

Lesson 8
Sabbath Afternoon, November 14
Interpreting Prophetic Writings

The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great Advent Movement.

Adventists then held that the earth, or some portion of it, was the sanctuary. They understood that the cleansing of the sanctuary was the purification of the earth by the fires of the last great day, and that this would take place at the Second Advent. Hence the conclusion that Christ would return to the earth in 1844. But the appointed time had passed, and the Lord had not appeared. The believers knew that God's Word could not fail; their interpretation of the prophecy must be at fault; but where was the mistake? . . .

In their investigation they learned that there is no Scripture evidence sustaining the popular view that the earth is the sanctuary; but they found in the Bible a full explanation of the subject of the sanctuary, its nature, location, and services.

Those who followed in the light of the prophetic word saw that, instead of coming to the earth at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ then entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, to perform the closing work of atonement, preparatory to His coming. —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 284.

Now in the holy of holies they again beheld Him, their compassionate High Priest, soon to appear as their king and deliverer. Light from the sanctuary illumined the past, the present, and the future. They knew that God had led them by His unerring providence. Though, like the first disciples, they themselves had failed to understand the message which they bore, yet it had been in every respect correct. In proclaiming it they had fulfilled the purpose of God, and their labor had not been in vain in the Lord. Begotten "again unto a lively hope," they rejoiced "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Both the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," and the first angel's message, "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come," pointed to Christ's ministration in the most holy place, to the investigative judgment, and not to the coming of Christ for the redemption of His people and the destruction of the wicked. The mistake had not been in the reckoning of the prophetic periods, but in the event to take place at the end of the 2300 days. Through this error the believers had suffered disappointment, yet all that was foretold by the prophecy, and all that they had any Scripture warrant to expect, had been accomplished. At the very time when they were lamenting the failure of their hopes, the event had taken place which was foretold by the message, and which must be fulfilled before the Lord could appear to give reward to His servants. —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 423, 424.

Sunday, November 15
The Bible, Its Own Interpreter

Daniel sought the Lord when the decree went forth to slay all the wise men of the kingdom of Babylon because they could not relate or interpret a dream that had gone from the king's mind. He demanded not only the interpretation of the dream, but the relation of the dream itself. . . .

The magicians were full of fear and trembling. They declared that the request of the king was something unreasonable, and a test beyond that which had ever been required of anyone. The king became furious and acted like all persons who have great power and uncontrollable passions. He decided that every one of them should be put to death, and as Daniel and his fellows were numbered with the wise men, they also were to share their fate. . . .

Daniel came before the king and pleaded for time to bring this matter before the supreme court of the universe, from whose decision there could be no appeal. When his request was granted, Daniel laid the whole matter before his companions who were united with him in worshipping the true God.

The matter was carefully considered, and on their bended knees, they pleaded that God would give them the power and wisdom that alone would avail them in their great necessity. . . . With contrition of heart they submitted their case to the great Judge of the earth. It was all that they could do. . . .

Daniel prayed, "I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter." . . .

Daniel was imbued with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and he pleaded- that the wise men of Babylon should not be destroyed. The followers of Christ do not possess the attributes of Satan, which make it a pleasure to grieve and afflict the creatures of God. They have the spirit of their Master, who said, I am "come to seek and to save that which was lost." . . .

"Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation." . . . Then in all humility of mind he [Daniel] acknowledges that the wisdom is not in him, but in the God of heaven, and that the vision has been revealed to him for the sake of God's servants, and that the king might know the thoughts of his heart. —*Christ Triumphant*, p. 176.

The advent of the army of Cyrus before the walls of Babylon was to the Jews a sign that their deliverance from captivity was drawing nigh. More than a century before the birth of Cyrus, Inspiration had mentioned him by name, and had caused a record to be made of the actual work he should do in taking the city of Babylon unawares, and in preparing the way for the release of the children of the captivity. Through Isaiah the word had been spoken:

"Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; . . . to open before him the two-leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; 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: 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." Isaiah 45:1–3.

In the unexpected entry of the army of the Persian conqueror into the heart of the Babylonian capital by way of the channel of the river whose waters had been turned aside, and through the inner gates that in careless security had been left open and unprotected, the Jews had abundant evidence of the literal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the sudden overthrow of their oppressors. And this should have been to them an unmistakable sign that God was shaping the affairs of nations in their behalf; for inseparably linked with the prophecy outlining the manner of Babylon's capture and fall were the words:

"Cyrus, he is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 44:28; 45:13.

Nor were these the only prophecies upon which the exiles had opportunity to base their hope of speedy deliverance. The writings of Jeremiah were within their reach, and in these was plainly set forth the length of time that should elapse before the restoration of Israel from Babylon. "When seventy years are accomplished," the Lord had foretold through His messenger, "I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations." Jeremiah 25:12. Favor would be shown the remnant of Judah, in answer to fervent prayer. "I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." Jeremiah 29:14. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 551, 552.

The work of Sabbath reform to be accomplished in the last days is foretold in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil." (Isaiah 56:1, 2.) . . .

These words apply in the Christian age, as shown by the context: "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." (Verse 8.) Here is foreshadowed the gathering in of the Gentiles by the gospel. And upon those who then honor the Sabbath, a blessing is pronounced. Thus the obligation of the fourth commandment extends past the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, to the time when His servants should preach to all nations the message of glad tidings. . . .

