When I started, I was the best king of Israel. By the time I finished, I was the worst king of Israel. Every Jew who has ever lived should spit in disgust at the sound of my name. My name is King Solomon, and I'm sure you have heard a lot about me.

One of the most dangerous things any monarchy can do is make it unclear as to who will succeed its leaders upon their death. You are probably used to thinking that a king's firstborn son is always the successor. In my time, no such rule had been established, so the position was up for grabs as King David aged…and there were a lot of people interested in the final results.

My father, King David, had at least twenty sons by his many wives and concubines. His firstborn son, Amnon, was murdered by his third son, Absalom. Absalom was killed during his rebellion against King David. There is little record of the second son, so it is presumed that he died at a young age. That left the fourth son, Adonijah, in line by age. Although Adonijah tried to claim the throne, King David put an end to his efforts and named me as his successor.

I am the second son of David by his wife, Bathsheba. Bathsheba's first son died as a young infant as God's punishment for David's committing adultery with her, and for murdering her first husband, Uriah.

Although David had promised Bathsheba that I would succeed him, it is unclear whether that was God's preferred choice or my mother using her good looks and charm. However, I did succeed David when he crowned me as king shortly before he passed away after ruling Israel for forty years.

There was the proverbial good news and bad news awaiting me as king. I had to deal harshly with three people. The pretender-to-the-throne, my half-brother, Adonijah, was given leniency by me, but broke the rules and I executed him. The commander of David's army, Joab, conspired with Adonijah and had to be punished for his past crimes, so I had him put to death. Shimei, who had insulted my father while he was fleeing from Absalom, also chose to disregard the rules of his probation, and I had him put to death.

Overall, the good news was that my father had thoroughly subjugated the enemies of Israel and all of the surrounding countries. Our country was at peace, and tributes and treasures flowed into our country so we were very, very wealthy.

Another outstanding piece of good news was that my father had amassed a huge amount of treasure that would easily allow me to build a fabulous temple for God, and an extravagant palace for myself. It took me seven years to build the temple, but almost twice as long to build my palace.

My kingship started out on a very good foundation. In a dream, God told me that I could have anything I wanted. I asked only for wisdom in governing God's people. God was so pleased with this unselfish request that he granted me great wisdom *and* great riches.

I finished building the temple and palace, and the Lord appeared to me a second time. He told me that he had consecrated the temple, and that his name, eyes, and heart would be there forever. That promise was conditional. God also told me that if I walked before him with integrity and obedience, that my line would be established forever. If, I or my descendants chose to turn from God and not be obedient, he would cut off the Israelites from the land and reject the temple.

Simple, right? All my descendants and I had to do was walk with integrity and obedience to God. I started doing so with the best of intentions.

My wisdom became the stuff of legends. I was the wisest person in the world, and was capable of talking about any subject. People from all nations came to listen to my wisdom. Most people know the story of me finding the true mother of a baby by threatening to cut it in half. Most people know that I had more knowledge than any other man of my time. People from all over the world came to listen to me, including the Queen of Sheba.

But even my wisdom was not enough to protect me from my riches. My first use of riches was to build God's temple and all its furnishings. God was very happy with the results of building his house. He might not have been quite so happy that I spent so much on my own house. After that, I just kept amassing wealth as it flowed in.

Hundreds of years before my time, Moses had commanded that when Israel had a king, he must not acquire a great number of horses, especially from Egypt; not take many wives or his heart will be led astray; and, not accumulate large amounts of silver or gold.[1]

I clearly violated the third of those commands by accumulating large amounts of silver and gold. In fact, silver was so common under my command that it was considered a common stone.[2] That excess of wealth might have been excused because God had granted it to me as a blessing.

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[1] Deut. 17:14-17

[2] 1 Kings 10:27

But, one of my first uses for my wealth was to accumulate a great number of horses, especially the really fine horses from Egypt.[3] I had twelve thousand horses. So many that I created special cities in which to house them and my chariots.[4] As you can guess, this not only cost a huge amount of money to upkeep, but also started turning my trust from God to trusting in my own army.

I should have known better. My father, David, did that same thing when he ordered a census to count his fighting men,[5] and God got so angry that he sent a plague to Israel that killed 70,000 people. I made God even more angry than my father, but God did not react as quickly.

