

## Sabbath Lesson #5 – Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land – 27 Jan-2 Feb 2024

**C**hrist would have us know the answer to the psalmist’s question: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4). To know the answer, we study the history of the Jews in ancient Babylon. Going into Babylon, the Jews had been instructed by the Lord to build houses and plant vineyards, marry and increase in numbers, and to pray for the peace and prosperity of Babylon, for their captivity would last seventy years (Jeremiah 29:4-10). The Babylonians, who were sun-worshippers, mocked the Jews because of the Sabbath (Lamentations 1:7). The Babylonians often demanded songs from the Jews. “They that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion;” but their hearts were mournful, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” The Babylonians boasted that it was no sin to oppress the Jews, reasoning that God had placed the Hebrews in bondage because of their sins (Jeremiah 50:7). It was a time of trouble, a foretaste of the great time of trouble through which the people of God will pass before the second coming of the Saviour. Both periods are called by the same name, – the time of Jacob’s Trouble, – by the prophet Jeremiah (30:7). Under these trying circumstances the Jews were obliged to preach the gospel which they once had the opportunity to give with power from Jerusalem. Groaning beneath oppression, they taught of the coming Messiah, they taught of the true God, they taught righteousness by faith, the hour of God’s judgment, the fall of Babylon, the destruction of those upon whom was found the mark of Babylonian worship (Isaiah 13:6-22; 21:9; Jeremiah 51:6, 8, 35, 47). Before Sunday Law, – the time of Jacob’s Trouble, – how shall we sing Jehovah’s songs in a strange land? We will teach of the hour of God’s judgment and teach souls to worship the true God (Revelation 14:6-11).

**Sunday: The Days of Evil** – How does trusting in the promises of God help us, as it did help the psalmist, in the days of evil, having acknowledged and repented of our sins? After acknowledging his sin, the psalmist says: “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for Thy name’s sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?” (Psalm 79:9-10). The existence of God’s Government depends on the fulfilment of His promises. The Christian has assurance of the Government of the universe, that every lawful request that he makes will be granted. Governments are especially for the protection of the weak. Suppose now that God should fail to fulfil one of His promises to the very weakest and most insignificant persons in the world; that single failure would destroy the entire Government of God. The whole universe would at once be thrown into confusion. If God should break one of His promises, no one in the universe could ever have any confidence, and His rule would be at an end. So the humble Christian depends on the word of God, knowing that God has more at stake than he has. If such a thing were possible as that God should break His word, the Christian would lose only his life, but God would lose His character, the stability of His Government, and the control of the universe.

**Monday: At Death’s Door** – In Psalm 41 we learn that sin might bring sickness and in Psalm 88 we learn that sickness might come regardless of sin; how can we learn to still trust in the Lord when we have followed His ways yet fall sick? “Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make [“turn”] all his bed in his sickness” (Psalm 41:1-3). There is a promise for those who, having served God faithfully, are nevertheless laid upon the bed of languishing. “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalm 37:24). Job was a perfect and an upright man, who feared God, and eschewed evil; yet he suffered terrible afflictions. However, he was delivered from them all. The Lord “turned” his bed in his sickness, and he rose a well man, because he did not lose his faith. Many more souls might live, if in the midst of sore afflictions, they could keep hold of God’s promise to keep them alive, and say, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (Psalm 118:17).

**Tuesday: Where is God?** – Focusing on Psalm 63, What can we learn from the psalmists’ responses to God’s apparent absence? How do you respond to times when God does seem silent? What sustains your faith? “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee;

my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary” (verses 1-2). David had correct ideas of his relations to God. He says: “Thou art my God.” Too many imagine that God is far off from them, and that they have to make some great exertions to arouse his interest in them. They forget that God is “not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28). They forget that God has sought us and is anxiously waiting for us to seek him. They imagine that God is like a man, – holding off those who have done him a wrong and refusing to be reconciled. They forget that “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), and that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” and that to his ministers he has committed the word of reconciliation, who in Christ’s stead beg of sinners, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Many people remain at a distance from God, because they forget, or have never heard, that He has proclaimed Himself “the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). “He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). So willing is He to forgive, that when men seek Him, turning from their wicked thoughts and actions, “He will multiply to pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). And so abundant and efficient is His mercy toward them that fear Him, that though their sins be as scarlet, “they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Why will not men let the goodness of God lead them to repentance?!

**Wednesday: Has His Promise Failed Forevermore?** – In Psalm 77, how can we learn to trust that the promises of God do not fail? “I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High, I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Psalm 77:10-11). “The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly” (Psalm 118:16). And how long has the Lord’s right hand been employed doing wonderful things? From eternity. We cannot count the years; we can only remember that God has promised to uphold us with the right hand of His righteousness (Isaiah 41:10), and that it can never fail. Recall what God has done; meditate on the works of His hands: and you will know something of what it still does, and will do. How then must I pray differently? I must plead as well as pray. My prayers must be more of the nature of arguments – I must make greater use than I have ever done, of certain pleas. There is one derived from the character of God. “For Thy name’s sake pardon mine iniquity. Have mercy on me according to thy loving kindness.” Another is derived from the promises of God. “hath He said, and shall He not do it; or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” Another is drawn from the past doings of God. “I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old.” I must also plead Christ more in my prayers. The argument is drawn out to our hands by Paul: “He that spared not His own Son. .... how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

**Thursday: Lest the Righteous Be Tempted** – Lest we forget, what is the difference between the wealthy sinner and the poor servant of God? There is no promise made to the transgressor of God’s law. God allows the sun to shine, and the rain to fall, alike on the just and unjust. But the transgressor has no assurance that all his riches may not “take to themselves wings and fly away” (Proverbs 23:5) and he be left a beggar; while the righteous man who may have but a bare living, has the promise that that little will be continued to him. God often permits His servants to be brought into strait places, to try their faith, but still His promises cannot fail. Food and clothing are promised, and though these may be scant, yet “a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked” (Psalm 37:16). Why does anybody envy wicked men? The Psalmist tells us why he envied them: “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.... Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart can wish” (Psalm 73:3-7). But why should we envy “the ungodly, who prosper in the world,” who “increase in riches”? Here is the exhortation: “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (Psalm 37:1-2).