

BIBLE LESSONS

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BIBLE STUDY

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August 4, 1968

RULER OF MEN AND NATIONS

Printed Portion Isaiah 45:1-6, 18, 22, 23

Isa. 45:1 Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

5 I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:

6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else.

18 For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else.

22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

Memory Verse: Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. Isaiah 45:22.

Practical Truth: God can use man to accomplish His desires even today.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

To understand our lesson we must get the essence of its background. Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus, the heathen Gentile king of the Medes and Persians, and called him by name even before he was born. (verse 4) Our lesson was written about 200 years before it took place. (712 B. C.) How wonderful the Bible is! We also know that Isaiah told about Jesus and His coming hundreds of years before it came to pass.

This Gentile king was "anointed" by God to overthrow the Babylonian Empire which had burned Jerusalem and taken the Israelites captive, as we have studied. We do not know that Cyrus ever believed in the true God or accepted the Jewish religion, but it is well to note that God had a purpose in his life and it says about him "whose hand I have holden to subdue nations," etc. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that Cyrus was shown this

prophecy when he entered Babylon. Perhaps this also had an influence upon him to help free the Israelite captives and let them go back to their home in Jerusalem.

We need to note that "loose the loins of kings" would mean to strip them of their weapons and wealth, which Cyrus did. "Two leaved gates" would refer to the gates of the city. We are told that someone left the gate to the river open and Cyrus the king of Medians and Persians changed the course of the river that ran under the wall of the city of Babylon and they streamed through into the city through the river bed. We read in Dan. 5:1-31 about the night that Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall and God told him his kingdom was to end. (538 B. C.) That very night the Bible tells us that the Medo-Persian army took the city. (Darius was a maternal uncle of Cyrus who gave the throne to him after he took the city.—Clarke Com.)

Verses 3 and 4 confirm that for Jacob and Israel's sake God had called Cyrus by name and though he did not know Him, God used him. He had a purpose in his life which he chose to carry out. He did not have to, but God knew he wanted to do this.

The last verses of our lesson tell us of the great God we serve. He said, "Look unto me, and be saved." Only as we look to God through Jesus Christ can we be saved. The disciples looked to him and Paul looked to him and found salvation. We, too, can be saved as we look to God.

August 11, 1968

EXILES RETURN HOME

Printed Portion Ezra 1:1-4; 2:68, 69; 3:10-13

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God), which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place;

69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

Ezra 3:10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD, because he is good, for

his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Memory Verse: All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Ezra 3:11.

Practical Truth: It is possible for sinners to return to God and rejoice.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God spoke through His prophets and then we notice the word "fulfilled" many times later in the Bible. We must bear in mind that some of the books of the Bible were written hundreds and even thousands of years apart.

Our first verse tells us that it was about time for the prophecy of Jeremiah to be fulfilled. (Read Jer. 29:10.) The seventy years were about up and the captives from Israel were to be allowed to go back to Jerusalem at that time, so God "stirred up the spirit" of this heathen king. How wonderful the Bible is!

Historians tell us that Cyrus recognized the God of the Jews along with other gods, yet he worshipped his own heathen god. We can see the hand of God in using this heathen king to bring to pass that which He desired. We notice that all were given a right to return if they desired, and rebuild the temple of God. Our lesson is plain as to how it was done. How happy the people were to return to their homeland again! Great rejoicing was heard in the land. The noise of their shouting was "heard afar off." Many wept for joy.

How wonderful it is to arrive home after being gone for some time! How much greater is the blessing when a sinner returns home to God! His voyage in sin has been turbulent and the worldly joy so shallow and empty. When he repents and returns to God there is great joy among the angels in heaven. (Luke 15:7) It brings joy to God's people, also. A sinner becomes a "new creature in Christ Jesus." He does not live as he did before, but lives to please the Lord.

Thank God, one of these days there will be the greatest Home-coming that has ever taken place. All of God's people will meet around the great throne of God there to live in eternity. I want to be in that number, don't you?

