

# Maclaren on 1 Kings

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### 1 Kings 1:28-39 David Appointing Solomon

The earlier part of this chapter must be taken into account in order to get the right view of this incident. David's eldest surviving son, Adonijah, had claimed the succession, and gathered his partisans to a feast. Nathan, alarmed at the prospect of such a successor, had arranged with Bathsheba that she should go to David and ask his public confirmation of his promise to her that Solomon should succeed him, and that then Nathan should seek an audience while she was with the king, and, as independently, should prefer the same request.

The plan was carried out, and here we see its results. The old king was roused to a flash of his ancient vigour, confirmed his oath to Bathsheba, and promptly cut the ground from under Adonijah's feet by sending for the three who had remained true to him—Nathan, Benaiah, and Zadok—and despatching them without a moment's delay to proclaim Solomon king, and then to bring him up to the palace and enthrone him. The swift execution of these decisive orders, and the burst of popular acclamation which welcomed Solomon's accession, shattered the nascent conspiracy, and its supporters scattered in haste, to preserve their lives. The story may be best dealt with, for our purpose, by taking this brief summary and trying to draw lessons from it.

#### **I. It points anew the truth that 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'**

As Absalom, so Adonijah, had been spoiled by David's over-indulgence (verse 6), and having never had his wishes checked, was now letting his unbridled wishes hurry him into rebellion. Nor was that fault of David's the only one which brought about the miserable squabbles round his deathbed, as to who should wear the crown which had not yet fallen from his head. Eastern monarchies are familiar with struggles for the crown between the sons of different mothers when their father dies. David had indulged in a multitude of wives, and his last days were darkened by the resulting intrigues of his sons. No doubt, too, Solomon was disliked by his brethren as the child of Bathsheba, and the shame of David's crime was an obstacle in his younger son's way. Thus, as ever, his evil deeds came home to roost, and the poisonous seed which he had sown grew up and waved, a bitter harvest, which he had to reap. Repentance and forgiveness did not neutralise the natural consequences of his sin. Nor will they do so for us. God often leaves them to be experienced, that the experience may make us hate the sins the more.

#### **II. The sad defection to Adonijah of such tried friends as Joab and Abiathar has its lesson.**

The reason for Joab's treachery is plain. He had been steadily drifting away from David for years. His fierce temper could not brook the king's displeasure on account of his murders of Abner and Amasa, and his slaying of Absalom had made the breach irreparable. No doubt, David had made him feel that he loved and trusted him no longer; and his old comrade in many a fight, Benaiah, had stepped into the place which he had once filled. Professional rivalry had darkened into bitter hate. Joab commanded the native-born Israelites; Benaiah, the 'Cherethites and Pelethites,' who are now generally regarded as foreign mercenaries. They were David's bodyguard, and were probably as heartily hated by Joab and the other Israelite soldiers as they were trusted by David. So there were reasons enough for Joab's abetting an insurrection which would again make him the foremost soldier. He wanted to be indispensable, and would prop the throne as long as its occupant looked only to him as its defender. Besides, he probably felt that he would have little chance of winning distinction in a kingdom which was to be a peaceful one.

Abiathar's motives are unexplained, but if we notice that he had been obliged to acquiesce in the irregular arrangement of putting the high-priest's office into commission, we can understand that he bore no goodwill to Zadok, his colleague, or to David for making the latter so. Self was at the bottom of these two renegades' action. The fair fellowship, which had been made the closer because of

dangers and privations faced together, crumbled away before the disintegrating influences of petty personal jealousies. When once self-regard gets in, it is like the trickle of water in the cracks of a rock, which freezes in winter and splits the hardest stone. No common action for a great cause is possible without the suppression of sidelong looks towards private advantage. Joab and Abiathar tarnished a life's devotion and broke sacred bonds, because they thought of themselves rather than of God's will. Surely they must have had some pangs as they sat at Adonijah's feast, when they thought of the decrepit old king lying in his chamber up on Zion, and remembered what he and they had come through together.

### **III. We may note the pathetic picture of decaying old age which is seen in David.**

He was not very old in years, being about seventy, but he was a worn-out man. His early hardships had told on him, and now he lay in the inner chamber, the shadow of himself. His love for Bathsheba had died down, as would appear both from her demeanour before him, and from her ignorance of his intentions as to his successor. She was little or nothing to him now. He seems to have been torpidly unaware of what was going on. The noise of Adonijah's revels had not disturbed his quiet. He had not even taken the trouble to designate his successor, though 'the eyes of all Israel were upon him that he should tell who was to sit on his throne after him' ( v. 20 ). Such neglect was criminal in the circumstances, and brings out forcibly the weary indifference which had crept over him. Contrast that picture with the early days of swift energy and eager interest in all things. Is this half-comatose old man the David who flashed like a meteor and struck swift as a thunderbolt but a few years before? Yes, and a like collapse of power befalls us all, if life is prolonged. Those who most need the lesson will be least touched by it; but let not the young glory in their strength, for it soon fades away; and let them give the vigour of their early days to God, that, when the years come in which they shall say, 'I have no pleasure in them,' they may be able, like David, to look back over a long life and say, with him, that the Lord 'hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity.'

### **IV. We note the flash of fire which blazed up in the dying embers of David's life.**

The old lion could be roused yet, and could strike when roused. It took much to shake him out of his torpor. Nathan's plan of bringing the double influence of Bathsheba and himself to bear was successful beyond what he had hoped. All that they desired was a formal declaration of Solomon as successor. They knew that the king's name was still dear enough to all Israel to ensure that his wish would settle the succession; and they would have been content to have left the actual entrance of Solomon on office till after David's death, so sure were they that his word was still a spell. But the old king, shaking off his languor, as a lion does the drops from his mane, goes beyond their wishes, and strikes one decisive blow as with a great paw, and no second is needed. Without a moment's delay, he sends for the trusty three, and bids them act on the instant. So down to Gihon goes the procession, with the youthful prince seated on his father's mule, in token of his accession, the trusty bodyguard round him with Benaiah at their head, and the great prophet Nathan, side by side with the high-priest Zadok, representing the divine sanction of the solemn act.

It would take stronger men than the spoiled Adonijah and his revellers to upset anything which that determined company resolved to do. The lad is anointed with the holy oil which Zadok as high-priest had the right to bring forth from the temporary sanctuary. That signified and effected the communication from above of qualifications for the kingly office, and indicated divine appointment. Then out blared the trumpets, and the glad people shouted 'God save the king!' What thoughts filled the young heart of Solomon as he stood silent there his vision in Gibeon may partly tell. But the distant roar of acclaim reached Adonijah and his gang as they sat at their too hasty banquet.

They had begun at the wrong end. The feast should have closed, not inaugurated, the dash for the crown. They who feast when they should fight are likely to end their mirth with sorrow. David's one stroke was enough. They were as sure as Nathan and Bathsheba had been that the declaration of his wish would carry all Israel with it, and so they saw that the game was up, and there was a rush for dear life. The empty banqueting-hall proclaimed the collapse of a rebellion which had no brains to guide it, and no reason to justify it. Let us learn that, though 'the race is not always to the swift,' promptitude of action, when we are sure of God's will, is usually a condition of success. Life is too short, and the work to be done too pressing and great, to allow of dawdling. 'I made haste, and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.' Let us learn, too, from Adonijah's fiasco, to see the end of a thing before we commit ourselves to it, and to have the work done first before we think of the feast.

Nathan and Bathsheba and David all believed that God had willed Solomon's succeeding to the throne. No doubt, the reason for their belief was the divine word to David through Nathan ( 2 Samuel vii. 12 ), which designated a son not yet born as his successor, and therefore excluded Adonijah as well as Absalom. But, while they believed this, they did not therefore let Adonijah work his will, and leave God to carry out His purposes. Their belief animated their action. They knew what God willed, and therefore they worked strenuously to effect that will. We may bewilder our brains with speculations about the relation between God's sovereignty and man's freedom, but, when it comes to practical work, we have to put out the best and most that is in us to prevent God's will from being thwarted by rebellious men, and to ensure its being carried into effect through our efforts, 'for we are God's fellow-workers.'

## **1 KINGS 3:5-15: A Young Man's Wise Choice of Wisdom**

The new king was apparently some nineteen or twenty years old on his accession. He stepped at once out of seclusion and idleness to bear the whole weight of the kingdom. The glories of David's reign, his brother Adonijah's pretensions to the crown, the smouldering hostility of Saul's old partisans, made his position difficult and his throne unsteady. No doubt, 'the weight of too much dignity' pressed on the youth, and this dream found a point of origin in his waking thoughts. God does not thus reveal Himself to men who seek Him not; and the offer in the vision is but the repetition of what Solomon felt in many a waking moment of meditation that God was saying to him, and the choice he makes in it is the choice that he had already made. He who seeks wisdom first is already wise.

### **I. Note the wide possibilities opened by the divine offer.**

Our narrative brings that gracious offer into connection with Solomon's lavish sacrifice before the Tabernacle at Gibeon. 'God loveth a cheerful giver' and because these thousand burnt offerings meant devotion and thankfulness, therefore He who lets no man be the poorer for what he gives to Him, and is honoured most, not by our givings to, but by our takings from Him, comes in the quiet night, and puts the key of all His treasures into the young king's hands. In a very real sense this divine voice is but the putting into words of the fact as to every young life. The all but boundless possibilities before every young man and woman give solemnity to their position, which they too often do not recognise till youth is past. The future lies blank before them, ready to receive what they choose to write on its page. Once written, it is indelible. They are still free from the limitations of habit and associations. They have still the capacity and the opportunity of choice. There are limits, of course, but still it is scarcely exaggeration to say that a man may become almost anything he likes, if he strongly wills it when young, and sticks to his resolve. When the liquid iron flows from the blast furnace, it may be run into any mould; but it soon cools and hardens, and obstinately keeps its shape, in spite of hammers.

If young men and women could but see the possibilities of their youth, and the issues that hang on early choice, as clearly as they will see them some day, there would be fewer wasted mornings of life and fewer gloomy sunsets. But the misery is that so many do not choose at all, but just let things slide, and allow themselves to be moulded by whatever influence happens to be strongest. For one man who goes wrong by deliberate choice, with open eyes, there are twenty who simply drift. Unfortunately, there is more evil than good in the world; and if a lad takes his colour from his surroundings, the chances are terribly against his coming to anything high, noble, or pure. This world is no place for a man who cannot say 'No.' If we are like the weeds in a stream, and let it decide which way we shall point, we shall be sure to point downwards. It would do much to secure the choice of the Good, if there were a clear recognition by all young persons of the fact that they have the choice to make, and are really making it unconsciously. If they could be brought, like Solomon, to put their ruling wish into plain words, many who are not ashamed to yield to unworthy desires would be ashamed to speak them out baldly. Let each ask himself, 'Suppose that I had to say out what I want most, dare I avow before my own conscience, to say nothing of God, what it is?'

