February 20, 2016

Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 4 – “Results of Transgression”

Prominent among the primary causes that led Solomon into extravagance and oppression was his failure to maintain and foster the spirit of self-sacrifice. {PK 61.1}

When, at the foot of Sinai, Moses told the people of the divine command, "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them," the response of the Israelites was accompanied by the appropriate gifts. "They came, everyone whose heart stirred him up, and everyone whom his spirit made willing," and brought offerings. Exodus 25:8; 35:21. For the building of the sanctuary, great and extensive preparations were necessary; a large amount of the most precious and costly material was required, but the Lord accepted only freewill offerings. "Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering," was the command repeated by Moses to the congregation. Exodus 25:2. Devotion to God and a spirit of sacrifice were the first requisites in preparing a dwelling place for the Most High. {PK 61.2}

A similar call to self-sacrifice was made when David turned over to Solomon the responsibility of building the temple. Of the assembled multitude David asked, "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" 1 Chronicles 29:5. This call to consecration and willing service should ever have been kept in mind by those who had to do with the erection of the temple. {PK 62.1}

For the construction of the wilderness tabernacle, chosen men were endowed by God with special skill and wisdom. "Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the Lord hath called by name Bezaleel, . . . of the tribe of Judah; and He hath filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. . . . And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, . . . of the tribe of Dan. Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, . . . and of the weaver, even of them that do any work. . . . Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wisehearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding." Exodus 35:30-35; 36:1. Heavenly intelligences co-operated with the workmen whom God Himself had chosen. {PK 62.2}

The descendants of these workmen inherited to a large degree the talents conferred on their forefathers. For a time these men of Judah and Dan remained humble and unselfish; but gradually, almost imperceptibly, they lost their hold upon God and their desire to serve Him unselfishly. They asked higher wages for their services, because of their superior skill as workmen in the finer arts. In some instances their request was granted, but more often they found employment in the surrounding nations. In place of the noble spirit of self-sacrifice that had filled the hearts of their illustrious ancestors, they indulged a spirit of covetousness, of grasping for more and more. That their selfish desires might be gratified, they used their God-given skill in the service of heathen kings, and lent their talent to the perfecting of works which were a dishonor to their Maker. {PK 62.3}

It was among these men that Solomon looked for a master workman to superintend the construction of the temple on Mount Moriah. Minute specifications, in writing, regarding every portion of the sacred structure, had been entrusted to the king; and he could have looked to God in faith for consecrated helpers, to whom would have been granted special skill for doing with exactness the work required. But Solomon lost sight of this opportunity to exercise faith in God. He sent to the king of Tyre for a man, "cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men . . . in Judah and in Jerusalem." 2 Chronicles 2:7. {PK 63.1}

The Phoenician king responded by sending Huram, "the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre." Verse 14. Huram was a descendant, on his mother's side, of Aholiab, to whom, hundreds of years before, God had given special wisdom for the construction of the tabernacle. {PK 63.2}

Thus at the head of Solomon's company of workmen there was placed a man whose efforts were not prompted by an unselfish desire to render service to God. He served the god of this world, mammon. The very fibers of his being were inwrought with the principles of selfishness. {PK 63.3}

Because of his unusual skill, Huram demanded large wages. Gradually the wrong principles that he cherished came to be accepted by his associates. As they labored with him day after day, they yielded to the inclination to compare his wages with their own, and they began to lose sight of the holy character of their work. The spirit of self-denial left them, and in its place came the spirit of covetousness. The result was a demand for higher wages, which was granted. {PK 64.1}

The baleful influences thus set in operation permeated all branches of the Lord's service, and extended throughout the kingdom. The high wages demanded and received gave to many an opportunity to indulge in luxury and extravagance. The poor were oppressed by the rich; the spirit of self-sacrifice was well-nigh lost. In the far-reaching effects of these influences may be traced one of the principal causes of the terrible apostasy of him who once was numbered among the wisest of mortals. {PK 64.2}

The sharp contrast between the spirit and motives of the people building the wilderness tabernacle, and of those engaged in erecting Solomon's temple, has a lesson of deep significance. The self-seeking that characterized the workers on the temple finds its counterpart today in the selfishness that rules in the world. The spirit of covetousness, of seeking for the highest position and the highest wage, is rife. The willing service and joyous self-denial of the tabernacle workers is seldom met with. But this is the only spirit that should actuate the followers of Jesus. Our divine Master has given an example of how His disciples are to work. To those whom He bade, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19), He offered no stated sum as a reward for their services. They were to share with Him in self-denial and sacrifice. {PK 64.3}

Not for the wages we receive are we to labor. The motive that prompts us to work for God should have in it nothing akin to self-serving. Unselfish devotion and a spirit of sacrifice have always been and always will be the first requisite of acceptable service. Our Lord and Master designs that not one thread of selfishness shall be woven into His work. Into our efforts we are to bring the tact and skill, the exactitude and wisdom, that the God of perfection required of the builders of the earthly tabernacle; yet in all our labors we are to remember that the greatest talents or the most splendid services are acceptable only when self is laid upon the altar, a living, consuming sacrifice. {PK 65.1}

