

Spiritual Risk

Robert Forto

School of Business, Liberty University

BMAL 714

Dr. Daniel Rogers

May 2, 2021

Authors Note

By submitting this assignment, I attest this submission represents my own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet source. I understand I am responsible for knowing and correctly utilizing referencing and bibliographical guidelines.

Abstract

People from every walk of life are susceptible to risk. In biblical times rulers and kings were no exception. This paper examines King Solomon's reign through the lens of spiritual risk and a risk management model as outlined in the current scholarly literature and biblical research. Scripture illustrates the fulfillment of God's blessing of providing Solomon with the wisdom for administering justice in several parables in 1 Kings. Rather than following the divine voice that God supplied to Solomon, he instead clouds his legacy as a nation's great temple builder, and the latter became his downfall through his continued perilous endeavors. Solomon's lack of obedience to the Lord became his ultimate weakness when he surmised that, even through his infinite wisdom, his actions could not be more significant than the will of God. The research will show that Solomon was not an effective risk manager and that he did more to avoid risk rather than welcome it. Also, a definition of spiritual risk is outlined and correlated with the story of King Solomon, and current risk practices and recommendations are given on how businesses and organizations can use this model in developing a risk management plan.

Keywords: spiritual risk, King Solomon, risk and the Bible, risk management

Introduction

Merida (2015) postulates, what should Kings do? In 1 Kings 2:1-4, David's final words give Solomon a 'spiritual charge' urging him to obey God's word (Merida, 2015). Solomon is tasked to walk in the laws of the Lord, meditate on it, and experience blessing (Merida, 2015). Solomon is asked to abolish the threats to the kingdom, focus on the covenant, and be vigilant and not passive (Kings 2:5-9). King Solomon is known to be the wisest of all kings (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). People came from all the nations to hear Solomon's wisdom, as did all the kings of the earth who had listened to his wisdom (1 Kings 5:11-14). Part of this wisdom was to realize the risk and avoid losses. While one could argue that Solomon managed risk well in some areas and asked others to do the same, God expects his people to manage risk carefully. God does not gift us with this expectation so that we can lose it because of laziness, naivety, or foolishness. God expected Solomon to do his part and, in turn, have Solomon teach his people to be prudent and good stewards.

Scripture illustrates the fulfillment of God's blessing of providing Solomon with the wisdom for administering justice in several parables in 1 Kings (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). In 1 Kings 3, God defines a wise heart as one that can discern between good and evil (Benz, 2016). This wisdom can be paralleled with risk management and how it can play a role in stewardship, success in business, life, and financial endeavors. Solomon was an example of excess and took foolish risks. Proverbs 22:26 expounds on this by advancing, "do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts security for debts." Even though this is a time in biblical history to amass wealth and to help others in need, offering charity and even pride, all of these can be hazards of risk. Financial indiscretion is just one example of risk taken on by Solomon, and there were many

more. Some scholars will argue that Solomon may have been the wisest leader but ultimately became one of the worst (Friedman & Friedman, 2019).

King Solomon's Reign

Solomon's life contains both positive and negative examples of wisdom. Merida (2015) argues that Solomon is portrayed positively until 1 Kings 11 even though there were warning signs of greater and greater sins. In 1 Kings 3:3, it can be seen that Solomon was a man with a divided heart (Merida, 2015). Solomon's intentions were righteous and honorable during the beginning of his reign. Still, as it continued, he began to make selfish choices and eventually introduced risk into his relationship with God. He disobeyed God by taking on more than 700 wives, he practiced idolatry, he built a lavish palace, and his downfall was eventually a gateway to Apostasy.

