

Series: STUFF WE MISSED: Extraordinary Stories from an Extraordinary GOD

September 5, 2010

SOLOMON'S GOLD: Drifting from God

1 Kings 10:14-29; 11:1-13; 14:25-27

1. Does anyone here, besides me, enjoy reading the Guinness World Book of Records? The WOW factor is what gets me. I am always amazed at the weird things people will do for 15 minutes of fame! Like the guy who had metal implants surgically installed in his head, scales tattooed on his body and his tongue split to look like a lizard! **[pic]** Or, have you heard of Mr. Mangetout—Mr. ***Eat-Everything*** **[pic]** who, in his lifetime so far, has eaten bicycles, computers and an entire Cessna airplane!

-People are ***fascinated*** by extremes; the biggest, the best, the fastest, the richest, the tallest, the fattest—and it's been like this for thousands of years. There's one guy in the Bible who broke every record in his day. Can anyone guess who that was?
Solomon.

-When it came to the span of what he accomplished when it came to wealth, knowledge, extravagance, marriages, accomplishments—Solomon ***totally*** stood apart from anyone who has ever lived. But it's interesting—when Jesus, the Messiah comes, he is known as the Son—the descendant of ***David***. And in all the records of Israelite kings, they are compared to David, not Solomon. Why?

-Well, that's what I'd like to talk about. Solomon may have also broken the record for the way he drifted from the One who gave him all he had. In fact, his drift ultimately sabotaged the country he led. In the middle of all his accomplishments—gold-plating everything he touched—Solomon forgot to ask the question: ***What does GOD think of what I'm doing?***

-Wouldn't it be a tragedy for you or me if, like Solomon, everyone is amazed by our lives, our stuff, and our impressive accomplishments--except the God to whom we are ultimately accountable?

2. Solomon's amazing journey began when he took the reins of the kingdom from his Dad, David. At the worship service on that occasion—you and I would've been impressed by his humility. On that day, he declared his intent to follow God with ***all his heart***--no matter what ***anyone*** thought!

-The night God appeared to him in a dream—and gave him an opportunity that has ***never*** been offered to anyone else. God said,

"Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (1 Kings 3:5 TNIV)

What would ***you*** ask for if God said that to you?

-Solomon's answer gives us some insight into what his heart was like at that juncture of his life:

I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties...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." (1 Kings 3:7, 9-14 TNIV)

-Solomon's devotion is seen in his determination to build a temple worthy of the God He serves. To get the necessary materials, he began a strategic relationship with a guy named **Hiram**, King of Tyre—someone in the import/export business.

- a. But as you read the account, you get the sense that Solomon gets caught up in the thrill of international commerce—fascinated with the money to be made there. That's when he started drifting spiritually. The Temple took 7 years to finish—and it was breathtaking. But the record then says,

It took Solomon *thirteen* years, however, to complete the construction of *his* palace. (1 Kings 7:1 TNIV)

-The word, **however** is a comparative word. The author is saying, "Notice that Solomon spent **twice** as much time on his **own** extravagant palace. Know why? He had married Pharaoh's daughter.

-It's called "peer pressure." Imagine having a father-in-law—like Pharaoh who had tens of thousands of slaves building his tomb? Who, as a wedding gift, gives your spouse their **own city!**

- b. After importing what he needed for the temple and his own palace, Solomon mimicked Hiram. He built ships, like Hiram's, and began sending them all over the known world of that day. Now, he imported all kinds of things—but at the top of the list was **gold**. You find **gold** mentioned all through the accounts of Solomon. His income was measured in gold. He had gold place settings at his table. I think he may have been addicted to it!
- c. The course Solomon was on was reinforced by the people he led. The narrative says,

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. (1 Kings 4:20 TNIV)

I mean, what's not to like about a king whose trading and wisdom makes **everyone** safe...and wealthy? The public opinion polls were off the charts in his favor!

-National safety was a huge issue in that culture. And Solomon insured it. With his ability to trade, Solomon acquired **12,000 horses and 1400 chariots**. Understand, chariots were **the** strategic military weapon in his day.

-Facilitated by his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon imported his horses and chariots from Egypt—and then made money by exporting them all over the Middle East.

- c. Like a lot of people, Solomon thought that if a little bit was good—a **lot** was better! In every area. His marriage to Pharaoh's daughter worked so well in bringing really cool trade agreements and peace treaties that Solomon married **700 other wives of royal birth!** It's a round number because even Solomon didn't know how many wives he had!

-Besides that, Solomon acquired 300 concubines—women brought into his harem mainly for sexual purposes. Please note that the Bible is simply **reporting** on Solomon's actions—not giving its approval. You'll find out later what God thought of Solomon's fascination with women.

