

THE CHURCH A MOTHER NO. 2776

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 27, 1902.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPELS SOUTHWARK,
ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DURING THE SPRING OF 1860.

“The children which you shall have, after you have lost the other, shall say again in your ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?”
Isaiah 49:20, 21.

I NEVER like to look upon the Bible as merely an old Book, a relic of the past; I like to read it and think of it as a new Book and one applicable to the present time. And I am continually compelled to regard it as such; for I find that it relates to the things passing around me—it deals with my present sorrows, my present doubts, and my present joys. It is not merely a record of the saints in olden times; it is a Book of Direction for the saints of the present generation. It not merely gave consolation to those who received the promise centuries ago, but the same promise comes home fresh and sweet to us, and we look upon it as being a new and present revelation from heaven to us. At least, there are times when the Spirit takes of the words of Scripture, and makes them as fresh and new to us as though an angel had just flown from heaven, and, for the first time, uttered the gracious words by whispering them in our ears. And the passage which I have read bears to me, just now, though it may not to you, all the freshness and sweetness of a passage made for the occasion. If this Book had been written yesterday, I am sure it could not contain truth more applicable to myself—no, if I had to have it, as Mohammed's followers had the Koran, chapter by chapter, just as they required it, I could not have a Bible more adapted to my daily experience and my daily needs. For so does the Holy Spirit continually take of the things of Christ, and not simply apply them unto us, but, apparently, He seems to adapt them to us, or else He brings out to our mind's eye that old original adaptation which God had placed in them, foreknowing for what purpose they would be used in later days.

I propose to comment upon this text somewhat pointedly, and I hope that the remarks I shall make upon it may be the means of leading others to take the passage as a subject of profitable meditation; and I shall begin by observing that *the Church is a mother*; when I have dwelt upon that idea, I shall notice that, like other mothers, *the Church has sometimes to be bereaved*; then, in the third place, I shall observe that she has another trouble which mothers in England do not have—God grant they never may!—*she is sometimes herself a captive*, she wears bonds and fetters, and groans in slavery; and then I have to notice, in the fourth place, the promise of the text, that *this mother, despite her bereavement, despite all her captivity, shall see her family multiplied to a most extraordinary degree*, so that she shall be overwhelmed with amazement, and lifting up her eyes shall say, “Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?”

I. Well now, first of all, notice that THE CHURCH IS A MOTHER; she always did stand in that relationship to all her members. Take each member of the Church individually, he is a child; take us altogether we make up the mother, the Church. The Church of Rome professes to be a mother; and what a mother she has proved to be! Let the Inquisition tell how tenderly she has nursed her babes. Let conventual torture chambers tell how her little infants have been cared for. Let the stakes that once stood on Smithfield, let the gallows and the fires all stand up, and tell the story of that tender and pitiful mother! Ah! But the Church of Christ is a true mother. Even when she is not continually using the name, yet is she a tender and affectionate nursing mother to all her offspring. I shall begin here very briefly to speak about this mother.

The Church is a mother *because it is her privilege to bring forth into the world the spiritual children of the Lord Jesus Christ*. The Church is left in the world still that she may bring out the rest of God's elect that are still hidden in the caverns and strongholds of sin. If God had willed it, He might have brought out all His children by the mere effort of His own power, without the use of any instrumentality. He might have sent His grace into each individual heart in some such miraculous manner as He did into the heart of Saul, when He was going toward Damascus; but He has not chosen to do so. He, who has taken the Church to be His spouse and His bride, has chosen to bring men to Himself by means; and thus it is, through God's using the Church, her ministers, her children, her works, her sufferings, her prayers—through making these the means of the increase of His spiritual kingdom, she proves her right to take to herself the title of mother.

But when these little ones are born, the Church's business is, next, *to feed them*. It is not enough that she has brought them to Christ; it is not sufficient that, through her agency, they have been quickened, and begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; it is her work to feed them. She gives to them the unadulterated milk of the Word. Through her ministers, through her servants, through the different agencies which she employs, she endeavors to satisfy their longing souls with the bread of life. She gives them food convenient for them; she feeds them by her doctrine, by her ordinances; she bids them come and eat and drink at her table, and it is her earnest desire and effort to supply all their spiritual wants by feeding their understandings, their affections, their hearts; every part and power of the mind and soul, the Church labors to feed.

