

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – The Two Witnesses – 4-10 May 2024

Christ would have us believe the word of God. Our memory text is Isaiah 40:8. It is well for us to read the whole chapter – it is wholly a message of comfort. It begins, “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.” Then follows an assurance of forgiveness. Then the special message is given by the voice of one crying in the wilderness. That message is the power of the Word of God, as contrasted with the weakness of man. Then follow illustrations of the power of the word of God. The facts of creation are referred to, and the power of God is contrasted with the weakness of men. Then comes this beautiful passage in verses 25-26; the special encouragement (verses 27-29). What a lesson of trust!

Sunday: Two Witnesses – Who are the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-13)? We are told: “Concerning the two witnesses the prophet declares further: “These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.” “Thy word,” said the psalmist, “is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Revelation 11:4; Psalm 119:105. The two witnesses represent the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament. Both are important testimonies to the origin and perpetuity of the law of God. Both are witnesses also to the plan of salvation. The types, sacrifices, and prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to a Saviour to come. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament tell of a Saviour who has come in the exact manner foretold by type and prophecy” {GC 267.1}.

Monday: Prophetic Time Periods – In Revelation 11:3 and 12:5, 6, 14, 15 and in Daniel 7:25, what similarities do you see in these prophetic periods? “The periods here mentioned — “forty and two months,” and “a thousand two hundred and threescore days” — are the same, alike representing the time in which the church of Christ was to suffer oppression from Rome. The 1260 years of papal supremacy began in A.D. 538, and would therefore terminate in 1798. At that time a French army entered Rome and made the pope a prisoner, and he died in exile. Though a new pope was soon afterward elected, the papal hierarchy has never since been able to wield the power which it before possessed” {GC 266.3}.

Tuesday: The Two Witnesses Are Killed – How was Revelation 11:7 fulfilled and by what power was it fulfilled? “The atheistical power that ruled in France during the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, did wage such a war against God and His holy word as the world had never witnessed. The worship of the Deity was abolished by the National Assembly. Bibles were collected and publicly burned with every possible manifestation of scorn. The law of God was trampled underfoot. The institutions of the Bible were abolished. The weekly rest day was set aside, and in its stead every tenth day was devoted to reveling and blasphemy. Baptism and the Communion were prohibited. And announcements posted conspicuously over the burial places declared death to be an eternal sleep” {GC 273.2}.

Wednesday: The Two Witnesses Resurrected – How was Revelation 11:11 fulfilled? “It was in 1793 that the decrees which abolished the Christian religion and set aside the Bible passed the French Assembly. Three years and a half later a resolution rescinding these decrees, thus granting toleration to the Scriptures, was adopted by the same body. The world stood aghast at the enormity of guilt which had resulted from a rejection of the Sacred Oracles, and men recognized the necessity of faith in God and His word as the foundation of virtue and morality” {GC 287.1}. “Since France made war upon God's two witnesses, they have been honored as never before. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was organized. This was followed by similar organizations, with numerous branches, upon the continent of Europe. In 1816 the American Bible Society was founded. When the British Society was formed, the Bible had been printed and circulated in fifty tongues. It has since been translated into many hundreds of languages and dialects” {GC 287.2}.

Thursday: Truth Triumphant – What confidence in the word of God do we have to be sure that despite the attacks of the enemy, truth will always be triumphant? All throughout the ages every attempt to crush out the truth, either by burning the Word of truth, or by persecuting its adherents to death, has resulted only in demonstrating the words of the Apostle Paul: “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:8). Satan's effort to thwart God's plan, by bringing sin into the world, and causing man to lose his first dominion, resulted in God responding with love: “But where sin abounded, grace did

much more abound" (Romans 5:20); and every lie against the truth makes the truth of God to abound still more ("For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?" Romans 3:7), and causes the glory of the infinite One to stand out in more vivid contrast against the darkness. In England, we are told, "the bishop of Durham at one time bought of a bookseller who was a friend of Tyndale his whole stock of Bibles, for the purpose of destroying them, supposing that this would greatly hinder the work. But, on the contrary, the money thus furnished, purchased material for a new and better edition, which, but for this, could not have been published" {GC 247.1}.

So, rather than swat the printing of the Bibles, Tyndale was assisted to print Bibles. Thus, it was in a marked degree in the days of the apostles. Peter and John were put into prison for healing a lame man, and preaching Jesus, in whose name the deed was done; but five thousand men were left at liberty to spread the story, as the result of the words that Peter spoke; and when the disciples heard of the threatenings of the rulers they only prayed for more boldness and for more of the same working that had stirred up the wrath of those in authority. They recognised how impossible it is for man to stay God's chariot, saying:

"Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For a truth against Thy Holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word" (Acts 4:24-29). They later spoke with boldness! But what folly to rise up against God who makes the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10)! Whatever men do to frustrate God's purpose only helps to accomplish it.

More and mightier miracles were wrought through the apostles in answer to the threats of the rulers, who at last rose up in their indignation, and seized all the apostles, and put them in the common prison. Foolish men! to think that prison doors could hold men filled with the Spirit of Him whom the gates of the grave could not confine. "The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:19-20). This they did, and when the council met in the morning, and sent the officers for the prisoners, they found everything in order, the doors locked, and the keepers guarding them with all diligence, but nobody inside. They were watching an empty cage, while the prisoners were preaching the word of life to the people. No wonder that "when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow" (Acts 5:24).

And what did these spiritually blind men then do? Read the next verses; also note the bold words of truth spoken by the apostles! Note the wise counsel of Gamaliel. He cited two instances of great movements among the people, which soon came to nothing, and said:

"Not I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found to fight against God." To this they agreed, but could not refrain from venting their spite; they beat the apostles, and commanded them that they speak not in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Did this stop the spread of the truth? Far from it. The apostles "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ," with the result that "the number of the disciples was multiplied."

Has this any instruction for us personally, more than to show us the folly of trying to hinder the spread of the Gospel when God has set His hand to it? Yes; it shows us the power of the truth, which is a shield and defence to all who accept it. Let the truth find lodgment in your heart, and it will root out every evil. That truth which persecution cannot crush out will be your protection in time of persecution. God has from the beginning chosen us to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13); and the power of the truth to resist the destructive rage of leaders is the manifestation of its power to save us. With the Lord, the God of truth, there is plenteous redemption.