- d. And, of course, Solomon had to provide for 1000 families—and he had the money to do it. His annual income was 25 tons of—guess what? **Gold!** About \$800 million per year in our culture. That would about cover the Visa bill for 700 wives of royal birth, right? Along with the cost of braces and new running shoes for the kids, right? And that was just **one** income stream.

-And then there was the **grocery** list for his family and all their servants—and all his officials—paid for through the tax system. .

*10,000 pounds of prime beef

*15,000 pounds of mutton and goat

*exotic, imported game and fowl

*185 bushels of fine wheat

*375 bushels of meal

-That's **per day!**

- e. But Solomon wasn't just a money-making machine; he won the decathlon of life-time achievements. For example, he was a musician--and wrote over 1000 songs; and he was viewed as the smartest, wisest, most astute man of his day. The record says,

The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. (1 Kings 10:24 TNIV)

-Remember how I said that **gold** was the trademark of Solomon's kingdom? Well, if you ever had an audience with him, you'd get that. He had this massive, intimidating throne--overlaid with gold, inset with ivory. It took six steps just to get up to it. And if that didn't impress you, the décor of his palace would.

King Solomon made 200 large shields of hammered gold, each weighing more than fifteen pounds. He also made 300 smaller shields of hammered

gold, each weighing nearly four pounds. The king placed these shields in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. (1 Kings 10:16-17 NLT)

-Solomon mastered philosophy, science, nature, music, architecture, commerce, and business administration. His kingdom ran like clockwork. And if you're not impressed yet—Solomon wasn't just rich, talented, brilliant and wise—he was the **love doctor!** He was both good-looking **and** romantic! Read the Song of Solomon if you're not convinced! It's quite steamy!

3. How am I doing so far? How many of you are thoroughly impressed? A visiting queen—a connoisseur of elegance and extravagance, commented, “The legends about you don't even tell half the story!” Solomon was a phenomenal leader—no scandals, no corrupted justice, no Watergates. He even wrote portions of the Bible. Proverbs, a collection of his wise sayings—is profound! When it comes to achievement, Solomon truly stands alone!

-But you have to ask, what did **God** think of Solomon? God did set up a score card for kings, you know, before Israel even had one. It's found Deuteronomy 17. This is where Solomon's story gets **very** interesting.

- a. God said,

The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' (Deuteronomy 17:16 NLT)

-How did Solomon score?

Solomon built up a huge force of chariots and horses. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses...Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Cilicia... (1 Kings 10:26, 28)

Blew that one!

- b. God also said,

The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD. (Deuteronomy 17:17 NLT)

-How did Solomon score? Next question!

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...The LORD had clearly instructed the people of Israel, 'You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.' Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the LORD. (1 Kings 11:1-3 NLT)

Solomon **obliterated** that command.

- c. Concerning kings, God also said:

And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself. (Deuteronomy 17:17b NLT)

-How did Solomon score?

Each year Solomon received about 25 tons of gold. This did not include the additional revenue he received from merchants and traders, all the kings of Arabia, and the governors of the land...All of King Solomon's drinking cups were solid gold, as were all the utensils in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. They were not made of silver, for silver was considered worthless in Solomon's day! (1 Kings 10:14-15, 21 NLT)

-Add to that—200 large gold shields and 300 small gold shields in Solomon's palace. Man, he totally wrecked that command!

- d. Finally, God said that the king was to be careful keep a copy of these instructions for kings with him at all times:

This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. (Deuteronomy 17:19 NLT)

-How did Solomon score?

Then the king made a huge throne, decorated with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps and a rounded back...No other throne in all the world could be compared with it! (1 Kings 10: 18ff NLT)

- People were already intimidated by Solomon's power, intelligence and money—but that wasn't enough. He wanted it to be clear that he was superior—way above them. In this case, they had to cower beneath five feet of gold and ivory to see him!

- e. One more characteristic. Moses, in his last message, makes God's will very clear in how to treat foreigners.

...[God] He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:18b-19 NLT)

-How did Solomon score on this one?

Solomon took a census of all foreigners in the land of Israel, like the census his father had taken, and he counted 153,600. He assigned 70,000 of them as common laborers, 80,000 as quarry workers in the hill country, and 3,600 as foremen. (2 Chronicles 2:17-18 NLT)

-He enslaves them; uses them.

- f. Did anyone notice the change of heart in Solomon? At the beginning of his reign, Solomon is saying things like, “God, I’m just a little kid. I need help! All I want to do is serve the people well.” 20 years later he has taken the gifts and blessings **God** gave him to set himself up like a little god.

-The question is—**Why?** As impressive as Solomon was, he struggled with something we all can relate to. Peer pressure. Just doing what seemed normal in his world—what all the other kings were doing. The Bible calls it **the world-system**. Translated, it’s simply **the way most people think**.