Looked at from a somewhat different point of view, God's offer to Solomon presupposes God's knowledge and approval of his wishes. He does not give blank cheques to those whom He cannot trust to fill them up rightly. When James and John tried to commit Jesus to a blind promise 'that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask of Thee,' their answer was a question as to what they wished. 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' God loves us too well to let us have carte blanche unless our wills run parallel with His. He is a foolish and cruel father who promises compliance with all his child's unknown wishes. Not such is our Father's loving discipline. It is to those who 'abide in Christ,' and have Him abiding in them, moulding their longings and prayers, that the great promise is sealed: 'Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'

### **II. Note next the wise choice of wisdom.**

'Had not Solomon been wise before, he had not known the worth of wisdom. The dunghill cocks of this world cannot know the price of this pearl; those that have it know that all other excellencies are but trash and rubbish unto it.' Solomon's prayer shows the temper with which he entered on his reign. There is no exultation; his serious and clear-eyed spirit sees in rule a heavy task. He contrasts his inexperienced rawness with the 'truth and righteousness' and veteran maturity of his great predecessor, and trembles to think that he, a mere lad, sits on David's throne. But he pleads with God that He has made him king, and implies that therefore God is bound to fit him for his office. That is the boldness permitted to faith,—to remind God of His own past acts, which pledge Him to give what He has put us into circumstances to need. With beautiful humility, Solomon dwells on his youth and inexperience, and on the vastness of the charge laid on him. All these considerations are the motives for his choice of a gift, and also pleas with God to grant his request.

He asks for the practical wisdom needed for ruling in these old days, when the king was judge as well as ruler and captain. Was this the highest gift that he could have asked or received? Surely the deep longings of his father for communion with God were yet better. No doubt the 'wisdom' of the Book of Proverbs is religion and morality as well as true thinking, but the 'understanding heart to judge Thy people' which Solomon asked and received is narrower and more secular in its meaning. There is no sign in his biography that he ever had the deep inward devotion of his father. After the poet-psalmist came the prosaic and keen-sighted shrewd man of affairs. The one breathed his ardent soul into psalms, which feed devotion to-day; the other crystallised his discernment in 'three

thousand proverbs,' and, though his 'songs were one thousand and five' they touched a lower range, both of poetry and religious feeling, than his father's, as may be expressed by calling them 'songs,' not 'psalms.'

But though the request is not the highest, it may well be taken as a pattern by the young. Note the view of his position from which it rises. To Solomon dignity meant duty; and his crown was not a toy, but a task. The responsibilities, not the enjoyments, of his station were uppermost in his mind. That is the only right view to take. Youth is meant to be enthusiastic, and to feed its aspirations on noble ideals, and if, instead of that, it does as too many do, especially in countries where wealth abounds, namely, regards life as a garden of delights, or sometimes as a sty where young men may wallow in 'pleasures,' then farewell to all hopes of high achievements or of an honourable career. Youthful ideals will fade fast enough; but alas for the life which had none to begin with! Note the sense of insufficiency for his task. Youth is prone to be over-confident, and to think that it can do better than its fathers, who were as confident in their time. There is a false humility which flattens the spirit and keeps from plain duty; and there is a true lowliness which feels that the task must be attempted, though the heart may shrink, and which impels to prayer for fitness not its own. He who tells God his consciousness of impotence, and asks Him to supply His strength to its weakness and His wisdom to its inexperience, will never shirk work because it is too great, nor ever fail to find power according to his need.

### III. Note God's answer.

Solomon gets his wish, and much which he had not asked besides. The divine answer is in two parts. First, the reasons for the large gift; and second, the details of the gift. His not wishing material good was the very reason why he obtained it. That is not always so; for often enough a man whose whole nature is sharpened to one point, in the intensity of his desire to make money, will succeed. But what then? He will be none the better, but the poorer, for his wealth. But this is always true,—that the people who do not make worldly good their first object are the people who can be most safely trusted with it, and who get most enjoyment out of it. Whether in the precise form of the gift to Solomon or not, outward good does attend a life which sets duty before pleasure, and desires most to be able to do it. All earthly good is exalted by being put second, and degraded as well as corrupted by being put first. The water lapped up in the palm, as the soldier marches, is sweeter than the abundant draughts swilled down by self-indulgence. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, . . . and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Note the largeness of the gift. When God is pleased with a man's prayers, He gives more than was asked, and so teaches us to be ashamed of the smallness of our expectations, and widens our desires by His overlapping bestowments. First, He gives the wisdom asked. Dependence on God, rising from the sense of our own ignorance, has a wonderful power of bringing illumination, even as to small matters of practical duty. Solomon asked it, to guide him in his judicial decisions; and the first case to which it was applied, when received, was a miserable quarrel between two disreputable women. A devout heart, purged from self-conceit, is often gifted with a piercing wisdom before which the crafty shrewdness of the world is abashed. We cannot be 'wise as serpents' unless we are 'harmless as doves.' The world may think such 'wisdom' folly, but she will be 'justified of her children.' Is the saying of James's Epistle a reminiscence of Solomon's dream, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . and it shall be given him'?

Then follows the grant of the unasked goods,—riches, honour, and length of days. Surely we hear an echo of these promises in that magnificent description of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs: 'Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour' These and similar gifts may or may not follow our choice of divine wisdom as our truest good. If we have really chosen it, we shall regard them as make-weights, to be thankfully received and rightly used, but not as indispensable. If we pursue wisdom for the sake of getting these, we shall lose both it and them. If we have set our desires most earnestly on the most worthy things, which are God's love and a character hallowed by His grace, we shall be rich indeed, whether what the world calls wealth be ours or no; and our days will be long enough if in them we have been prepared for the fuller wisdom and undying life of heaven.

Solomon realised his youthful aspirations. The only way to be sure of getting what we wish, is to wish what God desires to give,—even Himself,—and to ask it of Him. Solomon, like many a young man, outgrew his early 'dream.' Was he happier or wiser when he was a worn-out voluptuary, smiling with cynical scorn at his young self, or when, with generous enthusiasm, he felt the solemnity of life and the awfulness of duty, and asked God to help his insufficiency? Was not the dream truer and more real than the waking hours of profligacy and unreal 'enjoyment'?

## 1 Kings 4:25-34 The Great Gain of Godliness

The glories of Solomon's reign kindle the writer of this Book of Kings to patriotic enthusiasm, all the more touching if, as is probable, he wrote during Israel's exile. The fair vision of the past would make the sad present still sadder. But it is not patriotism only which guides his pen; he recognises that Solomon's glory was the result of Solomon's religion, and by portraying it he would teach the eternal truth that godliness hath 'promise of the life that now is' as well as 'of that which is to come.' The passage brings out three characteristics of Solomon's reign and character: the peace enjoyed by Israel during his time, his wealth, and his wisdom.

**I. That beautiful phrase for a time of secure enjoyment of modest, material good in a simple state of agricultural society, 'dwelt safely,** every man under his vine and under his fig tree' occurs frequently in the Old Testament, and breathes the very

essence of a calm life of rural felicity and restful enjoyment of wholesome joys. How different from the feverish ideal predominant in our great cities to-day! Which is the nobler and the more likely to yield abiding content and to be the ally of high and serious thought—this antique picture of leisurely, unambitious lives, or the scramble for wealth which destroys repose, and is so busy getting that it has no time either rightly to enjoy, or nobly to expend, its wealth? Those who have their country's truest prosperity at heart may well sigh for the return of the vanished ideal of Solomon's days; and those who would make the most of themselves must in some measure seek to conform their own lives to it.

But another view may be taken of this picture of national prosperity. Remember the time at which it was painted,—a time when the prosperity of a nation was thought to consist in conquest, and when the arts of peace were despised. How far beyond his era was the king who set his highest glory in securing for his people tranquil lives on their fertile homesteads, and condemned the vulgar glory of the conqueror! How far beyond his era was the writer who felt that the fairest page in his book was not that which told of battles and triumphs, but that which portrayed a peaceful reign, when swords were turned into ploughshares! The world has not yet learned that the highest function of government is to promote individual prosperity. The vulgar, wicked notion of 'glory' bewitches the nations still. A Europe, armed to the teeth and staggering under the weight of its weapons, has need to go to school to this old Hebrew ideal. 'They didn't know everything down in Judee,' but they knew that peace has nobler victories than war has. The people who see nothing in the world's history but natural evolution have a hard nut to crack in accounting for the singular fact that the Jew somehow or other had got hold of a truth to which the most advanced nations to-day have scarcely grown up.

## **II. The wealth of Solomon is illustrated by his large equipment of chariots and horsemen.**

The older habits of the nation had not favoured the use of either, and their employment by Solomon was a sign of growing luxury, which had the seeds of evil in it. But the novelty was characteristic of the change coming over Israel in his day, and of its closer intercourse with other nations. The number of forty thousand for the stalls of the horses is an evident clerical error, which is corrected in the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles 9:25 to the more probable number of four thousand. A well-organised staff looked after provisioning the cavalry and chariot horses wherever they were quartered. This one instance of Solomon's resources should be connected with the other details of these. The intention of all is, not only to magnify his wealth, but to bring out the fulfilment of the promise made to him as part of the reward of his prayer for wisdom, that he should have the inferior good which he had not asked, 'both riches and honour.'

The principle which the writer of this book would confirm and exemplify is, that to the man who seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness all these things shall be added. Now the whole order of supernatural providences in the Old Testament was directed to making material prosperity depend on obedience to God. And we cannot assert that the New Testament order has the same purpose in view. 'Prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New.' But even in Old Testament times outward prosperity did not always follow godliness, and the problem which has tortured all generations had already been raised, as the Book of Job and Psalm lxxiii show.

Undoubtedly, religion does contribute to prosperity. The natural tendency of the course of life which Christianity enjoins is to lead to moderate, modest success in a worldly point of view. Not many millionaires owe their millions to the practice of Christian virtues, but many a man owes his elevation from poverty to modest competence to the character and habits which his religion has stamped on him. People who get converted in the slums soon get out of the slums.

But, whether Christianity helps a man to worldly success or not, it helps him to get all the good out of the world that the world can give. It may, or may not, give dainties, but it will make brown bread sweet. It may, or may not, give wealth, but it will make the 'little that a righteous man hath better than the riches of many wicked.' They who know no higher good than earth can yield know not the highest good of earth; they who put worldly prosperity and treasure second find them far more precious and sweet than when they ranked them as first.

## **III. But the crown of Solomon's gifts was his wisdom.**

And his elevation of intellectual and moral endowments above material good is as remarkable as his similar elevation of peace above warlike fame, and suggests the same questions as to the source of ideas so far ahead of what was then the world's point of view. Observe that Solomon's 'wisdom' in all its departments is traced to God its giver. Observe, too, that expression 'largeness of heart,' by which is meant, not width of quick sympathy or generosity, but what we should call comprehensive intellect. The 'heart' is the centre of the personal being, from which thoughts as well as affections flow, and the phrase here points to thoughts rather than to affections.

Solomon, then, was a many-sided student, and his 'genius' showed itself in very various forms. He lived before the days of specialists. The region of knowledge was so limited that a man could be master in many departments. Nowadays the mass has become so unmanageable that, to know one subject thoroughly, we have to be ignorant of many, like the scholar who had given his life to the study of the Greek noun, and, dying, lamented that he had not confined himself to the dative case! Practical wisdom, which

had its field In doing justice between his subjects; shrewd observation of life, with wit to discern resemblances and to put wisdom into homely, short sayings; poetic sensibility and the gift of melodious speech; and, added to these manifold endowments, interest in, and rudimentary knowledge of, natural history and botany, make the points specified as Solomon's wisdom.

'A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome,'—

the first and greatest of the few students or philosophers who have sat on thrones.

But the main thing to notice is that in Solomon we see exemplified the normal relation between religion and intellectual power and learning. Judge, artist, scientist, and all other thinkers and students, draw their power from God, and should use it for Him. And, on the other hand, Solomon's example is a rebuke to those narrow-minded Christians who look askance at men of learning, letters, or science, as well as to those still more narrow-minded men of intellectual ability who think that science and religion must be sworn foes. If our religion is what it should be, it will widen our understanding all round.

'Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell.'

