

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Rebuke and Retribution – 17-23 October 2015

Christ would have us rebuked to save us from perishing. Christ would have us trust in Him. But many trust in man and make flesh their arm; if such will accept His rebuke to avoid perishing, they must cry to the merciful God in sincerity, “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; saved me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise” (Jeremiah 17:14). But many, like Ephraim, are joined to their idols, to be left alone (Hosea 4:17). Like Judah, their leaders led them to Baal worship and as a result regarded lightly the Sabbath.

In the days of Jeremiah, following other nations, Judah had fallen into idolatry. After they broke the first commandment, they started regarding lightly the Sabbath. Their worship of idols begun in their hearts or minds: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Ezekiel 14:3). Today in our remnant church, “No outward shrines may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and his attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal. Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place?” {5T 173.4}. Like Judah, if you are worshipping idols, having a false understanding or conception of God, you will also regard the Sabbath lightly, and at Sunday Law fail the test.

Notwithstanding Judah being firmly fixed in idolatry, that the sin of Judah was written with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond, the gracious Lord made the following promise:

“Thus saith the Lord unto Me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem: and say unto them, Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates, thus saith the Lord: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto Me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princess sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:19-26). Judah did not hearken.

It is not for us to speculate as to how this promise would have been fulfilled; it is enough for us to know that God said it, and He is able to make every promise good. To build up the old city, and make it new would certainly have been as easy as to “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21), or to make an entirely new city to take the place of the old one. But Judah chose to reject the promises.

The pleadings through Jeremiah were in the very last days of the kingdom of Judah, for Jeremiah did not begin to prophesy till “the days of Josiah the son of Amon” (Jeremiah 1:2), in the thirteenth year of his reign, only twenty-one years before the beginning of the captivity in Babylon. Before Jeremiah began to prophesy, nearly all the prophets had finished their work, and passed away. The writings of Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and others, – all the principal prophets – were in the hands of the people before Jeremiah was born. This is a fact that should by no means be overlooked, for it is most important. In those writings are many promises, all of which might have been fulfilled if the people had given heed. Today, beside the Bible, we also have the writings of our pioneers who passed away before most of us were born. In our pioneers’ writings are truth about the personality of God and of Christ, all of which if accepted leads to worshipping of the true God and a true keeping of His Sabbath.

As it was for Judah so it is for the remnant today, the keeping of the Sabbath is always and it is made the test; to all to whom that truth is revealed. If they all truly kept the Sabbath, they and their city would have endured forever. We know the Sabbath is the seal of creation finished and perfect. As such it reveals God as Creator and Sanctifier (Ezekiel 20:12, 20), as Sanctifier by His creative power. The Sabbath is not a work, by which we may vainly try to win the favour of God, but it is rest, – rest in the everlasting arms. It is the sign and memorial of God's eternal power; and the keeping of it is the seal of that perfection which God alone can work out, and which He freely bestows upon all who trust Him. It means full and perfect trust in the Lord, that He can and will save us by the same power by which He made all things in the beginning. Therefore we see that since the same promise is left us, that was given to ancient Israel, it must necessarily be that the Sabbath should be made specially prominent in this our day, as we approach Sunday Law, and as Christ's coming approaches.

As there are always two options, so there was an alternative, in case the people refused to rest in the Lord. The prophet was commissioned to say still further: "But if ye will not hearken unto Me, to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering into the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jeremiah 17:27).

And so it was; although God was faithful and longsuffering in sending warning messages to His people, "they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years" (2 Chronicles 36:16-21). May God have mercy!

Our remnant church has repeated the history of Judah. First, after our leading Adventist pioneers had passed away, our church gradually turned from worshipping the only true God, to worship modern Baal (read from online Library the booklet "*Greater Abominations*" for details). Like Judah, our church continues to break the first commandment. Second, having the worship of false gods, the Sabbath of the true God is "lightly regarded" {1SM 204.2}, and when Sunday Law comes, it is no wonder "a large class" of Seventh-day Adventists will "join the ranks of the opposition" {GC 608.2}. Our pioneers worshipped the true God, our Father (John 17:3), who is "revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature." After our pioneers died, our Fundamental 'Principles' were changed to 'Beliefs' to accept modern Baal gods, our religion was changed, the Sabbath is lightly regarded, and soon many will fail the Sunday Law test.

"Let the reader understand" (Mark 13:14): "The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure" {1SM 204.2}.