

THE WISE MAN'S FOLLY

By Paul Penno Jr.

July 2, 2011

The story of King Solomon is one of the most fantastic in all sacred history. He starts out apparently perfect with that most rare gift of wisdom, gets everything added to it, collects yearly “666 talents of gold” until he has tons of it, enjoys peace with his prosperity, “and all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart” (1 Kings 10:21).

King Solomon was the wisest, most knowledgeable man of his generation (maybe of all time)! The Lord had richly endowed him with this wisdom that surpassed all of his day.

Yet underneath was a solid foundation of pure humility that made it possible for the Lord to bless him as He did. When the Lord offered him (as King David’s descendant) anything he might ask for, he was wise to ask for the right things: “O LORD my God, Thou hast made [me] Thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. . . . Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart . . . that I may discern between good and bad” (1 Kings 3:7-9).

The Lord commended him because he had not asked for riches, or fame, or power: “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”

Therefore the Lord gave him what he had asked for, but besides that, the Lord gave him wealth and power and fame beyond estimate: “I have also

given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor” (vss. 12, 13).

Have you ever felt like you don’t know how to go in or come out, as if you didn’t know how to live this new day? Blessed are you, if you confess this reality before the Lord, and simply ask Him to direct your steps, to keep you from making any stupid mistake, to save you from yourself, and to enable you to live for the One who died for you.

Does God remember King Solomon’s prayer? (It’s buried in 1 Kings 8:22-61). Your happiness now and forever depends on your answer.

You remember his Temple, furniture of solid gold, the wallpaper also of solid gold. Huge crowds present at the dedication. His prayer there is the longest in the Bible. He knelt (vs. 54), his hands lifted up to heaven (takes us a long time even to read it; was he tired?).

Eleven times he prays to the great God of all the earth to “hear,” to “listen,” to anybody in all the world who prays to Him, even the pagans and the heathen anywhere whose heart turns toward Him. Solomon seemed obsessed with this idea of begging God to *listen*, even if those who pray have rebelled against Him, disobeyed, “forsaken the Lord, worshiped other gods and served them,” you name it—the invitation is to sinners everywhere of all stripes. “Hear Thou their prayer and their supplication,” Solomon begs.

Even if they should languish as captives in a foreign land, if they would “bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto Thee in the land

of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness, . . . then hear Thou their prayer” (46-49).

Now the question: Does God today remember Solomon’s prayer? The king asks in vs. 59 that “my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord” be recorded before the eyes of God, forever, written on the walls of His heavenly sanctuary! If you answer the question, Yes, then know that He welcomes *you*, a sinner, into His presence, and that He indeed “hears,” “listens” to *your* prayer.

Solomon, the great king of Israel, built the world’s most magnificent building—the Jerusalem temple. He was reputed to be the wisest man in the world. Under his royal administration, the kingdom of Israel reached the apex of its glory; it came near to fulfilling the promise that God made to Israel’s “father” Abraham, that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

Jesus said something very strange that has puzzled many people since the day He said it: “Whosoever shall fall on this Stone [Himself, His history as Saviour of the world] shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Mt. 21:44).

The leaders of the nation were planning to kill Him; Caiaphas, the high priest, hated Him; Pilate the Roman governor would deliver Him, knowing He was innocent, to death; and King Herod would agree to His death. The greatest judicial travesty in all history! Jesus had just reminded them of the

well-known story of building Solomon’s temple. One large stone had baffled the workmen—they couldn’t figure out where to put it and they abandoned it in the weeds, to the heat of summer and the frost of winter and the storms. Finally they discovered that it was the “head stone of the corner,” where it proved to be an exact fit. So, said Jesus, He is the “head stone which the builders rejected.”

So far, it is clear. But why the idea of anyone “falling on the Stone and being broken”? Well, Peter was an example of such a person. Arrogant and proud, he was sure he would never give in to pressure and deny his Lord, but before the rooster crowed in the morning he had denied Jesus three times. Peter wept bitterly when he realized the sinfulness of his own heart. His repentance was deep. He “fell upon the Stone and was broken.” The love of self was broken up; his heart was broken. It was reported in early times that ever afterward there was a tear glistening in his eyes.

On the other hand, look at Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod: all they have is the final judgment. Christ will not grind them to powder—what will do it is their own history. He will not say a word to condemn them in that final judgment; they will do it themselves. They will salvage nothing for eternity.