Worse than any of those things, though, I started accumulating many wives. How many? My father, David, had at least eight wives. I had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines. My wives and concubines came from many countries and worshiped many gods. Through them, my heart was turned from the true God to many false gods.[6]

Since my wives were of royal birth, they were obviously from different countries and different races. This violated God's decree that we Jews not intermarry with other races.[7] So why? Why did I marry so many wives of royal birth? In my wisdom, I was sure that marrying them was a diplomatic way of having peace treaties with all of those countries. Rather than follow my father's example of trusting God and having a powerful army, I decided to trust in my diplomatic skills. This would turn out to be disastrous for Israel.

My wives influenced me greatly, and I was the one who chose to turn my heart away from the true God. I didn't just *barely* turn away from God, but I did it with fervor. I followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians. I followed Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. On a hill east of Jerusalem, I even built a high place for Molek and for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab who required detestable types of sacrifices. I did these sorts of things for all of my wives, though against what I knew was right. My heart completely turned from God.

This is why I was the worst king of Israel; I introduced worship of false gods to the Israelites so powerfully that they never fully recovered. I violated the terms of the deal I had made with God in my second vision.

Because I turned away from God, he punished me and my people as he said he would. He was intent that we would turn from our wicked ways and become his people. I knew that drill. As I

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[3] 1 Kings 10:28

[4] 1 Kings 9:19

[5] 2 Samuel 24

[6] 1 Kings 11:1-13

[7] 1 Kings 11:2

once wrote, “Don’t fail to discipline your child. Punish your child with a rod and he will not die.”[8]

God determined that the kingdom would be partially torn away from the line of my family, and he raised up adversaries to my rule, both internally and externally.
One of those adversaries was Hadad the Edomite. He and his raiders were a constant torment to my rule from Edom. Another adversary was Rezon. From Damascus, he and his men were a constant menace to my rule in the country of Aram.

It sounds like Hadad and Rezon were not that big of a deal. They only controlled a small portion of the land in my empire. However, the portion that they controlled was over parts of the important trade routes known as the King’s Highway and the Via Maris. So, they had the capability to disrupt trade and keep my military busy. However, they were not my biggest problem.

I had massive public works projects as I tried to fortify and grow my kingdom.. In order to accomplish those projects, I made slaves of many foreigners and conscripted Israelites. One of the young men who helped manage a project was Jeroboam. He was so diligent that I put him in charge of the whole labor force of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

One day, as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, he was met by Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh. Shiloh had lost its importance because it no longer housed the Ark of the Covenant, but it continued to be the home of prophets and priests. Ahijah told Jeroboam that God was going to split Israel into two pieces. One piece would have ten tribes and be led by Jeroboam, while the other piece would only have one tribe and would be led by my descendants. The tribe of Levi, the priests, would be split between the two. The split was to occur after my death. Like me, Jeroboam was instructed to be faithful to God and follow his commandments, or Jeroboam and his descendants would lose their kingdom, too.

When I found out about Ahijah’s prophecy, I tried to kill Jeroboam. But, he fled to Egypt and stayed out of my reach. However, he was a constant reminder that my days were numbered, and that God was going to punish me and my descendants for my unfaithfulness.

You may have noticed that there is no prophet associated with my story. I did not have a prophet to help keep me in line. I thought I was so wise that I could guide myself. “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their own perversity.”[9]I did not listen to my own proverb.

Many people consider my rule to be the Golden Age of Israel. We dominated the countries around us, there were no major empires that threatened us, and we were at peace. We had a

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[8] Proverbs 23:14

[9] Proverbs 11:3

new, fabulous temple that was finer than anything that any other country had for their gods. My palace was extravagant beyond belief. Our country was in an economic boom and we had massive public works projects that would make life much better for the Israelites. The whole world envied Israel and me.

However, we were a house built on sand. The high costs of my excessive lifestyle led to higher and higher taxes, and to my forcing people into virtual slavery. Some of the enemies that my father had dominated were growing in strength. Many Israelites were led by me into idolatry, and no longer worshiped God.

When I became king, Israel was at its zenith. When I died, after forty years of rule, the kingdom was falling off a precipice to its destruction because of my many mistakes. King Solomon. That is why all Jews who ever lived should spit at the sound of my name.