

SOLOMON'S SIN.

– DECEMBER 6. – 1 KINGS 11:4-13. –

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." – 1 Cor. 10:12.

AS Solomon was the wisest man, so also he was the most foolish man; for the greater the opportunity the greater the loss, and the greater the knowledge possessed the greater the sin in its misuse.

McLaren has truthfully said of Solomon: –

"There are many instances in history of lives of genius and enthusiasm, of high promise and partial accomplishment, marred and flung away, but none which presents the great tragedy of wasted gifts and blossoms never fruited in a sharper, more striking form than the life of the wise King of Israel, who, 'in his later days,' was 'a fool.' The goodliest vessel may be shipwrecked in sight of port.

"The sun went down in a thick bank of clouds, which rose from undrained marshes in his soul; and, stretched far up in the western horizon. His career in its glory and its shame preaches the great lesson which the Book of Ecclesiastes puts into his mouth as 'the conclusion of the whole matter:' 'Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.'"

(4-6) "When Solomon was old." We last saw him at forty entertaining the Queen of Sheba with his wisdom, and noted that at about that time the Lord appeared to him a second time to indicate that he had reached a crisis where he must choose the right or the wrong path of life – wisdom or folly. Solomon chose the wrong path. He gave himself up to self-gratification, to "every desire of his heart [mind]." The result was a premature old age, for he died about fifty-nine years old. We may suppose (verse 4) that Solomon was to be reckoned an old man from his fiftieth year onward; whereas really that should have been but the prime of his life had he walked in the ways of wisdom.

Contrary to the divine law (Deut. 17:17), Solomon multiplied wives till he had seven hundred. (Vs. 3.) Some of these "queens" were ladies of rank and refinement from the various royal families of surrounding nations, one being Pharaoh's daughter. Solomon in his wisdom was esteemed by them, and they in turn were esteemed by him, not only for their personality, but because of the court alliance and influence with other kingdoms which it cemented. Having slipped from the path of obedience to God and integrity of heart, Solomon fell readily under the influence of his young wives into the support of idolatry. We are not to suppose that he ceased to believe in the only true God and believed in the heathen gods and idols and nonsense; but that he came gradually to feel that he wished to please his various wives. This thought is borne out by verse six, which declares not that Solomon left the Lord, but that he went not fully after the Lord, and that he did that which was evil in the Lord's sight in sanctioning in any degree the idolatrous desires of his wives.

(7-8) Like all sins this one had its beginning – when Solomon built the high place or altar of Chemosh to satisfy his Moabitish wives; and what might be expected is told us in verse eight: that when one system of idolatry had been introduced, the other foreign wives claimed similar rights, privileges, altars, etc., for the divinities of their lands. In yielding to these Solomon no doubt had in mind the foreign maids and servants of these wives and yet more the visiting delegations of court representatives from those various lands which, finding altars and temples to their divinities, would praise Solomon for breadth of character. But very different was such praise from that of the Lord and from that of the Queen of Sheba, who recognized in her day Solomon's true wisdom in his fidelity to Jehovah God.

(9,10) The Lord's anger with Solomon was not a burst of fury nor a malicious anger. It was a righteous indignation against sin; and an anger of this sort is the only kind compatible with God's character. It is the only kind, therefore, that the children of God should cultivate or exercise. While anger in the nature of hatred, malice, strife, envy should

be put away by all who are seeking to be copies of God's dear Son, anger in the sense of righteous indignation against wrong-doing, sin in its various forms, is proper; and although it should be used with great moderation, backed by love, there are circumstances and conditions in which it would be wrong not to have righteous anger and use it.

(11,12) The rending of the bulk of the kingdom from the hand of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was a part of the penalty for Solomon's sin; yet it came in a natural way, and as the result of natural causes. The evil course which started in self-gratification and was manifested in the multiplication of wives and the gratifying of their desires for false religions did not stop there, but extended in other directions throughout Solomon's affairs and kingdom. He patterned his conduct more and more after other rulers of his day, selfishly augmented his own fortune, and ministered to his own desires and the desires of his numerous household, regardless of the interests of the Lord's people in whose interest and for whose happiness and welfare he should have sought to use the gifts of wisdom, influence and wealth bestowed upon him by the Lord. On the contrary, as we have seen (1 Kings 12:4,11), he bound heavy burdens upon the people.

