

Lesson 3
Sabbath Afternoon, October 10
Old Testament Prophets

Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra, in addition to his priestly training, had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the so-called wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God: he longed for wisdom to carry out God's will. And so he "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it."

This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God's people, as given in the writings of Old Testament prophets and kings. He was impressed by the Spirit of God to search the historical and poetical books of the Bible, to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed, and His people to be carried captive into a heathen land.

Ezra gave special study to the experiences of God's chosen people, from the time the promise was made to Abraham, to the deliverance from Egyptian bondage and the exodus. He studied the instruction given them at the foot of Mount Sinai, and throughout the long period of the wilderness-wandering. As he learned more and still more concerning God's dealings with His children, and began to realize how sacred was the law given at Sinai, Ezra's heart was stirred as never before. He experienced a new and thorough conversion, and determined to master the records of Old Testament history, that he might use this knowledge, not for selfish purposes, but to bring blessing and light to his people. Some of the prophecies were about to be fulfilled; he would search diligently for the light that had been obscured.

Ezra took pains with his studies. He endeavored to gain a heart-preparation for the work he believed was appointed him. He sought God earnestly, that he might be a workman of whom his Lord would not be ashamed. He searched out the words that had been written concerning the duties of God's denominated people; and he found the solemn pledge made by the Israelites, that they would obey the words of the Lord; and the pledge that God, in return, had made, promising them His blessing as a reward of obedience. —*To Be Like Jesus*, p. 118.

The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Christ as manifested to the patriarchs, as symbolized in the sacrificial service, as portrayed in the law, and as revealed by the prophets is the riches of the Old Testament. Christ in His life, His death, and His resurrection; Christ as He is manifested by the Holy Spirit, is the treasure of the New. Both Old and New present truths that will continually reveal new depths of meaning to the earnest seeker —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 462, 463.

Christ reproached His disciples with their slowness of comprehension. . . . After His resurrection, as He was walking to Emmaus with two of the disciples, He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures, so explaining the Old Testament to them that they saw in its teachings a meaning that the writers themselves had not seen. —*Lift Him Up*, p. 115.

It would seem that after showing courage so undaunted, after triumphing so completely over king and priests and people, Elijah could never afterward have given way to despondency nor been awed into timidity. But he who had been blessed with so many evidences of God's loving care was not above the frailties of mankind, and in this dark hour his faith and courage forsook him. . . . Had he remained where he was, had he made God his refuge and strength, standing steadfast for the truth, he would have been shielded from harm. The Lord would have given him another signal victory by sending His judgments on Jezebel. . . .

Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God. . . . Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being. . . .

For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Faith and activity will impart assurance and satisfaction that will increase day by day. . . . In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. . . . And He will bestow upon His faithful servants the measure of efficiency that their need demands. . . .

Did God forsake Elijah in his hour of trial? Oh, no! He loved His servant no less when Elijah felt himself forsaken of God and man than when, in answer to his prayer, fire flashed from heaven and illuminated the mountaintop. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 213.

Elijah's retreat on Mount Horeb, though hidden from man, was known to God; and the weary and discouraged prophet was not left to struggle alone with the powers of darkness that were pressing upon him. . . .

God met His tried servant with the inquiry, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" I sent you to the brook Cherith and afterward to the widow of Sarepta. I commissioned you to return to Israel and to stand before the idolatrous priests on Carmel, and I girded you with strength to guide the chariot of the king to the gate of Jezreel. But who sent you on this hasty flight into the wilderness? What errand have you here? . . .

Much depends on the unceasing activity of those who are true and loyal, and for this reason Satan puts forth every possible effort to thwart the divine purpose to be wrought out through the obedient. He causes some to lose sight of their high and holy mission, and to become satisfied with the pleasures of this life. . . . Others he causes to flee in discouragement from duty, because of opposition or persecution. . . . To every child of God whose voice the enemy of souls has succeeded in silencing, the question is addressed, "What doest thou here?" I commissioned you to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to prepare a people for the day of God. Why are you here? —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 214.

