March 5, 2016

Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 6 – “The Rending of the Kingdom”

"Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead." 1 Kings 11:43. {PK 87.1}

Soon after his accession to the throne, Rehoboam went to Shechem, where he expected to receive formal recognition from all the tribes. "To Shechem were all Israel come to make him king." 2 Chronicles 10:1. {PK 87.2}

Among those present was Jeroboam the son of Nebat--the same Jeroboam who during Solomon's reign had been known as "a mighty man of valor," and to whom the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite had delivered the startling message, "Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee." 1 Kings 11:28, 31. {PK 87.3}

The Lord through His messenger had spoken plainly to Jeroboam regarding the necessity of dividing the kingdom. This division must take place, He had declared, "because that they have forsaken Me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways, to do that which is right in Mine eyes, and to keep My statutes and My judgments, as did David." Verse 33. {PK 87.4}

Jeroboam had been further instructed that the kingdom was not to be divided before the close of Solomon's reign. "I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand," the Lord had declared; "but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David My servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept My commandments and My statutes: but I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes." Verses 34, 35. {PK 88.1}

Although Solomon had longed to prepare the mind of Rehoboam, his chosen successor, to meet with wisdom the crisis foretold by the prophet of God, he had never been able to exert a strong molding influence for good over the mind of his son, whose early training had been so grossly neglected. Rehoboam had received from his mother, an Ammonitess, the stamp of a vacillating character. At times he endeavored to serve God and was granted a measure of prosperity; but he was not steadfast, and at last he yielded to the influences for evil that had surrounded him from infancy. In the mistakes of Rehoboam's life and in his final apostasy is revealed the fearful result of Solomon's union with idolatrous women. {PK 88.2}

The tribes had long suffered grievous wrongs under the oppressive measures of their former ruler. The extravagance of Solomon's reign during his apostasy had led him to tax the people heavily and to require of them much menial service. Before going forward with the coronation of a new ruler, the leading men from among the tribes determined to ascertain whether or not it was the purpose of Solomon's son to lessen these burdens. "So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee." {PK 88.3}

Desirous of taking counsel with his advisers before outlining his policy, Rehoboam answered, "Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed. {PK 89.1}

"And King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants forever." 2 Chronicles 10:3-7. {PK 89.2}

Dissatisfied, Rehoboam turned to the younger men with whom he had associated during his youth and early manhood, and inquired of them, "What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?" 1 Kings 12:9. The young men suggested that he deal sternly with the subjects of his kingdom and make plain to them that from the very beginning he would brook no interference with his personal wishes. {PK 89.3}

Flattered by the prospect of exercising supreme authority, Rehoboam determined to disregard the counsel of the older men of his realm, and to make the younger men his advisers. Thus it came to pass that on the day appointed, when "Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam" for a statement concerning the policy he intended to pursue, Rehoboam "answered the people roughly, . . . saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." Verses 12-14. {PK 89.4}

Had Rehoboam and his inexperienced counselors understood the divine will concerning Israel, they would have listened to the request of the people for decided reforms in the administration of the government. But in the hour of opportunity that came to them during the meeting in Shechem, they failed to reason from cause to effect, and thus forever weakened their influence over a large number of the people. Their expressed determination to perpetuate and add to the oppression introduced during Solomon's reign was in direct conflict with God's plan for Israel, and gave the people ample occasion to doubt the sincerity of their motives. In this unwise and unfeeling attempt to exercise power, the king and his chosen counselors revealed the pride of position and authority. {PK 90.1}

The Lord did not allow Rehoboam to carry out the policy he had outlined. Among the tribes were many thousands who had become thoroughly aroused over the oppressive measures of Solomon's reign, and these now felt that they could not do otherwise than rebel against the house of David. "When all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents." Verse 16. {PK 90.2}

The breach created by the rash speech of Rehoboam proved irreparable. Thenceforth the twelve tribes of Israel were divided, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin composing the lower or southern kingdom of Judah, under the rulership of Rehoboam; while the ten northern tribes formed and maintained a separate government, known as the kingdom of Israel, with Jeroboam as their ruler. Thus was fulfilled the prediction of the prophet concerning the rending of the kingdom. "The cause was from the Lord." Verse 15. {PK 91.1}

When Rehoboam saw the ten tribes withdrawing their allegiance from him, he was aroused to action. Through one of the influential men of his kingdom, "Adoram, who was over the tribute," he made an effort to conciliate them. But the ambassador of peace received treatment which bore witness to the feeling against Rehoboam. "All Israel stoned him with stones, that he died." Startled by this evidence of the strength of revolt, "King Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem." Verse 18. {PK 91.2}

At Jerusalem "he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from Me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the Lord, and returned to depart, according to the word of the Lord." Verses 21-24. {PK 91.3}

For three years Rehoboam tried to profit by his sad experience at the beginning of his reign; and in this effort he was prospered. He "built cities for defense in Judah," and "fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine." He was careful to make these fortified cities "exceeding strong." 2 Chronicles 11:5, 11, 12. But the secret of Judah's prosperity during the first years of Rehoboam's reign lay not in these measures. It was their recognition of God as the Supreme Ruler that placed the tribes of Judah and Benjamin on vantage ground. To their number were added many God-fearing men from the northern tribes. "Out of all the tribes of Israel," the record reads, "such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon." Verses 16, 17. {PK 92.1}

