

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Lessons of the Past – 2-8 March 2024

Christ would have us remember the lessons of the past. Thus, the psalmist says, “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done” (Psalm 78:3-4). God says of the children of Israel in the wilderness, they “saw My works forty years,” but “they have not known My ways.” “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Psalm 103:7). Note that while all the children of Israel saw the acts or works of the Lord, Moses only is mentioned as knowing His ways. Why? – Because Moses had his eyes as well as his ears open. His heart turned to the Lord, and therefore he saw Him with unveiled face. A hard heart, “an evil heart of unbelief,” makes one blind, as well as deaf. The only reason why God did not make known His ways unto the children of Israel, was that they would not see; for God did all on His part. He showed them His works, and that is the only way any person can make himself truly known. If we know all of a man’s doings, then we know the man himself. Although Israel saw God’s “wonderful works,” “they soon forgot His works,” “and His wonders that He had showed them” (Psalm 78:4-11; 106:13); therefore they did not know His ways. We have no grounds on which to accuse the Israelites, for we are equally guilty with them. We have all seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and yet have remained in ignorance of God’s ways. His works are everywhere. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious; and His righteousness endureth for ever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered” (Psalm 106:2-4). “For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made” (Romans 1:20).

Sunday: The Lord’s Unstoppable Faithfulness – In Psalm 78, how did the Israelites respond to the Lord’s faithfulness? They responded with rebellion until they could enter the Lord’s rest. “And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness” (Acts 13:18). In these few words the Apostle Paul in his discourse in the synagogue at Antioch disposed of the forty years’ wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness; and for the purpose of our present study, we may pass it by nearly as hastily. Their manners were such that God literally “suffered” them. The record is one of murmurings and rebellion. We read a few verses. “They believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation” (Psalm 78:22). “How oft did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not His hand, nor the day when He delivered them from the enemy; how He had wrought His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan” (verses 40-43). Although for forty years they daily saw the works of God, they did not learn His ways; wherefore, says the Lord, “I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest” (Hebrews 3:10, 11). Since rest is found only in God, it is most evident that the children of Israel did not enjoy the rest and the inheritance, even while in Palestine, for although “He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents, yet they tempted and provoked the Most High God, and kept not His testimonies; but turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images,” so that “God greatly abhorred Israel” (verses 56-59).

Monday: Remembering History and the Praise – How does the psalmist admonish us to remember to praise God? “O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name; make known His deeds among the people” (Psalm 105:1). We know His deeds, for God is described as “making known to the sons of men His mighty acts” (Psalm 145:12). Not to give thanks is to deny God; for it is virtually to say that He has done nothing, and that He Himself is nothing. It is only by giving thanks for His wonderful works, because He is, and not by argument, that we can make God known to the people who know Him not. God is known by His works; and His works are made known through the thanksgiving of those who take pleasure in them.

Tuesday: Remembering History and Repentance – How does the psalmist admonish us to be thankful as a way of repentance? “Praise ye the Lord, O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: For his mercy endureth for ever” (Psalm 106:1). How often people say, or at least think, ‘I do not see what I have to be thankful for.’ That is the purely selfish idea of thankfulness, – so much visible, actual rain, so many thanks; nothing in sight, no thanks. Such a conception of thanksgiving naturally exists with one who lives by the law of works, whose reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt. His thanksgiving is a mere commercial transaction; it pertains to heathenism, and not the Christianity. The intelligent Christian has always and everywhere a cause for thanksgiving: because God is, and He is good. No circumstance, no gain or loss, can ever interfere with true thanksgiving. God is good, and, therefore, whether we consciously possess little or much it is equally good, and calls for thanks. God is “Our Father,” and, therefore, we always have all things in Him. Whoever knows God must necessarily give thanks, not for what he himself has, but for what God is. The Israelites could give thanks and trust the Lord as far as they could see Him, but no further. At the Red Sea, and the Lord saved them, parting the waters for them to cross, and their enemies perished in the waters. “And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel” (verses 11-13). How long did that thankfulness last; what about us? A three days’ journey in the wilderness without water sufficed to make them forget all that the Lord had done for them. When they found water, it was so bitter that they could not drink it, and then they murmured. This difficulty was easily remedied by the Lord, who showed Moses a tree which, when cast into the bitter waters, made them sweet. “There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them” (Exodus 15:25). Encamped by the palm trees and wells of Elim, they had nothing to vex them, so that it must have been nearly a month before they murmured again. During that time, they doubtless felt very well satisfied with themselves, as well as with their surroundings. Now they were surely trusting the Lord! So, it is with us. It is so easy for us to imagine that we are making progress when we are only lying at anchor, and the tide is flowing past us; like the Israelites, it is so easy to think that we have learned to trust the Lord, when there are no trials to test our faith.

Wednesday: The Parable of the Lord’s Vine – What lessons do we have in Psalm 80 regarding the parable of the Lord’s vine? We will take a bird’s eye view of the parable. They were compared to a vine. “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it” (Psalm 80:8). The long-suffering of God is represented by the figure of a husbandman trying to develop good fruit from his garden. Says Isaiah: “Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes” (Isaiah 5:1-2). It is the same parable of the vineyard that is recorded by Luke: “Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (Luke 13:7-9). Thus, is shown God’s unwillingness to cut off even the most unfruitful plant, so that He can say: “Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it” (Isaiah 5:3-4). The gnarled, crooked natures of some will resist all the efforts of the faithful husbandman to induce them to bear good fruit, or any fruit at all, and since they bear only thorns and briers, there is nothing to do with them but to burn them.

Thursday: The Lord’s Supremacy in History – How is God compared to other gods? There is no God but Jehovah. All the gods of the heathen are nothing (see Jeremiah 10:5, 10). A man is like that which he serves. He who serves a dumb, dead idol is himself destitute of life (Psalm 115:8). When we trusted in the works of our own hands, we were lifeless dead in trespasses and sins; but having been made alive in Christ, we reign with Him, instead of being lorded over. Not only will all false gods perish, but the very memory of them will be destroyed. The memorial of God, on the other hand, endures for ever (Psalm 135:13).