

SOLOMON'S LAST YEARS

I Kings 11:1-13, 26-43

Solomon was the second son of David and Bathsheba and the third king of Israel. The meaning of his name should be told in all classes, as well as the difference between his reign and David's. His wisdom and glory and his building of the temple should be noted. In the lesson for today stress the fact that his wives led him into the worship of idols, rather than the fact that he had a great number of wives. Connect the rending of Jeroboam's garment with the rending of Samuel's robe by Saul (I Samuel 15:27-28).

Doctrinal Points

The Lord is constantly trying to reach those in evil and falsity.

The Word is written in such a way that it may reach those in evil.

People who are in falsities may be saved if there is charity in their hearts.

True charity reaches out to everyone but does not treat the good and the evil just alike.

Notes for Parents

Our chapter for today again teaches that no one in this world becomes so good and so wise that he is beyond temptation and the possibility of falling into sin. This life is given us that we may of our own free will choose the heavenly life and progress in it as far as we are willing to progress, and we do this by recognizing the selfish tendencies which are ours by nature and overcoming them one by one with the Lord's help. If we are regenerating, the older we grow the deeper the evils we are likely to see in ourselves. This sometimes troubles and discourages us, but actually it is a sign of progress.

Solomon succumbed to his temptation instead of resisting it. He had been richly blessed. He was the second son of David and

Bathsheba and was chosen by his father—under inspiration from the Lord—and crowned at his father’s command even before David died. He did not have to fight for his throne,* and his enemies had all been conquered for him, so that his reign was one of peace and increasing glory. The very name *Solomon* means “peace.” When he first came to the throne, he was young and felt very humble and weak, and he asked the Lord to give him wisdom to rule his people well. In this humble state he could and did receive wisdom—wisdom never comes from ourselves. And the Lord also gave him great riches, and the right to build the temple in Jerusalem.

But Solomon, like David, eventually came to feel that he was above the law instead of subject to it. This is the great temptation which inevitably comes with success and prosperity. In our own day and age we do not have to look far to find examples of it, but we are likely to think of examples of the more obvious kind. Our real concern is with the more subtle form of it to which we may all be subject no matter how poor our outward circumstances are. Theoretically we recognize that the highest goal we may strive for is a heavenly character. This has nothing to do with material wealth or poverty: anyone may attain it if he will. And the mark of this character is love to the Lord and the neighbor, the Lord’s own spirit, in the heart. If we have this, we have the wisdom and the glory of Solomon. How can we be tempted then? Just as Solomon was—by forgetting that everything in the world is not fit to be loved, that we must still study and obey the letter of the Word, and that we must not let our love blind us to evil and falsity. If we yield, as Solomon did, to this temptation, the “kingdom” can still be taken from us.

Primary

Teach the children about Solomon’s reign and the meaning of his name, and drill them in the names of the three great kings. They will be interested in the rending of Jeroboam’s garment. The lesson proper should be taught as a prep-

*Except against his brothers. —Ed.

aration for the story of the division of the kingdom.

After David died, his son Solomon became king. The Old Testament was not first written in our English language. It was written in Hebrew. In that language all names have meanings. See if you can remember that the name *Solomon* means “peace.” We have learned that both Saul and David were fighting kings, and that David, because he obeyed the Lord, was given victory over all the enemies of Israel. So when Solomon became king, the country was at peace, and Solomon had no enemies to fight.

One night, not long after Solomon became king, the Lord appeared to him and told him to make a wish for whatever he most wanted. Solomon did not ask for riches or power, but for wisdom to rule his nation well. The Lord was pleased with Solomon's wish, and told him that he should have great wisdom and also the riches and power he had not asked for. And so his wish came true.

Solomon was so great and had so many beautiful treasures and was so wise that other kings and queens came to see his glory and to ask him the answers to the questions that were bothering them. He married the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and built her a house, and he built himself another house. And the Lord also allowed him to build a beautiful temple in Jerusalem for the ark, to take the place of the tabernacle.