A wise writer has used this text about the *Stone* in appealing to church members to let the Holy Spirit melt their proud hearts, and to teachers in Christian schools whose self-centered pride hides Jesus from the view of their students, and to ministers and church leaders who repeat Peter’s denial of Christ. It’s an *either/or* judgment we all face: self must be

humbled eventually. Either “by our own voluntary choice to take up the cross on which self is crucified,” or to go on making self the center of our heart’s devotion. The former calls for tears of melted-heart repentance now; the latter points to “powder” being blown away like dust in a windstorm, an eternal record of nothingness. Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate have given us an expensive object lesson.

Just before the second coming of Christ, God will send a full-orbed gospel message that will “lighten the earth with glory” and everyone on earth whose heart begins to respond to God’s love will “come out of Babylon” and be a part of modern “Israel” (Rev. 18:1-4). Solomon’s glorious reign prefigured that final victory for God’s gospel.

“Good morning, your majesty, King Solomon!” Suppose God were to address you that way? You’d say, “But I don’t have his wisdom!” But we are coming to the time when you’ll need it. We face very perplexing problems: shall we believe Genesis 1-3 that God created the earth in six literal days, or be crushed under the scientists who declare that evolution alone is the answer and ridicule us who believe in the First Great Miracle of the Bible? Is salvation by faith alone or by faith-plus-works? Are the Daniel/Revelation time prophecies a day-for-a-year, or meaningless jargon? Is there a manifestation of God’s “spirit of prophecy” today as clearly inspired as were the prophets of old? How can we judge between truth and subtly disguised error?

Two woman confronted King Solomon: each claimed a certain baby was hers. #1 loudly pressed her claim; #2 was more quiet. The king couldn’t run any DNA tests. It seemed impossible to know who was telling the truth.

Ah, he has a bright idea! He will employ the test of love. “Sorry, ladies, I can’t judge which of you two is telling the truth. So, let’s be fair. Bring me a knife, I’ll cut the baby in two and give each of you half.” #1 simply folded her arms and awaited the result; #2 shrieked loud enough to be heard down at the Temple. “No, your majesty! Give # 1 the baby. I can’t bear to see you kill it!” Love had shown the king who was the true mother.

In every theological puzzle that confronts you, where the evidence seems balanced between opposite views, don’t throw up your hands in despair, and decide to sit on the fence. You can’t! At the end of the road, you’re going to have to decide frankly and openly between the “mark of the beast” and “the seal of God” (Rev. 13:16, 17; 7:1-4). Look to see where is *agape*, the true biblical love. Don’t be fooled by the foolish, shallow sentimental “love” that is the counterfeit of *agape*. Keeping the commandments of God will be the final test in the great controversy between Christ and Satan; but let’s remember that only “*agape* is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 10:10). Outward conformity to the letter of the ten commandments may mask a heart that is bitterly devoid of *agape*. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:10).

In *Newsweek's* excerpts a former presidential aide said of his boss: "He lost the battle with himself . . . a story of a man . . . who became a better president every day, And then he threw it all away." We feel compassion for any man or woman who succumbs to the temptations we all know in one form or another, and wrecks the good life he/she once had. But we need also to remember that the dear Lord permits current history and past history to unroll before our eyes so that we can learn some valuable lessons.

Another very similar story is that of Solomon, king of Israel. Reputed the wisest of men, compassionate, just, brilliant of intellect and warm of heart, he began his illustrious reign at the pinnacle of greatness. He honored God and glorified his kingdom before the nations of his day. "Judah and Israel were many . . . eating and drinking, and making merry [the economy was good!]. Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines. . . . And Judah and Israel dwelt safely. . . . God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart. . . . And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of . . . all men. . . . And his fame was in all nations round about" (1 Kings 4:20-31).

And then . . . he "threw it all away." The more keen-minded, intelligent, a man/woman is, the more powerful is the addiction he/she is captive to. For example, a brilliant alcoholic has more difficulty going through de-tox, or a drug addict, or sexual pervert, or gambler. The chains that bind them

seem almost unbreakable. This is especially true when people are indulgent or sexually permissive in youthful years; their life is ever afterwards poisoned by a virus of sexual infidelity.

When he became greater and greater, he turned away from the God of his strength, married pagan wives, forgot to read and ponder God's word, descended into the abyss of sexual immorality. He who had once been famous for a brilliant decision about awarding custody of a disputed baby now offered living children to the pagan god Moloch. He would have died in despair had he not repented as best he could in the sunset hour of his life, and he did die in disgrace, abhorred of his own people.