## 1 Kings 5:1-12 Great Preparations for a Great Work

The building of the Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign ( 1 Kings 6:1). The preparations for so great a work must have taken much time, so that the arrangement with Hiram recorded in this passage was probably made very early in the reign. That probability is strengthened if we suppose, as we must do, that the embassy from Hiram mentioned in verse 1 was sent to congratulate Solomon on his accession. If so, the latter's proposal to get timber and stones from the Lebanon would be made at the very commencement of the reign. Three years would not be more than enough to get the material ready and transported. Great designs need long preparation. Raw haste wastes time; deliberation is as needful before beginning as rapid action is when we have begun.

**1 Kings 5:3-5 set forth very forcibly the motives which impelled the young king to the work, and may suggest to us the motives which should urge us to diligence in building a better temple than he reared.**

He begins by reference to his father's foiled wish, and to the reason why David could not build the house. Not only was it inappropriate that a warlike king should build it, but it was impossible that, whilst his thoughts were occupied and his resources taxed by war, he should devote himself to such a work. In Assyria and Egypt the great warrior kings are the great temple-builders, but a divine decorum forbade it to be so in Israel.

Solomon next thankfully describes his own happier circumstances. Observe his designation of Jehovah in verse 4 as 'my God,' and compare with verse 3 , where He is called David's God. The son had inherited the divine protection and the father's sense of personal relation to Jehovah. That is a better legacy than a throne. Well had it been for Solomon if he had held by the faith of his first days of royalty! Such a sense of a personal bond of love protecting on the one hand, and love trusting and obeying on the other, is the spring of all true service of God, whether it is busied in temple-building or in anything else.

We note also the grateful recognition of benefits received, and the tracing of peace and outward prosperity to God's care. There was not a cloud in the sky. The horizon was clear all round, and it was 'the Lord my God,' who had made this ease for Solomon. We are often more ready to recognise God's hand in sorrows than in joys. When He smites, we try to say 'It is the Lord!' Do we try to say it when all things are smooth and bright?

The effect of blessings should be thankfulness, and the proof of thankfulness is service. So Solomon did not take prosperity as an inducement to selfish luxurious repose, but heard in it God's call to a great task. If all the rich men and all the leisurely women who call themselves Christians would do likewise, there would be plenty of workers and of resources for Christ's service, which now sorely lacks both. How many of such 'lay up treasure for themselves, and are not rich toward God'! How many fritter away their leisure in vanities, having time for any amusement or folly, but none for Christian service!

The man whom Jesus called 'Thou fool!' not the wise king, is the pattern for a sad number of professing Christians. 'Thou hast much goods laid up for many years.' What then? 'I purpose to build an house for the name of the Lord'? By no means. 'I will build greater barns, and that will give me something to do, and then I will take mine ease.'

We note, too, that Solomon was impelled to his great work by the knowledge that God had appointed him to do it. The divine word concerning himself, spoken to his father, sounded in his ears, and gave him no rest till he had set about obeying it ( v. 5 ). The motives of the great temple-builders of old, as they themselves expound them in hieroglyphics and cuneiform, were largely ostentation and the wish to outdo predecessors; but Solomon was moved by thankfulness and by obedience to his father's will, and

still more, to God's destination of him. If we would look at our positions and blessings as he looked at his in the fair dawning of his reign, we should find abundant indications of God's will regarding our work.

Solomon uses a remarkable expression as to the purpose of the Temple. It is to be 'an house for the name of the Lord.' That is not the same as 'for the Lord.' Pagan temples might be intended by their builders for the actual residence of the god, but Solomon knew that the heaven of heavens could not contain Him, much less this house which he was about to build. We are fairly entitled, then, to lay stress on that phrase, 'the Name.' It means the whole self-revelation of God, or, rather, the character of God as made known by that self-revelation.

The Temple was, then, to be the place in which the God who fills earth and heaven was to manifest Himself, and where His servants were to behold and reverence Him as manifested. The Shechinah was the symbol, and in one aspect was a part, of that self-revelation. However, in common speech the Temple was spoken of as the house of Jehovah. The same thought which is expressed in Solomon's fuller phrase underlay the expression,— He dwelt 'not in temples made with hands' but His name was set there, and the structure was reared, not so much for Him as that worshippers might there meet Him.

## **II. The rest of the passage deals with Solomon's request to Hiram, and the preparation of the material for the Temple. Solomon's first care was to secure timber and stone.**

His own dominions can never have been well wooded, and there are many indications that the great central knot of mountainous land, which included the greater part of his kingdom, was comparatively treeless. He therefore proposed to Hiram to supply timber from the great woods on Lebanon, which have now nearly died out, and offered liberal payment.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles makes Solomon offer specified quantities of provisions for Hiram's workmen, and makes Hiram accept the terms. Verse 11 of this chapter says that the provisions named there were for the Tyrian king's 'household.' This may possibly mean the workmen, who would be regarded as Hiram's slaves, but, more probably, 'household' means 'court,' and Solomon had not only to feed the army of workmen, but to supply as much again for the great establishment which Hiram kept up. The little slip of seacoast, with the mountain rising sharply behind, which made Hiram's kingdom, could not grow enough for his people's wants. His country was 'nourished' by Palestine, long centuries after this time ( Acts 12:20 ), and the same was the case in Solomon's period. In verse 11 , the quantity of oil is impossibly small as compared with that of wheat. 2 Chronicles reads 'twenty thousand' instead of 'twenty,' and the Septuagint inserts 'thousand' in verse 11 , which is probably correct.

With all his Oriental politeness and probably real wish to oblige a powerful neighbour, Hiram was too true a Phoenician not to drive a good bargain. He was king of 'a nation of shopkeepers,' and was quite worthy of the position. 'Nothing for nothing' seems to have been his motto, even with friends. He would love Solomon, and send him flowery congratulations, and talk as if all he had was his ally's, but when it came to settling terms he knew what his cedars were worth, and meant to have their value.

There are a good many people who get mixed up with religious work, and talk as if it were very near their hearts, who have as sharp an eye to their own advantage as he had. The man who serves God because he gets paid for it, does not serve Him. The Temple may be built of the timber and stones that he has supplied, but he sold them, and did not give them, therefore he has no part in the building.

How different the uncalculating lavishness of Solomon! He knows no better use for treasures than to expend them on God's service, and 'all for love, and nothing for reward.' That is the true temper for Christian work. He to whom Christ has given Himself should give himself to Christ; and he who has given himself should and will keep back nothing, nor seek for cheap ways of serving the Lord, He who gives all, be it two mites, or a fishing-boat and some torn nets, or great wealth like that which Solomon found in his father's treasuries and devoted to building the Temple, gives much; and he who gives less than he can gives little.

Solomon's work was, after all, outward work, and fitter for that early age than the imitation of it would be now. The days for building temples and cathedrals are past. The universal religion hallows not Gerizim nor Jerusalem, but every place where souls seek God. The spiritual religion asks for no shrines reared by men's hands; for Jesus Christ is the true Temple, where God's name is set, and where men may behold the manifested Jehovah, and meet with Him. But we have work to do for Christ, and a temple to build in our own souls, and a stone or two to lay in the great Temple which is being built up through the ages. Well for us if we use our resources and our leisure, for such ends with the same promptitude, thankful surrender, and sense of fulfilling God's purpose, as animated the young king of Israel!

## **1 Kings 6:7 Building in Silence**

The Temple was built in silence. It 'rose like an exhalation.'

'No hammer fell, no ponderous axes rung, Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.'

Perhaps it was merely for convenience of transport and to save time that the stones were dressed in the quarries, but more probably the silence was due to an instinct of reverence. We may fairly use it as suggesting two thoughts.

### **I. How God's house is mostly built in silence.**

'The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.'

(1) In reference to its advance in the world.

Destructive work is noisy, constructive work is silent. God was in 'the still small voice,' not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. Christ's own career, how silent it was! Drums are loud and empty. The spread of the kingdom was unnoticed by the world's great ones—Caesars, philosophers, patricians, and it silently grew underground. Hence may flow—

(a) An encouragement to those whose work is inconspicuous.

(b) A lesson not to mistake noise and notoriety for spiritual progress.

(c) Guidance as to our expectations of the advance of Christ's kingdom. It will transform society by slow, often unnoticed, degrees, by radical change of individuals' habits. The elevation of humanity will be slow, like the imperceptible rise of the Norwegian coast. Sudden changes are short-lived changes. 'Lightly come, lightly go.' What matures slowly will last long.

### **(2) In reference to its growth in our souls.**

Silence is needed for that. There must be much still communion and quiet reflection. The advance in the Christian life is variously likened to a battle, since there are antagonists and struggle is needed to overcome; and to vegetable or corporeal growth, which the mysterious indwelling life works without effort and almost without consciousness, but it is also likened to the erection of a building, in which there is continuity, and each successive course of masonry is the foundation for that above it. That work of building is work that must be done in silence. If we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, we must silently drink in the sunshine and dew, and so prosperously pass from blade to ear, and thence to full corn in the ear.

Surely nothing is more needed in these days of noisy advertisement, and measurement of the importance of things by the noise that they can make, than this lesson of the place of silence in Christian progress, both for individuals and for the Christian Church as a whole.

### **II. How God's house is built of prepared stones.**

That is true, in one view of the matter, in regard to the Church on earth, for there must be the individual act of repentance and faith before a soul is fit to be built into the fabric of the Church.

There is providential training of men for their tasks before these are given to them.

But the highest application of the symbol which we venture to find in our text is to the relation between the earthly and the heavenly life.

This world is the quarry where the stones are dressed for the Temple in the heavens.

( a ) Life is the chipping and hewing. The unnecessary pieces are struck off with heavy mallet and sharp chisel. Pain and sorrow are thus explained, if not wholly, yet sufficiently to bring about submission and trust.

( b ) The Builder has His plan clearly before Him, and works accurately to realise it. He perfectly knows what He means to build, and every stroke of the dressing-tool is accurately directed. There are no mistakes made in His quarrying.

( c ) We may be sure that the prepared stones will be brought to the Temple site and built into it. There lie gigantic half-hewn pillars in abandoned quarries in Syria and Egypt. But no one will ever say of the divine Temple-Builder: He began to build and was not able to finish. It remains a problem how the old builders managed to transport these huge stones from the quarries to the site, but we may be sure that the Architect of the 'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,' knows how to bring every stone that has been prepared here, to the place prepared for it, and for which it has been prepared. We may repose on the Apostle's assurance that 'He that has begun a good work in you will perform it,' or rather on the more sure word of Jesus Himself, 'He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.'

## **1 Kings 8:54-63 The King "Blessing" His People**



The great ceremonial of dedicating the Temple was threefold. The first stage was setting the ark in its place, which was the essence of the whole thing. God's presence was the true dedication, and that was manifested by the bright cloud that filled the sanctuary as soon as the ark was placed there. The second stage was the lofty and spiritual prayer, saturated with the language and tone of Deuteronomy, and breathing the purest conceptions of the character and nature of God, and all aglow with trust in Him. Then followed, thirdly, this 'Blessing of the Congregation.' The prayer had been uttered by the kneeling king. Now he stands up, and, with ringing tones that reach to the outskirts of the crowd, he gathers the spirit of his prayer into two petitions, preceded by praise for national blessings, and followed by exhortation to national obedience. A huge sacrifice of unexampled magnitude closes the whole.

### **I. Note the thankful retrospect of the nation's past (1 Ki 8:56).**

Solomon 'blessed the congregation' when, in their name, he lifted up his voice to bless the Lord, prayed that God would incline their hearts to keep His law, and would maintain their cause, and exhorted them to keep their hearts perfect with Him. We bless each other when we ask God to bless, and when we draw each other nearer Him. Standing there in the new Temple, with a united nation gathered before him, the cloud filling the house, and peace resting on all his land to its farthest border, the king looks back on the long road from Sinai and the desert, and sums up the whole history in one sentence. The end has vindicated the methods. There had been many a dark time when enemies had oppressed, and many a hard-fought field had been stained with Israel's blood; but all had tended to this calm hour, when Israel's multitudes were gathered in worship, and their unguarded homes were safe. There had been many heroes in the long line.