But it is not always good for a person to have everything he wants.

What did Solomon do that was wrong?

Why should he have known better?

What did the Lord tell him?

Was all the kingdom to be taken from Solomon's son?

Who was to have part of it?

How was Jeroboam told what was to happen?

Junior

A good lesson for the Juniors is in the contrast between Solomon's wisdom and glory and the sins of his later years. We had the same general lesson with David. We must never rely on a period of good behavior to excuse later sins.

The name *Solomon* means “peace.” Because David had conquered all the enemies of Israel, Solomon’s reign was a peaceful one. Not long after David died and Solomon came to the throne, Solomon had a dream one night in which the Lord said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee.” Solomon did not ask for riches or glory but for wisdom to rule his people well. And the Lord was pleased and promised Solomon the wisdom he had asked for and also the riches and glory he had not asked for. Solomon became so wise that kings and queens came from other countries to ask him questions, and he did have great riches and many beautiful possessions. In I Kings 10:22-23 we even read that “the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.” Solomon was also allowed, you remember, to build a beautiful temple in Jerusalem to house the ark.

You know that sometimes you have a “good” day. You are happy, you are feeling helpful, and you do what your parents and teacher want you to do without having to be nagged or even reminded. Then along toward the end of the day you have a chance to do something that you know you ought not to do, but it looks like it would be a lot of fun and you think, “I’ve been so good all day, I ought to be allowed to have *some* fun.” But when your mother finds out, what she says is, “You’ve been so good all day; why did you have to spoil it?” Solomon was just a man after all.

Who was Solomon’s wife?

What bad thing did he now do?

Why was it bad?

When he was old, what did his wives lead him to do?

What did the Lord tell him would happen?

When was this to happen?

At that time people did not consider it wrong to have more than one wife, but the Lord had commanded them strictly not to take any wives from among the idolatrous nations who were their

enemies in the Holy Land. Solomon disobeyed this command, and the very thing happened which the Lord knew would happen. Solomon was led away by his wives into the worship of their idols. Then enemies began to rise up again and threaten the peace of his kingdom, and finally one of his own servants turned against him.

Who was this servant?

What position had Solomon given him?

What prophet did Jeroboam meet?

What did Ahijah do?

When was the same kind of sign given before?

What did Ahijah tell Jeroboam?

What did Solomon try to do?

Where did Jeroboam take refuge?

How long was Solomon's reign?

Intermediate

In the doctrinal points for this lesson attention is given to the celestial sense rather than to the spiritual, and none of this sense is given in the Intermediate notes this time. Stress the point that true charity does not treat the good and the evil alike. It is suggested that the teacher bring it out in connection with the illustration of the spoiled child. The important lesson for the Intermediates is in the inevitable results of disobedience.

We have learned that the three kings of Israel represent the rule of divine truth in our lives, and that they differ in character and accomplishment because our understanding of divine truth develops and deepens as we try to live according to it. Saul represents our first natural understanding of it, based on judgments formed from appearances. David represents a spiritual understanding, based on the recognition that appearances are deceiving and that there are spiritual principles which transcend natural ones. Both Saul and David spent most of their time fighting. The Lord says to us in Isaiah 1:16, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." This is a summary of the work of Saul and David—the overcoming of the enemies of our souls—which must be accomplished first. Then Isaiah 1:17

continues, “Learn to do well.” This is the work of Solomon.

Swedenborg tells us that Solomon represents “the Lord in relation to His celestial kingdom and His spiritual kingdom.” The celestial principle is love; the spiritual principle is truth. So under Solomon we are obeying divine truth understood in a still deeper way because we have come to love the Lord and the neighbor. **Perhaps we can understand this better if we think of a simple example.** We know that divine truth is summed up in the ten commandments. Suppose then we take the commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” We all at first have a natural desire to possess the good things which other people have. Even very little children are tempted to take things which do not belong to them. We begin to control this desire because we find that stealing gets us into trouble. Obedience from this motive is symbolized by Saul. Then we are taught the principle of love to the neighbor, which is a spiritual principle, and we see that it is right and control our impulse to steal not from fear of punishment but because we really see that stealing is wrong in the Lord’s sight; this is symbolized by David. But if we continue in the process of regeneration, we come to the point where we no longer covet what belongs to our neighbor; we enjoy his pleasure in it and would give him more if we could. All temptation to steal is gone and we are at peace; this is symbolized by Solomon. The name *Solomon* means “peace.”