Nor is she content with feeding: it is her endeavor *to train up her children*. There are some professed churches of Christ that seem to do nothing whatever in the way of training up the young in their midst. These churches, if there are any sinners converted, scarcely ever hear of it. If children are born, there is no rejoicing over them; their names are not written in the family register—the church book. They are not asked to come forward, and be recognized as children of God by being baptized; they are permitted to come up, perhaps, to the church's house, but if they should offer to join her number by profession of their faith, they would be at once told that they were not yet fit to be numbered with her right royal children. But the true nursing churches do not act thus. They look out for every babe in Christ that they can find, and then they seek to instruct these babes; and when they are instructed, the church receives them into her arms, and she takes them to be hers, to be trained up for future deeds of usefulness. She trains up some of her sons to be captains in the Lord's host. She puts the sword of the Spirit into their hands, and bids them use it in fighting their Master's battles. She trains up others of her sons and daughters to teach still younger ones, and these she puts into her schools. She trains up all her children, some by one means and some by another. She says to some, "Go abroad, my children, and labor for your Lord in His far-off fields, and extend His kingdom wherever you can." Thus does the Church well deserve the name of mother, when she brings up, and fosters, and nurtures the children of God.

Nor is this all the Church can do. *She will be always ready to nurse her children when they become sick*; for, alas, in the Church's family, there are always some sickly ones, not only sick in body, but sick in spirit. And never does the Church appear so truly a mother as she does to these. Over these she will be, if she is what she should be, peculiarly watchful and jealous. Though the strong shall have her attention, yet the weak shall have double. Though those who are standing up shall be helped, yet those who are cast down shall be helped still more. If there is a weak lamb, if there is a wandering sheep within the Church, she opens wide her eyes, and it will be her endeavor to watch most over these. She knows her duty is like her Lord's, to bind up the broken in heart, and comfort those who mourn; so she continually bids her ministers bring forth sweet things out of the storehouse. She says to her servitors, "Set on the great pot, and put in the precious doctrines of the gospel, and let all these be set a-simmering, that there may be food for all my children." "And," she says, "take care that you bring forth the wines on the lees well refined, the fat things full of marrow, for I have some weaklings in my family who will not be strong to labor unless they have the rich cordials of the gospel continually given to them."

Ah! And when the Church is in proper order, how she will nurse the weak! Do you remember what she did in Paul's days?—for what Paul did the Church did. He says, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children." So will the Church do, through her ministers, her officers, and, indeed, through all her members if they act up to their duty. She will be watching for the souls of men, especially for those souls that are the saddest, and the most cast down and the most subject to temptation and to trial; she will watch over them and nurse them. And she will never be happy, let me add, until she brings all her

children up to her Husband's house in heaven. She is expecting Him to come by and by; and when He comes, it will be her joy to meet her Husband leading her daughters with her. And she will say, "Come forth, you daughters of Jerusalem, and see Him who is greater than King Solomon crowned with the crown which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals." And, at last, when she and her Husband shall be safe in the glory kingdom in heaven, then will she say, "Here am I, and the children which You have given me, and have nursed for You; but by Your help have they been kept, by Your grace have they been preserved, and it has been my loving duty, as their tender mother, to nurse, and cherish, and nurture them, and bring them up, for You."

Every time I give the right hand of fellowship to a new member, especially to those just brought in from the world, I think I hear Christ's voice speaking to me, and saying, "Take these children, and nurse them for Me, and I will give you your wages." I say this is said to me, but I mean it is said to the entire Church—I merely speak, of course, as the representative of the body. We have, whenever members are given to us, a great charge, under God, to nurse them for Him, and, instrumentally, to advance them in the road to heaven. But, in all this, the Church is a poor mother, if her God is not with her. She can do nothing in bringing forth, nothing in nurturing, nothing in training, nothing in preserving and nothing, at last, in bringing her children home, unless the Holy Spirit dwells in her, and sends her strength to accomplish all.

When we speak of persons joining the Church, we mean that they are added to the company of God's people. We believe that the Church does not consist alone of the preachers, and deacons, and elders; but that the Church is a company of faithful men and women, banded together according to God's holy rule and ordinance for the propagation of the truth as it is in Jesus; and Betsy the servant-maid is as much in the Church as any Very Reverend Doctor or Dean is. The Church, then—by which I mean the great company and body of the faithful—that Church is a nursing mother.

