves only the Israelites and hates the other people. Rather, God's prohibitions here were for the purpose of preserving the spiritual devotion of the nation of Israel towards Himself. God knew that the influence of paganism would come through these foreign wives of Solomon, and it would have a detrimental impact on the lives and faith of the king and people.

However, the sad thing is that Solomon, who definitely was aware of such prohibitions from the Lord, wilfully disobeyed. Somehow, as he enjoyed his own "golden era" of success and blessings, he became strayed by the wrong ambition.

- He wanted to be the most powerful political leader in the whole region rather than just the king of Israel.
- He wanted political power through marriage alliances more than spiritual devotion to his God.

Perhaps, Solomon had overestimated his wisdom and spiritual strength. He did not start out wanting to be influenced by his foreign wives. In fact, he asked for God a discerning heart so that he could be directed by divine wisdom and justice to rule God's people. But as the days went by, the direction of influence came not from God, but from his foreign wives who worshipped pagan gods. In the end, their collective influence prevailed over Solomon.

Notice this effect in vv. 2-3.

- In v. 2, we are told that Solomon “held fast to them (his foreign wives) in love. What were meant to be pragmatic alliances had turned into strong, emotional attachments.
- In v. 3, we are told that “his wives led him astray” (“fatal attractions”). Instead of leading them to the Lord, Solomon was led away from the Lord by them. And by allowing these people to so influence him, Solomon’s fall was slow but sure; subtle but dangerous.

Like Solomon, the experience of being blessed can cause us to overestimate our own ability, including our spiritual strength. Thus, we need to be mindful that no one is so strong spiritually that he cannot fall; we need to be spiritually humble and vigilant at all times. Yes, we don’t go round looking down on other people with proud spiritual eyes. Yet we need to be careful of the kind of influences coming from them lest we get drawn away and lost our own spiritual ground.

- You may be a young person looking for peer friendship.
- You may be a single person looking for a life partnership.
- You may be a working person looking for a business relationship.
- You may be a lonely person looking for a social companionship.

In all these situations, we all need to be careful of the influences that you and I are exposing ourselves to. You and I can never be so strong that we cannot fall.

Solomon might have thought that he was strong enough to resist the spiritual influences of his foreign wives. But notice how subtly he lost his ground—he held fast to these wives in love and they led him astray (vv. 2-3). His wives might not hold fast to him, but he held fast to them—he was the one who could not resist; he was the one who could not run away.

Therefore, the wise thing is not to get committed and then fight our way out because we have presumed that we will win or overcome in the end. Rather, wise thing is to resist the temptation to get committed so that we will not be so entangled that we cannot set ourselves free. No one gets burnt by fire just because he knows that that thing is fire; he gets burnt by fire because he knows that that thing is fire AND he still plays with it.

I wonder if there are some influences in our lives that God wants us to keep away from.

- The people we mix with.
- The things we read.
- The sounds we hear.
- The images we see.
- The activities we engage in.

Remember, you and I are never so strong that we cannot succumb to ungodly influences that come our way.

Solomon committed a clear-minded defiance of the Word of God. He got himself involved in ungodly practices with his eyes wide opened and with his mind all so clear about what God had prohibited in the Law. In the end, he got himself stuck in ungodly practices. May his story be our warning today—that we are never so strong/blessed that we cannot fall or God will surely bail us out of our own mess.

We abuse our privilege of being blessed when we neglect our responsibility to be faithful to God. What then can further aggravate this negligence in life? This brings me to my second answer.

## **II. A double-minded allegiance to the Person of God (vv. 4-8).**

4 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. 5 He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. 7 On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

In vv. 4-6, we read that Solomon was not fully devoted to God because he also worshipped the pagan deities Ashtoreth and Molech. He not only allowed his foreign wives to continue to worship them, but he himself even followed them in worshipping these deities. The word “followed” in v. 5 literally means Solomon “went after” these deities worshipped by his foreign wives. Thus, he became divided in his allegiance to God—i.e. he did not reject God, but neither was he fully devoted to God; he became lukewarm to the Lord. Verse 6 says that “he did not follow the Lord completely”.

The world today may praise Solomon for being open-minded, inclusive, not bigoted, and respectful of other alternatives. But as far as the Lord was concerned, His appraisal of Solomon was harshly recorded in v. 6—“So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD ...”

