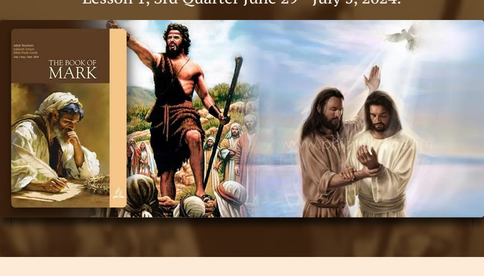
The Beginning of the Gospel

Lesson 1, 3rd Quarter June 29 - July 5, 2024.



Sabbath Afternoon, June 29

Memory Text:

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. KJV — Mark 1:14, 15

"'Sent forth by the Holy Ghost,' Paul and Barnabas, after their ordination by the brethren in Antioch, 'departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.' Thus the apostles began their first missionary journey. AA 166.1

"Cyprus was one of the places to which the believers had fled from Jerusalem because of the persecution following the death of Stephen. It was from Cyprus that certain men had journeyed to Antioch, 'preaching the Lord Jesus.' Acts 11:20. Barnabas himself was 'of the country of Cyprus' (Acts 4:36); and now he and Paul, accompanied by John Mark, a kinsman of Barnabas, visited this island field. AA 166.2

"Mark's mother was a convert to the Christian religion, and her home at Jerusalem was an asylum for the disciples. There they were always sure of a welcome and a season of rest. It was during one of these visits of the apostles to his mother's home, that Mark proposed to Paul and Barnabas that he should accompany them on their missionary tour. He felt the favor of God in his heart and longed to devote himself entirely to the work of the gospel ministry." AA 166.3

Sunday, June 30

The Failed Missionary

Read Acts 12:12. How is Mark introduced in the book of Acts?

"After their ordination Paul and Barnabas "went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus." Barnabas was "a native of Cyprus" (Acts 4:36, RSV), and now he and Paul, accompanied by John Mark, a relative of Barnabas, visited this island. Cyprus was one of the places to which believers had fled because of persecution following the death of Stephen. TT 89.1

"Mark's mother was a convert, and the apostles were always sure of a welcome and rest in her home at Jerusalem. During one of these visits to his mother's home, Mark proposed to Paul and Barnabas that he accompany them on their missionary tour. He longed to devote himself to the work of the gospel." TT 89.2

Read Acts 13: 1-5, 13. How did John Mark get attached to Saul and Barnabas, and what was the outcome?

"Barnabas himself was 'of the country of Cyprus' (Acts 4:36); and now he and Paul, accompanied by John Mark, a kinsman of Barnabas, visited this island field." AA 166.2

"Arriving at Salamis, the apostles 'preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.... And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.'" AA 167.1

Monday, July 1

A Second Chance

Read Acts 15:36-39. Why did Paul reject John Mark and why did Barnabas give him a second chance?

"Paul and his company continued their journey, going to Perga, in Pamphylia. Their way was toilsome; they encountered hardships and privations, and were beset with dangers on every side. In the towns and cities through which they passed, and along the lonely highways, they were surrounded by dangers seen and unseen. But Paul and Barnabas had learned to trust God's power to deliver. Their hearts were filled with fervent love for perishing souls. As faithful shepherds in search of the lost sheep, they gave no thought to their own ease and convenience. Forgetful of self, they faltered not when weary, hungry, and cold. They had in view but one object—the salvation of those who had wandered far from the fold. AA 169.2

"It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem." AA 169.3

Read Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24, and 1 Peter 5:13. What details about Mark's recovery do these verses suggest?

"This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ. In after years his solicitude in Mark's behalf was richly rewarded, for the young man gave himself unreservedly to the Lord and to the work of proclaiming the gospel message in difficult fields. Under the blessing of God, and the wise training of Barnabas, he developed into a valuable worker. AA 170.1

"Paul was afterward reconciled to Mark and received him as a fellow laborer. He also recommended him to the Colossians as one who was a fellow worker "unto the kingdom of God," and "a comfort unto me." Colossians 4:11. Again, not long before his own death, he spoke of Mark as "profitable" to him "for the ministry." 2 Timothy 4:11." AA 170.2

Tuesday, July 2

The Messenger

Read Mark 1:1-8. Who are the characters in these verses and what do they say and do?

