

Sabbath Lesson #8 – From the Stormy Sea to the Clouds of Heaven – 15-21 Feb 2020

Christ went to heaven to receive His kingdom, and He will return when He has received it. This week's Lesson takes us 'from the stormy sea' of earthly kingdoms that will be destroyed 'to the clouds of heaven' of Christ's everlasting kingdom. But the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of Israel. Was that not ended? At the birth of Jesus, the angel said: "God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end"; yet the prophet Daniel, after telling of the destruction of earthly monarchies, says: "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Daniel 7:27). Who will constitute the people of Israel?

A few remarks concerning God's purpose with Israel may be in place here. He chose Abraham, because Abraham had a heart to serve Him, and would keep the light of God's truth from dying out. He called the Israelites out from Egypt, so that they might serve Him; and He made them the depositaries of His holy law, so that they might hold up the standard of truth to the surrounding nations. The strangers who wished to serve the Lord could become a part of Israel, and heirs of the promise equally with the descendants of Abraham. If the children of Israel had been true to their high calling, and had not departed from God, or, having departed and repented, had remained faithful, they would ever have continued as a nation. A judgment, if they should depart from God, was uttered: "But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath-day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jeremiah 17:27).

These warnings were not heeded. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Jeremiah we find the announcement of their captivity, because of their refusal to obey God. And the twenty-seventh chapter contains the record that the Lord told the king of Judah, and the kings of the surrounding nations, that He had given their lands to the king of Babylon, and that they should submit to him (see Jeremiah 27:4-7). Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, left king Zedekiah on the throne of Judah, but when Zedekiah rebelled, Jerusalem was destroyed, to complete the overthrow of the kingdom of Judah. Although, after seventy years of captivity, all who wished were given full liberty to return to Jerusalem, and the city and the temple were rebuilt, no king since that time has ever sat upon the throne of Israel. The Jews were in Babylon till that empire was overthrown by the Medes and Persians, BC 538. Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia, gave them permission to return to their own land, but they had no king, and they existed only through the sufferance of the kings of Persia. Alexander the Great showed them favours, and to him they acknowledged allegiance. When the empire of Greece was divided at the death of Alexander, they were subject by turns to different kings, until finally they turned to the rising power of Rome for complete protection, and remained subject to Rome as long as they had any existence as a nation.

Fast forward, when Christ uttered that last cry upon the cross, "It is finished," the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, showing that their house was left unto them desolate. Less than forty years later (AD 70), the Romans besieged Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it, fulfilling the words of Christ in Matthew 24:2, and Luke 19:43-44. This destruction, which marked the utter extinction of the Jewish people as a nation, also prefigured the final destruction of all that reject the gospel. From this point we leave the lineal descendants of Abraham. But God had not forgotten his promise. Centuries before he had said to David that his throne should be established, and the people of Israel should continue, forever; and this promise he could not break. Said He: "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (Ps.89:34-37).

After His resurrection, as He was about to ascend to the Father, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power"

(Acts 1:6-7). Just afterward He ascended to Heaven, to sit down at the right hand of God. Before ascending, Christ said: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the *throne of his glory*; and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:31-34).

While He sits upon His Father's throne, it is as a priest, counselling with the Father for the peace of mankind. David tells until what time He will remain there, saying, "The Lord said unto My Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool" (Acts 2:34-35; Psalm 110:1). When Christ was on this earth He had not kingly power, except as He was full of grace and truth. As the representative of the kingdom of grace, He had power on earth to forgive sins. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." But the kingdom of this world was not His. If it had been he would not have had to bear the curse of the earth in order to redeem it. Said He to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is My kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). If He had then possessed the kingdom, He would have destroyed His enemies, as He will do when He returns, after He has received it.

From all these texts it is evident that Christ did not receive the kingdom at His first advent. Instead of having a kingdom, He had not so much as a place to lay His head. But He has ascended to the right hand of God, there to remain until the kingdom is given to Him, and His enemies are made His footstool, when He will return to rid His kingdom of His enemies.

The parable of the ten pounds, as recorded by Luke, was given for the purpose of teaching this very thing. "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading" (Luke 19:11-15). Then follows the accounting with the servants, and the commendation of those who had been faithful; and the parable closes with these words: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." This is so plain as to need no comment. It shows that Christ has gone to Heaven to receive the kingdom, and will return when He has received it.

In the seventh chapter of Daniel, verses 9-10, there is a graphic word picture of the judgment in Heaven, which will determine who are worthy to be raised from the dead, or to be translated when the Lord comes. As soon as this judgment is over, Christ will receive his kingdom, as we read in the following verses: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). This is the fulfilment of the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary, when he announced the birth of Jesus, saying: "And the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). The throne of David is the throne that was promised to Christ; therefore the dominion, the receiving of which is described in Daniel 7:13-14, must be the kingdom of Israel. It was declared that His everlasting dominion should be over the house of Jacob, yet the prophet, after telling of the destruction of earthly monarchies, says: "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:27). Therefore it must be that all the saints of God will constitute the people of Israel, over whom Christ shall reign.