The Jews as a people have always zealously guarded their liberties; and the spirit of liberty, as we have [R2068 : page 280] already seen, was the result of the measure of divine truth which had been granted them, which showed that the King upon the throne was as accountable as the peasant in the field to God the Judge of all. Hence the Israelites were prevented from believing, as did the heathen nations round about, that their kings were a kind of demi-god whose every wish was law; and hence, although we find no protest of the people against Solomon's departure from the Lord, nor against his erection of the altars for worship of false gods, we do find that they were disposed to resent Solomon's intrusion upon their personal rights and liberties. He divided the whole country into twelve districts, each of which was compelled to furnish contributions to the luxury of the royal palaces and court. He also established a system of forced labor in connection with the building of

roads, palaces, fortifications, immense gardens, reservoirs, etc. And while these public improvements were in many respects proper enough, the method of securing the labor was particularly distasteful to the [R2069 : page 280] Israelites, who were thereby reminded of the Egyptian slavery. Thirty thousand men were set to work to fell trees on Mount Lebanon and to work in quarries under Jerusalem, each division of ten thousand serving for one-third of a year; seventy thousand were made carriers and general laborers, while eighty thousand others were engaged as stone masons and carpenters; and it appears that in all there were thirty-two hundred overseers of this labor-army. The heavy work now done by machinery was in those days all done by physical strength. In all this Solomon only copied the methods of his day which treated the masses of mankind virtually as the slaves of the rulers. Besides the forces above mentioned, other levies were made for the royal army and general service. In the end the Israelites were learning under their wisest and greatest King what God, through Samuel, the prophet, had forewarned them they must expect. – See 1 Samuel 8:18.

(13) This verse was fulfilled through Jeroboam, who had been an officer in Solomon's industrial army. Partly from sympathy and largely through ambition, he sought to steal the hearts of the people away from Solomon and attempted a rebellion in Solomon's day, but contrary to the Lord's plan. (1 Kings 11:31.) It was after Solomon's death that Jeroboam, allying himself with the ten tribes of Israel, aroused a certain amount of animosity by pointing out that King Solomon, being of the tribe of Judah, had favored that tribe chiefly. He then joined with the chief men of the ten tribes in demanding of Rehoboam how he would conduct the kingdom, telling him that unless he promised reform from his father's methods and oppression they would revolt. Rehoboam refused to reform and they did revolt, and constituted a separate kingdom down to the time of the taking away into captivity by the King of Babylon, who took first the ten tribes and afterward the two tribes called Judah. Since the return from that captivity the distinction between Judah and Israel has not been maintained, and we find both the Lord and the apostles speaking of them, and applying prophecies to them, as "the twelve tribes," "the house of

Israel," "the twelve tribes [a part of whom were] scattered abroad" – not ten tribes scattered abroad and two tribes at home in their own land, but a part of the twelve tribes in Canaan (chiefly Judah), and the remainder of the *twelve tribes scattered abroad* and living in the various cities of the Gentiles; as for instance, those at Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, etc., to whom the apostles first preached the gospel when they went with it amongst the Gentiles. – Acts 16:13; 17:2,10; 18:8,19.

The statement here is that one tribe would be given to Solomon's son; and this is entirely consistent with the facts, for although sometimes called two tribes, yet really the remnant of the tribe of Benjamin (after it was almost destroyed) was absorbed into the tribe called Judah.

We may learn from this sad lesson of Solomon's fall, that it is not only important to begin life wisely in harmony with God, but equally necessary to continue it, and to end it so. We may learn also that the temptations and trials of life are not upon the young only, but rather that the strongest temptations are apt to come as we advance in life; and that for these we need the preparation of character well begun and cultivated, developed, strengthened by experience and endurance.

Another lesson respects the importance of marriage, and fully corroborates the Apostle Paul's statement, that while marriage is honorable, it should be only "in the Lord." Whoever has neglected this advice has either rued his neglect or by it has been led so far astray as to be unable to appreciate his own decline from godliness. Each Christian has in his own fallen members quite a sufficient downward tendency to fight against, without putting himself directly in the way of outside temptation, although he has the Lord's promise of grace sufficient for every time of need. If, neglecting the Lord's instruction, he surround himself with additional downward tendencies, by taking a husband or a wife not in the Lord – not seeking chiefly the Kingdom of God and setting his affections upon the things above, but upon the things beneath – he will surely find it greatly to his disadvantage, as did Solomon in the

taking of foreign wives – aliens to the divine promises and blessings, the commonwealth of Israel.

Another lesson is that wisdom and wealth, education and influence and great opportunities are sure to become snares and injurious, unless we are continually guided in their use by the wisdom which cometh from above. And the more of these talents we possess by nature or by acquisition, the more need we have for the divine grace provided in our Lord Jesus only, the more need to study and ponder and practise the exhortations to humility and godliness contained in his Word, and the more need to make full use of every other agency which he has provided for our blessing and help – "building one another up in the most holy faith."