II. The second remark which I proposed to make upon our text is that THE CHURCH IS SOMETIMES BEREAVED. Ah! There must be coffins in every house; there must be shrouds in every family; and so is it in the Church.

The Church has to lose some of her children. "After you have lost the other," I read here. Some of her nominal children she loses *by spiritual death*, but the reason of this is because they are not really her children at all. They are those who crept in, and pretended to be hers; and they looked so much like hers that she could hardly tell them. For a little while, she nursed them; but, afterwards, they turned out to be the offspring of Satan, and then they went away from her. But even when they go away, she is such a loving mother that, though she feared they were not her children, yet she did not like to lose them. I heard some of her children singing, the other night, after one of these false brethren had been found out—

*"When any turn from Zion's way,
Alas! What numbers do,
I think I hear my Savior say,
'Will you forsake Me too?'"*

The Church does not like to lose even those who are not her children.

Then, next, she loses many of her children—I mean, they go away from her—*by death temporal*. Many of the Church's children are taken up above; and, somehow, though she is glad to know they are in their Father's bosom, yet she does not like to miss them. The Church regrets to see the vacant seat of her dead, and especially if it has been one of her children who has been very dutiful and has striven to serve her much. She will weep full sore for such. When she lost her son Stephen, do you remember that a whole company of her children followed him to the grave; for it is said devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him! Though the Church does not sorrow as one that has no hope, though she is glad to know that her children are well provided for, and taken up to dwell in their Father's house, yet it is no small suffering to see her ministers taken away, and her church officers and members removed one by one, even while in their various spheres of usefulness, and while faithfully serving their Lord and Master.

Then, again, the Church loses her children, sometimes, *by a trying providence*. Many churches, as well as ourselves, are in that position; we have lost our children; we have lost many simply from the fact of their having to remove to a distance; in this way, our congregations are necessarily scattered. Some of those who used to sit under our ministry Sabbath by Sabbath, who came up with our great company, and kept holy day, cannot now be seen in our midst. And I, even if you do not, feel this as bereavement; I cannot bear to miss the face of a single one from the members of the church. There is a sort of sacred bond

of union that binds all together; and I do not like any one to go away, except it is, now and then, when some grow dissatisfied, and then I feel it is better for them to go somewhere else—it is certainly not worse for their minister. But those who have been loving, tender children have had to leave the church—those who have striven for her good. It is a sad thing to see them separated from us, and that has happened to this church over and over again. As often as the minister has been removed from her midst, some of her children have been lost. The church book is a very checkered book to look at. As I look back upon the record of the past, I see the membership increase rapidly. A certain minister dies, and then the church is diminished and brought low. Again another comes, and a fresh company is gathered together; and as soon as he removes, away they go; and thus the church suffers bereavement; her children are removed—not into the world, let us hope. But, alas! This does happen, even with God’s own children; after losing their early love in some one church, they go on wandering here and there, scarcely caring to unite themselves in church fellowship again, living unhappily, bereaved and alone, desolate and without companions.

I think I have said enough upon this point. The Church, like every other mother, has sometimes to lose her children, and suffer bereavement.

III. Now I come to the third head, which is this—**THE CHURCH HAS SOMETIMES TO BE CARRIED AWAY CAPTIVE.**

How often has this happened to the Church of God in the olden times! The Church has been carried into foreign countries; taken from her much-loved house at Jerusalem, and compelled to sit down by the waters of Babylon, and weep while she remembered her ancient habitation; her children have hung their harps upon the willows, and when their enemies came, and required of them a song, they have said, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” She has been a captive, indeed, in more modern times; since the days of Christ, the Church has been a captive in another sense, namely, that sometimes she has been cruelly persecuted. Kings have sent forth their bloody edicts against her; and then the tender nursing mother, the Church, has been obliged to house her children in the dens and caves of the earth; they have worshipped in catacombs, by the light of candles, or perhaps with no light whatever; her dearest sons have been compelled to administer the ordinance of Christ in the vaults among the dead. When the living was too unkind, then has death found them a shelter; the earth has helped the woman, and in the catacombs have her children been brought forth.