John was called to do a special work; he was to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths. The Lord did not send him to the school of the prophets and rabbis. He took him away from the assemblies of men to the desert, that he might learn of nature and nature's God. God did not desire him to have the mold of the priests and rulers. He was called to do a special work. The Lord gave him his message. Did he go to the priests and rulers and ask if he might proclaim this message?—No, God put him away from them that he might not be influenced by their spirit and teaching. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 40:3-5). This is the very message that must be given to our people; we are near the end of time, and the message is, Clear the King's highway; gather out the stones; raise up a standard for the people. The people must be awakened. It is no time now to cry peace and safety. We are exhorted to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 5:1). 1SM 410.1

Read Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1. What do these three passages have in common?

"When Moses was chosen as the messenger of the covenant, the word given him was, 'Be thou for the people to Godward.'" -- Gospel Workers, p. 20. "Christ the messenger of the covenant, brought the tidings of salvation." -- Gospel Workers, p. 44.

Whereas Gospel Workers applies the term to both Moses and Christ, Christ Himself applies it to John the Baptist. He said "unto the multitudes concerning John...But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. 11:7, 9, 10, 14.

As God had made both spoken and written covenants with His ancient people that He would send them Moses, John, and Christ, they came in fulfillment of those covenants. And each having brought a message, each in his own time was the Messenger of the Covenant. Nevertheless, the words of Malachi make plain that the Messenger of the Covenant is, in the strictest sense Elijah the prophet (Mal. 3:1-5; 4:5), the last messenger who prepares the way of the Lord. (See Testimonies to Ministers, p. 475.)

In the last analysis, however, the title Messenger of the Covenant belongs to the Holy Spirit. For example, 1 Peter 3:18-20 states that Christ preached to the antediluvians by the same "Spirit" Who "quickened" Him. But as He preached by the Spirit in the person of Noah, not of Himself, He thereby unfolded the truth that the Holy Spirit is in all His messengers alike.

Thus "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Pet. 1:21. Briefly summarized, the term Messenger of the Covenant means the Holy Spirit (the invisible Christ) in Heaven's visible representative--be it Moses, John, Christ, Elijah, or some other.

Wednesday, July 3

Jesus' Baptism

Read Mark 1:9-13. Who is present at the baptism of Jesus, and what happens?

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3:16, 17.

Having been baptized by immersion, and coming straightway out of the water, Jesus was immediately led to be tempted of the Devil.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the Devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and sitteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the Devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the Devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." Matt. 4:1-11.

Here is our example. After water baptism, temptations and victories are to be our lot, too. Jesus, you see, met the Devil with a "Thus saith the Lord," with what was written. If we cannot interest ourselves in the Bible as much as He was interested in It, if we do not study to know what He would have us to do, how, then, can we face our temptations and come out victorious? Is it any wonder that many after baptism fall out of the way? The very thing that would make them strong in the faith as they see God giving them glorious victory, they shrink from, not knowing that after a storm of rain and wind, there comes sunshine and a calm. Job was tried to the limit, but gained the victory, and afterwards received double for all his losses. Why can not we?

Having gotten the victory over His temptation, Jesus was never again troubled by the Devil. And Job and all God's great men by experience found the same relief from Satan.

Our position against sin, therefore, must be definite, without the slightest wavering. We, too, must let the Devil know that we mean business, if we are ever to find peace.

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Heb. 6:1-6. To make reservation for sin, is as it were to dig your own eternal grave.

Thursday, July 4

The Gospel according to Jesus

Read Mark 1;14, 15. What are the three parts of the gospel message that Jesus proclaimed?

