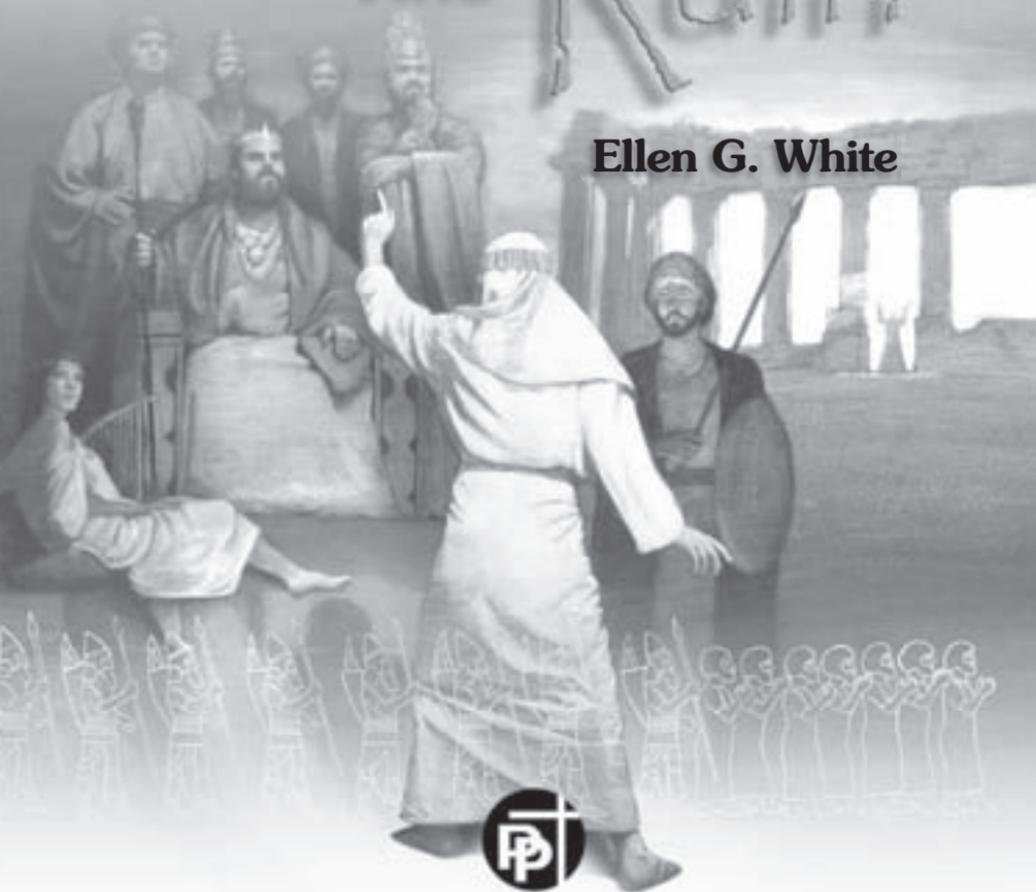


ROYALTY AND Ruin

Ellen G. White



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Foreword

Does history have meaning? Does human life have lasting significance? Is God involved in events on earth?

To these questions the author of this book answers Yes. Then, with deep insight into providential workings, she draws the curtain aside and reveals a philosophy of history which shows that events among the nations have eternal significance.

This volume is an adaptation of *From Splendor to Shadow*, a 1984 condensed edition of Ellen G. White's classic volume, *Prophets and Kings*. The condensed volume included all the chapters of the original, using only Mrs. White's own words but shortening the account.

The current adaptation goes a step beyond this, using some words, expressions, and sentence constructions more familiar to twenty-first century readers. Most of the Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version, which sounds much like the King James Version that Mrs. White used most often. It is hoped that readers who are new to Mrs. White's writings will enjoy this adaptation and will develop a desire to read the original editions of her works.

Royalty and Ruin begins with the account of Solomon's glorious reign over Israel. Here we review the history of a favored and chosen people, wavering between allegiance to God and to the gods of the nations around them. More importantly, in fascinating character studies of the kings, leaders, and prophets of a turbulent age, we find dramatic evidences of the raging conflict between Christ and Satan for the hearts of men and women. The book's final chapters tell of Christ's coming to the Jewish nation and the world as their true Royalty and of His reign that will finally undo all the ruin that humanity—royal or not—has brought on the earth through sin.

