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SOLOMON'S KINGDOM DIVIDED.

– JULY 3. – 1 KINGS 12:16-25. –

"A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."
– Prov. 15:1.

SOLOMON'S wonderful reign was not an unmixed blessing: in it we see much of divine providence and guidance, such as Solomon had requested at the beginning of his reign, but in it also we see many marks of human imperfection and unwisdom. In so far as Solomon respected God, and sought to exercise his kingly office in harmony with the principles of the divine law, his reign was a success; but in so far as he followed his own judgment and sought to be cosmopolitan and to fashion his kingdom after worldly ideals, it was comparatively a failure from the divine standpoint, altho this made it the more renowned from the worldly standpoint.

Solomon was a man of broad ideas, and like other men of similar good mold in this respect, he was the more susceptible to the temptation to think the Lord's ways and methods narrow; and to seek to be more [R2324 : page 187] broad and liberal than the Almighty. His error along this line is particularly shown in his recognition of foreign religions, which, according to God's law, had no right to be recognized in any sense or degree, in Israel.

Women have always exercised a potent influence in the affairs of the world, and Solomon's deflection, and the consequent deflection of his kingdom, were due in large measure to his foreign wives and their natural attachment to the false religions of their fathers. Mismatching was one of the first of Solomon's steps in the wrong course: it was taken, no doubt, with a view to a closer relationship with surrounding nations and royal families. It was a worldly-wise step, but an unwise one from the standpoint of the Lord, who desired Israel to be his elect,

holy, and peculiar people, separate and distinct from all the families of the earth. – Amos 3:2.

Yes, from a worldly standpoint Solomon's reign was a marvel of success. At the time of his death he dominated and collected tribute from a territory nearly seven times the size of Palestine; his capital city had become enormously wealthy, so that the war shields of some of his soldiers were made of gold, while the record is that – "the king made silver in Jerusalem to be as stones for abundance." (1 Kings 10:27.) While he lived, his wisdom and fame and the glitter of his success held the entire nation loyally to him, notwithstanding the fact that his methods, by which these brilliant results were achieved, were in a considerable measure oppressive to the people. This was especially the case with those of his people who resided at a distance from the capital city, and who did not so particularly share in the wealth there accumulated, but more particularly shared the general burdens of taxation and conscription of service, by which the wealth was amassed. Consequently, at Solomon's death, when the glitter faded, his kingdom, established not upon the loving loyalty of the people, but upon his own magnetic power and wisdom, was ready to disintegrate.

As we have already pointed out* the original organization of Israel was practically that of a republic, in which the heads of the tribes exercised a sovereignty similar to Congress or Parliament. When the people desired a king like unto the nations around them, and God let them have their way, they nevertheless **[R2324 : page 188]** still clung to some extent to their original tribal custom. Hence it was, that upon the death of Solomon there was a meeting of these heads of tribes at Shechem; and Rehoboam, already recognized by the heads of his own tribe, Judah, presented himself at the meeting, expecting, as a matter of course, that he would be accepted as king by these representatives of all the other tribes. To his surprise, he was requested to state himself respecting the policy he would pursue if accepted as king; and it was clearly intimated to him that the rigor of his father's reign, which

accumulated wealth in the capital city at the expense of the remainder of the nation, would not be tolerated from him.

**MILLENNIAL DAWN, [VOL. I, Chap. 3.](#)*

King Rehoboam took three days to consider the matter with his counsellors. He first consulted the elders – probably the chief men of the tribe of Judah, who already had acknowledged him, and who probably had accompanied him to this council. Their counsel was wise, in that it advocated at least an outward deference to the just claims of the people; but, recognizing the fact that the young king was full of ambition to be as great as or greater than his father and to have no diminution of the revenues of the kingdom, they probably meant him to understand that their advice was that he should merely promise reforms, until he should have the endorsement of all the tribes and be fully established in the kingdom, when he might do as he pleased.

