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Prison Ministry

**Patriarchs and Prophets – 1890 Edition - Chapter 71** **“David's Sin and Repentance”**

The Bible has little to say in praise of men. Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands. More than this--as all the lessons of Bible history teach--it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall. Man is contending with foes who are stronger than he. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places." Ephesians 6:12, margin. It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow. The tenor of the Bible is to inculcate distrust of human power and to encourage trust in divine power. {PP 717.1}

It was the spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation that prepared the way for David's fall. Flattery and the subtle allurements of power and luxury were not without effect upon him. Intercourse with surrounding nations also exerted an influence for evil. According to the customs prevailing among Eastern rulers, crimes not to be tolerated in subjects were uncondemned in the king; the monarch was not under obligation to exercise the same self-restraint as the subject. All this tended to lessen David's sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And instead of relying in humility upon the power of Jehovah, he began to trust to his own wisdom and might. As soon as Satan can separate the soul from God, the only Source of strength, he will seek to arouse the unholy desires of man's carnal nature. The work of the enemy is not abrupt; it is not, at the outset, sudden and startling; it is a secret undermining of the strongholds of principle. It begins in apparently small things--the neglect to be true to God and to rely upon Him wholly, the disposition to follow the customs and practices of the world. {PP 717.2}

Before the conclusion of the war with the Ammonites, David, leaving the conduct of the army to Joab, returned to Jerusalem. The Syrians had already submitted to Israel, and the complete overthrow of the Ammonites appeared certain. David was surrounded by the fruits of victory and the honors of his wise and able rule. It was now, while he was at ease and unguarded, that the tempter seized the opportunity to occupy his mind. The fact that God had taken David into so close connection with Himself and had manifested so great favor toward him, should have been to him the strongest of incentives to preserve his character unblemished. But when in ease and self-security he let go his hold upon God, David yielded to Satan and brought upon his soul the stain of guilt. He, the Heaven-appointed leader of the nation, chosen by God to execute His law, himself trampled upon its precepts. He who should have been a terror to evildoers, by his own act strengthened their hands. {PP 718.1}

Amid the perils of his earlier life David in conscious integrity could trust his case with God. The Lord's hand had guided him safely past the unnumbered snares that had been laid for his feet. But now, guilty and unrepentant, he did not ask help and guidance from Heaven, but sought to extricate himself from the dangers in which sin had involved him. Bathsheba, whose fatal beauty had proved a snare to the king, was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's bravest and most faithful officers. None could foresee what would be the result should the crime become known. The law of God pronounced the adulterer guilty of death, and the proud-spirited soldier, so shamefully wronged, might avenge himself by taking the life of the king or by exciting the nation to revolt. {PP 718.2}

Every effort which David made to conceal his guilt proved unavailing. He had betrayed himself into the power of Satan; danger surrounded him, dishonor more bitter than death was before him. There appeared but one way of escape, and in his desperation he was hurried on to add murder to adultery. He who had compassed the destruction of Saul was seeking to lead David also to ruin. Though the temptations were different, they were alike in leading to transgression of God's law. David reasoned that if Uriah were slain by the hand of enemies in battle, the guilt of his death could not be traced home to the king, Bathsheba would be free to become David's wife, suspicion could be averted, and the royal honor would be maintained. {PP 718.3}

Uriah was made the bearer of his own death warrant. A letter sent by his hand to Joab from the king commanded, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die." Joab, already stained with the guilt of one wanton murder, did not hesitate to obey the king's instructions, and Uriah fell by the sword of the children of Ammon. {PP 719.1}

Heretofore David's record as a ruler had been such as few monarchs have ever equaled. It is written of him that he "executed judgment and justice unto all his people." 2 Samuel 8:15. His integrity had won the confidence and fealty of the nation. But as he departed from God and yielded himself to the wicked one, he became for the time the agent of Satan; yet he still held the position and authority that God had given him, and because of this, claimed obedience that would imperil the soul of him who should yield it. And Joab, whose allegiance had been given to the king rather than to God, transgressed God's law because the king commanded it. {PP 719.2}

David's power had been given him by God, but to be exercised only in harmony with the divine law. When he commanded that which was contrary to God's law, it became sin to obey. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1), but we are not to obey them contrary to God's law. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, sets forth the principle by which we should be governed. He says, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1. {PP 719.3}