Often, too, has the Church been compelled to seek a refuge in foreign countries. You know how she went far into Africa; and how, again, she sought a lodging place in the fastnesses of the Alps—there, amidst the snow-clad mountains, she found some little shelter from the blood-thirsty hounds of hell. And in still more modern times, the Church in this land has had to fly across the waters; and there, in America, the Pilgrim Fathers have become the founders of mightier churches than those they had left behind. Those were the times of the Church’s captivity. We cannot tell in this age what griefs they were that did wring the hearts of the first passengers in “The Mayflower.” When they left England, and went to America, they went forth, not knowing where they went. They could not meet together for worship; it was death if they ventured to preach the gospel; but they went where they could, among the red men, to be free to worship their God. Ah, those were days of removing to and fro! Then the Church wept, and said, “I am desolate, I am a captive, I am driven far away from my former habitation.”

The same thing has sometimes happened to the Church also, not in days of persecution, but in days when deadly sickness has seized upon her limbs, when, all of a sudden, her energies have been dampened, her power lessened, and she has no more brought forth children, or even nursed them tenderly. Days of slumber and heaviness have come over the Church, yes, and days of heresy, too, when her ministers were no more shining lights, but, like the flax when the light is gone out, they were an offensive stench; when her fountains have no more gushed forth with living waters, but a black, turbid, and putrefying stream; when, instead of the bread of heaven, her children have had to eat husks; when, instead of the pure Word of God, it was anything but the truth—the lies of Satan and the inventions of hell.

IV. I will say no more of the Church’s captivity, but will just observe, in the last place, that, when the Church has lost her children, and when she herself has been made captive, and removed to and fro, she has said, “Ah, me! Ah, me! My God has forgotten me, the Lord has forsaken me; I have become a widow, I will sit in the dust, I will sorrow even to the end, I will groan even in the bitterness of my spirit; like Rachel, I will weep for my children, and I will not be satisfied or comforted, because they are not.” But here comes this last point: even then, **THE CHURCH HAS HAD A MARVELOUS INCREASE AFTER ALL HER CAPTIVITIES**, and all her bereavements have always worked for her good.

Never has the Church lost her children without obtaining many more. You remember when the Jewish nation seemed to be once and for all cut off from the Church; when the apostle said, "Seeing you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." The Church might have sorrowed, and said, "I have lost the Jews;" but she found the Gentiles. Where she lost one, she found thousands; the day of her sorrow was the day of her increase. And, do you know, whenever the Church has lost a martyr, she has always, soon afterwards, found her numbers increased? Gathering round the stake, idle bystanders have marked the patience of the man of God; they have seen him when his hoary beard was being singed by the flames; they have watched him as his very bones cracked in the fire; they have seen him lift to heaven his burning hands, and clapping them, cry, "God is with me in the fire!" Struck with amazement, they have asked, "What is this that makes the man rejoice in a death so terrible?" And they have gone home, and they have retired to pray; and the next day has found them knocking at the door of the Church, entreating to be admitted into the sacred number of her children. The days of her bereavement have been the days of the increase of her family; and when the Church has been scattered and driven to and fro, it has always been for her good—it has been like the scattering of seed. There was once a time when there was a granary full of heavenly seed. Satan knew this was destined to cover the whole earth with a glorious harvest. He was exceedingly angry concerning it; and he said, "What shall I do to destroy this seed?" so he went down into the dark pit, and brought up a legion of fiends. "Now," he said, "we will burst the granary door open, we will take out that grain, and we will cast it on the waters, we will throw it to the winds of heaven; we will throw it all away; it shall not be kept here to make a harvest on the earth." So they broke open the door, and scattered the seed. Fool that he was—God was making use of him to sow the fields; and, lo, the harvest sprang up, and Satan was still fuller of wrath to find that he had outwitted himself; instead of scattering the Church, he had increased it. The little handful of corn on the mountain top, when it was planted, grew and shook like Lebanon, and made the fruit of the seed rejoice and flourish like the grass of the earth. Yes, my brethren, you will find, in every instance in the Church's history, whenever she has been made captive, or has been bereaved, it has been for her good.

Now, just at this time, we are somewhat desolate; we have lost many of our children; our hearers are compelled to wander here and there, instead of listening to the Church's voice, while we ourselves are like a captive removing to and fro from one place to another, where we can meet; and we have been apt to say, "This is a very sad thing, and very much to our hurt." But let us say that no longer—for mark, I take this to be a personal promise, and I think it is a promise to the Church: "The children which you shall have, after you have lost the other, will say again in your ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?" This shall be the cry of the Church.

