

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – The Stranger *in* Your Gates – 23-29 October 2021

Christ reminds us our duty to strangers within our gates. Said Moses: “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19). We are to comfort even strangers who are afflicted. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Sunday: Circumcise Your Hearts – The Lord said to Abraham, “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you” (Genesis 17:11). It is generally supposed that the great majority of the people of Israel understood the token of the covenant, circumcision, only in its most literal sense. But that may well be doubted. According to Hebrews 4:1-2, they who fell in the wilderness of Arabia had the gospel preached to them, though there are many who fail to discover wherein they could have understood the gospel. It is clearly revealed that they were taught the spiritual nature of the covenant with Abraham, and the real intent of circumcision. Thus it was said in Deuteronomy 10:16: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.” And again in chapter 30:6, Moses said to them: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” And many years after this, the same was spoken by the prophet: “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 4:4). These scriptures show that the true intent of the ordinance was revealed to Israel; and no doubt all the faithful, devoted ones among them, all who searched to know the ways of God, well understood the subject, even as they saw the sacrifice of the Messiah in the daily offerings upon their altars; just as we see the body and blood of the Saviour in the Lord’s supper. No one can doubt that Abraham understood the true nature of the covenant then made, and we are informed that he received circumcision as a seal of righteousness. But in process of time, as traditions supplanted the word of God, and the fear of God was taught by the precept of men, Isaiah 29:13, it is likely that they largely lost sight of the spirituality of the covenant, and regarded circumcision only in its outward sense. The covenant that God made with Abraham has never been disannulled. It is the covenant of salvation from the effects of the fall. And, therefore, it is the plan for carrying out the promise made to Adam, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. He who does not see this relation of the Abrahamic covenant to the original promise of Genesis 3:15, reads it amiss. The token of that covenant remains, the true circumcision according to what God revealed to the children of Israel. The external has passed entirely away, as Paul said to the Romans: “Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; ... circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter” (Romans 2:28-29). In Romans 4:11, circumcision is called both a sign and a seal. Therefore in Ephesians 1:13, the apostle says: “Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” Also in Ephesians 4:30, he said: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” And as it was said to Abraham, the uncircumcised shall be cut off from among his people, even so now. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). He has not the true token or seal of the covenant; he shall be cut off. An outward seal was given only to the males, but that distinction is put away with the passing away of the external. The true seal is applied to all, for “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Thus, the token of the covenant with Abraham remains in the sense in which it was spoken of by Moses and Jeremiah.

Monday: Love the Stranger – “For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). Here is a reminder of their condition in Egypt. They were to remember other strangers, and in keeping the Sabbath they were to show love to strangers.

Tuesday: For You Were Strangers in Egypt – Paul preaching in Antioch, said, “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it” (Acts 13:17). The arm is the member most used in working; the strength of one’s arm represents the strength of its owner. Therefore the arm of the Lord signifies the power of God. Thus it was by the arm or power of God, that the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. David said: “We heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thy hand, and plantedst them; how Thou didst afflict the people and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own right arm save them; but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance because Thou hadst a favour unto them” (Psalm 44:1-3). All the power manifested in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, – the dividing of the Red Sea, the overthrow of the Egyptians, the dividing of the Jordan, and overthrowing of the walls of Jericho, as well as the miraculous provision of food and drink, was the working of God’s right arm. “Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand” (Psalm 89:13). Again we read: “O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things; His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. The Lord hath made known His salvation; His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered His mercy and His truth toward the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Psalm 98:1-4). All the wonders connected with the coming of the Lord to save His people, and to punish the wicked, are the operation of the arm of the Lord. Thus the prophet announces: “Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold His reward is with Him” (Isaiah 40:10). Again the power of that arm in effecting the final salvation is thus set forth: “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art Thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art Thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:9-11). The quaking earth and heavens, the darkened sun and moon, the falling stars, the moving islands and mountains, and the mighty hailstones, that herald the approach of Christ, are all indications of the power of the Lord’s arm. And again, “The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 53:10).

Wednesday: Judge Righteously – “Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9). Judging righteously by voicing out for the poor. There is oppression of the poor by the rich in these last days. But the Lord judges the cause of the poor. In this is their only hope. “Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:4). The Lord hates oppression, but when the labourers organise, that they may oppress their oppressors, they take their case out of the Lord’s hand. He cannot approve or support their course. Ah, ‘shall men not go on strike when oppressed?’ If they commit their cause to God they may be quite sure that all that God can do for them will be done. “Say ye not, A confederacy, to all *them* to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid” (Isaiah 8:12). Labour Unions may have good objects, but they often work hardships on those whose interests they seek. The best and only secure Union we are to seek is this: “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, *even as we are One*: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22-23).

Thursday: Pure Religion Before God – Scripture does not sanction enriching ourselves at the expense of the poor in our business dealings. “Thou shalt not have in thy bag diverse weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thy house diverse measures, a great and a small” (Deuteronomy 25:13-14). “Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have” (Leviticus 19:36). Let us heed these laws in all our business transactions.