There are five powerful volumes in the "Conflict of the Ages" series, this book being condensed and adapted from the second of the five. That many more readers may be drawn to God through these books and their presentation of Bible themes is the hope and prayer of

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The Glorious Destiny Israel Might Have Had*

To bring the best gifts of Heaven to all peoples, God called Abraham from his idol-worshiping family and told him to establish his home in Canaan. “ ‘I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.’ ” Genesis 12:2. Abraham was called to a high honor—to be the father of the people who would preserve the truth of God, the people through whom all nations would be blessed by the advent of the promised Messiah.

People had nearly lost the knowledge of the true God. Idolatry had darkened their minds. Yet God in His mercy did not blot them out of existence. He planned that His people should live out the principles that would help to restore the moral image of God in human beings.

God’s law must be exalted, and He gave the people of Israel this great work. God separated them from the world and determined to preserve the knowledge of Himself through them. In this way all peoples would hear a voice appealing to them to turn from idol worship to serve the living God.

God brought His chosen people out of Egypt so that He might bring them to a good land that He had prepared as a haven from their enemies. In return for His goodness they were to glorify His name in the earth. He preserved them miraculously from the perils of the wilderness and finally established them in the Land of Promise as a favored nation.

With touching emotion Isaiah told the story of Israel’s call and training: “My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes.” Isaiah 5:1, 2.

“The vineyard of the Lord of hosts,” the prophet declared, “is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.” Isaiah 5:7. God’s people were walled in by the instructions of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices. God placed His holy

* *Author’s Introduction*

temple in the midst of the land, like the tower in the vineyard. Christ was their instructor, their teacher and guide. In the temple His glory beamed from the holy Shekinah above the mercy seat.

Moses had plainly shown the purpose of God and the conditions of their prosperity. “You are a holy people to the Lord your God,” He said. “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.” “Today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken.” Deuteronomy 7:6; 26:18, 19.

God intended to draw people to Himself through Israel’s revelation of His character. The gospel invitation was to go to all the world. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted, and all who would look to Him were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As Israel’s numbers increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom embraced the world.

But ancient Israel did not carry out God’s plan. The Lord declared, “I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?” “Why then, when I expected it to

bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste.’ . . . He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.” Jeremiah 2:21; Isaiah 5:4–7.

By refusing to keep His covenant, God’s people would cut themselves off from His blessings. Often in their history they forgot God, robbed Him of the service He required of them, and robbed their neighbors of religious guidance and a holy example. Their covetousness and greed caused even the heathen to despise them. Their behavior gave opportunity to misinterpret the character of God and the laws of His kingdom.

With a father’s heart, God patiently set their sins before His people and waited for them to acknowledge their wrongs. He sent prophets and messengers to urge His claim, but instead of welcoming them, the people treated these men of wisdom and spiritual power as enemies. God sent still other messengers, but they too were hated and persecuted.

The withdrawal of God’s favor during the Exile led many to repent, yet after they returned to the Land of Promise the Jewish people repeated the mistakes of former generations and brought themselves into political conflict with surrounding nations. The prophets whom God sent to correct their evils, they received with suspicion and scorn. So from century

to century, the keepers of the vineyard added to their guilt.

Israel despised the choice vine that the divine Gardener planted on the hills of Palestine, and they finally threw it over the vineyard wall. The Gardener removed it and planted it again, but on the other side of the wall and in such a manner that the stock was no longer visible. The branches hung over the wall, and grafts might be joined to it, but God placed the stem itself where human power could not harm it.

Of special value to God's church today—the keepers of His vineyard—are the messages given through the prophets. They clearly reveal His love for the lost race and His plan for

their salvation. The story of Israel's call, their successes and failures, their restoration to God's favor, their rejection of the Master of the vineyard, and a remnant's carrying out of His plan—this has been the theme of God's messengers to His church throughout the centuries that have passed.

The Master of the vineyard is now gathering from among all nations and peoples the precious fruits for which He has been waiting so long. Soon He will come for them, and in that glad day His eternal purpose will finally be fulfilled. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." Isaiah 27:6.

Solomon's Spectacular Beginning

In the reign of David and Solomon, Israel had many opportunities to exert a mighty influence for truth and right. Jehovah's name was exalted and held in honor. People from heathen lands seeking truth did not go away unsatisfied. Conversions took place, and the church of God on earth prospered.