In other lessons we have had the stories of Solomon’s dream in which he asked the Lord for wisdom and was granted riches and glory also, of the visit of the queen of Sheba and the details of Solomon’s glory, and of the building of the temple at Jerusalem. But now we come to the dark shadow which falls over the latter part of Solomon’s reign, brought on by his own sin. For all his glory and wisdom, Solomon—like David—was a mere man with the same selfish inclinations that we all have, and with our common tendency to rely upon our general good character to excuse our sins.

In our chapter Solomon is not rebuked because he had seven hundred wives, for we remember that at that time polygamy was considered allowable. It was rather because he took wives from

among the idolatrous nations in the Holy Land, against the Lord's express command. In the Bible women before they are married represent affections for truth (or falsity), and women after they are married represent affections for the good (or evil) which their husbands picture. Solomon early in his career married the daughter of Pharaoh king of Egypt, which pictures taking to himself the affection for the memory-knowledge of truth. This is right and necessary, for we must learn truth from the letter of the Word and from doctrine as a basis for a good life. And Solomon might without blame have taken other wives from nations which had not been forbidden—nations which have in general a good correspondence. But the nations in the Holy Land were enemies of Israel, and their women represent affections for falsity and evil.

Did you ever know a person who was so unwilling to criticize anyone that he excused all sorts of wrong things? Mothers sometimes do this with their children, and then we say the children are "spoiled." This is like Solomon's loving women from evil nations. When we let our love for someone blind us so that we do not recognize and try to correct wrong things, we are committing the sin of Solomon. The Lord had told the people plainly (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4) why they must not marry wives from these nations: it was because such wives would turn their hearts to the worship of their idols. And this happened even to Solomon, who had been greatly blessed by the Lord and should certainly have remained faithful to Him. Whenever we admit into our minds the thought that any commandment of the Lord may be broken without resulting harm, we are opening our minds to the entrance of all sorts of falsity and are led further and further away from the heavenly life. The "kingdom" is taken from us.

We shall study the actual division of the kingdom later, but we should note here that the seeds of this division were sown by Solomon's sin. As we have said before, no great change really takes place suddenly. We may seem to be getting along all right in spite of our sins—Solomon was allowed to keep his throne until he died—but the consequences begin piling up. Solomon was told that his

son would be able to hold only a part of the territory over which he had reigned, and he saw his enemies beginning to gain power. He also learned that Jeroboam, one of his own favored servants, had been promised by the Lord that he should rule over ten* of the tribes. There was nothing Solomon could do to prevent these consequences.

Basic Correspondences

Solomon = divine truth understood from love
women before marriage = affections for truth or falsity
women after marriage = affections for good or evil

Senior

The Seniors are old enough to see how this story can relate to the Lord's mercy and at the same time have an application to temptation in our own lives. We cannot too constantly stress with the young people the need of perpetual watchfulness and the fact that we never reach a state in which we can safely trust in self. This story is particularly apt for this purpose.

If you ask the "man on the street" what he knows about Solomon in the Bible, the chances are that his first and perhaps his only answer will be, "Well, he had a lot of wives, didn't he?" Shakespeare wrote, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." Solomon was the greatest of the kings of Israel. We are told in I Kings 10:23 that "he exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom." He built the temple at Jerusalem. Yet what the average person remembers is the thing which caused the downfall of his kingdom.

