

"In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years.

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord... Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents."

- II Kings xvii,1-3

II Kings xvii,1-18

Matthew vii,13-end

Psalm 26

New Book of Worship, Psalm 27, pp.48,49

Hoshea was the last king of Israel. He had reigned three years when Shalmaneser king of Assyria came against him and put him under tribute. For only a few years the tribute was paid, for Hoshea entered into a league with the king of Egypt and then ceased paying the tribute. This brought the Assyrian army into the country and the land was laid waste and Samaria besieged. For three years the city withstood the siege. It fell at last, and Hoshea was put in prison. Nothing more is said of him. Hoshea had conspired against his predecessor and slain him, but his conspiracy against Assyria led to his own downfall and destruction. Then Israel was led into captivity, scattered through various places in Assyria, and the kingdom of Israel was brought to its end. Thus was fulfilled the warning given centuries before that if the law of the Lord was not observed, their cities would be laid waste, the land would be desolated, and the people scattered among the heathen (Leviticus xxvi,31-34). Later Judah was to suffer for similar reasons.

Today in many colleges and universities the Bible is studied merely from the historical standpoint and judged accordingly. But - differently from other histories - the history of the Jews was so ordered that it might portray spiritual truths.

The verses of today's reading tell of the fulfillment of the prophecy that if the law of Moses was not observed, the people of Israel would be carried away captive and would never return. At the time of the siege of Jerusalem, alluded to in our text Assyria was at the summit of its splendor and power. Nineveh was its capital, a city sixty miles in circuit, containing hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, and including in its palaces works of art surpassed only by the best work of modern times.

Assyria was an offshoot of Babel, for we read, "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went Asshur and founded Nineveh" (Genesis x,9-11). Babylon and Assyria are frequently mentioned in Scripture. We meet them first in the purely allegorical portion of the Word as Babel and Asshur. Two thousand years before Christ Babylon and Nineveh were large and strong cities, and their history was connected with that of Israel while the Word was being given. And centuries after their disappearance as nations they were still retained in the Divine Word because of their spiritual signification. Rising in hoary antiquity, coming into power, and finally coming to an end, their names still stand as symbols of the love of rule and the pride of

self-intelligence.

Assyria in Scripture represents the rational faculty of the mind, and those prone to maintain the supremacy of the intellect. The intellect, when in harmony with religion, is a glorious power and capable of progress, and a defense against materialism and immorality. Religion, true religion, rejoices in true reason, but absurdity and superstition dread it.

The relation of the intellect to religion is described in the Bible by the history of Assyria. The intellect may become lawless and inflated with self-sufficiency, and then, like Assyria, it is insolent and boastful, denying God. The Assyrians often represented themselves as men with eagles' heads, and frequently as an eagle-headed figure overcoming a lion or a bull, picturing the superiority of the intellect over the affections. Their figures almost always had wings. Their men, their lions, their bulls were all given symbolic wings, because wings correspond to spiritual truths and they thought of everything in its relation to the intellect. Assyria's victories and widespread dominion were the result of its culture and intelligence. Knowledge is power, and intellect must triumph over the sensual. This was true then and it will be true forever. But when the rational faculty resists, closes its eyes, and will not see the spiritual, when it persists in doubt and is opposed to the spiritual, it is Assyria warring against Samaria.

The true Christian knows in whom he can trust. If he can reason well, the legions of false argument will have no power against him and Assyria will be to him a safeguard. And even if he cannot reason much, he will still be safe, for he has a perception which comes from goodness, from living according to the commandments. It amounts to this: mere reasoners will fall of themselves; there is no need to worry about them. False reason, given a little time, will refute itself. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah xxx,15).

Israel's persistent sinning brought the captivity. Man's persistent sinning brings his spiritual captivity. He who cannot control his appetites or govern his passions, he who thinks that the Lord cannot give him power to keep the commandments is a spiritual captive. The king of the natural mind rules over him. His river is the river of Assyria, not the river of the Holy Land, the truths of the Word. The teachings of the Word in regard to right living and wrong living are so evident that no one who really desires the truth can fail to apprehend it.

Israel and Judah both went into captivity, Israel first and Judah afterward. Israel stands for the truth in the church, and Judah for its good. If the truth of a church perishes, so must its good. The captivity of Israel and Judah typifies the captivity of the church. The church at the time of the Jewish nation existed centrally with the Jews. When they profaned the holy things of the church, it came to an end, for other nations were dependent on the church of their day for spiritual instruction and the presence of the Lord. By means of the church heaven is today consociated with the earth. By means of it there is conjunction with the Lord and consociation with angels, and through it light from the heavens and the Lord passes to all peoples. When the church of any age rejects the Word and refuses to teach it, it comes to an end, and mankind would perish from the earth were

not the church in some way revived by the Lord. This is what did happen to the Israelitish Church. So the Lord likened it to a fig tree with nothing but leaves, which withered away because it bore no fruit.

The captivity of Israel represents the wasting and destruction of the Israelitish Church as a church. Its truths became falsified and its good was turned into evil, and everything of the church fell captive to the nations around it.

Here we can draw a lesson of the vitality of the true Christian Church, which we are told will never cease to increase. Christianity can withstand the evils in the nations around it. So the Apostles were commanded "to preach the Gospel to all nations." It has power to enlighten them and lift them up. The practices of the gentile nations have no power against Christianity. All the brighter does the light shine because of the darkness. And all the more strongly does the message of mercy appeal because of the destitution of those who have not yet come to the Light of the World. The assaults against the Word and Christianity do not weaken the church, if it remains true to its revelation. They only strengthen it and bring out its ministering helpfulness.

The great sin of Israel was idolatry. It started under Jeroboam when the ten tribes separated from Judah and set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan. The Egyptian bondage, the Red Sea deliverance, the giving of the commandments at Sinai, the wilderness experiences, the wonderful deliverances wrought by the Lord were not enough to restrain the Israelites from the universal idolatry of their day.

But idolatry means more than worshiping a graven image. In its broader sense idolatry is to love any merely natural thing more than the Lord and the things of His kingdom. The pleasures and gaiety of a worldly life look outwardly like the delights of spiritual happiness, but inwardly they are different. The outward form that makes the worldly look like the spiritual is but a graven image, a man-made idol with no life in it. Worldly prosperity looks like happiness, yet there may be no happiness in it. The idolatry of today is seen in the worship of outward success. But "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" No one can give way to the external, loving the natural kingdom more than the spiritual kingdom of the Divine virtues without going into captivity. This is an eternal law.

There is much lack of genuine allegiance to the Lord. This is not always due to an evil life. It is often the result of trust in self in the church leaders, which makes much of the teaching of the churches vague and lacking in spiritual strength. The Lord lived and died to make the truth real to men. Reason is a faculty. It does not give truth, but can confirm or reject it.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Men have not disputed the truth of these two great laws: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Men have been repeating them or hearing them for centuries. It is pride in self that prevents really believing them and living according to them. We should rid ourselves of trust and pride in self, gladly believing that the Lord has the words of eternal life, and so by their guidance grow in genuine love for Him.