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Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 3 – “Pride of Prosperity”

While Solomon exalted the law of heaven, God was with him, and wisdom was given him to rule over Israel with impartiality and mercy. At first, as wealth and worldly honor came to him, he remained humble, and great was the extent of his influence. "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river [Euphrates] unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt." "He . . . had peace on all sides round about him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, . . . all the days of Solomon." 1 Kings 4:21, 24, 25. {PK 51.1}

 But after a morning of great promise his life was darkened by apostasy. History records the melancholy fact that he who had been called Jedidiah,--"Beloved of the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:25, margin),--he who had been honored by God with tokens of divine favor so remarkable that his wisdom and uprightness gained for him world-wide fame, he who had led others to ascribe honor to the God of Israel, turned from the worship of Jehovah to bow before the idols of the heathen. {PK 51.2}

 Hundreds of years before Solomon came to the throne, the Lord, foreseeing the perils that would beset those who might be chosen as rulers of Israel, gave Moses instruction for their guidance. Directions were given that he who should sit on the throne of Israel should "write him a copy" of the statutes of Jehovah "in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites." "It shall be with him," the Lord said, "and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." Deuteronomy 17:18-20. {PK 52.1}

 In connection with this instruction the Lord particularly cautioned the one who might be anointed king not to "multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." Verse 17. {PK 52.2}

 With these warnings Solomon was familiar, and for a time he heeded them. His greatest desire was to live and rule in accordance with the statutes given at Sinai. His manner of conducting the affairs of the kingdom was in striking contrast with the customs of the nations of his time--nations who feared not God and whose rulers trampled underfoot His holy law. {PK 52.3}

 In seeking to strengthen his relations with the powerful kingdom lying to the southward of Israel, Solomon ventured upon forbidden ground. Satan knew the results that would attend obedience; and during the earlier years of Solomon's reign--years glorious because of the wisdom, the beneficence, and the uprightness of the king--he sought to bring in influences that would insidiously undermine Solomon's loyalty to principle and cause him to separate from God. That the enemy was successful in this effort, we know from the record: "Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the City of David." 1 Kings 3:1. {PK 53.1}

 From a human point of view, this marriage, though contrary to the teachings of God's law, seemed to prove a blessing; for Solomon's heathen wife was converted and united with him in the worship of the true God. Furthermore, Pharaoh rendered signal service to Israel by taking Gezer, slaying "the Canaanites that dwelt in the city," and giving it "for a present unto his daughter, Solomon's wife." 1 Kings 9:16. This city Solomon rebuilt and thus apparently greatly strengthened his kingdom along the Mediterranean seacoast. But in forming an alliance with a heathen nation, and sealing the compact by marriage with an idolatrous princess, Solomon rashly disregarded the wise provision that God had made for maintaining the purity of His people. The hope that his Egyptian wife might be converted was but a feeble excuse for the sin. {PK 53.2}

 For a time God in His compassionate mercy overruled this terrible mistake; and the king, by a wise course, could have checked at least in a large measure the evil forces that his imprudence had set in operation. But Solomon had begun to lose sight of the Source of his power and glory. As inclination gained the ascendancy over reason, self-confidence increased, and he sought to carry out the Lord's purpose in his own way. He reasoned that political and commercial alliances with the surrounding nations would bring these nations to a knowledge of the true God; and he entered into unholy alliance with nation after nation. Often these alliances were sealed by marriages with heathen princesses. The commands of Jehovah were set aside for the customs of surrounding peoples. {PK 53.3}

 Solomon flattered himself that his wisdom and the power of his example would lead his wives from idolatry to the worship of the true God, and also that the alliances thus formed would draw the nations round about into close touch with Israel. Vain hope! Solomon's mistake in regarding himself as strong enough to resist the influence of heathen associates was fatal. And fatal, too, the deception that led him to hope that notwithstanding a disregard of God's law on his part, others might be led to revere and obey its sacred precepts. {PK 54.1}

 The king's alliances and commercial relations with heathen nations brought him renown, honor, and the riches of this world. He was enabled to bring gold from Ophir and silver from Tarshish in great abundance. "The king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance." 2 Chronicles 1:15. Wealth, with all its attendant temptations, came in Solomon's day to an increasingly large number of people; but the fine gold of character was dimmed and marred. {PK 54.2}

 So gradual was Solomon's apostasy that before he was aware of it; he had wandered far from God. Almost imperceptibly he began to trust less and less in divine guidance and blessing, and to put confidence in his own strength. Little by little he withheld from God that unswerving obedience which was to make Israel a peculiar people, and he conformed more and more closely to the customs of the surrounding nations. Yielding to the temptations incident to his success and his honored position, he forgot the Source of his prosperity. An ambition to excel all other nations in power and grandeur led him to pervert for selfish purposes the heavenly gifts hitherto employed for the glory of God. The money which should have been held in sacred trust for the benefit of the worthy poor and for the extension of principles of holy living throughout the world, was selfishly absorbed in ambitious projects. {PK 55.1}

 Engrossed in an overmastering desire to surpass other nations in outward display, the king overlooked the need of acquiring beauty and perfection of character. In seeking to glorify himself before the world, he sold his honor and integrity. The enormous revenues acquired through commerce with many lands were supplemented by heavy taxes. Thus pride, ambition, prodigality, and indulgence bore fruit in cruelty and exaction. The conscientious, considerate spirit that had marked his dealings with the people during the early part of his reign, was now changed. From the wisest and most merciful of rulers, he degenerated into a tyrant. Once the compassionate, God-fearing guardian of the people, he became oppressive and despotic. Tax after tax was levied upon the people, that means might be forthcoming to support the luxurious court. {PK 55.2}

