**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 KINGS-010. THE FALL OF SOLOMON by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"4. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. 7. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. 9. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10. And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. 11. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. 12. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. 13. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen."*

*1 Kings 11:4-13*

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. Verses 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. Verses 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.