

01.08.21

Solomon and Jeremiah on Works of Grace by Ben M.
Ephesians 3

Solomon was the person who built the temple. He saw it going up. Jeremiah saw it coming down. It was destroyed several hundred years after Solomon. While we think about these two lives I want us to think about the message of works and grace: the things we do for God and the things that God does for us, his grace.

Be wise: What is reasonable for you to expect to know about another person? What we know about others comes from what they say and what others say about them. We also see what people do. This is how we have been able to build up a picture of this very important person, King Solomon. We get a chance to hear Solomon in his own words in the books he authored: primarily in the book of Proverbs we learn of his clear understanding of what is wise and what is foolish. He's a very moral man concerned about the difference between right and wrong. In the book of Ruth he shows himself to be a great romantic story teller. He is interested in how God is at work in history and in romantic relationships. In Job he is not afraid to delve into deep, dark philosophical thought about the wisdom of God in the face of serious trials. The Song of Solomon exposes Solomon's lyrical side with music, poetry and romance. Then we see his melancholy in Ecclesiastes. It is an honest book where he confesses that he chased after many foolish things. All these things, added together, show us a picture of a genius at work. We see the breadth of the man with all his God-given extraordinary gifts. Knowing God can put a depth into your life that makes you wise in a lot of these areas covered by Solomon.

Be a temple-builder: What do others say about Solomon? Ezra wrote 1st & 2nd Chronicles. He writes a lot of good things about his hero Solomon because Solomon built the temple. "I [David] had in mine heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, ...But God said to me, You will not build a house for my name, because you have been warrior, and have shed blood. ...And he said unto me, Solomon your son will build my house" (1Chron 28:2&6) In the last verses of 2 Chron. Ezra describes how God commissioned King Cyrus to have the temple rebuilt at the end of the captivity. (2 Chron. 36:23) Ezra is saying that it is an amazing thing to build the house of God. Okay, there are a lot of practical things to do with buildings but Ezra's message is 'build up the people of God' because they have a special calling as worshipers to testify to the name of God in the earth. The people of God whom he is calling by name have a great destiny to do a great work for his honour.

Confess your sin: The other books that talk about Solomon are 1 and 2 Kings, brought together by Jeremiah. He writes about 100 years before Ezra just as the exile begins. Jeremiah, the truth telling prophet, tells us things about Solomon that we have to know but no one else will say. Kings 11:1 "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." Solomon sinned by walking in the opposite direction from where God had called him to walk. Solomon may have been a great wise king but he did evil in the sight of the Lord. As a result the lord started to raise up enemies against Israel. (11:14) Living under Solomon's reign could be really unpleasant. When his son became king he was told, "Your father [Solomon] put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labour and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." (1 Kings 12:4) The whole nation suddenly splits. (12:16) Two tribes against ten. Civil war broke out because of Solomon's sin. The straight-talker, Jeremiah believes we have to talk about the problem of sin and its consequences even in the lives of our heroes. Within a few short years the treasures of the temple were all gone. (1 Kings 14:25-26) Solomon built the temple by his wisdom but he destroyed it by his sin.

Trust God's Grace: Despite all our good works we carry in us something that is fundamentally destructive. If our confidence is in our works, it's only a question of time before judgement makes clear that all those things are as filthy rags; they are worthless. Of course this doesn't mean we shouldn't be wise and build the house of God. But if you are doing these things in order to win favour with God, you have missed a fundamental truth. Do your good works but know that you cannot exchange them for the favour of God. We can only find favour with God through God's grace. It is a free gift independent of anything we do. If grace is the only way we have hope. So, be encouraged. The first time Solomon is mentioned in the Bible is 2 Samuel 12: 24&25. The lord named him (through Nathan the prophet) Jedidiah which means 'loved by God.' This tiny little squiddy baby who knew no good or evil, had no wisdom, had not yet built the temple was loved by God even from his birth. It's important to know that God loves you from your birth. "This amazing love raises us up in Christ because he is so rich in mercy. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy ...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God: not by works, so that no one can boast." God is merciful to broken sinners. What a wonderful God we serve!! Jeremiah writes from his suffering in the ash-heap in Lamentations, (3:19) "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." He knows God is gracious and good so that whatever we suffer 'He loves me.' "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." It's not about us, it's all about Him and his grace .

What sign has God given to us of his love? John 3:16 "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." Trust the grace of God. 'God will hold me fast.'