

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Children of the Promise – 2-8 December 2017

Christ would have us know that it is only by mercy we are saved. Thus Paul says, “Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Romans 9:18). Read chapter nine of Romans for our study. The subject in this chapter, as well as in the tenth and eleventh chapters, is who are Israelites. The matter has, however, been covered in the studies of the second, third and fourth chapters. At first sight it would seem that the subject of the epistle is entirely changed. A more general view will show us that the apostle here carried out the original subject, showing who are heirs of God’s promise, and how only it is to be obtained.

Sunday: Paul’s Burden – “What advantage then hath the Jew?” “Much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1, 2). So here we read a wondrous list of things that pertain to Israel: the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises. A terrible thing it is indeed to prove unfaithful amid such inestimable privileges! But then, as Israel in the flesh, they are accursed from Christ and in the most deplorable condition. To be without Christ is to be without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Paul’s burden to his brethren is shown in his willingness to be placed in such an accursed condition for his brethren according to the flesh, if it would have done them any good. What does that show? Simply this, that Israel according to the flesh was, and is, in just that condition accursed from Christ, “having no hope, and without God in the world.” But since all the promises of God are in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20), those who are separate from Christ have no part in the promises; and therefore we learn anew the fact that Israel after the flesh, as a nation on earth, have not and never had any claim upon God above other nations; promises are to all in Christ, God never made special promises to Israel after the flesh, more than to any other people.

In the wish that Paul expressed, he showed how completely he was given up to the Lord, and how much he shared in His Spirit. Christ gave Himself for men, consenting even to be separated from God, in order that he might reach and save the lost. There is none other name under heaven whereby men can be saved, and consequently Paul’s being accursed would not have saved his brethren, as he very well knew. But he simply showed how desperate was the case of the Jews, and how great was his solicitude. While no human sacrifice can avail, men are privileged to share Christ’s sufferings for others. Paul says of himself, “who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). The case of Israel in the flesh is a sad state of things. All the promises belong to Israel, and there is nothing from God for any other nation, and yet the very people known as Israel are accursed from Christ. Nevertheless the word of God has not failed, “for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” The unbelief of some cannot make the faith of God without effect (Romans 3:3). If every literal descendant of Jacob were lost, that would not weaken in the least God’s promises to Israel, since the true Israelites are only those who believe the promises.

“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” The Lesson writer asks: ‘What important message can we find there for ourselves, as Adventists, who in many ways play the same roles in our era that the ancient Israelites did in theirs?’ Ellen White: “I have been shown that the spirit of the world is fast leavening the church. You are following the same path as did ancient Israel. There is the same falling away from your holy calling as God’s peculiar people. You are having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Your concord with unbelievers have provoked the Lord’s displeasure. You know not the things that belong to your peace, and they are fast being hid from your eyes. Your neglect to follow the light will place you in a more unfavorable position than the Jews upon whom Christ pronounced a woe” {5T 75-76}. “Like ancient Israel, the church has dishonored her God by departing from the light, neglecting her duties, and abusing her high and exalted privilege of being peculiar and holy in character. Her members have violated their covenant to live for God and Him only. They have joined with the selfish and world-loving. Pride, the love of pleasure, and sin have been cherished, and Christ has departed. His Spirit has been quenched in the church. Satan works side by side with professed Christians; yet they are so destitute of spiritual discernment that they do not detect him” {2T 441-442}. “Now it is just exactly as in the days of the Jews. When a message came in, why all the power of the leaders was put against it, that it should not have access to the people. Now, brethren, go to God for yourselves, and on your knees plead with God. ... If God sends us light, let it come to us, and let no man close the door, or try to close it. Don’t close it yourselves. Open the door of your heart and let the brilliant rays of light shine into your heart and into your mind. I pray you, let the Sun of Righteousness in” {1888 Material 541.2}.

Monday: Elected – When children were not yet born, had done neither good nor evil, it was said of them, “The elder shall serve the younger.” God knows the end from the beginning, and could tell what each one would do. The choice was in accordance with what is said of God, “who hath saved

us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9). "Esau Have I Hated." Note, this was not written until many years after the death of both Jacob and Esau. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness" (Malachi 1:2-3). Of Esau's descendants it is said that they shall be called, "the people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever" (verse 3). Why? "Thus saith the Lord, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11). Jacob, on the other hand, while no better by nature than Esau, believed the promises of God, and was by them made partaker of the divine nature and thus an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Mark well Romans 9:14-17 for evidence that there is no arbitrariness in God's choice. It is all of mercy. We read, "He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." So it is all of "God that sheweth mercy." The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord (Psalms 119:64), and "His mercy endureth forever."

Tuesday: Mysteries – "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God, that showeth mercy." As proof of this, the apostle cited the case of Pharaoh, who was chosen in Christ just as much as Jacob was, and just as much as we are. Here we find that the case of Pharaoh is cited by the apostle as an illustration of the statement that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." The purpose of God in raising Pharaoh up, or causing him to stand, was that he might show to him and in him his power, and that His name might be declared throughout all the earth. This purpose was accomplished in the destruction of Pharaoh because of his stubborn resistance. But it would have been accomplished just as well, and much better for Pharaoh if he had listened to the word of God. Pharaoh saw God's power, but would not believe. If he had believed, he would have been saved, for God is salvation to whoever believeth. Pharaoh had an imperious will. His one great characteristic was steadfastness, pertinacity degenerating into stubbornness. But who can estimate the power for good that Pharaoh would have been if his will had been yielded to the Lord? To yield to the Lord would have meant a great sacrifice, as men count sacrifices, but no greater than that which Moses had made. Moses had given up the same throne, to cast in his lot with God's people. A wonderful and honorable position was offered to Pharaoh, but he knew not the day of his visitation. It involved humiliation, and he rejected it. As a consequence he lost everything; while Moses, who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, and to share the reproach of Christ, has a name and a place that will endure throughout eternity. The mercies of God rejected turn into curses. "For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hosea 14:9).

Wednesday: Ammi: "My People" – In Romans 9:25-26: "As He saith also in Osee [Hosea 1:9, 10], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people; there shall they be called the children of the living God." God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. The apostle Peter described this visit in these words: "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Further, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:7-11). And so "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). "Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved." Therefore "at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5). No matter how many there may be who can trace their genealogy to Jacob according to the flesh, it is only they who are willing subjects of the grace of God who will be saved. All are saved in Christ.

Thursday: Stumbling – Do not fail to connect the last part of this chapter with the first part. Remember that the beginning presents Israel according to the flesh as accursed from Christ. To them pertained, among other things, the giving of the law, but they came miserably short of it. Why? "For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." What stumbling-stone? Christ. They were in the very same condition that so many people are today, they would not believe that the promises of God to Israel were wholly and solely in Christ. Many professed Christians think that God honoured Jews for their own sake, without any regard to Christ. Christ is the stumbling-stone over which all stumble who regard the promises to Israel as made to an earthly nation, to exclusion of all others.