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Mark 1:14, 15. DA 231.1

"Thus the gospel message, as given by the Saviour Himself, was based on the prophecies. The "time" which He declared to be fulfilled was the period made known by the angel Gabriel to Daniel. "Seventy weeks," said the angel, "are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." Daniel 9:24. A day in prophecy stands for a year. See Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6. The seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety days, represent four hundred and ninety years. A starting point for this period is given: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks," sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred and eighty-three years. Daniel 9:25. The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, as completed by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus (see Ezra 6:14; 7:1, 9, margin), went into effect in the autumn of B. C. 457. From this time four hundred and eighty-three years extend to the autumn of A. D. 27. According to the prophecy, this period was to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One. In A. D. 27, Jesus at His baptism received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and soon afterward began His ministry. Then the message was proclaimed. 'The time is fulfilled.' DA 233.1

"Then, said the angel, "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week [seven years]." For seven years after the Saviour entered on His ministry, the gospel was to be preached especially to the Jews; for three and a half years by Christ Himself; and afterward by the apostles. "In the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Daniel 9:27. In the spring of A. D. 31, Christ the true sacrifice was offered on Calvary. Then the veil of the temple was rent in twain, showing that the sacredness and significance of the sacrificial service had departed. The time had come for the earthly sacrifice and oblation to cease. DA 233.2

"The one week—seven years—ended in A. D. 34. Then by the stoning of Stephen the Jews finally sealed their rejection of the gospel; the disciples who were scattered abroad by persecution "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4); and shortly after, Saul the persecutor was converted, and became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles." DA 233.3

The time of Christ's coming, His anointing by the Holy Spirit, His death, and the giving of the gospel to the Gentiles, were definitely pointed out. It was the privilege of the Jewish people to understand these prophecies, and to recognize their fulfillment in the mission of Jesus. Christ urged upon His disciples the importance of prophetic study. Referring to the prophecy given to Daniel in regard to their time, He said, "Whoso readeth, let him understand." Matthew 24:15. After His resurrection He explained to the disciples in "all the prophets" "the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:27. The Saviour had spoken through all the prophets. "The Spirit of Christ which was in them" "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." 1 Peter 1:11. DA 234.1

It was Gabriel, the angel next in rank to the Son of God, who came with the divine message to Daniel. It was Gabriel, "His angel," whom Christ sent to open the future to the beloved John; and a blessing is pronounced on those who read and hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written therein. Revelation 1:3. DA 234.2

"'The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.' While 'the secret things belong unto the Lord our God,' 'those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.' Amos 3:7; Deuteronomy 29:29. God has given these things to us, and His blessing will attend the reverent, prayerful study of the prophetic scriptures." DA 234.3

Friday, June 28

Further Thought

We as students and gospel teachers have for years dwelt heavily on the signs of Christ's second coming, but not at all on the signs of the Kingdom. As a result of this, Christendom has theoretically merged the signs of the Kingdom with the signs of the second Advent.

Since we as a people know some of the signs of Christ's second coming, and none of the signs of the Kingdom, we had better now concentrate on the signs of the latter.

Matt. 13:24-30 – "Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the Householder came and said unto Him, Sir, didst not Thou sow good seed in Thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto Him, Wilt Thou then that we go and gather them up? But He said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into My barn."

This parable of the Kingdom, you note, contains three periods of time: First, the period of sowing the seed – the time of Christ's ministry; second, the period of growing – the time from the ascension of Christ to the harvest; third, the time of harvest – a short period of time "at the end of the world" (Matt. 13:49), the period in which the earth is lightened with the glory of the angel (Rev. 18:1), and in which all God's people are called out of Babylon (verse 4). Then those who did not respond to this gathering call will cry out: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Jer. 8:20. The "harvest," therefore, is "the end of the world." Verse 49. It commences in the church and ends in Babylon.