The first thing which astonishes the Church when she opens her eyes after her captivity is to notice *the number of her children*. She formerly counted her children by the number of their graves, she said they were all dead; but, all of a sudden, she found others coming round her, and calling her mother; again she saw her house filled, they were thronging about her, and she was astonished to see so great a number. Had there been but one or two, she would have thought they were the residue spared from the hands of the enemy, but she saw the great number, and was astonished. Now, sometimes, when we think of this Church, which God has so greatly enlarged that we number fifteen hundred souls, we are apt to think, "What a number!" It astonishes us. "You shall see greater things than these," and you shall find that our removal to another place, and our apparent captivity, shall increase the number of converts, and we shall be astonished as, month by month, they come before the Church, and bear witness of what grace has done for them. We shall say, "Who has begotten me these? Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?"

It was not merely their number; it was also *their character* that astonished her, for she said, "Who has begotten me *these*? I do not know them. I have lost my children. These, where had they been? Who has brought up these?" It is their character, as well as their number, that amazes her. Often, the Church finds her converts run in a certain vein; a certain class of persons is brought to know the truth. But when the Church removes to and fro, there is another set brought in. Do you remember what happened once in Exeter Hall? A young man going, one Sunday morning, with his skates in his hand, to the Serpentine, and passing Exeter Hall, saw a crowd blocking up the path; he said, "What is this? There is something special going on here." He joins the crowd, and the mass behind pushes him in; the minister preaches, and the

words go home to that young man's heart; they are quick and powerful—he is brought to know the Savior, and is converted. Many, who are not accustomed to go to one place, will go to another; many, who would not enter a place consecrated to divine worship, may, nevertheless, step in to another building out of idle curiosity or amusement. This has happened at the Surrey Gardens; and now, when we go to another place, another class, who perhaps has never been to hear the gospel, will be induced to come in, and we shall say, “Who has begotten me these? These, where have they been?” I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet; but, before long, this will come to pass; we shall see numbers converted to God that will astonish us; and, besides that, there will be among them some remarkable sinners and some remarkable saints, and when they are added to the church, they will compel us to say, “These, where have they been? Who has begotten us these?” Then shall you thank God that ever you had to suffer. Then shall the church rejoice that she was bereaved, and that she was removed to and fro. How do I know this? Well, I know it, simply, because I know, if I know anything, that this passage has been applied to my heart by the Holy Spirit. It has stuck so to me, and entered so thoroughly into my heart, that I have not been able to get rid of it; but have lived upon it, and have felt the sweetness of it; and if this does not come true, then am I certainly deceived. But let us take care that it does come true; for, while we believe the promise, it is ours to be the means, in the hand of God, of fulfilling it.

Dear brothers and sisters, pray more than you have ever done. Wrestle with God in prayer. Plead with Him that this may come true. For, though He gives the promise, He says, “I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” I pledge you this night—I cannot get you each to say, “Yes”—but I pledge you, as a personal favor to your minister, and as an act of kindness to our loving mother the church, as a proof of your affection to your Lord and Master—I pledge you, at the family altar, and in private tonight, and on, till next Christmas day, that we meet together, to plead with God for this particular blessing. Turn to this promise in your Bibles; read the passage at your family altars, and then plead it—“Lord, You have made us to be for a time desolate. We have lost some of our children; now grant that the children which we shall have, after we have lost these others, may cry, ‘Make room for us; the place is too strait for us to dwell in.’” One of our brethren lately said to me, “You surely do not expect to see the Tabernacle crowded down the aisles, do you?” I do, indeed; I expect to see it as crowded as ever this chapel has been. [All who are familiar with the history of the Metropolitan Tabernacle know how literally and how blessedly this expectation was realized.] I do think we shall often be moved to say, “Who has begotten me these?” God's arm is not shortened that He cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that He cannot hear us. We shall go on, and conquer, and never cease. The God who has been with us in the past, will be with us in the future; and as it has been, so shall it be still. God shall still be glorified in the salvation of men.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
2 CHRONICLES 11:1-17; 12.**

Let us read, for our instruction, part of the story of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.

2 Chronicles 11 Verses 1-4. *And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return, every man, to his house: for this thing is done of Me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam.*

So far, so good. There was some degree of the fear of God in the minds of men when, at the bidding of a single prophet, a king would disband his troops, and cease from war.