August 18, 1968

THE PROPHETS HEAR EXCUSES

Printed Portion Haggai 1:1-9; Ezra 5:1, 2

Hag. 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

2 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.

3 Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

5 Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.

6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes.

7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.

8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.

9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.

2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Memory Verse: Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Haggai 1:4.

Practical Truth: With more than two hundred million copies of the Bible circulating in our country, our nation is without excuse before God.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

When the people returned to Jerusalem they started with great zeal to rebuild the temple, but there were hindrances that caused them to lose heart and the work stopped. They had certain "adversaries of Judah;" neither did the people who lived there offer to help much. Our lesson today is the Lord speaking through the prophet, Ezra, telling the people to "consider your ways" and not think only of building their own homes and providing for themselves, but to work for the Lord in rebuilding the temple of God. No doubt, they had many excuses, but God will not accept an excuse for not obeying Him.

Today many are putting themselves first and God and His work last. They are not willing to obey God's Word and live accordingly. They are thinking of their own fleshly, worldly desires. God wants us to build our lives upon His Word. It will take time spent in praying, reading, studying, and waiting with patience to build our spiritual life for God. He wants us to get to the place where He can use us. God wants our hearts to burn with fervency and sincerity. We want to put our all in God's service, living daily according to His will. The Apostle Paul has said, "Thou art inexcusable O man."

Jesus tells about a man who made a great supper and invited many. (Luke 14:16-24). Each made an excuse. One bought a piece of ground, another bought five yoke of oxen, and one had married a wife, and they said they could not come. The man sent his servants out into the streets and compelled others to come in so that his supper would be eaten. Jesus has come but many are making excuses as to why they are not serving Him. The time will come when it will be too late. They will be shut out forever from His presence.

Our last verse tells us that through the efforts of Zarubbabel, the temple was rebuilt.

August 25, 1968

EZRA CALLS FOR REFORMS

Printed Portion Ezra 7:6; 9:10-15; 10:10-12

Ezra 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.

Ezra 9:10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments.

11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this;

14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?

15 O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

Ezra 10:10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

11 Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

Memory Verse: For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. Ezra 8:22.

Practical Truth: We must come God's way to bring His pleasure upon us.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Ezra was a "ready scribe" which means he was not only a skilled copyist of the law of God, but was also a student and teacher of the law. The king granted his request to go to Jerusalem from Babylon. When he arrived he was greatly troubled because of the unfaithfulness of the people and at the time of the evening sacrifice he fell upon his knees before God in prayer. (Ezra 9:5) Verse 10 in our lesson is the beginning of his prayer which continues through verse 15. The people were deeply moved after hearing this public prayer. It was sad to Ezra for the people to sin again so quickly after they had been punished by being taken captives to Babylon for seventy years.

God had warned the children of Israel years before when they first came from Egypt that they were not to partake of the sins of the heathens nor to let their children marry their children. The land was all right, but it was called defiled because of the sins of the people who lived there. That was one reason why God took the land away from them and gave it to the Israelites. Now the Israelites had sinned, yet as Ezra prayed, "God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve."

Ezra stood up and preached to the people. He told them to make confession and to separate themselves from the strange wives that they had taken. This was a hard saying to them, yet they were willing to do anything to bring God's pleasure upon them. They said, "As thou hast said, so must we do." Is that in our hearts—to obey God even if it touches us deeply? We must never forget that God's ways are best and will bring us in contact with God and heaven in the end. —Sis. Marie Miles

The Tree of Life

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:8, 9. "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life." Gen. 3:22-24. We have here a very touching, serious, and important lesson. There was something about this tree of life that assured life forever to whoever partook of its fruit. Of what nature it was, and just how this was performed we are not certain. But we do know that it was there in the garden, intended of God for such a great blessing to man. But when man listened to Satan and disobeyed the commandment of the Lord God, he lost his right to the tree of life. This was passed upon all men. Man continued to subsist and live from the fruit of the ground, but no more did he have the healing, preserving substance of the tree of life to assure him of life evermore. And in the course of time the frame of dust weakened with age and infirmity until at last it yielded up the precious spirit that had been imparted of God. Thus death passed upon all men, for each succeeding generation was polluted by the nature of sin.

