

* The Sunday School *

BIBLE LESSON

Abridged from Peloubet's Notes.

First Quarter.

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS.

Lesson IV. January 22.—John 3:1-16.

Study Verses 1-21.

Compare 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

Commit Verses 14-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, John 3:16.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE INQUIRER.—Vs. 1, 2. I. THERE WAS A MAN OF THE PHARISEES. The best and most religious sect of the Jews, holding the most correct opinions (Matt. 23:23) and looking for the Messiah, and, therefore, the best of them, like Nicodemus and Paul, were the best soil for planting the gospel truths. NICODEMUS. A Greek name in common use. All we know of him is recorded here and in John 7:50; 19:39, which implies that he became a disciple. A RULER OF THE JEWS. ('Archon') a Greek term, applied to the members of the Sanhedrim.)

CAME TO JESUS BY NIGHT. He went by night (1) because common prudence would lead him so to do. It was not wise to commit himself till he knew more about the new teacher. He would not launch out on an unknown voyage over an unknown sea. (2) Others might have interfered with his investigations. (3) The quiet evening hour, after the public work and teaching of Jesus were over, and the crowds had retired to their homes, was by far the best time for this purpose. It is well to note that his going at all implies strength of character, unprejudiced desire for the truth, earnestness, and honesty of purpose.

THOU ART A TEACHER COME FROM GOD. And therefore with a message from God which would be eyes to the blind and a light to the path. Nicodemus came, that he might find an answer to the puzzling questions that thronged around him. He came because Jesus had publicly given proofs that he was from God. FOR NO MAN CAN DO THESE MIRACLES, signs, etc. It is possible that, as Professor Dodds thinks, he came also to guide and help "this inexperienced Galilean" in his mission. He was a man of influence, and might thus aid the cause.

II. THE TEACHER PRESENTS THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.—THE ESSENTIAL CONDITION OF ENTERING IS A NEW BIRTH, A NEW LIFE.—Vs. 3-8. 3. JESUS ANSWERED THE INQUIRER'S needs, the questions of his soul. VERILY, VERILY. Laying great emphasis on the truth that follows. EXCEPT A MAN (any one) BE BORN AGAIN, or "anew," as in R. V., margin, "from above." Whosoever is "born again" is "born anew" and "born from above." HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The declaration is explicit that a new spiritual life is necessary, not only to enter into, but even to form any correct conception of the kingdom of God. Christ's answer is equivalent to "It is not learning, but life, that is wanted for Messiah's kingdom, and life must begin by birth." (See Matt. 18:3). THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Not an outward kingdom, or a place into which any one can enter without regard to character, but that condition or state where God reigns as king, where he is the supreme object of love and service.

5. EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT.

It is not merely to the ordinance of baptism that Jesus refers, but to the truths which underlie the ordinance, and to the blessings of which it is a sign and seal, and new birth including the putting away of the old unclean nature and the putting on of the new.

6. THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH IS FLESH, etc. "By the word 'flesh' he signifies the appetites, desires, faculties, which animate and govern the body, as well as the body itself—the whole equipment with which nature furnishes a man for life in this world. This natural birth gives a man entrance into much, and forever determines much that has important bearings on his person, character and destiny."

Thus Jesus lays down the law which makes the new birth a necessity for entering the spiritual kingdom of God. The spiritual life cannot be produced by natural generation. A man may be born a Jew, but he must come by his spiritual life from a spiritual source.

7. MARVEL NOT, because of the reason given in v. 8. Natural life is as full of mysteries as spiritual life. YE MUST BE. The emphasis is on "ye," even the Jews, even the best and most learned of the Jews.

MUST BE. There is no escape from this law.

8. THE WIND BLOWETH. The term for "wind" in Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as in Greek, was also the term for "spirit," the immaterial in man being represented in a metaphor by the invisible but life-giving breath. WHERE IT LISTETH (pleaseth), i. e., according to its unknown laws, and not according to our pleasure or will. THOU HEAREST THE SOUND THEREOF, etc. You see the results, but you cannot tell the causes which are beyond our reach. We know the facts though we cannot see the methods. "At the pauses of the conversation we may picture they heard the wind without." SO IS EVERY ONE THAT IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT. The Spirit's methods we cannot know, but the facts of the new life are as plain and certain as that the strong wind bends the forest trees. We may not know the day nor the hour when we are born again, but we may know the fact by the fruits, as we know not how life works in a peach tree, but that it does work is proved by the peaches that grow on it.