Wright (2017) outlines the risk management process typically used in most organizations as a model where it begins to understand the events or actions that could negatively impact the organization (p. 21). This understanding is followed by an understanding of the risks, an attempt to measure the extent of the exposure to the company, and finally, find mitigating processes to minimize this exposure. When we think of Solomon and the risks he took in his reign as king, it is easy to understand what went wrong in the process. Bonder and Strawn (2020) argue that a survey of the narrative of 1 Kings reveals that Solomon did follow the model outlined in Wright (2017), at least at first. Solomon organized a carefully controlled and substantial infrastructure with administrative centralization (Bonder & Strawn, 2020). Then things went haywire when Solomon began to amass worldly pleasures instead of being obedient to God along with a burgeoning regime to the tyranny of Pharaoh and other means of idolatry and coercion (Bonder & Strawn, 2020). Along with Solomon's rampant predilection for intermarriage, the stockpiling

of gold, and taxing his people into slavery are all examples of a man that did not fully understand the detriments of his risks. Or did he even care?

Rather than following the divine voice that God provided to Solomon (1 Kings 6:11-13), he instead clouds his legacy as a nation's great temple builder, and the latter became his downfall. Solomon's lack of obedience to the Lord became his ultimate weakness when he surmised that, even through his infinite wisdom, his actions could not be more significant than the will of God. Guenter (2019) argues that this is confirmed in 1 Kings 11:11, as it says, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates." God gave Solomon all the means necessary to be a successful ruler and king, yet he disobeyed the covenant with the Lord through his risky and ill-gained endeavors.

Following Wright's (2017) process of, if 'X' were to happen, how long could an organization function, or if 'Y' were to happen, how would the process be affected? Solomon's downfall was predictable. In 1 Kings 11:1-3, Solomon could not plead for ignorance or accident, and he knew God's clear word was revealed in the Scriptures (Merida, 2015). Instead of mitigating the risks, Solomon continued to disobey his covenant with God deliberately. Sadly, Solomon's story began with the statement, Solomon loved the Lord: (1 Kings 3:3); and ends in tragedy, where his downfall caused devastating results (1 Kings 11:9-44; Merida, 2015).

Definition of spiritual risk

Spiritual risks are the challenges and obstacles that the church faces in keeping up with the word of God or being in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we tend to think that God has a future for us and everything is under his control. Knowing the future and putting trust in Him allows the faithful to build a set of expectations around our beliefs. Armed with the

premise that our future is destined, we can take risks, launch businesses and churches with a good deal of confidence that we are safely within the will of God and nothing can go wrong.

Fear, however, is a powerful motivator. As Christians, it is not uncommon for us to prevent the pain of missed expectations by avoiding or ignoring the risk or loss from our endeavors. Rather than taking steps to make the gains, we often live to prevent the losses. Job 3:25 (NIV) is an example of this fear. This verse has been taken in context to describe where Job continually made sacrifices for his family because he was afraid they might have sinned or cursed God in their hearts and judgment might fail. This judgment was what Job greatly feared, and it eventually cost him his family, possessions, and health (Job 1:6-12). Job did not know that God would bless him more at the latter end than at the beginning for his faithful endurance, but there can be no reward without risk. God does not want Christians to be as worried as Job. Philippians 4:6 (NIV) tells us that we need to be careful of nothing and not worry, but everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be known unto God. In turn, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:7).

Moreover, both the fear and the gift of understanding the word of God are also deeply rooted in our culture. O'Callaghan (2017) describes modern culture as an elevated, sophisticated one, containing a great variety of precious insights and strengths, with surprising adaptability and openness to absorb, clarify and unite. However, at the present moment, our culture is built on one without faith, and one that is willfully disconnected from that faith that leads to a pathology of individualism and ingratitude, as people attempt to live in isolation from the fellows, unprepared to recognize the world they live in and the privileges they enjoy as God's gifts (O'Callaghan, 2017). This suggests that Christians need to widen our scope of human rationality in two

directions: with others and toward others, other humans, and ultimately God, the sources of all goodness and truth (O'Callaghan, 2017).

Matthew 10:16 (NIV) suggests that Jesus taught us how to optimize our gospel spreading opportunities and that successful Christian living requires us to strike the optimal balance between the dove and the serpent. We must strive to be gentle without being pushovers, and we must be sacrificial without being taken advantage of. In short, we need to be aware of unscrupulous tactics from those that may wish us ill will and take the high road. Spiritual risk is real. Although we have a destiny, our future is not entirely scripted by God. We have many choices that we must understand the true nature of God and have the resolve to manifest a righteous path that is flexible and congruent with the word of God regarding exactly how we will arrive at our destination. Our destiny.