Mankind since then has lived and died, deprived of that glorious right that Adam had in this present life. For many ages the records reveal that the life years of men were many. But sooner or later each individual lost the battle for survival and closed his eyes in the sleep of death. But there is an unmistakable fact revealed in the Bible that presents life in a two-fold meaning. The one is natural life, and the other is spiritual life. Spiritual death was the cause for

natural death. Spiritual death resulted in separation from God. And natural death resulted from this spiritual death. But to regain that lost access to the tree of life has been a most desired quest; to secure for himself triumph over death and life forever has been a heart-felt desire of man. But there was only one ray of light shining through the ages that afforded such hope. And this was salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 3:18 says, "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." This was spoken of wisdom, which the scriptures declared in various places as the fear of God. And truly, since it was disobedience and disregard for God that caused man to lose his right to the tree of life, it would be quite apparent that the way back to such a blessed state would be the path of wisdom, the fear of God. Then Prov. 11:30 says that the fruit of the righteous was the tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise. So we see a little more about the tree of life and things that pertain to it: Righteousness, wisdom, and the winning of souls. And as concerning the winning of souls, Psalms 19 had something to say about that. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Verses 7-9. Simplicity, perfection, light, purity, holiness, cleanness, and truth all enter the picture now. And in this same chapter the writer says concerning the law of God: "By them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? [That is, who can understand his own personal sins?] Cleanse thou me from secret [or hidden] faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

It is a Biblical fact that in God Almighty we "live and move, and have our being." Acts 17:28. It is another Biblical fact that the cause for death was the spiritual separation of God from man. It was that departure from His holiness and pleasure that caused the wrath of God to sentence man to death. But sin and transgression must be reckoned with man. Therefore in the course of the plan of God a law having to do with man's relationship with God and man was given. This was the law of Moses given on Mt. Sinai. Its standard was, "The man that doeth those things, shall live by them." Rom. 10:5. But we have the record of one man who found that he could not find life by the law, but rather he found death. "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." Rom. 7:9, 10. This was not death of the body, but spiritual death, separation from God's pleasure. It would take a lengthy discussion to bring out every point on this, but we can

readily assume that death, spiritually and naturally, came upon us because of sin, and sin becomes real to us when we have a knowledge of God's holy law. This was the true purpose of the law of Moses. It was not to justify, although it seemingly had that appearance. But in the end, it just went to prove that man truly was cut off from God and in a terrible state of transgression. And such a state just paved the way for the real deliverance that was to come through the promised Messiah.

Jesus Christ came into the world as the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth to bring life unto the souls of men. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10. He came into the world to regain for lost man the blessed right of the tree of life. He hath abolished death, and hath brought to light (or to the access and understanding of man) life and immortality through the gospel. 2 Tim. 1:10. Jesus presented Himself to men as the Bread of Life, saying, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." And then as a way of explanation he added: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And when He asked if His disciples would leave Him as the multitude was doing, Peter answered resolutely: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." John 6:32-69. Therefore we conclude that Jesus Christ becomes to us in His Word, His Spirit, His doctrine and example of life and meekness the tree of life. To eat of Him means to live forever, even as to eat of the tree of life meant eternal life in the beginning. But this time, eternal life must come to us through the resurrection. And even as spiritual life was the basis of eternal life in the beginning, so even it is now. Jesus spoke in John 5:25-29 of two separate resurrections. Close survey and honest intent concerning his saying will reveal that the first resurrection is a spiritual one, and the second one is that of the body.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Rev. 2:7. The term "overcome" here means a real triumph over sin and the evil of the world, such that brought the great separation between God and men. "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22:14. Oh, the blessed thought of the tree of life!

—Leslie Busbee

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