Prosperity, praise and flattery make one's full cup difficult to carry without spilling it. Be thankful if your cup is emptier, at least. Pay attention to a heavenly Father who is trying to save you from yourself. "Let him [her] who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). It's too late in the day to repeat Solomon's sad story. And although you're probably not a king, you certainly have too much to lose.

King Solomon led his nation, like several of our presidents have led theirs, in an orgy of sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility. He "loved many strange women" (1 Kings 11:1). The reason was that he abandoned the worship of the God who is the Creator and Redeemer of the world, and dabbled in paganism.

Love is a precious gift which we receive from Jesus, that is, the kind of love that sweetens life's bitter cup, and enables a man or woman to love one

person with the kind of love wherewith Jesus loves one Bride (He is not unfaithful!). Fidelity is an essence of love itself.

The love wherewith Solomon loved “many women” was sexual lust and pathological infatuation. In the end, he was left loving no one and no one loved him, for he had atrophied his capacity to love. Bitterness was all he had. Sexual promiscuity “takes away the heart,” says Hosea 4:11, that is, destroys the capacity to love. Thereafter, life without love becomes either hopeless divorces or a cold “relationship” that one must “work at” even to have a modicum of domestic stability. Human beings who live without such fidelity-love are little happier than pagans, even though they may go to church. “We love because [Jesus] first loved us,” says 1 Jn. 4:19. That’s why such love is “a precious gift which we receive from” Him, says a wise writer. It is its own defense against infatuating infidelity.

If you love, you cannot commit adultery. Love makes infidelity impossible. That’s why the Ten Commandments, rightly understood, are ten promises for anybody who appreciates the One who says, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2), and what it cost Him to deliver us. The New Testament says repeatedly that this love comes in the same package with our faith (Eph. 6:23; Col. 1:4).

Solomon, you had it made! You have brought heaven on earth, better yet, you are fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). And then,

Solomon, you blew it; you turned right around and “went after Ashtoreh, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.” You built temples to pagan gods and set them up in our holy city of Jerusalem (11:1-8)! Why, oh why, would you do this? What made you fall like this?

This almost unbelievable history must have a lesson for us today—it’s “Solomon’s Law” which must be fulfilled all over again 3000 years later until the lesson is learned. Add to Solomon’s impressive “holy” obedience of his early years (with God’s undeniable blessings) the factor of Old Covenant thinking, and the recipe calls for national apostasy to develop. Solomon reverses 500 years of Israel’s history, takes them back to the “Egyptian” darkness from which they had been delivered.

We all know that King Solomon was the wisest man in the world, and probably the richest; but was his thinking dominated by the Old Covenant, or the New? There were many good, faithful Israelites who did many good works, under the Old. In ancient times, it was better than paganism (Old Covenant “Christian” living is better today than being in “Babylon”; we can be proud that we’ve “come out”).

Solomon’s Ecclesiastes is certainly not gospel-oriented, although by much searching we can find a little good news hope therein; but Solomon’s enormous ego dominates. God gave him the wisdom that he requested when a youth, but he later came to see it as his acquirement. His message in Ecclesiastes is basically egocentric: do

what's right and you'll reap a great reward. "Wisdom"!

The "good news" is that after his descending to the level of paganism and even offering a child as a burnt offering, and tragically mis-feeding his people with theological poison that eventually ruined the kingdom, God forgave the foolish old king and restored him personally, drooping with contrition, to salvation-favor—giving hope to any sinner today who has gone the length in rebellion against the Lord.

But was it really Solomon's fault totally that he fell? Reality is that he inherited Old Covenant thinking all the way from Mt. Sinai. Jeremiah later saw it clearly—the New Covenant in that day remained the one that the Lord will make [future tense] with the house of Israel, after those days, says the LORD" (31:33). Revival after revival under "good kings" was only temporary in nature (the Northern Kingdom never had even one!), until the Old Covenant finally drove Israel into captivity in Babylon, and then in the end to crucify their Messiah.

Now, in our modern Christian history, if we add to all our "holy" obedience to the law (with God's undeniable blessings) the factor of Old Covenant theology, we also inevitably end up going to "Babylon" to learn methods of worship and patterns of thinking. We again reverse our own history. Moral: it's time for us to grow up out of the Old into the New!

Those who have been sacredly commissioned to proclaim "Babylon the great is fallen" fulfill

"Solomon's Law" by adopting Babylon's theology and worship.

