

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – God’s Call – 12-18 October 2019

Christ would have us know God’s call in our lives. God has called each of us to a duty of spreading the good news of salvation to the world. God has provided us with means and each one of us owes his property, to be used just as fast and in just such ways as the needs of the cause of Christ demand; each one owes himself, with all that is intrusted to him. Shall we now, then, with a sense that we, no less than the apostle Paul, are debtors to all men (Romans 1:14), hold ourselves and our means subject to God’s call? Nay, rather with the feeling of one who cannot rest easy under unpaid debts, shall we not eagerly say, “Here am I; send me,” or use me in any way that will advance Thy cause? When each one of us as individual members of the church shall with united hearts arouse to a sense of our call, and in the fear of God begin to pay the debt we owe to the world, the message will go with a loud cry, and the unearned reward will soon be given. God calls and equips those He calls – God called Ezra and equipped him through favour with the king to support the work. Ezra says: “Blessed *be* the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put *such a thing* as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:27).

Sunday: The Calling of Ezra and Nehemiah – “In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, nor shrink from vindicating the honor of God. Those upon whom rests the burden of this work will not hold their peace when wrong is done, neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. They will remember that God is no respecter of persons, and that severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed.” “In their work, Ezra and Nehemiah humbled themselves before God, confessing their sins and the sins of their people, and entreating pardon as if they themselves were the offenders. Patiently they toiled and prayed and suffered. That which made their work most difficult was not the open hostility of the heathen, but the secret opposition of pretended friends, who, by lending their influence to the service of evil, increased tenfold the burden of God’s servants. These traitors furnished the Lord’s enemies with material to use in their warfare upon His people. Their evil passions and rebellious wills were ever at war with the plain requirements of God.” “The success attending Nehemiah’s efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish. Nehemiah was not a priest; he was not a prophet; he made no pretension to high title. He was a reformer raised up for an important time. It was his aim to set his people right with God. Inspired with a great purpose, he bent every energy of his being to its accomplishment. High, unbending integrity marked his efforts. As he came into contact with evil and opposition to right he took so determined a stand that the people were roused to labor with fresh zeal and courage. They could not but recognize his loyalty, his patriotism, and his deep love for God; and, seeing this, they were willing to follow where he led” {PK 675 para. 1-3}.

Monday: Prophetic Timing – The call to ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah came in partial fulfilment of prophecies concerning God’s people. The main task for Ezra and Nehemiah was to rebuild Jerusalem. The command to rebuild Jerusalem had been prophesied and marked the beginning of a prophetic time. Daniel had been told, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks” (Daniel 9:25). The going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, was the seventh year of Artaxerxes, or 457 BC (see the seventh chapter of Ezra). There had been decrees concerning Jerusalem (see Ezra 1:1-4; 5:1-15), but this is the only decree that contemplated the complete restoration of Jerusalem to its former power and glory, and consequently it is the one that must be referred to in Daniel 9. From the date of this decree, until the Messiah, was to be seven weeks, and three-score and two weeks, that is sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred and eighty-three days. Of course this did not mean that the Messiah should come in a little over a year from that time; but the prophecy concerning the days is one in which nations are represented by symbols (see Daniel 8:1-14), and the days must therefore be symbolic. In a prophecy recorded in Ezekiel 4:6, we learn that a prophetic day

is a literal year. Hence Daniel 9:25 is equivalent to a statement that four hundred and eighty-three years from the decree of Artaxerxes (BC 457), Messiah the Prince should come.

Tuesday: The 70 weeks and the 2,300 Days – The 2,300 Days is a long prophetic period in a vision given to Daniel. That the 2,300 are not literal days may be known from this: This is a prophecy of symbols, in which short-lived animals are used to represent kingdoms that existed during hundreds of years; it is perfectly in keeping with the method of symbolic prophecy to use days in connection with the symbols, but it is evident that they must represent a longer period, in the interpretation, since two thousand three hundred days – a little more than six years – would scarcely be the beginning of the first kingdom. So we are warranted in concluding that each day stands for a year, as in Ezekiel 4:6, where the Lord uses days in symbolising years. The angel made known the meaning of the vision to Daniel (Daniel 9:20-23). The angel said, “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people,” etc (verse 24). Seventy weeks, four hundred and ninety years, were determined or cut off from the two thousand three hundred years, upon the Jewish people. They were to begin from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. This commandment full and complete we find in Ezra 7:11-26, and it was given in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, which was BC 457. Beginning in the year 457 BC, four hundred and ninety years would end in the year 34 AD. But the last one of these prophetic weeks was divided. Sixty-nine of them – 483 years – reaching to the year 27 AD, marked the time of the revelation of the Messiah, or the Anointed One, the time when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost at His baptism. In the middle of the last week of years, namely three and one-half years after the baptism of Jesus, Messiah was “cut off, but not for Himself.” During the entire week, or seven years, the covenant was confirmed. The whole period of two thousand three hundred years, which can readily be calculated, reaches to the year 1844 AD, which is in the past. Thus the longest prophetic period given in the Bible has expired, so that now indeed “the time of the promise” must be very near. When the Lord will come to restore all things, no one can tell, for “of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matt 24:36).

Wednesday: God's Election – God's people are His elect “through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus” (1 Peter 1:2). From the beginning God hath chosen us to salvation “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Indeed He has chosen us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Still He allows us full liberty to accept or reject His choice for us. We may resist His Spirit, and grieve it away, and then our election will fail. If we say, “We will not have this Man to reign over us,” Christ will not compel us to serve Him. But if we gladly submit ourselves to Him, choosing His ways, we make our calling and election sure.

Thursday: Our Responsibility – The Lesson draws our attention to Moses, comparing with Ezra and Nehemiah – when Moses was called, he first attempted to give excuses, while Ezra and Nehemiah accepted without questioning. When Moses said to the Lord, “Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou shouldst send,” he indirectly charged God with not knowing who He ought to send. If the Lord had not seen that Moses was the best man for the place, He would not have selected him. While God does not want a man to run when He has not been sent (see Jeremiah 23:2), He does want a man to go when He sends him. If God indicates that He wants a man to do a certain work, that is sufficient evidence that He will sustain him in that work. It is a terrible thing to refuse to obey the Lord. To beg off from labour to which one has been appointed, is not always humility. It may be an evidence of pride. This case under consideration may naturally call to the minds of many the case of Jonah, although Jonah was not like Moses except in that he did not want to do what the Lord wanted him to do. The motives of the two men were different. The reader will do well to call attention to not only the case of Jonah, but also the cases of others that come to his mind, as different phases of this shrinking from duty. Very often people who plead inability to do a certain work in the church, to which they are called, think that their refusal is an evidence of their humility, when, in fact, it is often an evidence of nothing but pride. They fear that if they should take hold of it, they might make mistakes, and that people might not think so much of them in consequence. And so, in order to avoid possible criticism by men, they are content to be inactive, and to risk the displeasure of God. That is one of the worst kinds of pride.