Verses 7-8 tells why Solomon truly deserves this harsh appraisal. He promoted pagan worship by building high places for all the pagan gods. And you know what the far-reaching implications were?

- First of all, it implies that Solomon exalted the status of these pagan gods to the same level as Yahweh, the true God of Israel.
- These high places, being prominent locations of worship, challenged the sole and true worship of Yahweh in Israel.

- Their physical presence in the eyes of the people of Israel was a powerful symbol of an acceptable alternative to Yahweh worship.
- It was as if by erecting these high places, Solomon was telling the people, “Look, here are so many choices. Just pick your choice. Any choice would do as long as you are comfortable with your choice.”
- Of course, this had deep and damaging effects on the spiritual purity of Israel—the people would forsake Yahweh and embrace idolatry in later years.

So, the erosion of spiritual purity in Israel was slow but sure; and who was instrumental for sowing the early seeds of this spiritual decline? Yes, it was Solomon, the king of Israel; the head of the nation.

When I apply the example of Solomon as head of the nation to myself as head of my own family, the Lord checks my heart with some soul-searching questions.

- “John, are you erecting worldly high places in your own home?”
- “John, can you say with Joshua that you and your family will serve no one else, except the Lord?”
- “John, you believe in God, but do you live as if God truly matters before the eyes of your family members?”

These are soul-searching questions for me because in my desire to have the best of everything, I can be lured astray by many concerns yet without rejecting God. I can be guilty of serving “two masters”. I can be like Solomon—worshipping the true God, yet building high places for other gods at the same time.

The people of Israel took their cue from Solomon, their king—his example became their imitation. Sadly, Solomon gave the wrong cue; the wrong example; the wrong message. The people followed him, and the spiritual purity and vitality of Israel began to erode slowly but surely.

- Let’s seek the Lord to help us who are fathers and husbands to send the right spiritual cue, example, and message to our family.
- Let’s help our children be blessed with the Bible lessons that they have learnt in church because they see the same biblical truths being lived out at home by us whom they look up to as role models.
- Let’s all in the family submit to God’s sovereign rule in our respective homes so that every father, mother, son, and daughter will acknowledge that God’s rule in the family is not merely a choice out of many choices, but the absolute command from God to us.

You know, there is one danger of being a Christian family. It is this—we can unconsciously lose the sense of God’s sovereign rule in our family as years go by. We then become accustomed to the living out of our faith only with outward forms, and not with inner substance.

- Our faith then becomes a culture rather than a conviction, like in so many so-called Christian countries in Europe and N. America. In fact, many in these countries have now proudly and arrogantly declared themselves as in the post-Christian era. “Post” in the sense that like any passing trend or fashion, Christianity is now looked down as something outdated and irrelevant.
- We may be in the line of many generations of Christians; we may have been in church for a long time; we may have many Bibles in our homes; we may be able to sing many hymns; we may even profess belief in God. But then, we may live as if God doesn’t matter in life.

Hence, I lovingly call on all Christian families to hold fast to God’s sovereign rule in our family life so that the dangerous norms and values in this world will not erode the spiritual purity and inner substance of each Christian home.

We abuse our privilege of being blessed when we neglect our responsibility to be faithful to God. One more question—what can result from a persistent negligence in being faithful to God? And this brings me to my third and final answer.

### **III. A stubborn-minded indifference to the judgment of God (vv. 9-13).**

9 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. 10 Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord’s command. 11 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. 12 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. 13 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.”

In vv. 9-10, we see Solomon incurring God’s anger because of his stubborn disobedience.

- He had been gifted with discernment and wisdom (3:1-15); and after the temple dedication, he was reminded by God to remain obedient to His commands (9:1-9).
- Thus, he violated God’s commands knowingly, but he was unrepentant; instead, he became hardened in his errant ways.
- He then reached a point where he was oblivious to the judgment of God (i.e. he became indifferent), especially in the midst of enjoying his successes.

Little wonder that Solomon’s callous attitude earned God’s sharp rebuke in 11:11-13.

11 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. 12 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. 13 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."

Now, hearing these words from God Himself must have sounded very strange to Solomon. You see, he had been so used to hearing the praises of God for him in his life as king. He might even have prided himself on being the very reason for Israel's success. But God was here going to let him know that he would be the very reason for Israel's shame—the nation would be divided because of him. Solomon would leave behind a weak kingdom that would eventually break up, and his successor-son would rule over only one tribe of Israel.