But Rehoboam also consulted the young men – his wealthy companions and friends, with whom he had grown up. Their advice was that to make promises of reforms would imply a weakness on the part of the king, and make the discontented people more self-assertive and more rebellious than ever; and that now was the proper time to state himself strongly, to put down his foot with authority, and to dare the people to cross his will. Probably proud of heart, and vain-glorious, this last foolish advice was most in accord with the king's sentiments. And it was followed. He gave in substance the message of the young men: "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins; and now, whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" ([1 Kings 12:10-14.](#)) The reference to whips and scorpions should be understood: it was the custom then, and is still the custom to a considerable extent in the far East, for the kings to draft the people to do service in the building of public works, kings' palaces, etc.; and these drafted men were treated for the time as the veriest slaves, being under taskmasters, who kept them up to the notch of diligence with whips. The scorpions referred to were scorpion whips,

which differed from other whips in that they had a stinger at the end of the lashes, consisting of a sharp-pointed piece of lead.

No wonder that king Rehoboam is noted as the foolish king; his unwise, boastful, vainglorious language, which no doubt was the abundant overflow of a heart in similar condition, which meant all that it boastfully said, caused him the loss of more than two-thirds of his dominion and subjects. The chiefs of the ten tribes promptly declared that Judah and Benjamin might have Rehoboam for their king, but that he was not acceptable to the remainder of the tribes. They accordingly chose one of their number, Jeroboam, who had once been one of Solomon's conscripts, and because of his natural ability as a manager of men had been made an overseer of a department of the government. It was he whom the Prophet Ahijah had already anointed to be king over the ten tribes, prophesying that he should yet occupy that position. – See 1 Kings 11:29-38.

Some one has said, "Solomon had a thousand wives but only one son, and he was a fool." His folly consisted in seeking advice from a wrong quarter. Had he recognized, as did his grandfather David and his father Solomon, that the throne of Israel was "the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord," his course should have been to seek counsel of the Lord, as did his father and his grandfather. But the fact is that Rehoboam's folly was really a part of his father's folly, for his mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess and idolater, for whom Solomon built, adjoining the Mount of Olives, and opposite the Temple of God, a temple to Moloch (a heathen divinity), the site of which is still pointed out to the traveller and known as "The Mount of Offence." Did not Rehoboam come by his folly honestly? Could we expect more of the son of a heathen mother, and of a father who, while worshiping the true God himself, was so lacking in firmness and principle in the conduct of the religious interests of his home?

Rehoboam's unwise decision in his affairs is but an illustration of the many unwise decisions by mankind in general in respect to various

questions of life, far reaching in their results. All cannot lose a kingdom, in the same sense, but each may win or lose another kingdom, in the sense signified by the poet, when he said:

"My mind to me a kingdom is."

Questions come before every intelligent person, at the threshold of maturer life, the decision of which, one way or the other, will have a bearing on all the remainder of the present life, and perhaps also a strong influence upon the interests of the life to come, provided for through the atonement. Happy and wise will be the choice, if the counsels of the Lord are sought and followed – less happy will be the conclusion [R2324 : page 189] if the wisdom of the world is sought and followed – disastrous will be the conclusion if the wisdom of the unwise and inexperienced be followed.

We have the Lord's word for it that the division of Israel into two parts or nations – the ten tribes, known by the original national name, Israel, and the two tribes thereafter known as Judah – was of his foreknowledge and arrangement. In some way the Lord saw that such a division would work favorably for the development of his purposes. We may, perhaps, surmise how it would be. The entire nation, while still loyal to Jehovah, had become permeated with what would to-day be termed "liberal views on religion" – views which tolerated, if they did not countenance, idolatry; and which gradually were undermining its interests in the special hope which God had set before that nation, that it, as the seed of Abraham, should be a peculiar people, separate from all the other nations and ready at the coming of Messiah to become his associates (his Bride) in the work of blessing and enlightening the world, and establishing them in the ways of righteousness and in the knowledge of the true God.