The wisest of men, brilliant intellectually, endowed with an enormous ego/libido, a sex drive that must have been insatiable according to what he tells us in his book, Ecclesiastes—when he was old he began to regret his indiscretions and to long for deliverance.

He remembered the two times the great God of heaven had appeared to him personally and the glorious ministry entrusted to him which he had perverted and prostituted; he wanted to repent. But he found that he couldn't. He said: "His own iniquities entrap the wicked person, and he is caught in the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction [the gospel?], and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray" (Pr. 5:22, 23). He lamented: "Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts." "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I know surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked" (Eccl. 9:3; 8:12, 13).

Solomon got to the place where life was a curse; he couldn't sleep at night; life was a nightmare. He felt that God had cursed him. But in that very curse he discerned a ray of hope ("there are more blessings in God's curses than in man's benedictions," a wise man told me in my youth). God forgave his father, David; God could forgive him, even now. And He did. Solomon finally had the

sense to repent. Lord, grant that same precious gift to us!

Solomon finally found a purpose for living: he would write the Book of Ecclesiastes and try in some small way to undo the enormous evil he had done as a bad example to youth, yes, to the world. He discovered the gospel truth of the new covenant, and he wanted to share it. It saved him; it will save you, too.

Does God love everybody? If you believe what John 3:16 says, you have to answer *yes*.

But does God admire and respect everybody for what he or she is? Is it possible for God to love someone and at the same time “abhor” him/her? Yes! If God “abhors” someone it doesn’t mean He doesn’t love that person, but only that God is disgusted with the pride, arrogance, selfishness, willful rebellion, of that person. Yes, God loves and pities a fool, but according to very clear teaching in the Bible He must have a very hard time respecting a fool. And there is nothing in the Bible that even faintly suggests that even though He is “longsuffering,” that God’s patience with fools is everlasting.

For example: “The great God that formed all things . . . rewardeth the fool” (Pr 26:10). How? “Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools” (19:29, the “stripes” are an evidence of God’s love for the fool).

The Bible does not picture God as delighting in hurling lightning bolts at fools: those who “hate knowledge” and “despise” all of God’s reproof shall simply “eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled

with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools [“it’s the economy!” say those who don’t care about decency or uprightness in national leadership] shall destroy them” (1:29-32).

And there is this insightful gem of divine wisdom: “The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; he who is abhorred of the Lord will fall therein” (Pr. 22:14). In the eyes of heaven such a person does not have any respect. But let’s not forget: God still loves a fool. David was one—he walked right into the “pit” with his eyes wide open. But oh, how he repented! In dust and ashes forever after! It’s a great prayer to pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” but maybe it’s an even greater one to pray, “God be merciful to me a fool!” The Good News? God hears that prayer.

In Mt. 24:12, Jesus offers a deep insight into the problem: “Because iniquity shall abound, the love (*agape*) of many shall wax cold.” In other words, love dies. And why does love die? Because it is not *agape*. Sexual love known as *eros* dies quickly and often turns into hate. Only *agape* can love until “death do us part,” because 1 Cor. 13:8 says that “*agape* never fails.”

And why is there such a dearth of *agape*? To be quite honest, it’s not the fault of the government or even the media, and it’s useless to try to blame Hollywood—you’ll just go round in circles: the fault lies with the churches that do not proclaim *agape* in its true light. How else are the people to learn? But sexual lust and me-first selfishness are not *agape*. And why has the *agape* grown cold? Because the

Christian church, God's last refuge of righteousness on earth, has not proclaimed it. The Book of Revelation chronicles the disaster: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become the habitation of demons. . . For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev. 18:2, 3). The spiritual state of God's true people is described as unconscionable arrogance and lovelessness. Jesus complains that because of their "lukewarmness" He feels like throwing up (3:16), for they boast of "needing nothing" while the world around them crumbles into moral ruin (vs. 17).

Paul asks the question, "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). This kind of love (*agape*) is foreign to all our sinful human hearts, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). It must be imported, installed, "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (5:5). There is only one possible source of *agape*: it's in beholding, seeing, comprehending, the love (*agape*) of Christ revealed at His cross. To rob that love of its true dimensions is to nullify it so it "waxes cold." And it's true dimensions include the reality that Jesus loved us so much that He went to hell to save us, He died the equivalent of the "second death" (Rev. 2:11). "Herein is love (*agape*)" says John (1 Jn. 4:10). There is no other way to learn to love and no other way therefore to save an impossible marriage.