Monday, October 12
Identifying True Prophets

God's servants are to work for the higher classes, but this does not mean that they are to bind themselves up with the honored of the earth, depending on them for strength, influence, and success. The Lord will often incline the hearts of those in positions of responsibility to grant favors to His commandment-keeping people. But when God's servants leave Him to solicit recognition from men of the world, they exchange power for weakness.

We have a most solemn work before us, the importance of which we can only understand by the light which is shining from God's Word on the past and the present. Who is holding fast the faith once delivered to the saints? Who, amid the cries of "Lo here" and "Lo there," is showing unshaken confidence in the Word of God? The faith of the present connects us with the past and points us to the future.

We may learn valuable lessons from the experience of the prophet Elisha. Elisha was chosen by the Lord as Elijah's helper, and through test and trial he proved himself true to his trust. He was willing to be and do anything the Lord directed. He did not seek to shun the humblest service, but was as faithful in the performance of smaller duties as of larger responsibilities. He was always willing to serve in any position to which the Lord pointed him, however disagreeable it might be to his natural inclinations. And at every step he learned lessons of humility and service. . . .

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (2 Kings 2:9). He did not ask for worldly honor, for a high place among the great men of the earth. That for which he craved was a double portion of the Spirit given to the one God was about to honor with translation. He knew that nothing but a double portion of the Spirit that had rested on Elijah could fit him to fill the place Elijah had filled, because Elijah had the experience and wisdom of age, which cannot by any method be imparted to the young. . . .

Had you been asked this question, what would you have answered? What is the greatest desire of your heart as you engage in the service of God? —*The Upward Look*, p. 331.

Elijah had thought that he alone in Israel was a worshiper of the true God. But He who reads the hearts of all revealed to the prophet that there were many others who, through the long years of apostasy, had remained true to Him. . . .

From Elijah's experience during those days of discouragement and apparent defeat there are many lessons to be drawn, lessons invaluable to the servants of God in this age, marked as it is by general departure from right. The apostasy prevailing today is similar to that which in the prophet's day overspread Israel. In the exaltation of the human above the divine, in the praise of popular leaders, in the worship of mammon, and in the placing of the teachings of science above the truths of revelation, multitudes today are following after Baal. Doubt and unbelief are exercising their baleful influence over mind and heart, and many are substituting for the oracles of God the theories of men. It is publicly taught that we have reached a time when human reason should be exalted above the teachings of the Word. The law of God, the divine standard of righteousness, is declared to be of no effect. The enemy of all truth is working with deceptive power to cause men and women to place human institutions where God should be, and to forget that which was ordained for the happiness and salvation of mankind.

Yet this apostasy, widespread as it has come to be, is not universal. Not all in the world are lawless and sinful; not all have taken sides with the enemy. God has many. . . who are hoping against hope that Jesus will come soon to end the reign of sin and death. . . . These need the personal help of those who have learned to know God and the power of His word. . . . As those who have an understanding of Bible truth try to seek out the men and women who are longing for light, angels of God will attend them. . . . Many will cease to pay homage to man-made institutions and will take their stand fearlessly on the side of God and His law. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 215.

Nathan the prophet was bidden to bear a message of reproof to David. It was a message terrible in its severity. To few sovereigns could such a reproof be given but at the price of certain death to the reprover. Nathan delivered the divine sentence unflinchingly, yet with such heaven-born wisdom as to engage the sympathies of the king, to arouse his conscience, and to call from his lips the sentence of death upon himself. . . .

This experience was most painful to David, but it was most bene-ficial. But for the mirror which Nathan held up before him, in which he so clearly recognized his own likeness, he would have gone on unconvicted of his heinous sin, and would have been ruined. The conviction of his guilt was the saving of his soul. He saw himself in another light, as the Lord saw him, and as long as he lived he repented of his sin. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 179.

Wednesday, October 14
Women Prophets

None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men and women who have lived the nearest to God, who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.

