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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

THE GLORY OF SOLOMON'S EMPIRE (Temperance)
Golden Text.—A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.
Approach to the Lesson
 It is not an unmitigated kindness to leave to a son wealth which he has done nothing to earn, or to introduce him to a position to which he has not striven to attain. Lacking the discipline of the father who struggled and toiled, such a son rarely maintains the standards set by his father, nor proves himself a worthy successor. He is a wise father who sees that his son is trained to the handling of wealth before committing it to him, and fitted for the position before entrusting it to him.
 Solomon stepped into a dangerous situation — a kingdom all ready made for him through the vigorous policies and many wars of his father. If there was more wealth in the royal coffers during his reign than in the days of David, he was simply gathering in the harvest of his father's toil. But there was one thing that saved Solomon. David not only left him an established kingdom and wells of wealth about to yield immense returns, but he committed to him also a great task, that of building the Temple. This undertaking absorbed Solomon's energies during the first years of his reign, and called out the best that was in him, giving his life a bent which persisted for some time after the task was finished. If it had not been for that great challenging work, with its sacred associations, Solomon might have been a useless playboy from the start, for we see that in later years, when the early activities gave way to ease, he became more and more voluptuous, and even turned to idolatry, with all its sordid appeal. He could give sage advice, but did not follow it.

Verse by Verse
 1 Kings 4:20.—"Judah and Israel were many... eating and drinking, and making merry." Increase of population, economic plenty and abounding pleasure marked the reign of Solomon. Few can endure this for long without becoming victims of a softening process.

Verse 21.—"From the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt." The river mentioned is the Euphrates; the land of the Philistines was the Mediterranean coast. So we have the northeast, west and south borders of Solomon's empire. Thus the promise of Genesis 15:18 was fulfilled. The tribute from all the kingdoms of this area must have been considerable.

Verses 22, 23.—"Solomon's provision." It has been reckoned that this provided for 4,000 retainers. How all this was gathered is related in verses 7-19, 27, 28. Fatted fowl are thought to have been geese.

Verse 4.—"For he had dominion over all the kings on this side the river; and he had peace." The lavish provision was made possible by the extent of his rule. Tiphshah was a town on the west bank of the Euphrates. Azzah is better known as Gaza, one of the cities of the Philistines on the border of Egypt. Like the "Pax Romana" of later days, Solomon's peace was the result of complete subjection of the nations around, effected by David.

Verse 25.—"And Judah and Israel dwelt safely... all the days of Solomon." This mention of Judah and Israel suggests that the historian lived after the division of the kingdom, although even in the time of David a temporary breach was made, when northern tribes followed Ishbosheth for seven years.

Verse 26.—"And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses." Compare Deuteronomy 17:16 where multiplying horses was forbidden to a king of Israel. When disobedience begins, there is no telling where it will lead.

Chap. 11:4.—"When Solomon was old... his heart was not perfect with the Lord." David fell into a grievous sin, and greatly repented, but Solomon drifted into an evil manner of life, from which there is no record of his repenting. Too much yielding to the desire of the flesh sapped his moral strength, till he was driven by winds of evil influence into support of, if not actual participation in, idolatrous practices.

Verse 5.—"For Solomon went after Ashtoreth... and after Milcom." Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, was worshiped with grossly impure rituals, while Milcom (or Molech) was the firegod, to whom children were sacrificed in the fire. That Solomon countenanced and even supported such idolatry shows how far he had drifted from his first love of the Lord.

Verse 6.—"And Solomon went not fully after the Lord, as did David." Despite his sins, David became Old Testament standard of complete devotion to the Lord, and following kings were judged by him as standard.

Verse 7.—"Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh." Chemosh was the god of war, worshiped by the Moabites. Think of an altar to this heathen deity on the Mount of Olives, right before Jerusalem!

Verse 8.—"And likewise did he for all his strange wives." Had he hearkened to the Law of Moses, he would not have been found supporting heathenism, and sowing the seed of disruption in the nation. The warnings of the Word of God are not idle chatter!

The Heart of the Lesson
 Things may not always be as bright as they are rosy looking. Israel seemed to be in its golden age. From being a small, uncertain nation they had become a kingdom whose borders reached to the Euphrates in the east, and Egypt in the southwest. None challenged their peace. Prosperity was in evidence in all parts of the country.

There was shortage of nothing, and pleasure abounded. Their king was sought out by men of all nations for his wisdom. He was indeed a world figure. Government was stable, and administration sound. Besides all that, the religions of the nation had been given new impetus by the building of a magnificent Temple, and the whole nation was united in an enthusiastic devotion to Jehovah. It seemed as if the smile of God rested upon them, so that He loaded them with benefits. One can scarcely imagine more delightful conditions this side of the millennium.

But with all this blessing and bounty, the seeds of disaster were being sown, and that by no less person than the king himself. Despite all his wisdom, and all his revelations from God, and all his zeal in building the house of God, there was disobedience in his life. One can scarcely imagine that Solomon was ignorant of the Law. The fact is, he was well instructed in the Law of the Lord. Now the Law prohibited the king from multiplying two things — horses and wives. But Solomon could not conceive of the magnificence of his kingdom being quite complete without horses, so he conducted a regular trade in horses with Egypt and building great stables which have been uncovered in recent times. And Solomon did not quite see why the king should be restricted in his love affairs. That was an interference with the royal prerogative. And to make things worse he flouted the ancient command which forbade Israel to intermarry with certain nations (Exod. 34:16). The more "exotic" a woman was, the better he liked her.

If you had told Solomon what toll his sin would take of himself and of his sons and of his nation, he would not have believed you. And Christians today seem to think that their "little" disobediences are innocuous, when as a matter of fact, they are preparing disaster for their own spiritual life and for the souls of more than they will ever know. It is no light thing to disregard the Law of the Lord.

BETHESDA
 We extend our sympathy to the family of the late Mrs. Pike. The W.M.S. met at the home of Mrs. R. Hunt last Wednesday. The program was in charge of Mrs. J. Gibson, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Robins and Mrs. Taun gave the missionary news. Mrs. Harvey Preston was a guest and sang two solos. Miss Jean Empringham has returned to duty at the Toronto East General Hospital after spending her holidays at her home.



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