-Think about Solomon’s stables for a minute. What’s the big deal about importing horses and chariots from Egypt? His people were to trust in God—and Solomon was in essence saying, “Uhhh, **God** seems a little ethereal—so trust ME!”

-And what about Solomon’s wives and concubines? Women in that culture were treated like property. God wanted his people to be different; He wanted women to have the dignity He had created them to have. He said, “A man will leave his father and mother, be united with his wife, and the **two** will become **one**.” What kind of message and what kind of precedent do you think Solomon set by collecting wives like hockey cards? By the way, how do you love, cherish, unite and become one 1000 wives? You can’t.

-In the way he amassed money and stuff, strutted around in pomp and circumstance, treated foreigners like machines to build his empire, He did what all kings did—but he did it **BETTER**.

4. I don’t think Solomon **ever** intended to end up where he did. He just...well...**drifted**. Drifting is quiet. Slow. It creeps up on us. And you **never** drift **toward** God. Think about Solomon’s connecting with God. God spoke to him in a dream. He saw the glory of God fill the temple he built. He felt the Spirit breath in him when he wrote portions of the Bible.

-And yet by the end of his life, he’s worshipping his wives pagan gods--defying every law God had ever set up to govern the behavior of kings! What **happened?** I think he forgot **Who** gave him all he had. He forgot that he was called to **serve** God—and his people.

- a. In his personal journal, Ecclesiastes, we get a glimpse of what was actually going on in Solomon’s heart. Surprisingly, it sounds more like the Rolling Stones hit, **Can’t Get No Satisfaction** than it does Jesus. It would appear that with all he had, Solomon was bored.

-He openly says in the opening chapters, "I crammed my life with pleasure, laughter, great projects, houses, gardens, slaves, livestock, women, success...

But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. (Ecclesiastes 2:11 NLT)

This man who had an insatiable appetite for learning and experience—as well as money, sex and power—ended up as a bitter, cynical king who **hated** his gold-plated life.

- b. Solomon drifted to a point that the Bible goes back to again and again and again

...his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. (1 Kings 11:4 TNIV)

-And he drifted into the very thing God hated most; the worship of pagan gods. The final comment, spiritually, about Solomon is sad:

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. (1 Kings 11:9 TNIV)

-Who would ever **dream** that God was once so pleased with him that He said, “Solomon—ask for anything you want and I’ll give it to you!” Who would ever **dream** that Solomon, with all his wisdom, would put the **gifts** before the **Giver**?

- c. That tragedy is that if you read Israel’s history from this point on you realize that Solomon started them on a trajectory that they never really recovered from. The kingdom split in two—and both went downhill. There’s a **very** telling event in the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon’s son. Remember the 500 hand-crafted gold shields that Solomon put in his palace as a status symbol of his wealth and power? Listen to this:

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. (1 Kings 14:25-27 TNIV)

5. Let’s talk about you and me! Several years ago, our family boat was taking a small excursion on Pigeon Lake in our 12 foot green fiberglass fishing boat. Believe me, with our whole family in it—it sat pretty darn low in the water. Well, when we hit the wake of a larger boat, the front end dipped under the water. The person who happened to be sitting there got a wet backside. Now, I won’t tell you **who** it was, but Lori was pretty upset!

-So with a front end full of water, we were even **lower** in the water, which meant that we had to negotiate carefully toward the shore—where we pulled the boat out. God whispered in my ear that day. He said, “Ken, get a bigger boat!”

- a. Like my little boat in the lake, you and I have to live and navigate carefully in the world system. God doesn’t ask **us** to **leave** the world system. Instead, He calls us to join **Him** in His Mission of bringing everyone to Himself—and making all

things right. He's placed His Spirit in us—Who gives us all we need to influence others and the world system we find ourselves in.

- b But when we make our choices based on the values of the system--instead of living out God's values **in** it—we swamp the boat. Eventually, the boat is compromised; it becomes totally **of** the water--not **in** the water. Sooner or later it's going down! Even the Titanic went down when it ceased being **in** the water—and became **of** the water.

-Jesus said that when you call Him Lord--but live by the rules and values of the world system—and live for your **own** mission—you lose your soul and sabotage **God's** mission.

6. Know what the core issue with Solomon was? The kind of king God was calling him to be was way, **way** different than the kind of king every other country had. Ultimately, he had to make a decision, “Will I beat all the other kings at their own game—and impress them—or will I show the nations how God leads?”

-We have a decision to make. It's a values decision. A score card decision. Whose values do you follow? Who, really, are you trying to impress? Which score card will you use in deciding whether your life is successful...or not?

