

ROAD TO REVIVAL

By

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Chapter Six -

SHIELDS OF BRASS

THE prosperous reign of Solomon was followed by the apostasy under Rehoboam. You will remember how he listened to the rash advice of the young men and plunged the country into a course of idolatry. Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord; they provoked Him to jealousy; they built high places and images and groves; there were also sodomites in the land; and Judah did according to all the abominations of the heathen nations (I Kings 14:21-24).

It is not surprising that on the heels of such apostasy Jerusalem should be attacked by Shishak, king of Egypt. We read that he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord. All over our land today are hearts and homes and churches once rich with Divine wealth but now ransacked and barren because Shishak has stolen the treasures of the Lord.

Note one other detail in this account of the invasion by Shishak. He took away (I Kings 14:26) all the shields of gold which Solomon had made, and Rehoboam made in their stead brazen shields. Now these golden shields of Solomon were doubtless beautiful.

They symbolized the prosperity with which GOD had blessed His people. But Shishak took them and Rehoboam, to cover his embarrassment, substituted shields of brass, and everyone must have been reminded of the contrast between his time and the days of Solomon every time they saw the brazen shields.

We often see the spiritual counterpart of this in Christian experience. Satan steals our shields of gold and we try to cover our defeat and hide our chagrin by making in their stead shields of brass!

At Pentecost the church began with shields of gold. But that which began in the SPIRIT tried later to make itself perfect in the flesh. Constantine embraced Christianity and the church joined hands with the world. Harnack tells us: "As the proofs of the SPIRIT and of power subsided after the beginning of the third century, the extraordinary moral tension also became relaxed, paving the way gradually for a morality which was adapted to a worldly life."

The church began to compromise, so as to be less offensive to an ungodly age. When Thomas Aquinas visited the pope and was being shown the splendor of the papal treasures, the pontiff remarked, "You will observe that the church no longer has to say, "**Silver and gold have I**

none." And Aquinas answered, "Neither can she now say, '**Rise and walk**'"! Shishak had stolen the shields of gold and men were substituting shields of brass.

The great preachers, prophets, and reformers of church history were men whom GOD raised up to restore to the church its shields of gold. Savonarola, Luther, Knox, Wesley, Fox, Zinzendorf, Moody - these men GOD called in times of declension and burdened them with the evils of their day. While time-serving churchmen rested at ease in Zion and lukewarm believers saw nothing to be excited about, these seers could not be deceived. They saw through the sham and veneer and false pretense and vain show and knew full well that the church was waving shields of brass to hide her embarrassment. They knew that the golden shields had been stolen and that brass, though it may gleam and glitter, is only brass. They refused to be satisfied with "second bests" and stirred the church to recover her lost treasure.

May GOD raise up another such prophet today! The church, like Samson of old, has been shorn of power and goes out to shake itself Sunday morning and night, yet it wists not that the SPIRIT of the Lord has departed. There is need of a voice in the wilderness, a preacher who wears no tags and labels, who is not intimidated by the glare of brass, but who sees in it only man's substitute for GOD's gold.

"The good is the enemy of the best." The church is taken up today with much that is good, but she is not carrying on in the power of Pentecost and there is no use trying to conceal the fact that Shishak has substituted his "good" for GOD's best.

The world is not deceived: they know that we have been robbed and all our clever tricks do not deceive. There is no use trying to save our faces. Shishak has taken the shields of gold, our testimony and our power, and we waste time in activities that may help to hide it when our greatest need is to confess it and regain what we have lost.

One has only to look at individual churches today to see the ravages of Shishak. We can appreciate the sexton who rang the funeral bell by mistake just before the regular preaching service. "It makes no difference," he said; "the church is dead anyway." "Ichabod" might be written over many a sanctuary, for the glory has departed.

When we say this, we do not have in mind dilapidated churches with the congregation departed and roof falling in. We used to think of Sardis in Revelation as being such a church, but we read that it had a name to be alive but was dead. Ephesus too was busy and active and orthodox, but had left its first love. In both cases there was much waving of brazen shields to make up for the shields of gold.