'Time would fail' him 'to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel . . . who . . . turned to flight armies of aliens.' One name alone is worthy to be named,—the name of the true Deliverer and Monarch. It is the Lord who 'hath given rest unto His people.' We look on the past most wisely when we see in it all the working of one mighty Hand, and pass beyond the great names of history or the dear names which have made the light of our homes, to the ever-living God, who works through changing instruments; and 'the help that is done on earth, He doeth it Himself.' We read the past most truly when we see in all its vicissitudes God's unchanging faithfulness, and recognise that the foes and sorrows which often pressed sore upon us were no breach of His faithful promises, but either His loving chastisement for our faithlessness, or His loving discipline meant to perfect our characters. We read the past best from the vantage-ground of the Temple. From its height we understand the lie of the land. Communion with God explains much which is else inexplicable. Solomon's judgment of Israel's checkered history will be our judgment of our own when we stand in the higher courts of the heavenly home, and look from that height upon all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us. In the meantime, it is often a trial for faith to repeat these words; but the blessing that comes from believing them true is worth the effort to stifle our tears in order to say them.

### **II. Note the prayer for obedient hearts (1 Kings 8:57, 58).**

The proper subject-matter of this petition is 'that He may incline our hearts to walk in His ways,' and God's presence is invoked as a means thereto. The deepest desire of a truly religious soul is for the felt nearness of God. That goes before all other blessings, and contains them all. Nothing is so needful or so sweet as that The presence of God is the absence of evil, the evil both of pain and of sin, as surely as the rising sun is the routing of night's black hosts. 'The best of all is, God is with us.' The prayer again looks back to the past, and asks that the ancient experiences may be renewed. The generations of those who trust in God are knit together, and the wonders of old time are capable of repetition to-day. Faith can say with deeper meaning than the Preacher, 'That which hath been is that which shall be.' However varying may be the forms, the fact of a divine presence and help according to need is invariable, and they that have gone before have not exhausted the fountain, which will fill the vessel of the latest comer as it did that of the first. How beautifully the abiding God and the fleeting series of 'our fathers' is contrasted! A moment of triumph, when some work, like that of building the Temple, which has for ages been looked forward to, and into which the sacrifices and aspirations of a long line of dead toilers are built, brings strongly before all thoughtful men the continuity of a nation or a Church, and the transiency of its individual members. It should suggest the abiding God yet more strongly than it does the passing fathers. The mercy remains the same, while the receivers change. The sunshine and the tree are the same, though the leaves which glisten and grow in the light have but one summer to live.

But Solomon desires that God may be with him and his people for one specific purpose. Is it to bring outward prosperity, or to extend their territory, or to give them victory? As in his choice in his dream, so now, he asks, not for these things, but for an inward influence on heart and will. What he wants most for himself and them is moral conformity to God's will. All must be right if that be right. The prayer implies that, without God's help, the heart will wander from the paths of duty. The weakness of human nature, and the consequent necessity for God's grace in order to obedience, were as deeply felt by the devout men of the Old Testament as by Apostles. They are felt by every man who has honestly tried to measure the sweep and inwardness of God's law, and to realise it in life. We need go but a very short way on the road to discover that temptations to diverge lie so thick on either side, and that our feet grow weary so soon, that we shall make but little progress without help from above.

The synonyms for the law are worthy of notice. Why are there so many of these in the Old Testament? For the same reason that

there are so many for 'money' in English,—because those who made the language thought so much about the thing, and delighted in it so much. As 'commandments,' it was solemnly imposed by rightful authority, and obedience was obligatory. The word rendered 'statutes' means something engraved, or written, and recalls the tables inscribed by God's finger. 'Judgments' are the divine decisions or sentences as to what is right, and therefore the infallible clue to the else bewildering labyrinth. To obey these commandments, to read that solemn writing, and to accept these decisions as our guides, is man's perfection and blessedness; and for that God's felt presence is indispensable.

### **III. Note the prayer for God's defence (1 Kings 8:59, 60).**

The proper subject-matter of this petition is that God would maintain the cause of king and nation; and it is preceded by a petition that, to that end, the preceding prayer may be answered, and is followed by the desire that thereby the knowledge of God may fill the earth. The prayer for outward blessings comes after the prayer for inward heart-obedience. Is not that the right order? Our prayers need to be prayed for, and a true desire is not contented with one utterance. To ask that what we have asked may be given is no vain repetition, nor a sign of weak faith, or undue anxiety. How bold the figure in asking that the prayer may lie before God day and night, like some suppliant at the foot of His throne!

Note the grand aim of God's help of Israel,—the universal diffusion of His name among all the peoples of the earth. Solomon understood the divine vocation of Israel, and had risen above desiring blessings only for his own or his subjects' sake. Later ages fell from that elevation of feeling, and hugged their special privileges without a thought of the obligations which they involved. God's choice of Israel was not meant for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but as the means of transmitting the knowledge of God to them. The one nation was chosen that God's grace might fructify through it to all. The fire was gathered into a hearth, that the whole house might be warmed. But selfishness marred the divine plan, and Israel became a nonconductor, and the privileges selfishly kept became corrupt; as the miser's corn stored in his barns in famine breeds weevils. Christians need no more solemn lesson of what comes from selfishly hoarding spiritual blessings than the fate of Israel. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others who sit in the dark the light which we possess; and if we fail to do so, the light will darken within us.

### **IV. The blessing ends with one brief, all-comprehensive charge to the people, which seems based, by its 'therefore,' on the preceding thought of Jehovah as the only God.**

The only attitude corresponding to His sole and supreme Majesty is the entire devotion of heart, which leads to thoroughgoing obedience to His commandments. The word rendered 'perfect' literally means 'entire' or 'sound,' and here expresses the complete devotion of the whole nature. Solomon meant that it should be complete, in contradistinction to any sidelong glances to idolatry. The principle underlying that 'therefore' is that, God being what He is, our only God and refuge, the only adequate hope and object of our nature, we should give our whole selves to Him. We, too, are tempted to bring Him divided hearts, and to carry some of our love and trust as offerings at other shrines. But if there be 'one God, and none other but He,' then to serve Him with all our heart and strength and mind is the dictate of common sense, and the only service which He can accept, or which can bring to our else distracted natures peace and satisfaction. His voice to us is, 'My son, give Me thy whole heart.' Our answer to Him should ever be that prayer, 'Lord, . . . unite my heart to fear Thy name.' A divided heart is misery. Partial trust is distrust. 'Love me all in all, or not at all,' is the requirement of all deep, human love; and shall God ask less than men and women ask from and give to one another?

## **1 Kings 8:59 The Matter of a Day in Its Day**

I have ventured to diverge from my usual custom, and take this fragment of a text because, in the forcible language of the original, it carries some very important lessons. The margin of our Bible gives the literal reading of the Hebrew; the sense, but not the vigorous idiom, of which is conveyed in the paraphrase in our version. 'At all times, as the matter shall require,' is, literally, 'the thing of a day in its day'; and that is the only limitation which this prayer of Solomon places upon the petition that God would maintain the cause of His servants and of His people Israel. The kingly suppliant got a glimpse of very great, though very familiar, truths, and at that hour of spiritual illumination, the very high-water mark of his relations to God—for I suppose he was never half as good a man afterwards—he gave utterance to the great thought that God's mercies come to us day by day, according to the exigencies of the moment.

Now, I think that in the words 'the matter of a day in its day' we may see both a principle in reference to God's gifts and a precept in reference to our actions. Let us look at these two things.

### **I. A principle in reference to God's gifts.**

Of course, obviously—and I need not say more than a word about that—we find it so in regard to the outward blessings that are poured into our lives. We are taught, if the translation of the New Testament is correct, to ask, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and to let to-morrow alone. Life comes to us pulsation by pulsation, breath by breath, by reason of the continual operation, in the material world, of the present God's present giving. He does not start us, at the beginning of our days, with a fund of physical vitality upon which we thereafter draw, but moment by moment He opens His hand, and lets life and breath and all things flow out to us moment

by moment, for no creature would live for an instant except for the present working of a present God. If we only realised how the slow pulsation of the minutes is due to the touch of His finger on the pendulum, and how everything that we have, and the existence of us who have it, are results of the continuous welling out from the fountain of life, of ripple after ripple of the waters, everything would be more sacred, and more solemn, and fuller of God than, alas! it is.

But the true region in which we may best find illustrations of this principle in reference to God's gifts is the region of the spiritual and moral bestowments which He in His love pours upon us. He does not flood us with them: He filters them drop by drop, for great and good reasons. I only mention three various forms of this one great thought.

God gives us gifts adapted to the moment. 'The matter of a day,' the thing fitted for the instant, comes. In deepest reality, all is one gift, for in truth what God gives to us is Himself; or, if you like to put it so, His grace. That little word 'grace' is like a small window that opens out on to a great landscape, for it gathers up into one encyclopaediacal expression the whole infinite variety of beneficences and bestowments which come showering down upon us. That one gift is, as the Apostle puts it in one of his eloquent epithets, 'the manifold grace of God,' which word in the original is even more rich and picturesque, because it means the 'many-variegated' grace—like some rich piece of embroidery glowing with all manner of dyes and gold. So the one gift comes to us manifold, rich in its adaptation to, and its exquisite fitness for, the needs of the moment. The Rabbis had a tradition that the manna in the wilderness tasted to every man just what each man needed or wished most. It is as though in some imperial city on a day of rejoicing, one found a fountain in the market-place pouring out, according to the wish of the people, various costly wines and refreshing drinks, God's gift comes to us with like variety—the 'matter of a day in its day.'

God never gives us the wrong medicine. In whatever variety of circumstances we stand, that one infinitely simple and yet infinitely complex gift contains what we specially want at the moment. Am I struggling? He extends a hand to steady me. Am I fighting? He is my 'sword and shield, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.' Am I anxious? He comes into my heart, and brings with Him a great peace, and all waves cease to toss and smooth themselves into a level plain. Am I glad? He comes to heighten the gladness by some touch of holier joy. Am I perplexed in mind? If I look to Him, 'His coming shall be as the morning,' and illumination will be granted. Am I treading a lonely path? There is One by my side who will neither change, nor fail, nor die. Whatever any man needs, at the moment that he needs it, that one great Gift will supply 'the matter of a day in its day.'

God gives punctually. Many of us may have sometimes sent Christmas presents to India or Australia some weeks before. Some will arrive in time and some will be too late. God's gifts never reach us before the day, and they never come after the day. 'The Lord shall help her, and that right early,' said the grand psalm. What the Psalmist was thinking about was, I suppose, that miraculous intervention when the army of Sennacherib was smitten in a night. Timid and faithless souls in Jerusalem, as they looked over the walls and saw the encircling lines of the fierce foes drawing closer and closer round the doomed city, must have said, 'Our Lord delayeth His coming,' and could not stand the test of their faith and patience, involved in God's apparent indifference to the need of His people. To-morrow the assault is to be delivered. To-night

'The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed';

and the would-be assailants, when that to-morrow dawned, were lying stiff and stark in their tents. God's help comes, not too soon, lest we should not know the blessedness of trusting in the dark; and not too late, lest we should know the misery of trusting in vain.

