

Where Do You Keep Your Egyptian Wife?

¹¹Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, "My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy." - 2 Chronicles 8:11

For me, King Solomon is one of the Bible's most perplexing characters. The Solomon I learned about in Sunday School was renowned for his wisdom. God would have given him anything, but Solomon asked for the knowledge and wisdom to govern the nation. When two women came to him disputing the maternity of a child, the king was able to discern which woman was moved by a mother's true love and which one was just trying to win a dispute. Solomon did not pray for riches or fame, but because he made a noble request of the LORD, he was blessed with riches and honor as well. Solomon appeared to be one of the all-time great kings of Israel.

As I got a little older and learned a bit more of Solomon's story, I distinctly remember being crushed to learn how the sheen on Solomon's story tarnished very quickly. The decline began as Solomon's power and prestige increased. He married many foreign wives and took for himself even more concubines. Idolatry was thusly introduced into Israel. Solomon's reign was marked by numerous important achievements, particularly, when it came to construction projects that built up the majesty and prestige of Israel. Some conscription of labor may have been necessary, but, somewhere, in the midst of these great accomplishments, Solomon lost his perspective and became rather despotic.

One of Solomon's greatest accomplishments was to build a temple for the LORD in Jerusalem. Not only did he design it and oversee its construction, but he was also central in leading the people in worship when the temple was dedicated. It was in the aftermath of this great event that Solomon's sense of what was holy compelled him to find another town for his Egyptian wife to live, for the City of David housed the temple which housed the Ark of the Covenant.

It is difficult to judge Solomon's reaction to this peculiar development. Perhaps, Solomon should be credited for recognizing the holiness of Jerusalem as well as the inappropriateness of his foreign wife living there. But, any reaction would be awkward. Divorcing her and sending her back to Egypt would have been sticky politically, not to mention, gray in terms of what best honored the Law of Moses. On the other hand, keeping her around created its own set of problems. Even Solomon's motives were unclear. Was he trying to make the best of a bad situation, or, was he attempting to "compartmentalize" the godly and ungodly areas of his life?

Obviously, the best remedy to this dilemma was the one Solomon failed to observe early in his reign. He should have honored God in the first place when he was entertaining the bright idea of taking this woman, not to mention, all the others, as wives.

That's what happens when believers fail to grasp the priority of purity. Though God is faithful and just to forgive our sins when we repent of them, they come with baggage. We might find ourselves with things in our lives that, at best, we cannot figure out what to do about and, at worst, we attempt to compartmentalize away from our higher and more significant pursuits. Though our guilt can be removed, the consequences of foolish and rebellious choices can plague us for a lifetime. It is always better to opt for obedience when we know the will of God than to have to figure out later how to salvage a situation that has no truly good solution.

If you can, get rid of your Egyptian wife. Better yet, don't marry her in the first place.

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