Much church activity today is simply brass trying to shine like gold. There is sometimes a haunting consciousness that the fire is strange fire like that of Nadab and Abihu, and not the supernatural fire from above. The young prophet of Elisha's day did not go on chopping wood with the handle after the axehead was gone, but there is a lot of frantic activity today that bespeaks lack of power instead of fulness of power, just as sometimes a speaker pounds the desk most vigorously when he has least to say.

It is a sad day for a church when Shishak steals its shields of gold. Sadder still is its plight if,

instead of recognizing its loss and repenting of its sin and recovering its lost power, it works doubly hard so that no one will suspect that anything is wrong. But GOD knows and even the world detects the difference for, burnish as you will, brass can never be gold.

Preachers had better take this truth to heart. Shishak is out to steal the preacher's shield of gold. Sometimes he does it with modernism. Sometimes he exchanges comforts and earthly honors, glittering brazen shields for GOD's best. More than once have we seen a preacher castaway who once served GOD with power, but somewhere along the road he struck a bargain with Shishak and now his shield is brass.

Maybe he chose ecclesiastical promotion and trimmed his message to suit the powers that be. Maybe he allowed a multitude of small duties to smother the prophetic passion in him and his study became an office. Maybe he wasted his energies on various small affairs, good in themselves but to be delegated to others that he might give himself to the ministry of the Word and prayer.

Our Lord is coming soon and we are to hold fast what we have that no man take our crown (Revelation 3:11). Satan is clever: if he cannot entice a consecrated preacher into grosser forms of sin, he sets about to cheat him out of GOD's best. He allows him the good: the brother is allowed to be active and earnest and diligent, but it is brass and not gold.

I am not so afraid of some preachers drifting into worldliness or modernism or immorality as I fear that gradually and imperceptibly they may be snared into accepting something almost as good as GOD's best for them. A brazen shield may be better than no shield at all, but why accept anything less than gold when gold has been provided

Christians in general today are continually in danger from Shishak. How many there are who make out with a second-rate experience, a "just-as-good" substitute of the devil. How much of our prayer-life is brass instead of gold! We merely read the Bible, if indeed we do that, instead of feeding upon it. Our witnessing is cheap and tawdry. We sink to the level of the general average, afraid to be different lest our friends accuse us as they did our Lord of being beside ourselves. Shishak steals the joy of our salvation and we try to make out with a false religious enthusiasm, "pep" instead of power. A vast amount of church work is being done today by the same kind of energy with which the world carries on its work. Unconsecrated men and women are transplanted on Sunday from the world into the church upon the mistaken impression that if they can "put things over" outside the church, they can do it inside the church.

We have an idea that church work just must go on; if not in the power of the Lord, it must go on anyway, so David hauls the ark on a cart of his own devising. If Satan has stolen our golden shields, never mind, we will make brazen shields and go on as before. But we don't go on as before. Brass shines, but we and the Lord and even the whole world know that it is not gold.

We are hearing a great deal today about revival and evangelism, more about evangelism than revival. May GOD save us from a brass revival! GOD deliver us from imitation awakenings that produce no fruits meet for repentance! We pretend that we want revival, but do not most of us want only a polite and elegant revival that never sees the axe laid to the trees?

Too often have we witnessed innocuous invitations that generalized until nobody could possibly

feel convicted. These omnibus invitations brought scores down the aisles in a mere parade that meant no more than an idle gesture. There is too much spreading cold cream on cancers and dusting off sin with a powder puff. We need a fresh perusal of Finney's sermon on "*How to Preach so as to Convert Nobody.*"

Let us not live in a fool's paradise. Shishak has stolen the shields of gold and we get nowhere by carrying shields of brass. It is often suggested that we never should expose sin in the professing church because it advertises the faults of believers to the world. Well, we are not telling the world anything it did not already know!

David had to acknowledge his sin and repent before the lost joy of salvation was restored. Then and not until then could he teach transgressors GOD's ways and win sinners unto Him. Nor can we win them today until we take the same route that David took. There is nothing to be gained by trying to hide our embarrassment with brazen shields. Let us return to GOD for His best.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
