

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Arrest in Jerusalem – 8-14 September 2018

Christ is the Comforter, and as He comforted Paul, so He does Comfort us. Paul the apostle had come up to Jerusalem to worship, and to bring alms to the poor saints, and had been seized in the temple, and almost but killed by an infuriated mob led by the rulers of the Jews. He had been beaten, had been bound with two chains, and had been nearly pulled in pieces by the priestly mob as he testified to truth before the Council. Now it was night, and as he lay in the castle prison, guarded by Roman soldiers, “the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). How true it is that the Lord gives not peace as the world gives. A man of the world, wishing to comfort a friend in trouble, would say, ‘Cheer up, old fellow; this cannot last long; in few days we shall have you out of this trouble.’ That is to say, what everybody knows, that the world knows of no comfort *in tribulation*; and its only method of comfort is to seek to remove the tribulation. If it cannot see any prospect of a speedy cessation of the trouble, it can only say, ‘Well, bear it like a man; am awfully sorry for you, but I cannot help you; you will have to make the best of it.’ Cold comfort that, is it not? It is the best the world can give. Now what better has the Lord to give? Here it is, as shown in the case of Paul: Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have borne witness here in chains, before a howling mob who would think no more of taking your life than that of a mad dog, even so must you bear witness in Rome. That is, the Lord comforted Paul in his tribulation by telling him that he was to have yet more of it! That is indeed not like the comfort of the world, and the world would not recognise it as comfort at all; but the man who knows the Lord, and has tasted the comfort of the Lord’s own Spirit can understand it and rejoice in it.

Sunday: Meeting the Jerusalem Leaders – Read Acts 21:17-26, What had the Jews at Jerusalem heard concerning Paul’s teachings? What plan did his friends propose by which to convince the Jews that Paul was loyal to Jewish customs? It is very sad that the elders at Jerusalem misadvised Paul to compromise to appease the Jews! The remainder of this Lesson comments we quote what Ellen White wrote: “The elders of the church had been at fault in allowing themselves to be influenced by the enemies of the apostle. But when they heard from his own lips an account of the work he had been doing, it assumed a different aspect. They could not condemn his manner of labor; they were convinced that it bore the signet of Heaven. The liberal contributions from the new churches he had raised up, testified to the power of the truth. They saw that they had been held in bondage by the Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their efforts to maintain the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile” {LP 211.2}.

“Now was the golden opportunity for these leading men to frankly confess that God had wrought through Paul, and that they were wrong in permitting the reports of his enemies to create jealousy and prejudice against him. But instead of doing justice to the one whom they had injured, they still appeared to hold him responsible for the existing prejudice, as though he had given them cause for such feelings. They did not nobly stand in his defense, and endeavor to show the disaffected party their error; but they threw the burden wholly upon Paul, counseling him to pursue a course for the removal of all misapprehension. They responded to his testimony in these words: Thou seest [Acts 21:20-25 quoted]” {LP 211.3}.

“The brethren hoped that by this act Paul might give a decisive contradiction of the false reports concerning him. But while James assured Paul that the decision of the former council (Acts 15) concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law still held good, the advice given was not consistent with that decision which had also been sanctioned by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God did not prompt this advice. It was the fruit of cowardice” {LP 212.1}. But the elders at Jerusalem did not seek counsel from the Lord when they misled Paul in advising him to compromise the truth he had taught and conform to Jewish customs.

Monday: Riot in the Temple – Paul was considered an apostate by the Jews and for him to be found in the temple could only attract riot. But the elders at Jerusalem had advised him to go into the temple and purify himself after the Jewish customs. We are told: “Those who had counselled Paul to perform this act of concession had not fully considered the great peril to which he would be exposed. At this season, strangers from all regions of the world

thronged the streets of Jerusalem, and delighted to congregate in the temple courts. As Paul, in the fulfilment of his commission, had borne the gospel to the Gentiles, he had visited many of the world's largest cities, and was well known to thousands who came from foreign parts to attend the feast. For him to enter the temple on a public occasion was to risk his life. For several days he passed in and out among the worshippers, apparently unnoticed; but before the close of the specified period, as he was conversing with the priest concerning the sacrifices to be offered, he was recognized by some of the Jews from Asia. These men had been defeated in their controversy with him in the synagogue at Ephesus, and had become more and more enraged against him as they witnessed his success in raising up a Christian church in that city. They now saw him where they had not supposed that he would trust himself, – within the very precincts of the temple. Now he was in their power, and they determined to make him suffer for his boldness" {LP 215.1}. We are told: "With the fury of demons they rushed upon him, crying, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place' " {LP 216.1}.

Tuesday: Before the Crowd – What happened next? We are told: "News had been carried to Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Roman garrison, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Many voices were at once raised in loud and angry accusation; but on account of the uproar the chief captain could obtain no satisfactory information, and he ordered that the prisoner be removed to the castle, where were the Roman barracks" {LP 217.1}. Paul then "turned to the commanding officer and begged that he might be permitted to speak to the people. The Lord had given his servant an influence over the Roman officer, and the request was granted" {LP 218.1}. Paul spoke to the throng, starting with his testimony of how he had been zealous of the Jewish customs as they are; they were listening, none could argue with that. "He then endeavoured to show that his work among the Gentiles had not been from choice. He had desired to labour for his own nation; but in that very temple the voice of God had spoken to him in holy vision, directing his course "far hence, unto the Gentiles." Hitherto the people had given close attention, but when he reached the point in his history where he was appointed Christ's ambassador to the Gentiles, their fury broke forth anew. Accustomed to look upon themselves as the only people favoured of God, they could not endure the thought that the despised Gentiles should share the privilege which had hitherto belonged exclusively to themselves. National pride bore down every argument which could influence their reason or command their reverence. An outburst of rage interrupted his speech, as all with one voice cried out, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live!' In their excitement they flung off their garments, as they had done years before at the martyrdom of Stephen, and threw dust into the air with frantic violence" {LP 219.2}.

Wednesday: Before the Sanhedrin – The next step was to take Paul to the Sanhedrim for his judgment in religious matters. "The Sanhedrim council was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, who had long been at variance upon the doctrine of the resurrection. Knowing this, the apostle cried out, in clear, decided tones, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question'" {LP 222.1}.

The Council was divided over resurrection, "thus the strength of their opposition against Paul was broken; for however well united they were in warring against the gospel, they were divided by an insurmountable barrier in other matters of religious faith. The Pharisees flattered themselves that they had found in Paul a champion against their powerful rivals; and their hatred against the Sadducees was even greater than their hatred against Christ and his apostles. With great vehemence they now began to vindicate Paul, using nearly the same language that Gamaliel had used many years before: 'We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.'" {LP 222.2}

Thursday: Transfer to Caesarea – Next we find Lysias making arrangements for Paul to be transferred to Caesarea to be judged by Felix the governor. We are told: "It was in the broad light of day that Paul, attended by 'threescore and ten horsemen,' entered the city. How unlike his present escort was the humble Christian company that had attended him on the journey from Caesarea but a few days before! Notwithstanding his changed surroundings, he was recognized by Philip and others of his Christian associates, whose hearts were shocked and saddened at the swift realization of their forebodings" {LP 228.1}.