Another of the deviations from right principles that finally led to the downfall of Israel's king was his yielding to the temptation to take to himself the glory that belongs to God alone. {PK 65.2}

From the day that Solomon was entrusted with the work of building the temple, to the time of its completion, his avowed purpose was "to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel." 2 Chronicles 6:7. This purpose was fully recognized before the assembled hosts of Israel at the time of the dedication of the temple. In his prayer the king acknowledged that Jehovah had said, "My name shall be there." 1 Kings 8:29. {PK 65.3}

One of the most touching portions of Solomon's dedicatory prayer was his plea to God for the strangers that should come from countries afar to learn more of Him whose fame had been spread abroad among the nations. "They shall hear," the king pleaded, "of Thy great name, and of Thy strong hand, and of Thy stretched-out arm." In behalf of every one of these stranger worshipers Solomon had petitioned: "Hear Thou, . . . and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for: that all people of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by Thy name." Verses 42, 43. {PK 66.1}

At the close of the service, Solomon had exhorted Israel to be faithful and true to God, in order that "all the people of the earth may know," he said, "that the Lord is God, and that there is none else." Verse 60. {PK 66.2}

A Greater than Solomon was the designer of the temple; the wisdom and glory of God stood there revealed. Those who were unacquainted with this fact naturally admired and praised Solomon as the architect and builder; but the king disclaimed any honor for its conception or erection. {PK 66.3}

Thus it was when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon. Hearing of his wisdom and of the magnificent temple he had built, she determined "to prove him with hard questions" and to see for herself his famous works. Attended by a retinue of servants, and with camels bearing "spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones," she made the long journey to Jerusalem. "And when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart." She talked with him of the mysteries of nature; and Solomon taught her of the God of nature, the great Creator, who dwells in the highest heaven and rules over all. "Solomon told her all her questions: there was not anything hid from the king, which he told her not." 1 Kings 10:1-3; 2 Chronicles 9:1, 2. {PK 66.4}

"When the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, . . . there was no more spirit in her." "It was a true report," she acknowledged, "which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it:" "and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom." 1 Kings 10:4-8; 2 Chronicles 9:3-7. {PK 67.1}

By the time of the close of her visit the queen had been so fully taught by Solomon as to the source of his wisdom and prosperity that she was constrained, not to extol the human agent, but to exclaim, "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice." 1 Kings 10:9. This is the impression that God designed should be made upon all peoples. And when "all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart" (2 Chronicles 9:23), Solomon for a time honored God by reverently pointing them to the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Ruler of the universe, the All-wise. {PK 67.2}

Had Solomon continued in humility of mind to turn the attention of men from himself to the One who had given him wisdom and riches and honor, what a history might have been his! But while the pen of inspiration records his virtues, it also bears faithful witness to his downfall. Raised to a pinnacle of greatness and surrounded with the gifts of fortune, Solomon became dizzy, lost his balance, and fell. Constantly extolled by men of the world, he was at length unable to withstand the flattery offered him. The wisdom entrusted to him that he might glorify the Giver, filled him with pride. He finally permitted men to speak of him as the one most worthy of praise for the matchless splendor of the building planned and erected for the honor of "the name of the Lord God of Israel." {PK 68.1}

Thus it was that the temple of Jehovah came to be known throughout the nations as "Solomon's temple." The human agent had taken to himself the glory that belonged to the One "higher than the highest." Ecclesiastes 5:8. Even to this day the temple of which Solomon declared, "This house which I have built is called by Thy name" (2 Chronicles 6:33), is oftenest spoken of, not as the temple of Jehovah, but as "Solomon's temple." {PK 68.2}

Man cannot show greater weakness than by allowing men to ascribe to him the honor for gifts that are Heaven-bestowed. The true Christian will make God first and last and best in everything. No ambitious motives will chill his love for God; steadily, perseveringly, will he cause honor to redound to his heavenly Father. It is when we are faithful in exalting the name of God that our impulses are under divine supervision, and we are enabled to develop spiritual and intellectual power. {PK 68.3}

Jesus, the divine Master, ever exalted the name of His heavenly Father. He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." Matthew 6:9, A.R.V. And they were not to forget to acknowledge, "Thine is . . . the glory." Verse 13. So careful was the great Healer to direct attention from Himself to the Source of His power, that the wondering multitude, "when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see," did not glorify Him, but "glorified the God of Israel." Matthew 15:31. In the wonderful prayer that Christ offered just before His crucifixion, He declared, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." "Glorify Thy Son," He pleaded, "that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:4, 1, 25, 26. {PK 69.1}

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Jeremiah 9:23, 24.

"I will praise the name of God, . . .

And will magnify Him with thanksgiving."

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor

and power."

"I will praise Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart:

And I will glorify Thy name forevermore."

"O magnify the Lord with me,

And let us exalt His name together."