*See Bruce, *The First Three Kings of Israel*, pp. 549 ff. See also *The Sower*, Vol. 2, p. 331. *Note:* There is a good bit of inconsistency in the letter of the Word in regard to the total number of tribes: there are either twelve, or thirteen, if you count Ephraim, Manasseh and Levi. It is true, however, that whenever the tribes are listed by name, they will invariably add up to twelve; but some of the names will vary from list to list. In the dividing of the kingdom there is some obscurity about where to place both Benjamin and Simeon. Thus in I Kings 11:31-32 one *might* conclude there were only eleven tribes. –*Ed.*

We have had the story of David's sin and also the story of Saul's disobedience. The pattern is the same: a period of success led each of the three to set himself up in his own mind as superior to the commandment of the Lord. The lesson in the letter is obvious: Breaking the commandments never leads to good, and no finite human being ever becomes so perfect or so wise that he can safely cease to "search the scriptures."

But there are deeper aspects of our story for today which the New Churchman may study. The quotation at the end of this lesson is chosen to give you an idea of the inmost or celestial sense of this part of Solomon's life, the sense which relates to the Lord. "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." The writings tell us many times that not only does the Lord save all those Gentiles who preserve charity in their hearts in spite of the falsities in which they are brought up, but that His love is constantly reaching out to those in evil, trying by every possible means to lead them to see and acknowledge their evils and to turn from them. This is why so much of the Word is written in terms of vengeance and punishment, as well as why so many improper practices, like polygamy, were permitted to continue. They not only were representative of the states of the people of that time, but they kept them from falling into still deeper evils, and thus are actually expressions of the Lord's love for all mankind.

But in our Sunday school lessons our particular concern is with the spiritual sense of the Word, that sense which relates to the spiritual states of the individual man and woman. What does the story of Solomon mean for our personal lives? We have learned that a king represents truth (or falsity) ruling, and that the three great kings of Israel—Saul, David, and Solomon—represent divine truth ruling, understood in deeper and deeper ways as we advance in regeneration. Saul symbolizes a natural understanding of it and David a spiritual understanding. The task of both these kings was to seek out and overcome the enemies of Israel. Our first need after the outer life has been set in order—the period of reformation, pictured by the wilderness journey—is to wage war against evils and

falsities in our own hearts and minds and overcome them with the Lord's help. This is not accomplished all at once. The books of Joshua and Judges describe our first efforts, with their successes and failures, and the two books of Samuel our later, better-organized attack which results in victory. Throughout this long struggle, although we have moments of victory with its satisfactions, we are never really at peace.

Finally, however, the enemies are conquered and Solomon comes to the throne. The name *Solomon* means "peace." We have come into a state in which we accept the rule of divine truth not from fear of the consequences of disobedience nor even because we see that the truth is from the Lord and therefore is to be obeyed, but from love, love to the Lord and the neighbor in the heart. We no longer want to do wrong things. Therefore we have no battles to fight: we are at peace. It is in the period of Solomon that the temple is built silently, "of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building." Perhaps you know some old person who has apparently reached this Solomon state. Everyone loves and admires him. All kinds of people go to him for advice, as the queen of Sheba and others went to Solomon. We say he has a beautiful character. There is no evidence of weakness, temptation, or struggle in his life. Granted that not many reach such a state in this life, we know that a few do. Is it true that such a man has passed beyond the possibility of temptation?

Our chapter for today answers this question. It begins with the word *But* [KJV]. There is a temptation, and a very deep one, which accompanies this state. Solomon succumbed to it. It is the temptation to see nothing but good in everyone, to close one's eyes to evil and falsity and forget that it is never safe to ignore them. This leads the person gradually to condone evil and to accept false ideas without correcting them even in his own mind. Solomon's wives "turned away his heart after other gods." The acceptance of a false idea by a person known to be unusually good gives that falsity tremendous support and leads many astray.

