

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – The Crisis (Within and Without) – 3-9 October 2015

Christ desires that we learn from ancient Israel. “Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of His increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 2:3). The history of Israel, the crisis within and without, was “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). “We have far more to fear from within than from without” {1SM 122.3}.

A Quick History – Although the children of Israel sang the song of deliverance by the Red Sea, and with good reason, too, it was not until they had crossed the Jordan that they were really free from Egypt. They did not hold the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end, but “in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us” (Acts 7:39-40). When they crossed the Jordan, however, and came into the land of Canaan, they had the testimony from God that the reproach of Egypt was rolled away from them. Then they had rest, and were free in the Lord. But this freedom was not long retained; murmuring, distrust, and apostasy soon appeared among God’s people. The people of God soon desired a king, that they might be like the heathen about them, and their desire was granted to the full. They “mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood” (Psalm 106:35-38). Thus they became literally like the heathen round them.

The Two Kingdoms – A little glance at the history of some of the kings of Israel and Judah will show how completely the children of Israel, in getting a king, had the fulfillment of their wish to be like the heathen. To Saul, the first king, the prophet said, “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Solomon took strange wives from among the heathen and “it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (1 Kings 11:4-5).

Under Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, “Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also Sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel” (1 Kings 14:22-24). The same did Ahaz (2 Kings 16:1-4). Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen ... he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, ... and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them ... Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 21:1-9, 16). And Amon “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them” (2 Chronicles 33:22).

If we take the kings that reigned over the northern portion of Israel after the kingdom was divided upon the death of Solomon, we find a worse record still. There were some righteous kings in Jerusalem; but beginning with Jeroboam, “who did sin, and who made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 14:16), each successive king over the rest of Israel was worse than the one before him. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, “did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:26). Baasha “did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (34). Omri, who built Samaria, “wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of

Israel to anger with their vanities.” Yet bad as Omri was, “Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him;” and “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:25-26, 30, 33).

Two Evils – Israel witnessed a miracle whereby Moses struck the Rock and water came out for the people to drink (Exodus 17:1-7). That Rock was the Fountain of living waters, which was Christ. “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). It made all the difference in the world whether or not the people recognised Christ as the source of their life. If they did, if they drank in faith, they received spiritual life from the Rock. If they did not recognise the Lord in His gracious gift, then the water was no more to them than it was to their cattle. “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:20). But when the people with their superior abilities did not recognise God in His gifts any more than their cattle did, they showed themselves even less discerning than the cattle. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider” (Isaiah 1:3). In view of the miracle of the water from the Rock, we can better understand the force of Lord’s words when He afterward thus expressed the greatness of their sin in departing from Him: “Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13). The Psalmist said of the Lord, “He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92:15). His life is righteousness. Those who live by faith in Him live righteous lives. The water, which came from the Rock, in the desert, was for the life of the people. It was Christ’s own life. If, therefore, in drinking it they had recognised the source whence it came, they would have been drinking in righteousness, and would have been blessed with righteousness; for it is written, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). If we thirst for righteousness, and are filled, it is only by drinking in the righteousness for which we thirst.

The Babylonian Threat – As Israel continued in sin, the Lord warned He would discipline them through the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 26). Dealing with the last king of Israel, having changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17), Nebuchadnezzar “made him swear by God” (2 Chronicles 36:13) that he would not rebel against his authority; Jeremiah 27:1-11 shows that Nebuchadnezzar had a right to demand this. Nebuchadnezzar had as much right to rule in Jerusalem as any of the kings of Israel had ever had. His kingdom, moreover, was more extensive than that over which any king of Israel had ruled; and, more than all, after much instruction from the Lord, he used his opportunity to spread throughout the entire world the knowledge of the true God (see Daniel 4). Therefore when Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, he was wickedly setting himself against the Lord, who had given Israel into the power of king Nebuchadnezzar, as a punishment for their sins.

Swearing Falsely – Apostasy went on until the Lord could say by the prophet Jeremiah, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executes judgment, that seeketh the truth” (Jeremiah 5:1). Such a man was hard to find; “For among My people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked” (Jeremiah 5:26-28). Inasmuch as the Lord drove the heathen out of the land, because of their abominable idolatry, it is very evident that the children of Israel could have no real inheritance in it when they were just like the heathen, and even worse. The fact that those who call themselves Christians adopt heathen customs and manners does not make these customs one bit more acceptable to Christ. The fact that heathenism is in the church, does not recommend it. A high profession only makes the evil practice more heinous. We swear falsely to be Christians if Christ is not truly living in us. The Jews boastingly said, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man,” and “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever” (John 8:33-35).