Psalm 69:30; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 86:12; 34:3. {PK 69.2}

The introduction of principles leading away from a spirit of sacrifice and tending toward self-glorification, was accompanied by yet another gross perversion of the divine plan for Israel. God had designed that His people should be the light of the world. From them was to shine forth the glory of His law as revealed in the life practice. For the carrying out of this design, He had caused the chosen nation to occupy a strategic position among the nations of earth. {PK 70.1}

In the days of Solomon the kingdom of Israel extended from Hamath on the north to Egypt on the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the river Euphrates. Through this territory ran many natural highways of the world's commerce, and caravans from distant lands were constantly passing to and fro. Thus there was given to Solomon and his people opportunity to reveal to men of all nations the character of the King of kings, and to teach them to reverence and obey Him. To all the world this knowledge was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial offerings, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, that all who would might live. {PK 70.2}

Placed at the head of a nation that had been set as a beacon light to the surrounding nations, Solomon should have used his God-given wisdom and power of influence in organizing and directing a great movement for the enlightenment of those who were ignorant of God and His truth. Thus multitudes would have been won to allegiance to the divine precepts, Israel would have been shielded from the evils practiced by the heathen, and the Lord of glory would have been greatly honored. But Solomon lost sight of this high purpose. He failed of improving his splendid opportunities for enlightening those who were continually passing through his territory or tarrying at the principal cities. {PK 71.1}

The missionary spirit that God had implanted in the heart of Solomon and in the hearts of all true Israelites was supplanted by a spirit of commercialism. The opportunities afforded by contact with many nations were used for personal aggrandizement. Solomon sought to strengthen his position politically by building fortified cities at the gateways of commerce. He rebuilt Gezer, near Joppa, lying along the road between Egypt and Syria; Beth-horon, to the westward of Jerusalem, commanding the passes of the highway leading from the heart of Judea to Gezer and the seacoast; Megiddo, situated on the caravan road from Damascus to Egypt, and from Jerusalem to the northward; and "Tadmor in the wilderness" (2 Chronicles 8:4), along the route of caravans from the east. All these cities were strongly fortified. The commercial advantages of an outlet at the head of the Red Sea were developed by the construction of "a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, . . . on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom." Trained sailors from Tyre, "with the servants of Solomon," manned these vessels on voyages "to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold," and "great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones." Verse 18; 1 Kings 9:26, 28; 10:11. {PK 71.2}

The revenue of the king and of many of his subjects was greatly increased, but at what a cost! Through the cupidity and shortsightedness of those to whom had been entrusted the oracles of God, the countless multitudes who thronged the highways of travel were allowed to remain in ignorance of Jehovah. {PK 72.1}

In striking contrast to the course pursued by Solomon was the course followed by Christ when He was on this earth. The Saviour, though possessing "all power," never used this power for self-aggrandizement. No dream of earthly conquest, of worldly greatness, marred the perfection of His service for mankind. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests," He said, "but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Matthew 8:20. Those who, in response to the call of the hour, have entered the service of the Master Worker, may well study His methods. He took advantage of the opportunities to be found along the great thoroughfares of travel. {PK 73.1}

In the intervals of His journeys to and fro, Jesus dwelt at Capernaum, which came to be known as "His own city." Matthew 9:1. Situated on the highway from Damascus to Jerusalem and Egypt and to the Mediterranean Sea, it was well adapted to be the center of the Saviour's work. People from many lands passed through the city or tarried for rest. There Jesus met with those of all nations and all ranks, and thus His lessons were carried to other countries and into many households. By this means interest was aroused in the prophecies pointing forward to the Messiah, attention was directed to the Saviour, and His mission was brought before the world. {PK 73.2}

In this our day the opportunities for coming into contact with men and women of all classes and many nationalities are much greater than in the days of Israel. The thoroughfares of travel have multiplied a thousandfold. {PK 73.3}

Like Christ, the messengers of the Most High today should take their position in these great thoroughfares, where they can meet the passing multitudes from all parts of the world. Like Him, hiding self in God, they are to sow the gospel seed, presenting before others the precious truths of Holy Scripture that will take deep root in mind and heart, and spring up unto life eternal. {PK 74.1}

Solemn are the lessons of Israel's failure during the years when ruler and people turned from the high purpose they had been called to fulfill. Wherein they were weak, even to the point of failure, the Israel of God today, the representatives of heaven that make up the true church of Christ, must be strong; for upon them devolves the task of finishing the work that has been committed to man, and of ushering in the day of final awards. Yet the same influences that prevailed against Israel in the time when Solomon reigned are to be met with still. The forces of the enemy of all righteousness are strongly entrenched; only by the power of God can the victory be gained. The conflict before us calls for the exercise of a spirit of self-denial, for distrust of self and for dependence on God alone, for the wise use of every opportunity for the saving of souls. The Lord's blessing will attend His church as they advance unitedly, revealing to a world lying in the darkness of error the beauty of holiness as manifested in a Christlike spirit of self-sacrifice, in an exaltation of the divine rather than the human, and in loving and untiring service for those so much in need of the blessings of the gospel. {PK 74.2}

Next Mailing: **Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition Chapter 5 – “Solomon’s Repentance”