In continuing this course lay Rehoboam's opportunity to redeem in large measure the mistakes of the past and to restore confidence in his ability to rule with discretion. But the pen of inspiration has traced the sad record of Solomon's successor as one who failed to exert a strong influence for loyalty to Jehovah. Naturally headstrong, confident, self-willed, and inclined to idolatry, nevertheless, had he placed his trust wholly in God, he would have developed strength of character, steadfast faith, and submission to the divine requirements. But as time passed, the king put his trust in the power of position and in the strongholds he had fortified. Little by little he gave way to inherited weakness, until he threw his influence wholly on the side of idolatry. "It came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him." 2 Chronicles 12:1. {PK 93.1}

How sad, how filled with significance, the words, "And all Israel with him"! The people whom God had chosen to stand as a light to the surrounding nations were turning from their Source of strength and seeking to become like the nations about them. As with Solomon, so with Rehoboam--the influence of wrong example led many astray. And as with them, so to a greater or less degree is it today with everyone who gives himself up to work evil--the influence of wrongdoing is not confined to the doer. No man liveth unto himself. None perish alone in their iniquity. Every life is a light that brightens and cheers the pathway of others, or a dark and desolating influence that tends toward despair and ruin. We lead others either upward to happiness and immortal life, or downward to sorrow and eternal death. And if by our deeds we strengthen or force into activity the evil powers of those around us, we share their sin. {PK 94.1}

God did not allow the apostasy of Judah's ruler to remain unpunished. "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord, with twelve hundred chariots, and three score thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt. . . . And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. {PK 94.2}

"Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." Verses 2-5. {PK 94.3}

The people had not yet gone to such lengths in apostasy that they despised the judgments of God. In the losses sustained by the invasion of Shishak, they recognized the hand of God and for a time humbled themselves. "The Lord is righteous," they acknowledged. {PK 95.1}

"And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. {PK 95.2}

"So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. Instead of which King Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. . . . And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that He would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well." Verses 6-12. {PK 95.3}

But as the hand of affliction was removed, and the nation prospered once more, many forgot their fears and turned again to idolatry. Among these was King Rehoboam himself. Though humbled by the calamity that had befallen him, he failed to make this experience a decisive turning point in his life. Forgetting the lesson that God had endeavored to teach him, he relapsed into the sins that had brought judgments on the nation. After a few inglorious years, during which the king "did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord," "Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead." Verses 14, 16. {PK 95.4}

With the rending of the kingdom early in Rehoboam's reign the glory of Israel began to depart, never again to be regained in its fullness. At times during the centuries that followed, the throne of David was occupied by men of moral worth and far-seeing judgment, and under the rulership of these sovereigns the blessings resting upon the men of Judah were extended to the surrounding nations. At times the name of Jehovah was exalted above every false god, and His law was held in reverence. From time to time mighty prophets arose to strengthen the hands of the rulers and to encourage the people to continued faithfulness. But the seeds of evil already springing up when Rehoboam ascended the throne were never to be wholly uprooted; and at times the once-favored people of God were to fall so low as to become a byword among the heathen. {PK 96.1}

Yet notwithstanding the perversity of those who leaned toward idolatrous practices, God in mercy would do everything in His power to save the divided kingdom from utter ruin. And as the years rolled on and His purpose concerning Israel seemed to be utterly thwarted by the devices of men inspired by satanic agencies, He still manifested His beneficent designs through the captivity and restoration of the chosen nation. {PK 96.2}

The rending of the kingdom was but the beginning of a wonderful history, wherein are revealed the long-sufferance and tender mercy of God. From the crucible of affliction through which they were to pass because of hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, those whom God was seeking to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, were finally to acknowledge: {PK 97.1}

"There is none like unto Thee, O Lord; Thou art great, and Thy name is great in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? . . . Among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto Thee." "The Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King." Jeremiah 10:6, 7, 10. {PK 97.2}

And the worshipers of idols were at last to learn the lesson that false gods are powerless to uplift and save. "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens." Verse 11. Only in allegiance to the living God, the Creator of all and the Ruler over all, can man find rest and peace. {PK 97.3}

With one accord the chastened and penitent of Israel and Judah were at last to renew their covenant relationship with Jehovah of hosts, the God of their fathers; and of Him they were to declare:

"He hath made the earth by His power,

He hath established the world by His wisdom,

And hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion.

"When He uttereth His voice, there is a multitude of waters

in the heavens.

And He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends

of the earth;

He maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the

wind out of His treasures.

"Every man is brutish in his knowledge:

Every founder is confounded by the graven image:

For his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath

in them.

"They are vanity, and the work of errors:

In the time of their visitation they shall perish.

The portion of Jacob is not like them:

"For He is the former of all things;

And Israel is the rod of His inheritance:

The Lord of hosts is His name."

Verses 12-16. {PK 97.4}

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