And there is a way in which each one of us is subject to this temptation, even though in general we may be far from the Solomon stage of regeneration. When we love and admire someone very much, we may be tempted to excuse and justify his shortcomings, and to copy his faults as well as his virtues. At such times we need to remind ourselves of Solomon's sin and its consequences, and to say to ourselves: "There is none good but one, that is, God. . . if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

Adult

Probably the best discussion material for this class will be found in the difference between the celestial and the spiritual sense of this chapter and in the danger of refusing to recognize and condemn evil and falsity on the ground that we are taught to look for the good in everyone. Some useful examples may be found in the Intermediate and Senior notes.

We may think of the series of the three great kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—as picturing the increasingly full and satisfying rule of divine truth in our lives as we progress in regeneration and understand it more and more deeply. Consider this divine truth as it is summed up in the two great commandments, love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. From the beginning of our regeneration we recognize these as the essential foundation of a heavenly life.

When we are in the "Saul stage" of understanding, they mean that we should attend and support the church, obey the commandments in their literal sense, assist those about us when they are in trouble, and give to various charitable causes—perhaps take an active part in such work. This understanding enables us to overcome some of our more obvious selfish tendencies, but it inclines us toward self-satisfaction rather than toward humility, and we make mistakes and must eventually see that it is inadequate.

When we study the two great commandments more deeply, especially in the light of their internal meaning, we come into the David stage. We do not discard the good practices which we have developed, but we examine them with a view to finding out what has been genuinely good in the Lord's sight and what we have

been doing merely to be seen of men. In our worship we try sincerely to humble ourselves, and in our good works we learn to discriminate between the good and the evil, seeing that it is the good in everyone which is the neighbor to be helped, and that thoughtless and indiscriminate giving may actually promote evil. In this David stage we find within ourselves many “enemies” hitherto unnoticed. The reign of David is a long series of wars and conquests. And here, too, there is the temptation which comes with victory. But if we are willing to accept the Lord’s rebuke and repent of our evils, eventually Solomon is born.

In AE 654²⁹ we read that Solomon represents “the Lord in relation to His celestial kingdom and His spiritual kingdom.” Under Solomon the celestial principle, which is pure unselfish love, is in control of our understanding of divine truth. We now go to church and do good to the neighbor not to be seen of men and not from a sense of our duty to humble self and serve the Lord, but because we love the Lord and the neighbor. We are deeply thankful to the Lord and happy in the happiness of others. The long struggle against the enemies without and within is over and we are at peace. The name *Solomon* means “peace.” The great wisdom and glory of Solomon are representative of the state of the soul at this time, and it is in this stage that the temple of heavenly character is built silently within us out of materials prepared beforehand.

Yet here again victory brings the inevitable temptation. Our chapter for today begins with the word *But* [KJV]. There is always a “but.” The writings tell us that even in the heavens the angels sometimes have to be reminded that their own selfish nature is still with them and that it is only by the Lord’s mercy that it is kept quiescent there. We all probably know some old people who apparently have reached the Solomon stage. They live beautiful lives. Their advice is sought on many problems and they stand out as examples in the community. But sometimes we see in them also evidence of Solomon’s sin. They are so kindly that they “love” everyone, bad and good alike. They see only good and close their eyes to evil. So they condone false ideas and by so doing lead

others astray.

AE 654⁴⁶ points out to us the law which Solomon broke. It is given in Deuteronomy 17:15-17 and includes these words: “Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose . . . but he shall not multiply horses to himself . . . Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.” And section 47 of the same number explains that horses in this case signify “false knowledges which are fanciful” and that “As wives signify affections of truth and good, which become the affections of evil and falsity when one man has several wives, it is said ‘neither shall he multiply to himself wives that his heart turn not away.’ And as ‘silver and gold’ signify the truths and goods of the church, but here falsities and evils, when they are regarded only from the natural man, it is said ‘neither shall he multiply exceedingly to himself silver and gold.’” The section ends with these words: “Because Solomon not only procured for himself horses from Egypt, but also multiplied wives, and heaped up silver and gold, he became an idolater, and after his death the kingdom was divided.”