Peter is lying in prison. Herod intends, after the Passover, to bring him out to the people. The scaffolding is ready. The first watch of the night passes, and the second. If once it is fairly light, escape is impossible. But in the grey dawn the angel touches the sleeper. He wakes while his guards sleep. There is no need for hurry. He who has God for his Deliverer has no occasion to 'go out with haste.' So, with strange and majestic leisureliness, the escaping prisoner is bid to put on his shoes and gird himself. No doubt, he cast many a scrutinising glance at the four sleeping legionaries whom a heedless movement might have wakened. When all is ready, he is led forth through all the wards, each being a separate peril, and all made safe to him. The first gate opens, and the second gate opens, and the iron gate that leads into the city opens, and quietly he and the angel go down the street. It is light enough for him to see his way to the house where the brethren are assembled. He gets safe behind Mary's door before it is light enough for the gaolers to discover his absence, and for the pursuers to be started in their search. The Lord did help him, and that right early—'the matter of a day in its day.'

We shall find, if we leave our times in His hand, that the old simple faith has still a talismanic power to quiet us. His time is best, so be patient, and be trustful in your patience.

Again, God gives gifts enough, and not more than enough. He serves out our rations for spirit as for body, as they do on shipboard, where the sailors have to take their pots and plates to the galley every day and for each meal, and get enough to help them over the moment's hunger. The manna fell morning by morning. 'He that gathered much had nothing over, he that gathered little had no lack.' So all the variety of our changeful conditions, besides its purpose of disciplining ourselves and of making character, has also the

purpose of affording a theatre for the display, if I may use such cold language—or rather let me say affording an opportunity for the bestowment—of the infinitely varied, exquisitely adapted, punctual, and sufficient grace of God.

## II. But now, secondly, a word about the text as containing a precept for our action.

Let me put what I have to say in three plain sentences.

First, take short views of the future. Of course, we have to look ahead, and in reference to many things to take prudent forecasts, but how many of us there are who weaken ourselves and spoil to-day by being 'over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils!' It is a great piece of practical philosophy, and I am sure that it has much to do with our getting the best out of the present moment, that we should either take very short or very long views of the future. Either

'Let the unknown to-morrow  
Bring with it what it may,'

or look beyond the last of the days into the unseen light of an unsetting sun. If I must anticipate, let me anticipate the ultimate, the changeless, the certain; and let me not condemn my faculty of picturing that which is to come, to look along the low ranges of earthly life, and torture myself by imagining all the possibilities of evil of which my condition admits, as being turned into certainties to-morrow. Take 'the matter of a day in its day.' 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Let us make the minute what it ought to be, then God will make the whole what it ought to be.

Again I say, let us fill each day with discharged duties. If you and I do not do the matter of the day in its day, the chances are that no to-morrow will afford an opportunity of doing it. So there will come upon us all, if we are unfaithful to this portioning out of tasks to times, that burden of an irrevocable past, and of the omitted duties that will stand reproving and condemning before us, whensoever we turn our eyes to them. 'It might have been, and it is not'; does a sadder speech than that fall from human lips? Brethren, the day, though it is short, is elastic; and no one knows how much of discharged service and accomplished work and fulfilled responsibilities can be crammed into its hours, until he has earnestly tried to fill each moment with the task which belongs to the moment. 'The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing.' If our day is not filled full of work, some to-morrow will be filled full, in retrospect, of thorns and stings. Life is short; 'the night cometh when no man can work.' 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.'

Lastly, I would say, keep open a continual communion with God, that day by day you may get what day by day you need. There are hosts of people who call themselves, and, in some kind of surface way, are, Christian people, who seem to think that they get all that they need of the grace of God in a lump, at the beginning of their Christian career, and who are living upon past communications and the memory of these, and are forgetting that they can no more live and be nourished upon past gifts of God's grace than upon the dinner that they ate this day last year. We must hang continually upon Him, if we are continually to receive from His hand. No past blessing will avail for present use.

Dear friends, the purpose of this principle, which I have been trying to illustrate in God's way of dealing with us, is that we shall be content to be continually dependent, and consciously as well as continually dependent, upon Him. In the measure in which we keep our hearts open for the perpetual influx of His grace, in that measure shall we be ready for each day as it comes; for its trials and its joys, for its possibilities and its duties.

This, too, must be remembered—that the days bolted together make months; and the months, years; and the years, life; and that life as a whole is 'a day'; and that there is a 'matter' of that day which can only be done in its day. Oh that none of us may be the subjects of that sad wail from a Saviour's heart and a Saviour's lips, which lamented, 'If thou hadst known, at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now'—the night has come, and the darkness of the night, and—'they are hid from thine eyes!'

## 1 Kings 9:1-9 Promises and Threatenings

The successful end of a great work is often the beginning of a great reaction. When the tension is slackened, the whole nature of the worker is relaxed, and the temptation to slothful self-indulgence is strong. God knows our frame, and mercifully times His manifestations to the moments of special need. So, when Solomon had finished his great task, 'the Lord appeared the second time, as He had appeared at Gibeon.' There had been no manifest token of approval during all the years of building the Temple, for none was needed; but now there was danger that the finished work might be followed by languor and indifference, and therefore once more God spoke words of stimulus, both promises and warnings.

A solemn alternative is set before the king, both parts of which are fitted to rouse his energy and inspire him to faithful obedience. The same alternatives are presented to each of us. In 1 Kings 9:3-5 God promises blessed results from clinging to Him and keeping His statutes; in 1 Kings 9:6-9 He mercifully threatens the tragic issues of departure. In applying these to ourselves we must remember that outward prosperity was attached to a devout life more closely in Israel than it is now. But, though the form of the

blessings dependent on doing God's will alters, the reality remains unaltered.

### **I. The promises to Solomon are preceded by the assurance that his prayer had been heard.**

The answer corresponds very beautifully to the petitions. God has 'put His name' in the Temple, as the descent of the Glory to rest between the cherubim visibly showed, and thus has fulfilled Solomon's petition; but the answer surpasses the prayer in that the presence of 'the Name' is promised 'for ever.' Similarly, in Psalm cxxxii. , the answer to the petition 'Arise into Thy rest' transcends the petition which it answers, and adds the same promise of perpetuity, 'This is My rest for ever .' Again, Solomon had prayed, 'that Thine eyes may be open towards this house,' and God answers with the expanded promise that not His eyes only, but His heart shall be there perpetually. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,' and He delights to surprise us with over-answers to our prayers. We cannot widen our desires so far but that His gifts will stretch beyond them on every side.

But the promise of perpetual dwelling in the Temple is conditional, as appears in the latter part of God's answer, though no condition is stated at first. The promises to Solomon individually are all contingent. The all-important 'if' at the beginning of verse 4 governs the whole. The divine eulogium on David, which introduces these promises, suggests how mercifully God regards the imperfect lives of His servants. That merciful interpretation of conduct is removed by a whole universe from palliation of sin. It affords no ground for our thinking little of our inconsistencies. David's crime was sternly rebuked and sorely punished, but still his life, in its main drift and outline, could be presented as a pattern, as being marked by integrity of heart and uprightness. The moon shines like a disc of silver, though its surface is pitted with extinct volcanoes.

We may note, too, the pregnant description in outline of the elements of a devout life, as here enjoined on Solomon. The first requisite is to walk before God; that is, to nourish a continual consciousness of His presence, and to regulate all actions and thoughts under the thrilling and purifying sense of being 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye.' Only we are not to think of Him as only a Taskmaster, but as a loving Friend and Helper. A child is happy in its little work or play when it knows that its father is looking on with sympathy. The sense of God's eye being on us should 'make a sunshine in a shady place,' should lighten labour and sweeten care. It is at the root of practical obedience, as its place in this sequence shows; for there follow it, in verse 4, 'integrity of heart and uprightness,' on which again follow obedience to all God's commandments.

First must come the clear recognition of God's relation to us. That recognition will influence our relation to Him, bending hearts to love and wills to submit, and the whole inward being to cleave to Him. Thence, and only thence, will issue in the life the streams of practical obedience. It is vain to seek to produce righteous deeds unless our hearts are right, and it is as vain to labour at making our hearts right unless thoughts of what God is to us have purified them. Morality is rooted in religion. On the other hand, no knowledge of the truth about God is worth anything unless it touches the hidden man of the heart, and then passes outward to mould conduct. 'Faith without works is dead.' Correct theology and glowing emotions lack their consummation if they do not impel to holy and God-pleasing living.

The reward promised in verse 5 is for Solomon alone. His throne is to be 'established for ever.' The duration intended by that expression is therefore not absolutely unlimited, but equivalent to 'during thy lifetime.' Solomon could only affect himself by his obedience. The continuance of the kingdom after him depended on his successors. His possession of the throne during his life was the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise to David referred to in verse 5, but it was only the beginning, and, like all God's promises, it was contingent on obedience. We receive no outward kingdom if we are servants of God; but, in deepest truth, the righteous man is a king, 'lord of himself, though not of lands.' All creatures serve the soul that serves God, and all Christ's brethren share in His royalty.

**II. The second part of this divine utterance is addressed to the whole nation** as is marked by the 'ye' there compared with the 'thou' in verse 4, and it lays down for succeeding generations the conditions on which the new Temple, that stood glittering in the bright Eastern sunshine, should retain its pristine beauty. While the address to Solomon incited to obedience by painting its blessed consequences, that to the nation reaches the same end by the opposite path of darkly portraying the ruin that would be caused by departure from God. God draws by holding out a hand full of good things, and He no less lovingly drives by stretching out a hand armed with lightnings.

A plain declaration of the evils that dog disobedience is as loving as a bright vision of the good that attends on submission. The sternest threatenings of Scripture are spoken that they may never need to be executed. There is no more foolish misconception of Christianity than that which calls it harsh because it reveals that 'the wages of sin is death.' Note that the threatenings come second, not first. God's heart is averse to smite. To lavish blessing is His delight, and judgment is 'His work, His strange work,' forced on Him by sin.

The special sin against which Israel was warned was that to which it was specially prone and tempted by its circumstances. When all the nations 'worshipped stocks and stones,' it was hard to 'keep thy faith so pure' as to have no share in the universal bewitchment. So the whole history of the people is one of lapses into idolatry and of chastisements leading to temporary

amendment, until the long, sharp lesson of the Captivity eradicated the disposition to be as the nations around. No doubt, idolatry in its crudest forms is outgrown now in Western lands, but sense still craves material embodiment of the unseen, and still feels the pressure of the material and palpable. Hence the earthward direction of so many lives. Asthmatical patients often breathe more easily in the slums of a city than in pure mountain air, and sense-bound men find difficulty in respiration on the heights of a religion which minimises the appeal to sense.

The penalty attached to departure from God was the loss of the land. Israel kept it on a tenure like that of some of our English nobility, who hold their estates on condition of doing some service to the sovereign. Of course, that connection between serving God and national prosperity involved continual supernatural intervention, and cannot be applied entirely to national prosperity now; but it still remains true that moral and religious corruption saps the foundations of a people's well-being, and, when carried far enough, destroys a people's existence. The solemn threat of becoming 'a proverb and a byword' among all peoples is quoted, apparently from Deuteronomy 28:37, and has been only too terribly fulfilled for weary centuries.