An account of the execution of his order was sent to David, but so carefully worded as not to implicate either Joab or the king. Joab "charged the messenger saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, and if so be that the king's wrath arise, . . . then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. So the messenger went, and came and showed David all that Joab had sent him for." {PP 719.4}

The king's answer was, "Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him." {PP 720.1}

Bathsheba observed the customary days of mourning for her husband; and at their close "David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife." He whose tender conscience and high sense of honor would not permit him, even when in peril of his life, to put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, had so fallen that he could wrong and murder one of his most faithful and most valiant soldiers, and hope to enjoy undisturbed the reward of his sin. Alas! how had the fine gold become dim! how had the most fine gold changed! {PP 720.2}

From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; "but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. Happy they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes. God in His mercy did not leave David to be lured to utter ruin by the deceitful rewards of sin. {PP 720.3}

For the sake of Israel also there was a necessity for God to interpose. As time passed on, David's sin toward Bathsheba became known, and suspicion was excited that he had planned the death of Uriah. The Lord was dishonored. He had favored and exalted David, and David's sin misrepresented the character of God and cast reproach upon His name. It tended to lower the standard of godliness in Israel, to lessen in many minds the abhorrence of sin; while those who did not love and fear God were by it emboldened in transgression. {PP 720.4}

Nathan the prophet was bidden to bear a message of reproof to David. It was a message terrible in its severity. To few sovereigns could such a reproof be given but at the price of certain death to the reprover. Nathan delivered the divine sentence unflinchingly, yet with such heaven-born wisdom as to engage the sympathies of the king, to arouse his conscience, and to call from his lips the sentence of death upon himself. Appealing to David as the divinely appointed guardian of his people's rights, the prophet repeated a story of wrong and oppression that demanded redress. {PP 720.5}

"There were two men in one city," he said, "the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him." {PP 721.1}

The anger of the king was roused, and he exclaimed, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing is worthy to die. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." 2 Samuel 12:5, 6, margin. {PP 721.2}

Nathan fixed his eyes upon the king; then, lifting his right hand to heaven, he solemnly declared, "Thou art the man." "Wherefore," he continued, "hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" The guilty may attempt, as David had done, to conceal their crime from men; they may seek to bury the evil deed forever from human sight or knowledge; but "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:13. "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." Matthew 10:26. {PP 721.3}

Nathan declared: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. . . . Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house. . . . Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor. . . . For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." {PP 721.4}

The prophet's rebuke touched the heart of David; conscience was aroused; his guilt appeared in all its enormity. His soul was bowed in penitence before God. With trembling lips he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." All wrong done to others reaches back from the injured one to God. David had committed a grievous sin, toward both Uriah and Bathsheba, and he keenly felt this. But infinitely greater was his sin against God. {PP 722.1}

Though there would be found none in Israel to execute the sentence of death upon the anointed of the Lord, David trembled, lest, guilty and unforgiven, he should be cut down by the swift judgment of God. But the message was sent him by the prophet, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Yet justice must be maintained. The sentence of death was transferred from David to the child of his sin. Thus the king was given opportunity for repentance; while to him the suffering and death of the child, as a part of his punishment, was far more bitter than his own death could have been. The prophet said, "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." {PP 722.2}

When his child was stricken, David, with fasting and deep humiliation, pleaded for its life. He put off his royal robes, he laid aside his crown, and night after night he lay upon the earth, in heartbroken grief interceding for the innocent one suffering for his guilt. "The elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not." Often when judgments had been pronounced upon persons or cities, humiliation and repentance had turned aside the blow, and the Ever-Merciful, swift to pardon, had sent messengers of peace. Encouraged by this thought, David persevered in his supplication so long as the child was spared. Upon learning that it was dead, he quietly submitted to the decree of God. The first stroke had fallen of that retribution which he himself had declared just; but David, trusting in God's mercy, was not without comfort. {PP 722.3}

Very many, reading the history of David's fall, have inquired, "Why has this record been made public? Why did God see fit to throw open to the world this dark passage in the life of one so highly honored of Heaven?" The prophet, in his reproof to David, had declared concerning his sin, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." Through successive generations infidels have pointed to the character of David, bearing this dark stain, and have exclaimed in triumph and derision, "This is the man after God's own heart!" Thus a reproach has been brought upon religion, God and His word have been blasphemed, souls have been hardened in unbelief, and many, under a cloak of piety, have become bold in sin. {PP 722.4}