Solomon became king in the closing years of his father David. His early life was bright with promise, and God intended that he would grow more and more like the character of God. In this way he would inspire the people to fulfill their sacred trust as God-appointed witnesses of divine truth. David knew that for Solomon to fulfill the trust with which God honored him, the youthful ruler must be not merely a warrior and statesman but a good man, a teacher of righteousness, an example of loyal obedience. David earnestly appealed to Solomon to be noble, to show mercy to his subjects, and in all his dealings with the nations to honor the name of God and to reveal in his life the beauty of holiness. " 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.' " 2 Samuel 23:3.

In his youth Solomon made David's choice his own, and for many

years he lived in strict obedience to God's commands. Early in his reign he went to Gibeon, where the tabernacle built in the wilderness still was, and with his chosen advisers and "every leader in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' houses," joined in offering sacrifices to God and consecrating themselves fully to the Lord's service. 2 Chronicles 1:2. Solomon knew that those carrying heavy responsibilities must seek the Source of wisdom for guidance. This led him to encourage his counselors to unite with him in making sure that God accepted them.

Solomon's Dream From God

More than anything else on earth, the king desired wisdom and understanding, a compassionate heart, and a tender spirit. That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, " 'Ask! What shall I give you?' " In his answer the young ruler voiced his feeling of helplessness and his desire for aid. " 'You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. . . . Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern

between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?’

“The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”

“ ‘Because you have asked this thing,’ God said to Solomon, “ ‘and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

“ ‘So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.’ ” 1 Kings 3:5–14; see also 2 Chronicles 1:7–12.

The language Solomon used before the altar at Gibeon reveals his humility and his strong desire to honor God. In his heart there was no selfish longing for a knowledge that would raise him above others. He chose the gift that would enable his reign to bring glory to God. Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed, “ ‘I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.’ ”

As people occupy higher positions, they exert wider influence and need to depend on God all the more.

They are to stand before God in the attitude of a learner. Position does not give holiness of character. Honoring God and obeying His commands is what makes anyone truly great.

The God who gave Solomon the spirit of wise discernment is willing to grant the same blessing to His children today. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5. The person carrying heavy responsibilities who desires wisdom more than wealth, power, or fame will not be disappointed.

How to Succeed as a Leader

As long as they remain consecrated, those to whom God has given discernment and ability will not be eager for high positions nor seek to rule or control. Instead of striving for supremacy, true leaders will pray for an understanding heart, to discern between good and evil. Leaders have no easy path. But they are to see in every difficulty a call to prayer. Strengthened and enlightened by the Master, they will stand firm against unholy influences and will discern right from wrong.

The wisdom that Solomon wanted more than riches, honor, or long life, God gave him. “God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. . . . For he was wiser than all men . . . and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.” 1 Kings 4:29–31.

“And all Israel . . . stood in awe of the king, because they perceived

that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice." 1 Kings 3:28, NRSV. The hearts of the people turned toward Solomon. "Solomon . . . was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly." 2 Chronicles 1:1.

Solomon's Brilliant Success

For many years Solomon maintained a clear devotion to God and strict obedience to His commands. He managed the kingdom's business matters wisely. The magnificent buildings and public works that he constructed during the early years of his reign, the piety, justice, and spirit of generous grace that he revealed in word and deed, won the loyalty of his subjects and the admiration of the rulers of many lands. For a time Israel was like a light to the world, displaying to others the greatness of Jehovah.

As the years went by and Solomon's fame increased, he did his best to honor God by adding to his mental and spiritual strength and by continuing to share with others the blessings he received. He understood fully that these gifts were granted him so that he might give to the world a knowledge of the King of kings.

Solomon took a special interest in natural history. Through a diligent study of all created things, both living and non-living, he gained a clear concept of the Creator. In the forces of nature, in the mineral and animal world, and in every tree, shrub, and flower, he saw a revelation of God's

wisdom; and his knowledge of God and his love for Him constantly increased.

Solomon's inspired wisdom found expression in songs and in many proverbs. "He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish." 1 Kings 4:32, 33.

The proverbs outline principles of holy living and high ambition. Solomon spread these principles far and wide while recognizing God as the One to whom all praise and honor belong. This made Solomon's early reign a time of moral uplift as well as of material prosperity.

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom," he wrote, "and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor." Proverbs 3:13-16. "'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.'" Proverbs 8:13.

If only Solomon in his later years had heeded these wonderful words of wisdom! He who had taught the kings of the earth to offer praise to the King of kings, in "pride and arrogance" took to himself the glory due to God alone!