- a. John, an early leader in the Jesus movement said:

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. (1 John 2:15-17 NLT)

- b. There's another question—and it's extremely important. Who's boss? Where do you get your cues from in terms of how to treat people, use your time, spend your money and satisfy your desires? Who tells you what's important and what's not? See, if you **drift** in this area, it'll be TV. Friends. The people around you on any given day.

-See, like Solomon, God has made the guidelines for life very clear. And we all answer to Him.

7. The actual situations Solomon faced 3000 years ago were very different—but not the actual issues behind them. For example, we aren't tempted to import horses and chariots from Egypt—but we **do** have to decide where we will find our security.

-The world system says that security is found by accumulating money, success and power. Jesus told us to not be anxious and worry about the things we need; that our Father watches over us more closely than we watch over our own children. Who's

right? Would people watching your life know that you're depending on God? Is it obvious by how you live, how you work, and by how well you sleep?

- a. Most of us aren't tempted to have 1000 wives—or husbands. We have enough trouble with **one!** But the issue behind this is how we handle our sexuality and our relationships with the opposite sex. How many of you think there **might** be a difference between what God says about this—and what the world system says.

-This is **powerful** stuff. Let it get off track, and it can thoroughly humiliate you and destroy your life. And that's why God has put some pretty high walls around it—like restricting it to a marriage between a man and a woman. Period.
-The world system says, "That's **ridiculous!** No one can live like that!" And that means that you have to decide who's lying—and who's telling the truth. Will you believe God—or will you just float downstream on this issue?

- b. There's a third issue. Solomon had to decide how he was going to get his work done and build monuments to himself. He chose to oppress the aliens. The foreigners. And this leaked into how he treated his own people. The Israelites were so fed up with his heavy handed ways that they demanded change from Solomon's son. When he refused—the entire kingdom ripped in half.

-How we treat the aliens, the people who are different, the people who don't fit in—matters **deeply** to God. Friends, when he watches people who are vulnerable get taken advantage of or used, His blood boils! God says, "When you love them and help them and show compassion to them—you are loving, helping and showing compassion to **Me!**" And so, we have to decide who writes the rules on how others get treated—God, or our culture.

- c. There's another area the deeply affected Solomon—and became the symbol of his kingdom. **Gold!** He pursued it—and he amassed a **lot** of it! For us—it's money. We are so immersed in a consumer culture—it's **very** hard to distinguish ourselves from it. And life can very easily become a mission to accumulate and consume, accumulate and consume. Food. Houses. Cars. TVs. Computers. Boats. And just...**stuff!**

-See, it's very easy to look at Solomon's life and think, "Solid gold tableware? Gold shields? **Really! That's just too much!**" But on a smaller scale—at least in the eyes of our world—we can appear just as extravagant. Why? Because it's just...normal. The world system tells us that our money and how much we have brings happiness. A sense of security. It's a symbol of how successful you are. Jesus gave a **very** different message. He told us to be careful with it--that there's more joy, peace, happiness and comfort in giving than receiving.

*The world system says we are **owners**; the Bible says we're just managers.

*The world system says, "**Rich is good!**" The Bible says that the love of money is at the root of all **kinds** of evil. That in the pursuit of more, we can lose our souls.

And that means we'll have to make a choice about who's lying--and who's telling the truth. Solomon's money—and he had a boatload of it—twisted his value system.

8. The first little church we pastored in Emporium, Pennsylvania, had two steel cables stretched across the ceiling in the auditorium—basically to keep the walls from spreading out and falling down! I want you to imagine that there's a cable like that stretched across this room--and that it continues through the walls, across Canada—off into the galaxies into the light years of space.

-Got that picture in your mind? Now imagine that I could draw a dot on that cable with this Sharpie. That dot would accurately represent the 80 or 90 years you and I have--and how it compares to eternity. This life is just a dot; a tiny mark on a cable that extends to infinity.

-The question is, are you going to live for the dot--or the cable? Lot's of people pour their **entire** lives into the dot. The word that described Solomon's kingdom best is **gold**. Man, this guy **gold-plated** the dot! Solomon impressed **everyone** with all he accomplished, accumulated, and learned in the dot. Solomon **ruled** the dot—and wasted most of his life. I sometimes wonder if Jesus had Solomon in mind when He said, **You can gain the world and lose your soul.**

-Solomon's parting words—and the end of his journal of wasted years—give me hope that he turned back to God. He said:

Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NLT)

-Solomon, wisest man who ever lived, tried it all in a marathon of money, sex and power—and said, "It's meaningless; it's a waste of life!" Will you believe Him? Will you give God the place He deserves and asks for—first place? Or not. You have to choose. But be careful, because **everything's** at stake!