

THE GOLD SHIELDS OF SOLOMON AND THE BRASS SHIELDS OF REHOBOAM

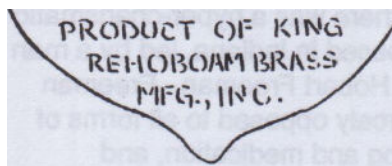
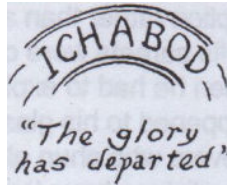
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When Solomon was king, he made 300 shields of gold "and put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon" (2 Chr. 9:16). After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king. Rehoboam did not inherit his father's wisdom. Nonetheless, his kingdom got off to a good start, thanks to some godly Levites and Israelites. "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" (2 Chr. 11:17). Unfortunately, the good times did not last very long: "And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of Yahweh, and all Israel with him" (2 Chr. 12:1).

Two years later, the Lord allowed Shishak, king of Egypt, to attack Jerusalem "because they had transgressed against Yahweh" (vs. 2). A prophet brought the word of the Lord to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah: "Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak" (vs. 5).

This prophetic word brought some repentance, so the Lord granted them only "some deliverance" (vs. 7). He said He would not pour out His wrath on Jerusalem, but He allowed Shishak to take away all the treasures of the Temple and of the king's house, including those 300 shields of gold that Solomon had made. So Rehoboam made shields of brass to replace the shields of gold.

This story provides a brief summary of what happened to the Messianic Community (a.k.a. "the Church") early in its history. When David reigned, Israel was powerful and prosperous. It continued this way after David was gone, when Solomon reigned. This pattern was repeated in the New Testament. When Messiah Son of David was on the earth, the power and prosperity of the Lord were manifested



wonders. After the Son of David left earth, the Apostles walked in this same power. The third generation of believers, like Rehoboam, "walked in the way of David and Solomon" for a season. But after the Church was "established" (like Rehoboam) and began walking in its own strength (like Rehoboam), Church leaders followed the example of Rehoboam. They forsook the Torah (at least those parts which they deemed "too Jewish"), and all Christians with them.

Because of the Church's compromise, the Lord soon allowed the Enemy to rob the Church of much of its spiritual treasures. Just as God allowed Shishak to steal Solomon's shields of gold, so He allowed Satan to rob believers of the Shield of Faith. Faith to do miracles, signs, and wonders gradually faded with that generation of believers who forsook the Torah. Miracles never completely disappeared - they can still happen even now - but both the magnitude and the frequency of miracles greatly diminished as the Church drifted away from the Torah.

After the Church lost its gold Shield of Faith, it continued to follow the example of Rehoboam. It made shields of brass - cheap, inferior substitutes that can be brightly polished to look like gold to the untrained eye. So now instead of healing the sick with the gold Shield of Faith, we help the sick with brass

form of Christian hospitals and medical clinics. Instead of selling our excess possessions and parting them to all men as every man has need, we donate a small percentage of our wealth to Christian relief agencies. Instead of being closely-knit communities of devoted disciples, we are loosely-knit denominational clubs whose members are, with few exceptions, not true disciples.

This pattern of losing the gold Shield of Faith and substituting a shield of brass is often repeated by believers on an individual level, too. When a disciple's first love for the Lord is at its peak and white hot, he has a gold Shield of Faith to deal with any sickness that comes at him. He prays a prayer of faith, and the Lord soon heals him. But when the disciple leaves his first love, he soon loses his Shield of Faith, because "faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Then when sickness comes, he has to rely on Blue Cross or Blue Shield instead of on the Savior's Cross and the Shield of Faith.

Some individuals make their job into a brass shield. When a disciple still has his first love for the Lord, he faithfully keeps the Sabbath, even if it means less money and less opportunities for promotions. He'll keep the Sabbath even if it causes him to lose his job. His gold Shield of Faith quenches every fiery dart of fear about finances. But when he leaves his first love, his faith in God's providence fades. Then when his employer orders him to work on the Sabbath, he is afraid he will lose his job and be unable to pay his bills if he refuses. So he uses his job as a brass shield and works on the Sabbath.

I knew of a brother years ago who used his job as a brass shield in a different way. This brother (whom I will call Tom) had a job singing and playing music in bars and night clubs when he first came to the Lord. The brother who led Tom to the Lord knew that this was not a good environment

for a new believer, so he told Tom he should quit his job and trust God to provide some other kind of work. So Tom quit his job and the Lord provided better work and better pay. As long as Tom maintained the fire of his first love, the Lord continued to provide. But as Tom's first love faded, so did his faith. Eventually he had no job and he felt like he had to go back to playing music in bars. This brother backslid. He committed adultery and his wife divorced him. Then he lived in sin with another woman, who gave birth to their illegitimate child. Tom eventually repented and got right with the Lord again, but only after years of heartache. If Tom had kept the fire of his first love burning, the Enemy would not have robbed him of his Shield of Faith.

