

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Justice and Mercy in the OT: Part 2 – 16-22 July 2016

Christ in justice and mercy gives life, as shown in prophecy: “And it shall come to pass, *that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh*” (Ezekiel 47:9). We focus on the Lesson’s section entitled “Alive in Christ” (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

A most cursory reading of thirty-seven of Ezekiel is sufficient to show that it deals with the resurrection of the dead. It is a most literal description of that event. Some one will say that it is a representation of the restoration of the Jews to their own land. That is exactly the truth, for that is what the text itself says; but it also tells us that the restoration is to be effected by the resurrection. In the eleventh verse the children of Israel are represented as saying that they are completely cut off. Death cuts man off from the face of the earth, and is *apparently* the destruction of his hope; for the promise is that the children of Abraham shall inherit the earth, yet they die without having any share in it. Accordingly the scoffers say, “Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4). But “the righteous hath hope in his death” (Proverbs 14:32). Paul writes: “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). The promise of land to Abraham included, and was based upon, the resurrection, and Abraham so understood it, else he could not have died in faith, not having received the promise.

The children whom Herod slew in order to kill the infant Jesus represent all the dead children of Israel. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, is represented as weeping for her children; but all the children of Israel are her children just as much as were the innocent babes who were slaughtered by the tyrant. Now read what is said of the death of her children: “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jeremiah 31:15-17).

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). Those who are dead are in the land of the enemy, but God has promised that they shall come from that land, and shall return “to their own border.” So we see that the return of the children of Israel to their own border, to their own land, is by the resurrection of the dead. That is the hope of Israel. The Apostle Paul was seized and bound by the unbelieving Jews because he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and he said, “For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20), and to another congregation of the Jews he said, “Of the hope and resurrection of the dead am I called in question” (Acts 23:6). There is therefore no hope for Israel except in the resurrection at the coming of the Lord; but that hope is a “lively hope,” to which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

Christ’s resurrection is the surety of the general resurrection. And from this we may learn that every righteous person is counted as Israel, and will be included in the restoration; for it is by the resurrection of the dead, through Christ, that Israel are restored, and what Christ does for one He does for all. There are no people who have some special interest in the death and resurrection of Christ, that others do not have. Since it is by the resurrection of Jesus that the children of Israel are restored to their own land, whoever sleeps in Jesus, and is raised through Him, is an Israelite, waiting to be redeemed from exile in the enemy’s land.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:9-13). Now we know that they did not inherit the promise; for God said to Abraham: “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and

shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Genesis 15:13-16). David said, "I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (Psalms 39:12). And he repeated this statement when at the height of his power he handed the kingdom over to Solomon (1 Chronicles 29:15). All the faithful are alike waiting the return of the Lord, and the resurrection, as the consummation of their hopes. It was by faith in the resurrection of the dead that Abraham offered Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The prophet says that as he prophesied according to the command of the Lord, "there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone" (verse 7). This agrees exactly with the description of the resurrection at the coming of Christ. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). When Christ died, "the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew 27:51-53). Three days afterward "there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:2). So we see that the resurrection of the dead is accompanied by an earthquake.

It is by the breath of God that men live. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). In His hand is the soul of all living, "And the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). "All the while my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils; my lips shall not speak wickedness" (Job 27:3-4). If He thought only of Himself; if He gathered and kept to Himself His Spirit and His breath; all flesh would perish together, and man would turn again unto dust (see Job 24:14-15). He takes away the breath of man and beast, and they die, and return to their dust; but He sends forth His Spirit, and they are created, and He renews the face of the earth.

Accordingly God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind, and say, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." From this we see that the wind that plays upon our cheeks, and that refreshes us as we draw full inspirations into our lungs, is the breath of God. Surely it is so, because we breathe the air, and yet we have the breath of God in our nostrils. Our breath is the same as Adam's. Adam's breath the second minute that he lived, and the third, and the fourth, and so on, was exactly the same as the first moment. Moreover, neither Adam nor any of his descendants has ever had any power over the breath, either to start it or stop it (Ecclesiastes 8:8). It comes involuntarily. For a minute, by a great effort, we may hold our breath, and then it will come in spite of us. No man could commit suicide by voluntarily refusing to breathe. Breath comes arbitrarily while we are asleep and entirely unconscious. Hence it is plain that not only did God breathe the breath of life into Adam's nostrils in the beginning, but that He continued doing so, and has performed the same operation for every man that has ever lived, every moment of his life.

How near God is to us! So near that we can feel His breath in our faces; so near that He is face to face with us, breathing into our nostrils. How real it is that He is "not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). And He is just as near us when we fall asleep in death; for all the righteous ones "sleep in Jesus," and the same breath that keeps us in life now will revive the dead from their sleep in the grave. "The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth" (John 5:28-29). And this resurrection from the dead is but the same process by which those who are dead in trespasses and sins are now quickened, and made to pass from death to life. Therefore we may know that if we believe God the life of righteousness will be just as easy as for faith is what will give it to us. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed ... The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17), but every man, whether just or otherwise, lives by breathing; therefore that which makes a man righteous is the fact that he breathes by faith. Our hope in Christ and His resurrection rests in the fact that God has surrounded the earth with an atmosphere of grace.