The promise in verse 3, that God's eyes and heart should be perpetually on the Temple, has now the condition attached that Israel should cleave to the Lord. Otherwise it will be cast out of His sight, and be a mark for scorn and wonder. The vivid representation of a dialogue between passers-by is quoted from Deuteronomy 29:24-26, where it is spoken in reference to the nation. It carries the solemn thought that God's name is made known among the heathen by the punishment of His unfaithful people, not less really, and sometimes more strikingly, than by the blessings bestowed on the obedient. If we will not magnify Him by joyous service, by rewarding which, with good He can magnify Himself, He will magnify Himself on us by retribution, the more severe as our blessings have been the greater. The lightning-scathed tree, standing white in the forest, witnesses to the power of the flash, as its leafy sisters in their green beauty proclaim the energy of the sunshine. Israel has, perhaps, been a more convincing witness for God, in its homeless centuries, than ever it was when at rest in the good land. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.'

## 1 Kings 10:1-13 A Royal Seeker After Wisdom

We feel the breath of a new era in the accounts of Solomon's reign. One most striking peculiarity is the friendly intercourse with the nations around. The horizon has widened, and, instead of wars with Philistines and Ammon, we have alliances with Egypt, Tyre, and, in the present passage, with Sheba, a district of Southern Arabia. The expansion was fruitful of both good and evil. It brought new ideas and much wealth; but it brought, too, luxury and idolatry. Still Israel was meant to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles,' and in this picturesque story of the wisdom-seeking queen, we have the true relation of Israel to the nations in its purest form. The details of the narrative. Interesting as they are, need not occupy us long.

The queen had heard the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, by which seems to be meant his reputation of being gifted with deep knowledge of the divine character as revealed to him. The questions which occupy earnest souls in all lands and ages were stirring in the heart of this woman-chief. The only way, in these old days, to learn the wisdom of the wise, was to go to them. So the streets of Jerusalem saw the strange sight of the long train which had come toiling up from Arabia, laden with its characteristic produce, gold and spices and precious stones, in the enumeration of which is reflected the wonder of the beholders at the unaccustomed procession. But better than all her wealth was the eager woman's thirst for truth. Surely it is a very unworthy and unlikely explanation of her 'hard questions' and purpose to suppose that she came only for a duel of wit,—to pose Solomon with half-playful riddles. The journey was too toilsome, the gifts too large, the accent of conviction in her subsequent words too grave, for that. She was a seeker after truth, and probably after God, and had known the torture of the eternal questions which rise in the mind, and, once having risen, leave no rest till they are answered.

So she came, though half incredulous, hoping to find some solution to what 'was in her heart,' and as thirsty for the answer as her country's sands for water. Only they who have known the pain of carrying such questions, like a fire in their bones, can know the joy which she felt when she found one to whom she could speak them. It is something of a drop to pass from Solomon's wisdom to the list of the splendours of his household, and the effect which these produced on the queen; but the whole account of Solomon's reign is marked by the same naive blending of wisdom and material wealth. In those days, outward prosperity was the sign of divine favour. But even in those days they knew that wisdom was 'better than rubies.' The two elements were both at their height in Solomon's reign, and the lower of them finally got uppermost, and wrecked him. Plain living and high thinking are better than 'wisdom,' which lets itself down to make much of 'the meat of the table,' and a retinue of servants in fine clothes. How many of us would listen much more respectfully to wisdom, if it lived in a palace, than in 'dens and caves of the earth'? The queen's words in verses 6 to 9 are graceful with a woman's tact, and full of feeling. She confesses that she had come half-doubting, even though she risked the journey, and fervently avows how far fame had been unlike itself in this instance, and had diminished, and not magnified. Then she envies the servants who wait on him, because they are so near the fountain, and finally breaks into praise of Solomon's God, whose love to Israel was shown in giving it such a king. One does not know whether praise of God or compliments to Solomon were most in her mind. The words scarcely sound as if she had become a worshipper of God. He is to her but 'thy God.' But we may

believe that she carried away some seed which grew up. Then, with munificent interchange of gifts, she and her train glide out of the story, and we lose them in the dark. The account of the wealth brought by Hiram's ships comes singularly in, breaking the narrative of the queen. Its insertion seems to indicate some connection between the fleet and her, and to suggest that Sheba and Ophir were near each other (which would put Ethiopia, where some have located it, out of court), and that she heard of Solomon through it.

The whole incident may be regarded as an illustration of the spirit that should mark all seekers after truth, whether earthly or heavenly. This queen had to win a victory over national prejudices, over the disabilities of her sex, over the temptations of her station, to travel far, and face dangers, and to incur great cost. It was surely no mere playful errand on which she was bent. She was smitten with the sacred impulse to 'follow knowledge like a sinking star.' Seldom, indeed, have rulers made progresses from their dominions for such an end, and seldom have two of them met to confer on such subjects. We shall not rightly measure the relative importance of things unless we resolutely set ourselves to look at them with eyes purged from the illusions of sense, and cleared to see how much better than wealth and all outward good is the possession of truth. All sacrifices made to win it are richly repaid, and wise investments. Even in regard to lower kinds of truth, to win them is worth the effort of a life; and, in regard to the highest kind, which is the personal Truth, he is the wise man who counts all earthly good but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of it. This queen points the path by which all pilgrims of the truth must travel. It is not to be won without effort, without conquest of prejudices, repression of weakness, sacrifices of delights, and long effort. There must be humility, which will gladly learn, if there is ever to be its possession.

'Nor can the man that moulds in idle cell  
Unto her happy mansion attain.'

But in our days, the easier the attainment, the less the appreciation. The queen of Sheba had no books, and she travelled far to get wisdom. We are flooded with all appliances, and many of us would not cross the road to get Solomon's wisdom, but would do much to be invited to feast at his table, or to secure some of the queen's camels' load.

This story brings out the true ideal of Israel's relation to the nations. Solomon is the embodiment of his people. His reign is marked by largely increased and amicable relations with his neighbours. These were not all wholesome, and ultimately led to much mischief. But, while the purely commercial connection with Tyre was defective, in that there was no attempt to bring Hiram and the men who worked for the Temple to any knowledge of the God of the Temple, and the relation with Egypt was more unsatisfactory still, in that it meant only the importation of corrupting luxuries and the marriage with an Egyptian princess, an idolatress, this relation with the queen of Sheba was the true one. Solomon did in it what Israel was meant to do for the world. He attracted a seeker from afar, and imparted to her the wisdom that God had given him. He answered the torturing questions and won the confidence of this woman who was groping in the dark, till he led her by the hand to the light. A bond of friendship knit them together, and mutual gifts cemented their amity.

All this is but the putting into concrete form of God's purpose in choosing Israel for His own. It was not meant to retain or to enclose, but to diffuse, the light. The world can only get blessing by one man or people getting it first. As well charge the builder of the lighthouse with partiality because he puts the bright lamps in that narrow room, as find fault with the divine method of making the earth know His name. The lighthouse is reared that the beams may stream out over the tossing, nightly sea. So God appointed to His people of old their task. So He has appointed the same task to His Church to-day. We ought to attract seekers from afar, to win their frank speech when they come, to be able to answer their anxious questions, and to bind them to ourselves in grateful bonds. In these days there are multitudes harassed by the modern forms of the same old, ever-pressing riddles which burdened this ancient queen's heart; and that Church but ill discharges its office which repels rather than draws the seekers, or has no word of illumination for them if they come.

But the highest use to be made of the story is that which Christ made of it. It stands as a perpetual witness against those who are too blind to see the beauty, or too careless to be drawn to listen to the wisdom, of a present Christ. The sacrifices which men can make for lower objects are the most powerful rebukes of their unwillingness to make sacrifices for the highest, just as their capacity of love and trust is of their not loving and trusting Him. The same energy and effort which this queen put forth to reach Solomon, and which men eagerly put forth for some temporal good, would suffice to bring them to the feet of the great Teacher. Her longing for wisdom, her discernment of the person who could give it, and her toilsome journey, rebuke men's indifference to Christ's gifts, their failure to recognise His sweetness and power to make blessed, and their laziness and self-indulgence, which will not take a hundredth part of the pains to secure heaven which they cheerfully expend, and that often in vain, to secure earth. Will the 'Queen of the south' stand alone as witness in that day, or will there not be many out of other lands, who, like her, stretched out their hands to the dimly descried but yearned-for light, and came nearer to it, though they seemed far off, than many who lived in its full blaze and never cared for it? Will it be only Christ's contemporaries who will be condemned by heathen seekers after God, or will there be many of ourselves, convicted of stolid indifference to the Christ who has been beside us all our lives, and has prayed us 'with much entreaty' and in vain, to 'receive the gift'?

They who find their way to Him, and tell Him all that is in their hearts, will have all their questions solved. We have not far to go; for 'a greater than Solomon is here.' If we betake ourselves to Him, and learn of Him, we too shall find that 'the half was not told us'; for Christ possessed is sweeter than all expectation, however high-pitched it may be, and to win Him is the only gain in which there is no disappointment, either at first or at last. We may all have the blessedness of His servants, 'which stand continually before' Him, and not only 'hear' but receive into their spirits His 'wisdom.'

## 1 Kings 11:4-13 The Fall of Solomon

Scripture never blinks the defects of its heroes. Its portraits do not smooth out wrinkles, but, with absolute fidelity, give all faults. That pitiless truthfulness is no small proof of its inspiration. If these historical books were simply fragments of national records, owning no higher source than patriotism, they would never have blurted out the errors and sins of David and Solomon as they do. Where else are there national histories of which the very central idea is the laying bare of national sins and chastisements? or where else are there legends of the people's heroes which tell their sins without apology or reticence? The difference in tone augurs a different origin. The Old Testament histories are not written to tell Israel's glories, or even, we may say, to recount its history, but to tell God's dealings with Israel,—a very different theme, and one which finds its material equally in the glories and in the miseries, which respectively follow its obedience and disobedience. So Solomon's fall is told in the same frank way as his wisdom and wealth; for what is of importance is not Solomon so much as God's dealings with Solomon, when his heart was turned away. We are told that the narrative of Solomon's reign is an ideal picture. Strange idealising which leaves the ideal king wallowing in a sty of sensuality and an apostate from Jehovah!

Here we are simply told of the two things,—his sin, and the divine judgment which it drew after it.

### I. 1 Kings 11:4-8 tell the black story of Solomon's apostasy.

What was its extent? Did he himself take part in idolatrous worship, or simply, with the foolish fondness of an old sensualist, let these foreign women have their shrines? The darker supposition seems correct. The expression that he 'went after other gods' is commonly used to mean actual idolatry; and his wives could scarcely have been said to have 'turned away his heart,' if all that he did was to wink at, or even to facilitate, their worship. But, on the other hand, he does not seem to have abandoned Jehovah's worship. The charge against him is that 'his heart was not perfect,' or wholly devoted to the Lord, or, as verse 6 puts it, that he 'went not fully' after the Lord. His was a case of halting between two opinions, or rather, of trying to hold both at once. He wanted to be a worshipper of Jehovah and of these idols also.

Was his apostasy final? Yes, so far as we can gather from the narrative. Not only is there no statement of his repentance, but the silence with which he receives the divine announcement of retribution is suspicious; and the prophecy of Ahijah to Jeroboam, which obviously comes later in time than the threatenings of the text, treats the idolatry as still existing (verse 33). Further, we learn from 2 Kings 23:13 that the shrines which he built stood till Josiah's time. If Solomon had ever abandoned his idolatry, he would not have left them standing. So we seem to have in him a case of a fall which knew no recovery, an eclipse which did not pass. The Book of Ecclesiastes, if of his composition, would somewhat lighten the darkness of such an end; but his authorship of it is now all but universally given up.

So there, on Olivet's southern ridge, right opposite the Temple, stood the three altars, and there the king worshipped; and, if he did, he would have a crowd of imitators. The lessons of such a fall are many.