Conclusion

The literature is replete with examples of what spiritual risk is and how it can be defined. A study in 1999 found that spiritual risk is defined as having high spiritual needs and low spiritual resources to address those needs (Fitchett, 1999). Others have said that spiritual risk is built into our culture and its ever-changing need to change. The Bible is teeming with stories of Moses, Abraham, Job, Jesus, King Solomon, and others. These stories sew a common thread; God has a plan for the future. Humankind will face judgment and rewards in the end.

Solomon is an excellent example of how spiritual risk can be effective and ineffective at the same time. Many biblical scholars will argue that he was less effective. He desired wealth, promiscuity and broke the commandments with God by avoiding the risk of war but marrying into other cultures. Solomon may have been wise, but not without his failure. His story is an excellent example for all Christians. The Bible does not tell us that we have to play it safe,

always seek comfort, not take chances, or flee from fear constantly. Quite the opposite, as with Job and Solomon, there is no fear where there is no risk. Without faith, there is an absence of belief and happiness. Without faith, there is no relationship with God. Without that relationship, there is no pleasing God and no destiny.

In business, in faith, we can always find a reason why we should not take a risk in our personal lives and endeavors. It may not be the right time or the right situation. Solomon reminds us that if people wait for life to be perfect, opportunities will be missed. Business owners cannot wait for their ideal customers. A farmer cannot wait to sow his seeds, and a father cannot shield his son from the inequities of today's world. As Christians, we need to understand that faith glorifies God. Romans 4:20 (NIV) suggests that faithless acts are sin because they do not glorify God as trustworthy. In Corinthians 10:31 (NIV), Paul said, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." You cannot glorify God if you do not trust him.

What makes Solomon ineffective, despite his wisdom and solid advice, was his turning away from God. Solomon's struggles can be a thesis to all Christians and can be best described as a postscript to the book of Ecclesiastes: "Now all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Lastly, Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, "without faith, it is impossible to please Him." Without risk, there is no faith and the inability to follow God's word in all its glory.

If a recommendation can be gleaned from this as it relates to the story of Solomon, risk theory, and spirituality, it can go back to the dying words of King David to his son, "Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord God, and my God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished." (1 Chronicles 28:20 NIV) As this passage relates to risk, it can be surmised

that if you take a step of faith not knowing if the ground is still beneath your feet, if you put your trust in the Lord and do the work, God will continue to give you instructions. God is faithful to equip us with exactly what we need. He brings people into our lives to fortify us and encourage us. He allows us to take risks and helps us stand firm and ready by listening to God and following his ways; it will enable us to dig deep and lean on the strength of the Holy Spirit. The promise is that God will never leave us, and we need not fear, a trait that Solomon faltered with. God will help us see this through, no matter what risks we take.

References

- Benz, B. C. (2016). The ethics of the fall: Restoring the divine image through the pursuit of biblical wisdom. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 46(4), 191-199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107916664054>
- Bodner, K., & Strawn, B. A. (2020). Solomon and 666 (Revelation 13.18). *New Testament Studies*, 66(2), 299-312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0028688519000523>
- Friedman, H., & Friedman, L. (2019). What went wrong? Lessons in leadership from Solomon, the Bible's wisest and worst ruler. *The Journal of Values Based Leadership*, 12(1), 21. <https://doi.org/10.22543/0733.121.1237>
- Fitchett, G. (1999). Screening for spiritual risk. *Chaplaincy Today*, 15(1), 2-12.
- Guenther, K. E. (2019). The word of the Lord to the ruling houses in Samuel and Kings. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 62(2), 307-327.
- New International Version Bible. (2011). The NIV Bible. <https://www.thenivbible.com> (Original work published 1978)
- Merida, T. (2015). *Christ-Centered Expositions: Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Kings*. B & H Publishing Group.

O'Callaghan, P. (2017). Cultural challenges to faith: a reflection on the dynamics of modernity.

Church, Communication and Culture, 2(1), 25-40.

Wright, L. (2017) *People, Risk, & Security*. Pan MacMillian Ltd.