So will it be with all who behold Christ. The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the heart before Him. At every advance step in our Christian experience our repentance will deepen. We shall know that our sufficiency is in Christ alone and shall make the apostle's confession our own: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Romans 7:18; Galatians 6:14.) —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561.

Josiah, from his earliest manhood, had endeavored to take advantage of his position as king to exalt the principles of God's holy law. And now, while Shaphan the scribe was reading to him out of the book of the law, the king discerned in this volume a treasure of knowledge, a powerful ally, in the work of reform he so much desired to see wrought in the land. He resolved to walk in the light of its counsels, and also to do all in his power to acquaint his people with its teachings, and to lead them, if possible, to cultivate reverence and love for the law of heaven.

But was it possible to bring about the needed reform? From all that he could learn from the reading of the volume before him, Israel had almost reached the limit of divine forbearance; soon God would arise to punish those who had brought dishonor upon His name. Already the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people. Overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay, Josiah rent his garments, and bowed before God in agony of spirit, seeking pardon for the sins of an impenitent nation.

At that time the prophetess Huldah was living in Jerusalem, near the Temple. The mind of the king, filled with anxious foreboding, reverted to her; and he determined to inquire of the Lord through this chosen messenger, to learn, if possible, whether by any means within his power he might save erring Judah, now on the verge of ruin.

The gravity of the situation, and the respect in which he held the prophetess, led him to choose as his messengers to her the first men of the kingdom. "Go ye," he bade them, "inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." —*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 268.

Thursday, October 15
False Prophets

How shall we distinguish God's true servants from the false prophets who Christ said should arise to deceive many? There is only one test of character—the law of Jehovah.

The Israelites placed over their doors a signature of blood to show that they were God's property. So the children of God in this age will bear the signature God has appointed. They will place themselves in harmony with God's holy law. A mark is placed upon every one of God's people just as verily as a mark was placed over the doors of the Hebrew dwellings, to preserve the people from the general ruin. God declares, "I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them" (Ezekiel 20:12). . . . There is no need for us to be deceived. . . .

Satanic agencies have made the earth a stage for horrors which no language can describe. War and bloodshed are carried on by nations claiming to be Christian. A disregard for the law of God has brought its sure result. The great conflict now being waged is not merely a strife of man against man. On one side stands the Prince of life, acting as man's substitute and surety; on the other, the prince of darkness, with the fallen angels under his command. . . .

There will be a sharp conflict between those who are loyal to God and those who cast scorn upon His law. The church has joined hands with the world. Reverence to God's law has been subverted. The religious leaders are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men. As it was in the days of Noah, so it is in this age of the world. But shall the prevalence of disloyalty and transgression cause those who have revered the law of God to have less respect for it, to unite with the powers of earth to make it void? The truly loyal will not be carried away by the current of evil. They will not throw scorn and contempt on that which God has set apart as holy. The test comes to every one. There are only two sides. On which side are you? —*That I May Know Him*, p. 211.

The voice of God is speaking to us through His Word, and there are many voices that we will hear; but Christ has said we should beware of them who will say, Here is Christ or there is Christ. Then how shall we know that they have not the truth, unless we bring everything to the Scriptures? Christ has warned us to beware of false prophets who will come to us in His name, saying that they are Christ. . . .

The time is coming when Satan will work miracles right in your sight, claiming that he is Christ; and if your feet are not firmly established upon the truth of God, then you will be led away from your foundation. The only safety for you is to search for the truth as for hid treasures. Dig for the truth as you would for treasures in the earth, and present the Word of God, the Bible, before your heavenly Father, and say, Enlighten me; teach me what is truth. And when His Holy Spirit shall come into your hearts, to impress the truth into your souls, you will not let it go easily. —*To Be Like Jesus*, p. 117.

Friday, October 16
For Further Reading

Christ Triumphant, "Learning to Lead Through Serving," June 8, p. 166.
The Faith I Live By, "The Gifts of the Spirit," October 13, p. 292.