

1 Kings 11:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

Analysis

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. This tragic verse marks Solomon's spiritual decline after decades of wisdom and faithfulness. The phrase 'when Solomon was old' (le'et ziknat Shlomoh, לַעֲתַת זִקְנַת שְׁלֹמֹה) suggests that apostasy often comes through gradual compromise rather than sudden rebellion. The verb 'turned away' (natah, נָטָה) describes a bending or inclining, indicating subtle drift rather than abrupt rejection.

The role of Solomon's foreign wives in his apostasy fulfills the warning of Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and demonstrates the spiritual danger of intimate relationships with those who don't share covenant faith. These marriages, often political alliances to secure peace with neighboring nations, brought pagan worship practices into Solomon's household and eventually into Israel's religious life. Love and influence intertwined with political convenience created conditions for compromise.

The comparison with David's heart reveals the standard: wholehearted devotion to Yahweh. The phrase 'perfect with the LORD' (shalem im-YHWH, שָׁלֵם עִם־יְהוָה) means complete, undivided, fully devoted. Though David sinned grievously, he never served other gods or sponsored idolatry. Solomon's divided heart—

attempting to honor both Yahweh and foreign deities—violated the first commandment and the Shema's call for exclusive love of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). This apostasy would lead directly to the kingdom's division under Rehoboam.

Historical Context

Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (11:3) primarily resulted from political marriages sealing alliances with surrounding nations. Ancient Near Eastern diplomacy regularly used royal marriages to cement treaties and ensure peace. Each wife likely brought her household gods and religious practices, expecting accommodation for her worship. Solomon's construction of high places for Chemosh (Moabite god) and Molech (Ammonite god) near Jerusalem (11:7) demonstrates the extent of his compromise.

The timing 'when Solomon was old' suggests this occurred later in his 40-year reign, perhaps in the final decade (c. 940-930 BCE). The gradual accumulation of foreign wives and the subtle shift in priorities demonstrate how spiritual decline often happens imperceptibly over years. What began as political pragmatism evolved into personal participation in idolatry. Ecclesiastes, traditionally attributed to Solomon's later life, may reflect his disillusionment after pursuing wisdom, pleasure, and achievement apart from exclusive devotion to God.

This apostasy violated explicit biblical warnings. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 outlined kingship regulations prohibiting multiple wives specifically because they would 'turn away his heart' (17:17). Solomon knew these commands but rationalized disobedience through political necessity and personal desire. His case demonstrates that knowledge without obedience leads to spiritual disaster. The wisest man who ever lived became an idolater through gradual compromise.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What areas of gradual compromise or tolerated disobedience in your life might become footholds for greater spiritual decline if left unaddressed?
2. How do your closest relationships either strengthen or weaken your devotion to God, and what changes might be necessary to guard your heart?
3. What practices of spiritual vigilance and self-examination can help ensure your heart remains 'perfect' (whole, undivided) toward God throughout life's stages?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּהֲרֹג H1961	לָעֵת H6256	זָקֵן H2209	שְׁלֹמֹה H8010	בְּנָשָׁיו H802	הָטָה H5186
	For it came to pass when	was old	Solomon	that his wives	turned away
אֶת H853	כְּלֹב־ב H3824	אַחֲרָי H310	אֱלֹהִים H430	אֲחֵרִים H3808	וְלֹא H1961
	and his heart	after	gods	other	and his heart
					H3824
שְׁלֵמָה H8003	עִם H5973	יְהוָה H3068	אֱלֹהִים H430	כְּלֹב־ב H3824	דָּוִד H1732
was not perfect		with the LORD	gods	and his heart	of David
					his father
					H1

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 9:4 (References David): And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments:

1 Kings 8:61 (References God): Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (References God): And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the

thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

1 Kings 11:6 (References Lord): And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.

Deuteronomy 17:17 (Parallel theme): Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

1 Kings 11:2 (References God): Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

2 Chronicles 17:3 (References Lord): And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim;

2 Chronicles 34:2 (References Lord): And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left.