But the history of David furnishes no countenance to sin. It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God's own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord. The word of God plainly declares, "The thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord." 2 Samuel 11:27, margin. And the Lord said to David by the prophet, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? . . . Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me." Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed he himself had sown. The judgments upon him and upon his house testify to God's abhorrence of the sin. {PP 723.1}

Heretofore God's providence had preserved David against all the plottings of his enemies, and had been directly exercised to restrain Saul. But David's transgression had changed his relation to God. The Lord could not in any wise sanction iniquity. He could not exercise His power to protect David from the results of his sin as he had protected him from the enmity of Saul. {PP 723.2}

There was a great change in David himself. He was broken in spirit by the consciousness of his sin and its far-reaching results. He felt humbled in the eyes of his subjects. His influence was weakened. Hitherto his prosperity had been attributed to his conscientious obedience to the commandments of the Lord. But now his subjects, having a knowledge of his sin, would be led to sin more freely. His authority in his own household, his claim to respect and obedience from his sons, was weakened. A sense of his guilt kept him silent when he should have condemned sin; it made his arm feeble to execute justice in his house. His evil example exerted its influence upon his sons, and God would not interpose to prevent the result. He would permit things to take their natural course, and thus David was severely chastised. {PP 723.3}

For a whole year after his fall David lived in apparent security; there was no outward evidence of God's displeasure. But the divine sentence was hanging over him. Swiftly and surely a day of judgment and retribution was approaching, which no repentance could avert, agony and shame that would darken his whole earthly life. Those who, by pointing to the example of David, try to lessen the guilt of their own sins, should learn from the Bible record that the way of transgression is hard. Though like David they should turn from their evil course, the results of sin, even in this life, will be found bitter and hard to bear. {PP 723.4}

God intended the history of David's fall to serve as a warning that even those whom He has greatly blessed and favored are not to feel secure and neglect watchfulness and prayer. And thus it has proved to those who in humility have sought to learn the lesson that God designed to teach. From generation to generation thousands have thus been led to realize their own danger from the tempter's power. The fall of David, one so greatly honored by the Lord, has awakened in them distrust of self. They have felt that God alone could keep them by His power through faith. Knowing that in Him was their strength and safety, they have feared to take the first step on Satan's ground. {PP 724.1}

Even before the divine sentence was pronounced against David he had begun to reap the fruit of transgression. His conscience was not at rest. The agony of spirit which he then endured is brought to view in the thirty-second psalm. He says:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,

And in whose spirit there is no guile.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old

Through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me:

My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer."

Psalm 32:1-4, R.V. {PP 724.2}

And the fifty-first psalm is an expression of David's repentance, when the message of reproof came to him from God:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness:

According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. . . .

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness;

That the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.

Hide Thy face from my sins,

And blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God;

And renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence;

And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;

And uphold me with Thy free Spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways;

And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation:

And my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness."

Psalm 51:1-14. {PP 724.3}

Thus in a sacred song to be sung in the public assemblies of his people, in the presence of the court--priests and judges, princes and men of war--and which would preserve to the latest generation the knowledge of his fall, the king of Israel recounted his sin, his repentance, and his hope of pardon through the mercy of God. Instead of endeavoring to conceal his guilt he desired that others might be instructed by the sad history of his fall. {PP 725.1}

David's repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. David did not in despair give over the struggle. In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance.

"For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:

Thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:

A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Psalm 51:16, 17. {PP 725.2}

Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell. In the joy of his release he sang:

"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;

And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. . . .

Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble;

Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

Psalm 32:5-7. {PP 726.1}

Many have murmured at what they called God's injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence. {PP 726.2}

This passage in David's history is full of significance to the repenting sinner. It is one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggles and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Through all the ages it has proved a source of encouragement to souls that, having fallen into sin, were struggling under the burden of their guilt. Thousands of the children of God, who have been betrayed into sin, when ready to give up to despair have remembered how David's sincere repentance and confession were accepted by God, notwithstanding he suffered for his transgression; and they also have taken courage to repent and try again to walk in the way of God's commandments. {PP 726.3}

Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God's promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:7. {PP 726.4}

Next Mailing: Chapter 72 - The Rebellion of Absalom