The work of the harvest, very obviously, is synonymous with the Judgment that decides who are tares and who are wheat–who are to be burned and destroyed as noxious weeds, and who are as precious wheat to be admitted into "the barn," the Kingdom. Thus it is that the Judgment is the cleansing of the sanctuary (Dan. 8:14), "the house of God," the temple to which the Lord suddenly comes and purifies His servants, the Levites. Here is the way the latter scripture reads:

Mal. 3:1-3, 5 – "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.... And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me, saith the Lord of hosts."

How many yields of fruit is the harvest to give? – If the 144,000 are the "first fruits" (Rev. 14:4), then there must be "second fruits," for where there is no second there can be no first. The word "firstfruits" absolutely necessitates second fruits.

Where do the first fruits come from, and where do the second fruits come

from? – We are plainly told that the first fruits are Israelites – all from the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8). Israel certainly stands for the church membership at the time they are sealed; the title "Israel" cannot be construed to mean the world. The firstfruits, therefore, are harvested from the church itself at the time the separation begins. The word "sealed" means placed in a safe place – sealed. This is exactly what the apostle Peter says:

1 Pet. 4:17, 18 – "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Now, then, if the Judgment begins first in the "house of God," in the church, then it will end in the world, outside the church circles. The parable of the "net" and the Revelation of John very briefly and concisely bring this truth still better to the surface.

Matt. 13:47-50 – "Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Clearly, the net represents the gospel church into which are caught both hypocrite and saint. Accordingly, in the time of the firstfruit harvest (the Judgment "in the house of God") "at the end of the world" (verse 49), the angels sever the wicked from among the just, not the just from among the wicked. But in the second fruit harvest (the Judgment in the world) the separation is the reverse: the just are taken out from among the wicked, not the wicked from among the just, so says The Revelation: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Rev. 18:4. Plainly, the Judgment "in the house of God" is the harvest in which the hypocrites as "tares" are burned, but as bad "fish" they are cast out. In the Judgment in Babylon (in the world), though, not the bad, but the good are taken out and brought into the purified house of God where there is no sin and no sinner, and where there is no danger of the plagues. This same truth concerning the house of God again comes to us in these words:

Isa. 66:15, 16, 19, 20 – "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many....And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord."

Again we here see that those who escape the slaying of the Lord "in the house of God" (obviously the firstfruits, "the servants of God"), are sent to the nations who know not God, and from there they bring all their brethren (the second fruits) to the purified house of God where there is neither sin nor sinner, and where the plagues of Babylon therefore do not fall.

We have now positively seen that there are first and second fruits: one from the church – the 144,000 sons of Jacob; and one from all nations – the great multitude which no man can number (Rev. 7:9).

Who gathers the firstfruits if the firstfruits gather the second fruits? – Let us find our answer by reading–

Rev. 14:14-19 – "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud One sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to Him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in Thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in His sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God."

Here we are again told that there are two reapings, one by the Son of Man, and another by an angel. The reaping by the Son of Man precedes the reaping by the angel. "Son of Man," therefore, gathers the firstfruits, and the angel gathers the second fruits. (The vines, not the fully ripe grapes, he casts in the wine press.) The Son of Man Himself obviously reaps the firstfruits because His servants (figuratively the angel of the church of the Laodiceans) are in no condition to do such a work, for they themselves are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," and know it not (Rev. 3:14-18).

Looking down to this very time, the Spirit of Prophecy in Isaiah's day said:

Isa. 63:5 – "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me."

Here you note that when the time came there was not even one among His servants "to uphold" the work of the harvest, and consequently the Lord Himself did the work without them.

For the second reaping, however, He uses His guileless "servants," the "firstfruits," the 144,000, as prefigured by the angel with the sharp sickle (Rev. 14:17, 18). And just as there are two fruits and two reapings from two different places, the church and the world, there are, as shown before, also two ways of harvesting: at first the bad are cast from among the good, and at last the good are called out from among the bad.

These are some of the signs and events that precede the Kingdom of glory, the second coming of Christ.

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