 The people began to complain. The respect and admiration they had once cherished for their king was changed into disaffection and abhorrence. {PK 56.1}

 As a safeguard against dependence on the arm of flesh, the Lord had warned those who should rule over Israel not to multiply horses to themselves. But in utter disregard of this command, "Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt." "And they brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt, and out of all lands." "Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem." 2 Chronicles 1:16; 9:28; 1 Kings 10:26. {PK 56.2}

 More and more the king came to regard luxury, self-indulgence, and the favor of the world as indications of greatness. Beautiful and attractive women were brought from Egypt, Phoenicia, Edom, and Moab, and from many other places. These women were numbered by hundreds. Their religion was idol worship, and they had been taught to practice cruel and degrading rites. Infatuated with their beauty, the king neglected his duties to God and to his kingdom. {PK 56.3}

 His wives exerted a strong influence over him and gradually prevailed on him to unite with them in their worship. Solomon had disregarded the instruction that God had given to serve as a barrier against apostasy, and now he gave himself up to the worship of the false gods. "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites." 1 Kings 11:4, 5. {PK 56.4}

 On the southern eminence of the Mount of Olives, opposite Mount Moriah, where stood the beautiful temple of Jehovah, Solomon erected an imposing pile of buildings to be used as idolatrous shrines. To please his wives, he placed huge idols, unshapely images of wood and stone, amidst the groves of myrtle and olive. There, before the altars of heathen deities, "Chemosh, the abomination of Moab," and "Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon," were practiced the most degrading rites of heathenism. Verse 7. {PK 57.1}

 Solomon's course brought its sure penalty. His separation from God through communication with idolaters was his ruin. As he cast off his allegiance to God, he lost the mastery of himself. His moral efficiency was gone. His fine sensibilities became blunted, his conscience seared. He who in his early reign had displayed so much wisdom and sympathy in restoring a helpless babe to its unfortunate mother (see 1 Kings 3:16-28), fell so low as to consent to the erection of an idol to whom living children were offered as sacrifices. He who in his youth was endowed with discretion and understanding, and who in his strong manhood had been inspired to write, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12), in later years departed so far from purity as to countenance licentious, revolting rites connected with the worship of Chemosh and Ashtoreth. He who at the dedication of the temple had said to his people, "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God" (1 Kings 8:61), became himself an offender, in heart and life denying his own words. He mistook license for liberty. He tried--but at what cost!--to unite light with darkness, good with evil, purity with impurity, Christ with Belial. {PK 57.2}

 From being one of the greatest kings that ever wielded a scepter, Solomon became a profligate, the tool and slave of others. His character, once noble and manly, became enervated and effeminate. His faith in the living God was supplanted by atheistic doubts. Unbelief marred his happiness, weakened his principles, and degraded his life. The justice and magnanimity of his early reign were changed to despotism and tyranny. Poor, frail human nature! God can do little for men who lose their sense of dependence upon Him. {PK 58.1}

 During these years of apostasy, the spiritual decline of Israel progressed steadily. How could it be otherwise when their king had united his interests with satanic agencies? Through these agencies the enemy worked to confuse the minds of the Israelites in regard to true and false worship, and they became an easy prey. Commerce with other nations brought them into intimate contact with those who had no love for God, and their own love for Him was greatly lessened. Their keen sense of the high, holy character of God was deadened. Refusing to follow in the path of obedience, they transferred their allegiance to the enemy of righteousness. It came to be a common practice to intermarry with idolaters, and the Israelites rapidly lost their abhorrence of idol worship. Polygamy was countenanced. Idolatrous mothers brought their children up to observe heathen rites. In the lives of some, the pure religious service instituted by God was replaced by idolatry of the darkest hue. {PK 58.2}

 Christians are to keep themselves distinct and separate from the world, its spirit, and its influences. God is fully able to keep us in the world, but we are not to be of the world. His love is not uncertain and fluctuating. Ever He watches over His children with a care that is measureless. But He requires undivided allegiance. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matthew 6:24. {PK 59.1}

 Solomon was endued with wonderful wisdom, but the world drew him away from God. Men today are no stronger than he; they are as prone to yield to the influences that caused his downfall. As God warned Solomon of his danger, so today He warns His children not to imperil their souls by affinity with the world. "Come out from among them," He pleads, "and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18. {PK 59.2}

 In the midst of prosperity lurks danger. Throughout the ages, riches and honor have ever been attended with peril to humility and spirituality. It is not the empty cup that we have difficulty in carrying; it is the cup full to the brim that must be carefully balanced. Affliction and adversity may cause sorrow, but it is prosperity that is most dangerous to spiritual life. Unless the human subject is in constant submission to the will of God, unless he is sanctified by the truth, prosperity will surely arouse the natural inclination to presumption. {PK 59.3}

 In the valley of humiliation, where men depend on God to teach them and to guide their every step, there is comparative safety. But the men who stand, as it were, on a lofty pinnacle, and who, because of their position, are supposed to possess great wisdom--these are in gravest peril. Unless such men make God their dependence, they will surely fall. {PK 60.1}

 Whenever pride and ambition are indulged, the life is marred, for pride, feeling no need, closes the heart against the infinite blessings of Heaven. He who makes self-glorification his aim will find himself destitute of the grace of God, through whose efficiency the truest riches and the most satisfying joys are won. But he who gives all and does all for Christ will know the fulfillment of the promise, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." Proverbs 10:22. With the gentle touch of grace the Saviour banishes from the soul unrest and unholy ambition, changing enmity to love and unbelief to confidence. When He speaks to the soul, saying, "Follow Me," the spell of the world's enchantment is broken. At the sound of His voice the spirit of greed and ambition flees from the heart, and men arise, emancipated, to follow Him. {PK 60.2}

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