It was because this hope had grown faint, that the ten tribes were so ready to break the bonds of relationship which connected them with the tribe of Judah; from which tribe the prophets of the Lord had declared that Messiah, their great King, should ultimately come. The

loss of this faith meant the loss of cohesive power in that nation, and it does not surprise us that when the ten tribes had organized a separate government, had cut themselves loose from the royal tribe and family, and from the Temple and the opportunities of approach to the Lord through it – it does not surprise us that under these conditions, and the preparation of "liberal views on religion" which led to these conditions, the ten tribes speedily drifted into idolatry, and became more and more like the nations round about them.

So also it is with the Gospel Church: in proportion as the second coming of Messiah and the promises of a share in his Kingdom are kept in mind, and the **[R2325 : page 189]** contrast between the Church and the world is sharply drawn, so long will practical and vital Christianity prosper. – "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure."

As the example of a drunken father sometimes proves a most salutary lesson to his son, and as the gross corruption of Papacy led to and developed the Reformation movement, so the division of the Kingdom of Israel and the rapid progress of the ten tribes toward irreligion and idolatry had the effect, by contrast and suggestion, of awakening the people of Judah to a greater and more intelligent appreciation of the Kingdom hopes and divine blessings of which their kingdom was the representative. And the further the ten tribes went into idolatry the more the two tribes seem to have been quickened in religious fervor in upholding the sublime truths of which they were the representatives. This thought is the more forcibly impressed upon us when we remember that the ultimate decline of Judah – the two tribes – into idolatry, prior to their captivity, was after the ten tribes had gone into captivity a considerable time.

Chagrined at the failure of his policy, and full of haughty determination that he would prove to them the weight of his little finger, Rehoboam hastened to his capital, and summoned his army, a hundred and eighty thousand chosen warriors: but the Lord sent a

special message to him and the people of Judah that they should engage in no such war against their brethren and that the matter was of his ordering.

Disappointments are more likely to lead to humility than are successes, and so it was in this case. Rehoboam's first folly having become apparent to him, he was more humbleminded, and the more ready to hear and to obey the divine command. Thus blessings sometimes come to us through lessons of our own imperfection and lack of wisdom: if our disappointments and extremities lead us to look for counsel in the proper direction, to which we should have looked at first. To the true Israelites the blighting of their popularity and national greatness in the sight of the world, and the consequent lessons of humility, were evidently beneficial. And thus with us who belong to spiritual Israel, the holy nation, the peculiar people, splits and divisions of the nominal mass will work for good to the Israelites indeed; but splits in the nominal mass, and the resulting benefits, do not justify splits or differences amongst those who are loyal and faithful to the Lord. As the Apostle says, there should be "no schism in the body" – of Christ. The true members of the body of Christ are held together by their common hopes, builded upon the exceeding great and precious promises of the Lord's word, and held together by the bonds of love. And those who have not these bonds of love are not true Israelites – "if any man have not the spirit of Christ [the bond of love] he is none of his." "They went out from us because they were not all of us."

"A SOFT ANSWER TURNETH AWAY WRATH."

Our Golden Text is excellent advice.

(1) It is good *policy* for anyone – Christian or worldling – to learn to give soft answers, even under anger-provoking conditions. Business people study this as a matter of policy: it means custom, sales, profits, wealth, and to ignore this rule in business is to be considered foolish. **[R2325 : page 190]**

(2) But that which is merely an outward form, *policy*, and often hypocritical in worldly people, is to abound much more in the child of God, begotten of a new mind. In him it is not to be *put on* for policy's sake, but to be the outgrowth or *fruitage* of the holy spirit or disposition which rules him as a "new creature in Christ Jesus."

Any other answer than "a soft answer" is incompatible with the holy spirit of Love – with its meekness, gentleness, patience and brotherly kindness. If the truth must needs be spoken and if under the circumstances the truth be severe, *hard*, nevertheless and indeed all the more the hard thing needs to be stated as *softly as possible*. This evidently is the thought of the Apostle when he recommends "speaking the truth in love."

This advice is nowhere more needed than in most of home circles. Each unkind, ungenerous, hard word or deed, is a testimony in opposition to our professions to be the Lord's people and to be begotten of his spirit. "Put away all these, anger, malice, hatred, strife," etc.