**First**, it teaches the destructive effect of yielding to sensual indulgence. Solomon's unbridled and monstrous polygamy sapped his manhood and his principle, darkened his clear spirit, blinded his keen eye, and turned a youth of noble aspiration and a manhood of noble accomplishment into an old age without dignity, reverence, or calm. All his wisdom was worth little if it could not keep him master of himself. A young man who lets his passions run away with him is less to be condemned than an old sensualist. God means that reason should govern impulses and desires, and that conscience should govern all and be governed by His will. The vessel is sure to be wrecked when the officers are sent below and the mutineers get hold of the helm.

**Second**, it warns us that till the very end of life a fall is possible. This ship went down when the voyage was nearly over. In sight of port it struck, and that not for want of beacons. What pathetic warning lies in that phrase, 'when Solomon was old'! After so many years of high aims, so many temptations overcome, with such habits of wisdom and kingly nobility, after such prayers and visions, he fell; and, if he fell, who can be sure of standing? No length of life spent in holy thoughts and service secures us against the possibility of disastrous fall. Only one thing does,—'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!' John Bunyan saw a door opening down to hell hard by the gates of the Celestial City. When a man that has been had in reputation for wisdom and honour shames the record of his life by a great splash of mud on the white page, near its end, he seldom returns. An old apostate is usually finally an apostate.

**Third**, may we not venture to see a warning here against marriages in which there is not unity in the deepest things, and a common faith? 'When you run in double harness, take a good look at the other horse.' If a young Christian man or woman enters on such a



union with one who is not a Christian, it is a great deal more probable that, in the end, there will be two unbelievers than that there will be two Christians.

We have nothing to do with pronouncing on Solomon's final condition, But he stands on the page of this history, a sad, enigmatical figure, a warning to all young people to take heed that the attrition of the world does not rub off the bloom of early religion, or make them cynically ashamed of the unselfishness of their early desires. There is no sadder sight than an old man whose youthful enthusiasm for goodness and belief in the super-excellency of wisdom have withered, leaving him a hard worldling or a gross sensualist. Better the early days, when he was obscure and poor, and believed in wisdom and in the God of wisdom, than the late ones, when worldly success has spoiled him!

## **II. 1 Kings 11:9-13 give the divine retribution announced.**

The immediate connection of sin and punishment is the teaching intended by this close juxtaposition of these two halves of our narrative. However long the chastisement may be in bursting, the divine resolve to send it is instantaneously consequent on the crime. The chain that binds departure from God with loss of blessing may be of many or few links, but it is riveted on when the evil is done. How gravely, as with the voice of an indictment drawn in heaven, the aggravations of Solomon's crime are set out, in that he had sinned against 'the Lord' who had appeared to him twice (once in his youthful vision, and once after the completion of the Temple), 'and had commanded him concerning' the very sin that he had done. Sin is made more heinous by the abundance of God's favours and the plainness of His commands. If we would remember God's appearances to us and for us, and meditate on His revealed will, we should be more impregnable to the assaults of temptation.

We do not learn how the Lord said this to Solomon. Possibly it was by the same prophet who afterwards announced to Jeroboam his destiny; but, however announced, it seems to have been received in sullen silence, and to have wrought no softening nor change. Like all God's threatenings, it was spoken that it might not be inflicted. Solomon was threatened before the prophet spoke to Jeroboam; and if Solomon had repented, Jeroboam would never have been spoken to. But he is too far gone to be stopped, though he has God's own word for it that he is ruining his kingdom by his sin. We have as clear declarations of worse results from ours; but they do not stop some of us. How strange it is that men will put out their hands to grasp their sins, even though they have to stretch across the smoke of the pit for them!

Note how forbearance delays and diminishes retribution. The separation of the kingdom is deferred, and one tribe is left to the Davidic house; probably Judah is meant, and Benjamin is omitted as being small. Observe, too, how we have a double instance of the law of God's providence which visits the father's deeds on the children. The consequences of David's goodness fall on Solomon, and the consequences of Solomon's evil fall on Rehoboam. Stated in the language of the secular historian, that is to say that the consequences of great national virtues or crimes are seldom reaped by the generation that sowed the seed and did the deed, but take time to mature and work themselves out. Stated in the language of Scripture, it is, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' The separation of the kingdom was not brought about by miracle, but came in the natural course of things. A people ground down by heavy taxation and forced labour, to keep up the luxury of a court containing all that disgusting crowd of wives and concubines, was ripe for revolt, and when the sceptre fell into the hands of a headstrong fool, and there was a capable leader on the other side, discontent soon became rebellion, and rebellion soon became triumphant. It all flowed as naturally as possible from the same fountain as the idolatry of which it was the punishment; and so it teaches once more the great truth that 'the world's history is the world's judgment,' and that the so-called 'natural consequences' of our deeds are, even here and now, God's retribution for our deeds.

What a lesson as to God's great patience is here! What a solemn glimpse into man's power to counterwork God's purpose! So soon after its establishment did the house of David prove unworthy, and the experiment fail. Yet that long-suffering purpose is not turned aside, but persistently and patiently goes on its way, altering its methods, but keeping its end unaltered, bending even sin to minister to its design, pitying and warning the sinner ere it strikes the blow that the sinner has made needful.

Behind the figure of Solomon we see another. The wisest of men fell shamefully, captured by coarse lust, and apparently steeled against all remonstrances from Heaven. 'A greater than Solomon is here.' The faults of the human kings of Israel prophesy of the true King, who is to be the substance of which they were but faint shadows, and whose manhood was stained by no flaw, nor His kingdom ever rent from His pure hands. Solomon was wise, but Christ is 'Wisdom.' Solomon built a Temple, but also altars to false gods overtopping it across the valley; and his Temple was burned with fire. But Christ is the true Temple as well as Priest and Sacrifice. Solomon was by name 'the peaceful,' and his land had outward rest, darkened at the last by war and rebellion. But Christ is the Prince of Peace, and of His dominion there shall be no end. Solomon is the great example of the sad truth that the loftiest and wisest share in the universal sinfulness. Christ is the one flawless Man, who makes those who take Him for their King wise and peaceful, prosperous, and in due time sinless, like Himself.

## **1 Kings 11:26-43 The New Garment Rent**

Solomon falls into the background in the last part of the story of his reign, and his enemies are more prominent than himself. So long as he walked with God, he was of importance for the historian; but as soon as he forsook God, and was consequently forsaken of His wisdom, he becomes as insignificant as an empty vessel which has once held sweet perfume, or a piece of carbon through which the electric current has ceased to flow. The sunbeam has left that peak, and shines on other summits. Never was there a sadder eclipse.

We are here told first how the instrument for shattering Solomon's kingdom was shaped by himself. It is the old story of a young man of mark, attracting the eyes of the king, being promoted to offices of trust, which at once stir ambition, and give prominence and influence which seem to afford a possibility of gratifying it. The passion for building, so common in Eastern kings, and the cause of so much misery to their subjects, had grown on Solomon; and as his later days were harassed by war, and he had lost the safe defence of God's arm, Jerusalem had to be enclosed by a wall. His father had been able to leave a 'breach' because the Lord was a wall round him and his city; and if Solomon had kept in his paths, he would have had no need to add to the fortifications. The preservation of ancestral piety is for nations and individuals a surer protection than the improvement of ancestral outward defenses. Jeroboam made himself conspicuous by his energy (for that rather than 'valour' must be the meaning of the word), and so got promotion. It was natural, but at the same time dangerous, to put him in command of the forced labour of his own tribe, as the narrative shows us was done; for 'the house of Joseph' is the tribe of Ephraim, to which, according to the correct translation of verse 26, he belonged. In such an office he would be thrown among his kinsmen, and would at once gain influence and learn to sympathize with their discontent, or, at any rate, to know where the sore places were, if he ever wanted to inflame them. One can easily fancy the grumbings of the Ephraimites dragged up to Jerusalem to the hated labour, which Samuel had predicted ( 1 Samuel 8:16 ), and how facile it would be for the officer in charge to fan discontent or to win friends by judicious indulgence. How long this went on we do not know, but the fire had smoldered for some time under the unconscious king's very eyes, when it was fanned into a flame by Ahijah's breath.

That is the second stage in the story,—the spark on the tinder. We have heard nothing of prophets during Solomon's reign; but now this man from Shiloh, the ancient seat of the Tabernacle, meets the ambitious young officer in some solitary spot, with the message which answered to his secret thoughts and made his heart beat fast. The symbolic action preceding the spoken word, as usual, supplied the text, of which the word was the explanation and expansion. How pathetic is the newness of the garment! Unworn, strong, and fresh, it yet is rent in pieces. So the kingdom is so recent, with such possibilities of duration, and yet it must be shattered! Thus quickly has the experiment broken down! It is little more than a century since Saul's anointing, little more than seventy years since the choice of David, and already the fabric, which had such fair promise of perpetuity, is ready to vanish away. If we may say so, that 'new garment' represents the divine disappointment and sorrow over the swift corruption of the kingdom. It was probably merely some loose square of cloth which Ahijah tore, with violence proportioned to its newness, into twelve pieces, ten of which he thrust into the astonished Jeroboam's hands. The commentary followed.

Ahijah's prophecy is substantially the same as the previous threatenings to Solomon, which had done no good. Their incipient fulfilment in the wars with Edom and Syria had been equally futile; and therefore God, who never strikes without warning, and never warns without striking if men do not heed, now drops the message into ears that were only too ready to hear. The seed fell on prepared soil, and Jeroboam's half-formed plans would be consolidated and fixed. The scene is like that in which the witches foretell to Macbeth his dignity. Slumbering ambitions are stirred, and a half-inclined will is finally determined by the glimpse into the future. How easily men are persuaded that God speaks, and how willing they are to obey, when their inclinations jump with Heaven's commandments! The prophet's message makes the separation of the kingdoms a direct divine act, and yet it was the breaking up of a divine institution. God's dealings have to be shaped according to facts, and He changes His methods, and lets the feebleness of His creatures and their sins mould His august procedure. The divine Potter, like mere human artisans, has His spoiled pieces of work, and, with infinite resource and patience as infinite, re-shapes the clay into other forms. The separation of the kingdoms was a divine act, and yet it is treated often in the later books as a crime and rebellion. God works out His purposes through men's deeds, and their motives determine whether their acts are sins or obedience. A man may be a rebel while he is doing the will of God, if what he does be done at the bidding of his own selfishness. The separation of the kingdoms was God's doing, but it was brought about by the free action of men obeying most secular impulses of political discontent, and led by a cunning, self-seeking schemer.

Note that the prophecy is in three parts. First, verses 31-33 announce the punishment, with the reservation of a dwindled dominion to the Davidic house, for the sake of their great ancestor and of God's choice of Jerusalem, and solemnly charge on the people the idolatry which the king had introduced. The second part (verses 34-36) postpones the execution of the sentence till after Solomon's death, and assigns the same two reasons for this further forbearance. The third part (verses 37-39) promises Jeroboam the kingdom, and lays down the conditions on which the favours promised to David and his house may be his. The whole closes with the assurance that the affliction of the seed of David is not to be for ever.

The punishment was heavy; for the disruption of the kingdom meant the wreck of all the prosperity of Solomon's earlier days, the hopeless weakness of the divided tribes as against the formidable powers that pressed in on them from north and south, frequent

intestine wars, bitter hatred instead of amity. Yet there was another side to it; for the very failure of the human kings made the Messianic hope the more bright, like a light glowing in the deepening darkness, and tumult and oppression might teach those whom prosperity and peace had only corrupted. The great lesson for us is the ruin which follows on departure from God. We do not see national sins followed with equal plainness or swiftness by national judgments; but the history of Israel is meant to show on a large scale what is always true, in the long run, both for nations and for individuals, that 'it is an evil thing and a bitter' to depart from the living God.