Indeed, Solomon's reign in his last years could only survive not because of his greatness and achievements, but because of God's grace on him. In fact, Solomon ruled the last years of his reign not under the favour of God, but under His judgement.

- Former defeated enemies re-emerged to constantly threaten his kingdom (11:14-25).
- From within his kingdom, a once loyal ally in the person of Jeroboam rebelled against him, betraying Solomon's trust in him (11:26-40).

Let me ask you this: "How does that sound for a conclusion in the last chapter of your life?" The answer is quite obvious—"It sucks!" The solemn lesson for us here is this—it is foolish to fight God with a stubborn-minded indifference towards Him because it is dreadful to fall into the judgement or displeasure of an angry God.

When we consider Solomon's earlier spiritual zeal and great wisdom, it seems impossible for him to fall into idolatry. Yet it happened—not overnight, but in slow degrees.

- He first allowed it.
- Then he became comfortable with it.
- At the end, he even began to participate in it.

Yes, he had never really totally renounced God all this while. But it was enough to prevent him from being fully devoted to God. And because of his folly, Israel became divided in later years; the city was conquered in time to come; the temple was destroyed, and the people were sent into exile in another land.

Alexander Maclaren, Scottish Baptist minister of an earlier era, likened Solomon's sad downfall to that of a "ship that went down when the voyage was nearly over". So near yet so far—what a sad commentary on how human power,

pride, and arrogance can produce spiritual unfaithfulness and forgetfulness that result in someone gradually being “given up” by God to pursue his own foolish ways.

Thus, the danger of stubbornly persisting in what is displeasing to God is two-fold.

- One, we become increasingly comfortable with disobeying God. It becomes a habit—something that becomes easier to commit as you go along. And before long, what’s so wrong can become so right. But such disobedience takes away the best that God has designed for us. A casual disobedience can lead to a stubborn lifestyle of sin. Yes, the long journey of faithfulness is often hampered by the small grains of sin in our lives—Solomon stumbled in silent, small steps before he fell with a loud, big crash.
- Two, each of us has a personal accountability before God in what we do. God’s judgement is sure, even for His people because we still need to answer to Him concerning how we live here on earth as His children. Our actions on earth not only affect ourselves, but can also affect others for better or worse. When Solomon disobeyed God as king, it affected the history of Israel in later years. So it was not just an issue between Solomon and God, but also between Solomon, God, and the people of Israel.

## Conclusion

One of the greatest races in sports history was that between Roger Bannister and John Landy.

Bannister was the first man to run the mile in 4 minutes. Three months later, Landy shocked the sports world when he sliced 1.4 seconds off Bannister’s time.

Another three months later, the two track giants met for a historic showdown. As the race went into the last lap, the other runners were left trailing far, far behind Bannister and Landy. It was a two-horse race as the two fought it out stride for stride.

At the final stretch, Landy caught his second wind and managed to surge ahead. It looked as if he would win, confirming his superiority over Bannister. But as Landy approached the finishing line, he was haunted with the question, “Where is Bannister?” And you know what he did? He looked back to see where his rival was. And as he did so, the figure of Bannister swept past him in a flash and hit the tape.

When Landy reviewed the race later, he said, “If I’d not looked back, I would have won the race.” Yes, if Landy had focused his eyes on the right thing—i.e. the finishing line in front instead of the man he had left behind, he would have tasted the joy of not only starting strong, but also finishing victorious.



Solomon was so near yet so far. In his final lap of faith, he did not focus being fully devoted to the worship of God in his life. He looked back at the “forbidden fruit” of idolatry—something that Israel had already left behind—and he lost his race of full and undivided devotion towards God. He started well and strong, but he ended poorly and weak.

We abuse of privilege of being blessed when we neglect our responsibility to be devoted and faithful to what God has for us in response to His grace and goodness. Yes, we thank God for His blessings; yet our human nature can make us vulnerable while enjoying God’s blessings.

Thus, we need to beware of ...

- That clear-minded defiance of the Word of God.
- That double-minded allegiance to the Person of God.
- Stubborn-minded indifference to the displeasure of God.

Let us now close by examining our own lives in the light of God’s Word today with two questions:

- One, as we enjoy our successes and blessings, are we rationalising away the sin potential in some actions in our lives? If so, then God’s Word says to us today, “Stop it!”
- Two, in our desire to succeed, are we tempted to do some things displeasing to God? If so, then God’s Word says to us today, “Don’t start it!”

Amen!