Shields of brass are cheap, inferior substitutes for the gold Shield of Faith, but are shields of brass always wrong? If a shield of brass is causing you to sin, it is definitely wrong. You need to repent, return to your first love, and get rid of that brass shield. But what about things like Christian doctors, hospitals, and medical clinics that exist as substitutes for miraculous healings? Because these are less than ideal, some believers shun any medical treatment. Some go so far as to say that it is sinful to go to a doctor or to take any kind of medicine. These things may be shields of brass, but they are better than no shields at all. Ideally, I would prefer to see people healed with nothing more than the Shield of Faith. I believe this power will eventually be restored to God's people, but in the meantime, it's foolish to curse the brass shields and throw them away if they can get the job done (without causing you to sin).

If you do not yet have the Shield of Faith, don't throw away the shield of brass if it is not causing you to sin and if it is getting the job done. When my wife was in high school in the 1970s, one of her classmates got all fired up at a Pentecostal healing rally. As the carload of teenagers were driving home after the meeting, this young brother decided to throw his eyeglasses out the car window as an act

of faith, trusting that Jesus would heal his eyesight. As they sped over the bridge, he cast his glasses out the car window and they sank beneath the waters of the Illinois River. It didn't work. Apparently it was an impulsive act of presumption rather than an act of real faith. His parents were quite displeased when he had to explain to them what happened to his glasses.

Some believers who shun all doctors and medicines have lost much more than a pair of glasses. In the 1970s there was a hyper-charismatic group based in Indiana, led by a man named Hobart Freeman. Freeman was fiercely opposed to all forms of doctoring and medication, and preached against it. He taught that believers should just confess by faith that they had received their healing. Any symptoms of sickness that lingered afterwards were to be considered nothing more than "Satanic deception." I had a friend who met with a group of Freemanites here in Peoria. This brother, like all faithful Freemanites, tried to totally shun all medicines, even aspirin. Some of his teeth rotted away because he refused to go to a dentist. He refused to wear his glasses, and confessed "by faith" that the Lord had healed his eyes. But the driver's license examiner wasn't convinced of it, because he failed his seeing test. So he couldn't get his driver's license renewed because of the unbelief of the examiner. He had a concrete construction business, and had to have his employees drive him around, until he finally compromised and went back to wearing glasses.

Many of the Freemanites in Indiana lost a lot more than their teeth or their driver's license. Some of them lost their lives or the lives of their children. Over a period of several years, there were around 100 deaths among the Freemanites, many of them children and most (if not all of them) deaths which could have been prevented. Parents were charged with child abuse and Freeman was charged with aiding and abetting negligent homicide. Two weeks before his court date, Freeman died of an infection, which some sources say was treatable.

As I write this, a 50-year old friend of mine is languishing away in a nursing home because he refused to take insulin for his diabetes, insisting that he was trusting God to heal him. He could have lived if he had taken insulin, but now his internal organs are damaged beyond repair, one doctor says. Unless God miraculously intervenes, he may be dead by the time most readers get this. A premature death due to presumption and stubbornness does not glorify God.

These are extreme cases, but they demonstrate the folly of throwing away the shields of brass if you don't really have the true Shield of Faith. If a shield of brass is causing you to sin, it needs to be thrown away. But some shields of brass function as a kind of temporary scaffolding to help us while we are in the process of rebuilding the structure of "the faith which was once delivered" and later was lost. We are rebuilding this structure like the Jews rebuilt Jerusalem after they left Babylon. They no doubt needed scaffolding to rebuild some of the walls, as we do. Scaffolding should not be dismantled until it is no longer needed. If it is dismantled too soon, it only makes the task more difficult.

When the Jews left their Babylonian exile and returned to Jerusalem, it would have been nice if the Temple and walls had still been standing intact and waiting for them. They weren't, though. The returning exiles had a long, difficult job of restoration ahead of them, and enemies to hinder the work.

When we leave our Babylonian exile, it would be nice if we found ourselves immediately walking in the same measure of power and authority that we see in the Book of Acts. But coming out of Babylon does not make the New Jerusalem magically appear. We have a lot of recovering and rebuilding to do. If we haven't yet recovered the gold Shield of Faith in a certain area of work, we may have to temporarily use a brass shield as a substitute for scaffolding - but only if the brass shield does not cause us to sin, and only until we recover the gold Shield of Faith.