Mark, too, that the judgment is wrought out by perfectly natural causes. The separation follows old lines of cleavage. The strength of David's kingdom lay in the south; and Ephraim was too powerful a tribe and too proud of its ancient glories, to acquiesce cheerfully in the pre-eminence of Judah. The oppression of forced labour and heavy taxation was put forward as the reason for the revolt, and, no doubt, was the reason for the readiness with which the ten tribes rallied to Jeroboam's flag. There are two ways of writing history. You can either leave God out, or trace all to Him. The former way calls itself 'scientific' and 'positive.' The latter is the Bible way. Perhaps, if modern history were written on the same principles as the Books of Kings, the divine hand would be as plainly visible,—only it requires an inspired historian to do it. The way of bringing about the judgment for departing from God has changed, but the judgment remains the same to-day as when Ahijah rent his garment.

Between 1 Kings 11:39 and 40 we must suppose an attempt at armed rebellion by Jeroboam. That is implied by the expression that he 'lifted his hand against the king' (1 Kings 11:26, 27). That attempt must have been put down by Solomon. And that it should have been made shows how little Jeroboam was influenced by religious motives. The prophet's words had set him all afire with ambitious hopes, and he paid no heed to the distinct assurance that Solomon was to be 'prince all the days of his life.' He stretched out a rash, self-willed hand to snatch the promised crown, and broke God's commandment even while he pretended to be keeping it. How different David's conduct in like circumstances! He took no steps to bring about the fulfilment of Samuel's promise at his anointing, but patiently waited for God to do as He had said, in His own time, and meantime continued his lowly work. God's time is the best time; and he who greedily grasps at a premature fulfilment of promised good will have to pay for it by defeat and exile from the modest good that he had.

Jeroboam's flight to Egypt brings that ill-omened name on the page for the first time since the Exodus. It has given occasion to an extraordinary addition to the Septuagint, professing to tell his adventures there,—how he was high in Shishak's favour, and married a princess. That is apparently pure legend; but his residence there was important, as the beginning of Egypt's interference in Israel's affairs. It is an old trick of aggressive nations to side with a pretender to the throne of a country which they covet, and benevolently to strengthen him that he may weaken it. No doubt it was as Jeroboam's ally that Shishak invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam, and plundered the Temple and the palace. It was a bad beginning for a king of Israel to be a pensioner of Egypt.

The narrative closes with the sad, reticent formula which ends each reign, and in Solomon's case hides so much that is tragic and dark. This was all that could be said about the end of a career that had begun so nobly. If more had been said, the record would have been sadder; and so the pitying narrative casts the veil of the stereotyped summary over the miserable story. There are many instances in history of lives of genius and enthusiasm, of high promise and partial accomplishment, marred and flung away, but none which present the great tragedy of wasted gifts, and blossoms never fruited, in a sharper, more striking form than the life of the wise king of Israel, who 'in his latter days' was 'a fool.' The goodliest vessel may be shipwrecked in sight of port. Solomon was not an old man, as we count age, when he died; for he reigned forty years, and was somewhere about twenty when he became king. But it was 'when he was old' that he fell, and that through passion which should have been well under control long before. The sun went down in a thick bank of clouds, which rose from undrained marshes in his soul, and stretched high up in the western horizon. His career, in its glory and its shame, preaches the great lesson which the Book of Ecclesiastes puts into his mouth as 'the conclusion of the whole matter': 'Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.'

## **1 Kings 12:1-7 How to Split a Kingdom**

The separation of the kingdom of Solomon into two weak and hostile states is, in one aspect, a wretched story of folly and selfishness wrecking a nation, and, in another, a solemn instance of divine retribution working its designs by men's sins. The greater part of this account deals with it in the former aspect, and shows the despicable motives of the men in whose hands was the nation's fate; but one sentence (verse 15) draws back the curtain for a moment, and shows us the true cause. There is something very striking in that one flash, which reveals the enthroned God, working through the ignoble strife which makes up the rest of the story. This double aspect of the disruption of the kingdom is the main truth about it which the narrative impresses on us.

As to the mere details of the incident, as a political revolution, they are in four stages. First come the terms of allegiance offered to the new king. Rehoboam goes to Shechem, because 'Israel was gone' there. The choice of the place is suspicious; for it was in the tribe of Ephraim, and had been for a time the centre of national life; and its selection at once indicated discontent with the preponderance of Jerusalem, and a wish to assert the importance of the central tribes. No doubt, the choice of the latter city for the capital had caused heart-burning, even during David's time.

Adopting the reading of the Revised Version, we see another suspicious sign in the recall of Jeroboam, and his selection as spokesman; for he had been in rebellion against Solomon ( 1 Kings 11:26 ), and therefore an exile. Probably he had now been the instigator of the discontent of which he became the mouthpiece; and, in any case, his appearance as the leader was all but a declaration of war. His former occupation as superintendent of the forced labour exacted from his own tribe taught him where the shoe pinched, and the weight of the yoke would not be lessened in his representations.

No doubt, the luxury and splendour of Solomon's brilliant reign had an under side of oppression, even though forced labour was not exacted from Israelites ( 1 Kings 9:22 ); but probably the severity was exaggerated in these complaints, which were plainly the pretext for a revolt of which tribal jealousy was the main cause, and Jeroboam's ambition the spark that set light to the train. Certainly there was ignoring of the benefits of the peaceful reign, which had brought security and commerce. But there was enough truth in the complaint to make it plausible and effective for catching the people. Had they a right to suspend their allegiance on compliance with their terms?

Israel was neither a despotism, nor simply a constitutional monarchy. God appointed the kings, and had ordained the Davidic house to the throne; and therefore this making terms was, in effect, asserting independence of God's will. Jeroboam was scheming for a crown. The people were shaking off their submission to God. It is very doubtful if concession would have conciliated them. There is nothing elevated, not to say religious, in their motives or acts.

Then comes Rehoboam on the scene. The one sensible thing that he did was to take three days to think. Whether or no his little finger was thicker than his father's loins, his head was not half so wise. Ecclesiastes, speaking in Solomon's name, reckons it a great evil that he must leave his labour to his successor; 'and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?' Certainly Rehoboam had little 'wisdom' either of the higher or lower kind. It was the lower kind which the old counsellors of his father gave him,—that wisdom which is mere cunning directed to selfish ends, and careless of honour or truth. 'Flatter them to-day, speak them fair, promise what you do not mean to keep, and then, when you are firm in the saddle, let them feel bit and spur.' That was all these grey-headed men had learned. If that was what passed for 'wisdom' in Solomon's later days, we need not wonder at revolt.

To act on such motives is bad enough, but to put them into plain words, and offer them as the rule of a king's conduct, is a depth of cynical contempt for truth and kingly honour that indicates only too clearly how rotten the state of Israel was. Have we never seen candidates for Parliament and the like on one side of the water, and for Congress, Senate, or Presidency on the other, who have gone to school to the old men at Shechem? The prizes of politicians are often still won by this stale device. The young counsellors differ only in the means of gaining the object. Neither set has the least glimmer of the responsibility of the office, nor ever thinks that God has any say in choosing the king. Naked, undisguised selfishness animates both; only, as becomes their several ages, the one set recommends crawling and the other bluster. Think of Saul hiding among the staff, David going back to his sheep after he was anointed, Solomon praying for wisdom to guide this people, and measure the depth of descent to this ignoble scramble for the sweets of royalty!

According to 1 Kings 14:21, Rehoboam was forty-one at this time, so his contemporaries could not have been very young. But possibly the number in the present text is an error for twenty-one, which would agree better with the tone of the reference to age here, and with the rash counsel. Note the recurrence, both in Rehoboam's question in verse 9 and in the young advisers' answer in verse 10, of the obnoxious speech of the people. That may be accidental, but it sounds as if both he and they were keeping their anger warm by repeating the offensive complaint.

The Revised Version reads, 'My little finger is thicker,' etc., and so makes the sentence not a threat, but the foundation of the following threat in an arrogant and empty assertion of greater power. The fool always thinks himself wiser than the wise dead; the 'living dog' fancies that his yelp is louder than the roar of 'the dead lion.' What can be done with a Rehoboam who brags that he is better than Solomon?

The threat which follows is inconceivably foolish; and all the more so because it probably did not represent any definite intention, and certainly was backed by no force adequate to carry it out. Passion and offended dignity are the worst guides for conduct. Threats are always mistakes. A sieve of oats, not a whip, attracts a horse to the halter. If Rehoboam had wished to split the kingdom, he could have found no better wedge than this blustering promise of tyranny.

Next in this miserable story of imbecility and arrogance comes the answer to the assembly. Shechem had seen many an eventful hour, but never one heavier with important issues than that on which the united Israel met for the last time, and there, in the rich valley with Ebal and Gerizim towering above them, heard the fateful answer of this braggart. A dozen rash words brought about four hundred years of strife, weakness, and final destruction. And neither the foolish speaker nor any man in that crowd dreamed of the unnumbered evils to flow from that hour. Since issues are so far beyond our sight, how careful it becomes us to be of motives! Angry counsels are always blunders. No nation can prosper when moderate complaints are met by threats, and 'spirited conduct,' asserting dignity, is a sign of weakness, not of strength. For nations and individuals that is true.

Here the historian draws back the curtain. On earth stand the insolent king and the now mutinous people, each driving at their ends, and neither free of sin in their selfishness. A stormy scene of passion, without thought of God, rages below, and above sits the Lord, working His great purpose by men's sin. That divine control does not in the least affect the freedom or the guilt of the actors. Rehoboam's disregard of the people's terms was 'a thing brought about of the Lord,' but it was Rehoboam's sin none the less. That which, looked at from the mere human side, is the sinful result of the free play of wrong motives, is, when regarded from the divine side, the determinate counsel of God. The greatest crime in the world's history was at the same time the accomplishment of God's most merciful purpose. Calvary is the highest example of the truth, which embraces all lesser instances of the wrath of man, which He makes to praise Him and effect His deep designs.

Again, the rending of the kingdom was the punishment of sin, especially Solomon's sin of idolatry, which was closely connected with the extravagant expenditure that occasioned the separation. So the so-called natural consequences of transgression constitute its temporal punishment in part, and behind all these our eyes should be clear-sighted enough to behold the operative will of God. This one piercing beam of light, cast on that scene of insolence and rebellion, lights up all history, and gives the principle on which it must be interpreted, if it is not to be misread.

Again, the punishment of sin, whether that of a community or of a single person, is sin. The separation was sin, on both sides; it led to much more. It was the consequence of previous departure. So ever the worst result of any sin is that it opens the door, like a thief who has crept in through a window, to a band of brethren.

Lastly, we have the fierce rejoinder to the empty boast of Rehoboam, and the definitive disruption of the nation. Jeroboam must have fanned the flame skilfully, or it would not have burst out so quickly. There is no hesitation, nor any regret. The ominous cry, which had been heard before, in Sheba's abortive revolt, answers Rehoboam with instantaneous and full-throated defiance. Rancorous tribal hatred is audible in it. Long pent up jealousy and dislike of the dynasty of David has got breath at last: 'To your tents, O Israel! now see to thine own house, David!'

That roar from a thousand voices meant a good deal more than the cowed king's vain threats did. The angry men who raised it, and were the tools of a crafty conspirator, the frightened courtiers and king who heard it, were alike in their entire oblivion of their true Lord and Monarch. 'God was not in all their thoughts.' An enterprise begun in disregard of Him is fated to failure. The only sure foundations of a nation are the fear of the Lord and obedience to His will. If politics have not a religious basis, the Lord will blow upon them, and they will be as stubble.