

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Confinement in Caesarea – 15-21 September 2018

Christ would have us preach Him as our hope as did His servant Paul. When Paul stood before Agrippa, to answer for his faith, he briefly stated the chief experiences of his life, and then preached Christ and Him crucified, expounding on the hope we should have in Christ. Paul's use of Scripture, for which Agrippa as a Jew could not deny, did put Agrippa in a position where he could have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. His reply shows that he rejected Christ: "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." "And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:29). In this week's Lesson, we focus on the Jews persecuting Paul for preaching Jesus Christ.

During his confinement in Caesarea, Paul preached Christ, and being in bonds became the means by which to witness before kings and large assemblies gathered at his trials. It is clear from this week's Lesson and reading through the book of Acts that the Jews rejecting the truth persecuted Paul because he preached Christ. Paul said in Corinth he knew nothing else but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2), and we may be sure that he did not preach a different gospel to the Corinthians from what he did to other people. Indeed, at the time when Paul stood before Agrippa, he said that he had continued unto that day, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23). Paul was judged and persecuted by the Jews for the promise made of God to the fathers – this promise to the fathers was that through Christ they should have a resurrection from the dead, and should by that means enter upon their inheritance. Paul looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise with as ardent hope and as steadfast faith as did Abraham, and it was this that he had in mind when he said that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13).

Now it is certain that neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Jacob, ever had any share in the inheritance promised to them. When Stephen was before the Jewish Sanhedrim, on trial for his life, he referred to God's call for Abraham to go into the land of Canaan, and said, "*And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on; yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child*" (Acts 7:5). And this Stephen used as part of his argument that the promise to Israel was yet to be fulfilled. But we shall find that the Lord is not slack concerning His promise.

Not only did Abraham have no inheritance in the land, but Isaac and Jacob were in a like condition. The apostle says: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

The same is true of Abraham's posterity through faith (verses 13-16). They confessed to be pilgrims on earth, which had been promised to them for an inheritance. They died without having received the promised inheritance, or any part of it; yet their faith was as strong when they died as when the promise was first made. They plainly declared, says Paul, that they looked for a country, and diligent study of Scripture shows that that country was the whole earth; and since they were not disappointed because the country was not given to them in their life-time, it is evident that they understood the promise to embrace the resurrection from the dead. This was plainly declared to be the case by Paul when he testified of his faith before Agrippa. "And now I stand and am judged *for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*" (Acts 26:6-8).

All who have read the book of Acts know that Paul was persecuted by the Jews because he preached Christ. This was the cause of all the Jewish persecution of Christians. After

Peter and John had healed the lame man, at the gate of the temple, and had declared to the Jews that it was done through the power of Jesus, whom they had crucified, and who had risen from the dead, "the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:1-2). And when Paul stood before Agrippa, and uttered the words quoted in the preceding paragraph, he said that he had continued unto that day, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23). The Jews professed to believe in Moses and the prophets, and the apostles preached nothing else. When Paul was accused by the Jews before Felix, he said: "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:14-15).

It is probably a fact that in many instances where men have been persecuted as heretics, the heresy of which they were accused was some doctrine which their accusers would have been obliged to hold if they had been consistent with their profession. In the great majority of cases, the "heretics" in the church have been men who have obeyed and talk about truth of the Bible, and their persecutors have been those, who, by their preaching, were convicted of inconsistency. So the Jews held the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead; but they persecute Paul for preaching it, because it involved the preaching of Christ, whom their pride led them to reject. Now put these facts with Paul's statement that he stood and was judged for the hope of the promise made of God to the fathers, and it is as plain as language can make it that the promise to the fathers that through Christ they should have a resurrection from the dead, and should by that means enter upon their inheritance. Like Paul, those who are true to their Christian calling, look forward to the fulfillment of the promise with as ardent hope and as steadfast faith as did Abraham, and can say, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

This has been the hope of the church in all ages. In the midst of his deep affliction, the patriarch Job found comfort in the knowledge that his Redeemer lived and should stand in the latter day upon the earth, and that although worms might devour his body, nevertheless in his flesh he should see God (Job 19:23-27). Again, after speaking of the certainty of death and decay, he asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" and at once answered his own question, saying, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands" (Job 14:14-15). What this change will be, and when it will take place, we are told by the apostle Paul in the following language: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians (15:51-55)).

Isaiah also, after speaking of the desolation of Israel, said: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isaiah 26:19). And this will take place at the time spoken of in the following verses, from which Paul quoted when he showed to the Corinthians the mystery of the resurrection from the dead: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:6-9). We look forward to the fulfillment of this promise.