5-15. *And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah. He built even Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, and Bethzur, and Shoco, and Adullam, and Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, and Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, and Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities. And he fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and stores of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceedingly strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side. And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto*

the LORD; and he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.

No wonder, therefore, that Rehoboam's kingdom was strengthened by the advent of these men, who were, doubtless, the best men in the whole country, men who feared the Lord—men who knew the law, and who knew how to teach the people what they should do.

16. *And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.*

"Birds of a feather flock together," so those in Israel who feared the Lord went where their ministers had gone; this movement would bring about an emigration of some of the best of the population, to reside near to the sacred shrine where Jehovah was worshipped; and it must have tended still further to the strengthening of Rehoboam's little kingdom.

17. *So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam, the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.*

That was well while it lasted; but, alas! It did not continue long.

2 Chronicles 12 Verse 1. *And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.*

He was not able to endure the perils of prosperity. He forgot the Lord who had caused him to prosper; and, in the pride of his heart, he turned aside to idols.

2. *And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD,*

That was not Shishak's reason for coming up against Jerusalem. He had heard of the riches of Solomon; and doubtless, he came for the sake of the spoil which the palace and the temple would yield to him. But God often overrules, for the accomplishment of His own purposes, the lower motives of men. "I girded you," said He of Cyrus, "though you have not known Me." So did He gird Shishak for the chastisement of Israel, though Shishak knew Him not.

3, 4. *With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.*

How vain is man when he boasts in the strength of his fortifications! These fenced cities fell at once, like houses built of cards, before the power of the mighty king of Egypt, and the vast hordes that accompanied him. Rehoboam had spent his strength in making these defenses, but how soon they were proved to be worthless. "Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is;" but "cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord."

5, 6. *Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus says the LORD, You have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hands of Shishak. Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.*

Now, that is the very essence of true humility, the acknowledgment that God is righteous in whatever punishment He brings upon us on account of our sin. It is a very short sentence, but there is a great fullness of meaning in it: "Jehovah is righteous."

7, 8. *And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.*

That is a very instructive expression. I believe that, when God's people go astray from Him, He sometimes allows them to fall into great bondage, in order that they may realize the difference between His happy service and the servitude in which they may be held by any other lord. All masters, to whom we surrender our minds and hearts, will turn out to be tyrants, except the blessed Prince of peace. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light; but all other yokes gall the shoulders sooner or later; and God has sometimes made His wandering people feel this so bitterly that they have longed to get back again to the service of their God.

9. *So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.*

He did not plunder the people; he was contented with the loot of the temple and the palace. These were comparatively easy terms for the conquered nation, and one wonders how such a powerful king as Shishak should have been thus satisfied in those days; but God has the hearts of all men under His control, and even when He lets a powerful foe go forth against His people, He still restrains him when He pleases. What a mercy it is for us that, when God chastens us, there is an end to it! It is always in measure, He does not let loose the fullness and the fierceness of His wrath, as He will upon the castaways in eternity; but when He lays His rod upon us, He counts every stripe. Forty stripes save one, was all that an Israelite might have to endure; and, surely, God often stops far short of that number when He deals with us. However, Shishak humiliated the king and his people by taking away the treasures of the temple and the palace; and, among the rest of his plunder, “he carried away the shields of gold which Solomon had made.”

10-12. *Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king’s house. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that He would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.*

Or, rather, “things in Judah even went well.” There was comparative prosperity; they were not altogether prosperous, for they were not altogether right with God; but there was a sufficient proportion of godly men, the Puritan party, the Evangelical party, was strong enough in the land, for God still to look upon it with favor, yet not unmixed with disapprobation; for the party that worshipped idols, the party composed of the superstitious, the party belonging to the world was still very strong.

13-15. *So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother’s name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies?*

Where are those books now? It is of no consequence whatever where they are. There are a great many other books that have perished because they were not inspired. They were books of genealogies—valuable in their day; but if they had been of any use to us spiritually, they would have been preserved. Now, as other ancient books have evidently been lost, let us devoutly bless God that the inspired Books have been preserved to us. By what a continuous miracle of providence, every inspired letter has been continued in existence, it would be hard to tell; but we ought to constantly praise the Lord that, out of the Book of this prophecy, not a line has been removed.

15, 16. *And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.*

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