Hallowed by the Creator's rest and blessing, the Sabbath was kept by Adam in his innocence in holy Eden; by Adam, fallen yet repentant, when he was driven from his happy estate. It was kept by all the patriarchs, from Abel to righteous Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob. When the chosen people were in bondage in Egypt, many, in the midst of prevailing idolatry, lost their knowledge of God's law; but when the Lord delivered Israel, He proclaimed His law in awful grandeur to the assembled multitude, that they might know His will and fear and obey Him forever.

From that day to the present the knowledge of God's law has been preserved in the earth, and the Sabbath of the fourth commandment has been kept. Though the "man of sin" succeeded in trampling underfoot God's holy day, yet even in the period of his supremacy there were, hidden in secret places, faithful souls who paid it honor. Since the Reformation, there have been some in every generation to maintain its observance. Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath. —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 451, 453.

In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite. With the cunning of the serpent they entrench themselves behind disconnected utterances construed to suit their carnal desires. Thus do many willfully pervert the word of God. Others, who have an active imagination, seize upon the figures and symbols of Holy Writ, interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter, and then they present their vagaries as the teachings of the Bible.

Whenever the study of the Scriptures is entered upon without a prayerful, humble, teachable spirit, the plainest and simplest as well as the most difficult passages will be wrested from their true meaning. . . . The Word of God is plain to all who study it with a prayerful heart. Every truly honest soul will come to the light of truth. "Light is sown for the righteous." Psalm 97:11. And no church can advance in holiness unless its members are earnestly seeking for truth as for hid treasure. —*Maranatha*, p. 132.

The Book of books has the highest claim to our reverent attention. We must not be satisfied with superficial knowledge, but must seek to learn the full meaning of the words of truth, and to drink deep of the spirit of the Holy Oracles. To read a certain number of chapters daily, or commit to memory a stipulated amount without careful thought as to the meaning of the sacred text, is a work of little profit. . . . Some portions of Scripture are, indeed, too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie upon the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture; there must be careful research and patient reflection. And such study will be richly repaid. As the miner discovers veins of precious metal concealed beneath the surface of the earth, so will he who perseveringly searches the Word of God as for hid treasure, find truths of greatest value, which are concealed from the view of the careless seeker.

No effort should be spared to establish a right habit of study. If the mind wanders, bring it back. If the intellectual and moral taste has been perverted by the overwrought and exciting tales of fiction, . . . then you have a battle to fight with yourself to overcome this depraved habit. . . . We are surrounded by unbelief. The very atmosphere seems charged with it. Only by constant effort can we resist its power. . . . I appeal to young and old: Make the Word of God your textbook. Here you will find the true standard of character. . . .

All over the field of revelation are scattered the glad springs of heavenly truth, and peace, and joy. They are within the reach of every seeker. The words of inspiration, pondered in the heart, will be as streams flowing from the river of the water of life. Our Saviour prayed that the minds of the disciples might be opened to understand the Scriptures. And whenever we study the Bible with a prayerful heart, the Holy Spirit is near to open to us the meaning of the words we read. —*Our High Calling*, p. 205.

The apostle says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident. . . .

The Lord God, the Creator of the worlds, at infinite cost has given the gospel to the world. —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 187, 188.

When a real love for the Bible is awakened, and the student begins to realize how vast is the field and how precious its treasure, he will desire to seize upon every opportunity for acquainting himself with God's word. Its study will be restricted to no special time or place. And this continuous study is one of the best means of cultivating a love for the Scriptures. Let the student keep his Bible always with him. As you have opportunity, read a text and meditate upon it. While walking the streets, waiting at a railway station, waiting to meet an engagement, improve the opportunity to gain some precious thought from the treasure house of truth.

The great motive powers of the soul are faith, hope, and love; and it is to these that Bible study, rightly pursued, appeals. The outward beauty of the Bible, the beauty of imagery and expression, is but the setting, as it were, for its real treasure—the beauty of holiness. In its record of the men who walked with God, we may catch glimpses of His glory. In the One "altogether lovely" we behold Him, of whom all beauty of earth and heaven is but a dim reflection. "I, if I be lifted up," He said, "will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32. As the student of the Bible beholds the Redeemer, there is awakened in the soul the mysterious power of faith, adoration, and love. Upon the vision of Christ the gaze is fixed, and the beholder grows into the likeness of that which he adores. The words of the apostle Paul become the language of the soul: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: . . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." Philippians 3:8–10.

The springs of heavenly peace and joy unsealed in the soul by the words of Inspiration will become a mighty river of influence to bless all who come within its reach. Let the youth of today, the youth who are growing up with the Bible in their hands, become the recipients and the channels of its life-giving energy, and what streams of blessing would flow forth to the world!—influences of whose power to heal and comfort we can scarcely conceive—rivers of living water, fountains "springing up unto everlasting life." —*Education*, pp. 191, 192.

Friday, November 20
For Further Reading

Ye Shall Receive Power, "Meditating on God's Word," April 16, p. 115.

To Be Like Jesus, "To Feed the Soul, Commune Constantly With Jesus," November 24, p. 342.