

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Longing for God in Zion – 9-15 March 2024

Christ is the living bread which satisfies by supplying life. Jesus Christ is “the Desire of all nations” (Haggai 2:7). There are comparatively few of the people in the world who know Him, and who recognise Him as the object of their desire; but it is a fact that all the very longings of the human heart can be satisfied in Christ, and in Him alone. God has implanted desires in every soul, which can be satisfied only by the possession of Christ, in order that when He is lifted before them, they may see in Him the object of their desires and be drawn to Him. The devil’s work is to deceive people with the thought that their desires may be satisfied in some other way than by the possession of Christ. David was a man of like passions with other men, his flesh was sinful, and as full of evil desires as any other human flesh. Yet when the Spirit of Christ enlightened his understanding, he said, “O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1). Again, per the Lesson’s memory text: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2). How are the appetites and lusts of the flesh misguided crying out of the flesh after God? By the fact that no man was ever yet satisfied by the indulgence of fleshly appetites and lusts. The drunkard drinks to satisfy a craving that is never satisfied. The reason why he follows the lusts of the flesh so eagerly, is that they make him their slave, deluding him with the idea that the next time he will find that complete satisfaction which evades him this time. The Lord, knowing that He alone can give the soul perfect and complete satisfaction, calls to us, saying, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isaiah 55:2).

Sunday: A Day in Your Courts Is Better Than a Thousand – Do you, like the psalmist (Psalm 84:1-4) long to dwell in the sanctuary, and why? That mortal men on this earth may in this present age not only enter the dwelling-place of the Lord, but may actually reside in the Lord’s house, is a fact made very plain in the Scriptures. Let us read a few familiar texts. First, we have a blessing on those who dwell in the house of the Lord: “Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee” (verse 4). They must praise the Lord, for He inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3), and “in His temple everything saith Glory” (Psalm 29:9). Many deprive themselves of the blessings of the Lord. But the Lord’s blessings are real: “How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures” (Psalm 36:7-8). We are dealing with facts, not theories; therefore, we have only to do with the fact that we may and should dwell now in the house of the Lord, and not with any explanation as to how it can be. With the text last quoted, about resting under the shadow of God’s wings, and being satisfied with the fatness of His house, connect the following: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide; under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt Thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling” (Psalm 91:1-10). Here we see that the safety of God’s people during the awful time of trouble just preceding the coming of the Lord (See Daniel 12:1; Luke 21:26-28), will be due to the fact that they have been and are then dwelling in the house of the Lord. The plagues that will be poured out upon the earth cannot touch them, because they will be dwelling safe in the place whence the plagues come. It is as one who is safe from the shot that comes

from a fort, because he is in the fort whence the fire comes. And yet these people are at the same time on the earth, in the midst of the plagues, with the wicked falling all around them.

Monday: Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem – Reading Psalm 122, how do we know that the psalmist had in mind beyond the peace of earthly Jerusalem? The holy men of old were moved by the Holy Ghost (1 Peter 1:21) and saw beyond earthly things. They well knew that the temple at Jerusalem in which they worshipped was altogether too small to be a real house of God, who “dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool; what house will ye build Me saith the Lord; or what is the place of My rest?” (Acts 7:48-49). Old Jerusalem was never large enough to hold the new temple of the Lord. That temple contains more angels waiting for the commands of the Lord, than there were ever inhabitants in Jerusalem (Revelation 10:11). When the prophets praised the beauty of Jerusalem, they had the new Jerusalem in their sanctified vision. It is in view of this that the psalmist wrote: “But Thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever. Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. when the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory” (Psalm 102:12-16). The stones in which the servants of the Lord take pleasure are not the old, moss-covered stones of the old Jerusalem, but “all manner of precious stones,” with which the real city is garnished (Revelation 21:19). It is this city, and not the Old Jerusalem, that the psalmist always had reference to when he broke forth in transports over its beauty (Psalm 48:1-3). This city is the home of God's people. “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:21). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God;” therefore they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, and heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16). The city is already prepared, and waits for preparation of its inhabitants. Toward this city we are to turn our eyes when we pray. We are to “lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens” (Lamentations 3:41), as David, when he said, “I lift up my hands toward Thy holy oracle” (Psalm 28:2).

Tuesday: Zion — The Home of All Nations – Reading in Psalm 87, what makes Zion such an esteemed place? Zion on earth was a shadow of the new Jerusalem, which the psalmist had in view, “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (verse 3), wherein “the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isaiah 33:20, 22, 24). It is very graphically described in Revelation 21:9-16. It is the city that Abraham looked for, “which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). It is the Jerusalem which Paul said “is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). It is the Father's house, in which, Christ said, “there are many mansions” (John 14:2) – a home of all nations.

Wednesday: Safety and Peace of Zion – In Psalms 46, how does Zion represent safety and peace? Zion was a shadow of the city to come and represented the presence of God. It is in God we have safety and peace. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (verse 1). “The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; He is their stronghold in the time of trouble. And the Lord helpeth them, and rescueth them; He rescueth them from the wicked, and saveth them, because they have taken refuge in Him” (Psalm 37:39-40). David wrote, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (Psalm 18:2).

Thursday: Immovable Like Mount Zion – In Psalm 125, how are those who trust in the Lord portrayed here? They have unwavering confidence, in prosperity and adversity, to say, “I shall never be moved” (Psalm 10:6). “Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountains to stand strong” (Psalm 30:7). “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever” (Psalm 125:1-2). It is better to have the Lord surround us than to be surrounded with mountain fortifications; for He sets the mountains fast by His power, and “the strength of the hills is His also” (Psalm 95:4).