Solomon's original and chief wife was the daughter of Pharaoh king of Egypt. The number of the *Apocalypse Explained* from which we have been quoting concerns Egypt and contains several references to Solomon. In section 3 of that number we read, “‘Egypt’ signifies in the Word the natural man in both senses, good and bad,” and in section 33: “Because Solomon represented the Lord in relation to both the celestial and the spiritual kingdoms, and as all who are of both these kingdoms are in intelligence and wisdom through the knowledges of truth and good and knowledges that confirm these, therefore ‘Solomon took the daughter of Pharaoh to wife, and brought her into the city of David’ (I Kings 3:1); ‘And afterwards he built for the daughter of Pharaoh a house beside the porch’ (I Kings 7:8). By this also was represented that knowledge, upon which all intelligence and wisdom is based, is signified by ‘Egypt’ in a good sense. And as every man of the

church has a spiritual, a rational, and a natural, therefore Solomon built three houses, the house of God or the temple to stand for the spiritual, the house of the forest of Lebanon for the rational (for a ‘cedar’ and thence ‘Lebanon’ signifies the rational), and the house of the daughter of Pharaoh for the natural.”

This leads us to the consideration of the celestial sense of our chapter, and it is important that we understand something of this, for the question is often asked, “How could Solomon represent the Lord when he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines?” The writings give us a very clear explanation of this. In DP 245 we read: “Solomon was permitted to establish idolatrous worship. This was done that he might represent the Lord’s kingdom or the church, with all the varieties of religion in the whole world . . . And because the Lord after the glorification of His Human had power over heaven and earth . . . so Solomon His representative appeared in glory and magnificence, and possessed wisdom above all the kings of the earth, and also built the temple.” The Lord’s love reaches out to people of all religions and to the evil as well as to the good, and the laws of permission are His way of leading us without interfering with our freedom.

But we must not take these laws of permission into our own hands and use them as justification for indulging our own selfish inclinations. Solomon—both as an individual and as king of Israel—broke a law which he knew, and he and his people suffered accordingly. Read here also AC 3246³⁻⁴ which tells us that concubinage, while permitted to the earlier church, is not allowable for Christians. We are all responsible for doing our best to live up to the highest truths which have been revealed to us.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Divine Providence, n. 245: “Solomon was permitted to establish idolatrous worship. This was done that he might represent the Lord’s kingdom or the church, with all the varieties of religion in the whole world; for the church instituted with the nation of Israel and Judah was a representative church; therefore all the judgments and statutes of that church represented the spiri-

tual things of the church, which are its internals; that people itself representing the church, the king representing the Lord, David representing the Lord who was to come into the world, and Solomon the Lord after His coming. And because the Lord after the glorification of His Human had power over heaven and earth . . . so Solomon His representative appeared in glory and magnificence, and possessed wisdom above all the kings of the earth, and also built the temple. Furthermore, Solomon permitted and set up the worship of many nations, by which the various religions in the world were represented. His wives, seven hundred in number, and his concubines, who numbered three hundred . . . had a like signification, for a 'wife' in the Word signifies the church, and a 'concubine' a religion."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was the second son of David and Bathsheba? *Solomon*
- P. Who was the third king of Israel? *Solomon*
- J. What did he ask of the Lord? *wisdom*
- J. What did the Lord give him? *that, plus wealth, fame*
- P. What did he build in Jerusalem? *temple*
- J. What sin did he commit? *married many foreign women*
- J. To what further sin did it lead him? *idolatry*
- P. What did the Lord tell him? *kingdom would be lost*
- J. Would this happen before he died? *no*
- J. How much of Solomon's kingdom would his son have? *one (two?) tribes*
[cf. I Kings 11:32]
- J. Who was to be king of the rest? *Jeroboam*
- J. Who was Jeroboam? *servant of Solomon*
- J. Who told him he would be king? *Ahijah*
- J. What sign was given him? *torn robe*
- J. What did Solomon try to do? *kill him*
- J. Where did Jeroboam take refuge? *Egypt*
- I. What does Solomon represent? *peace of soul*
- S. What does Solomon's sin picture? *excusing or ignoring evil*