III. THE AUTHORITY BEHIND THE TEACHER.—Vs. 9-13. 9. HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE? The mysteries in religion are like the mysteries in nature. In both cases the facts are easily comprehended, and plain enough even for a child to use. In both cases the methods of operation are a mystery. The life of a seed is as mysterious as the new birth of a soul.

10. ART THOU A MASTER (rather, "the teacher," as in R. V.) OF ISRAEL, the teacher of the Israelites, known and distinguished by thy learning? AND KNOWEST NOT THESE THINGS? Which are so important that every teacher should know them, which are taught in the Scriptures you study (Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26), and are taking place on the earth before your eyes.

11. WE SPEAK THAT (what) WE DO KNOW. What Jesus does for men; the changes made by the Holy Spirit in the new birth; the freer life, the higher joys; the victories over sin; the holier lives; the nobler motives, are matters not of mere theory nor of promise, but of experience and knowledge. Here is found the proof of the gospel from the human side. AND YE RECEIVE NOT OUR WITNESS. Ye Jews, the nation as a whole.

12. IF I HAVE TOLD YOU EARTHLY THINGS. Things whose proper place and manifestation are on the earth, such as the new birth of which he had spoken in vs. 3-8. HOW SHALL YE BELIEVE, IF I TELL YOU OF HEAVENLY THINGS? "Heavenly things" are those truths which could not be learned without a revelation from heaven; divine forgiveness, the perfect, free, universal love of God, the divine nature of Christ the atonement, the reality of life beyond the grave, the way to obtain it, the blessedness of heaven, the glories of the Messiah's kingdom on earth.

13. NO MAN HATH ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN, and brought back the testimony of an eye witness: BUT HE THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. EVEN THE SON OF MAN. Thus showing that he was the one who had come down from heaven. The "Son of Man" is the true representative of humanity; not only God, but a real man, with all the feelings, hopes, temptations, possibilities of man; the ideal man showing what man may become. WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. His home is in heaven, and he maintains continually a vital connection with heaven. So far as heaven is a state and a character, Jesus was always in heaven. The whole universe is heaven to him, for his senses are all open to perceive and receive.

IV. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE NEW LIFE CAN BE OBTAINED.—Vs. 14, 15. 14. AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS. Jesus now uses an illustration which makes clear some of the heavenly things he came to reveal. Study the story in Num. 21:4-9. EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP. On the cross. "The reference here is to the crucifixion, but beyond that, to the glorification of Christ."

15. THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM. Accepts him as Teacher, as Guide, and as Lord. Believing in the act of receiving the new life from God. SHOULD NOT PERISH. From the effects of sin, which naturally end in destruction of the soul. BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. He born again, have the new spiritual life by which he shall grow into a perfect man in Christ Jesus, and live forever in heaven.

VI. THE SOURCE AND THE MOTIVE.—THE INFINITE LOVE OF GOD.—v. 16.

NOTE that it was not Christ that made God love us, but Christ was sent because God first loved us. Tennyson's "The Victim" expresses the demand of Odin or Thor, but bears no resemblance to the demands of God's love.

THE WORLD. The sinful world in its sin.

GAVE freely the greatest gift possible for him to give. And the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON gave himself freely that he might save men. It was no forced sacrifice.

Messenger and Visitor.



A paper which every maritime Baptist should read regularly, if he wishes to be well informed in the affairs of his denomination at home and abroad.

The Messenger and Visitor FOR 1899.

We are pleased to be able to announce that in view of the promise of important contributions from a considerable number of Canadian Baptists who are recognized leaders in the thought and work of the denomination, we confidently hope to make the MESSENGER AND VISITOR for the coming year more valuable to its readers than it has ever been before. In addition to other valued correspondents who will continue to write for our columns, the following is a list of contributors who have promised their aid in the coming year, with the subjects with which they will deal, so far as they can now be given. We are quite sure that no intelligent Baptist who reads this list will feel that he can afford to do without the paper for 1899. Most of the contributors named, it will be seen, are ministers and college men, but we have a number of able laymen in mind whose names we hope to add to the list.

Special Contributors.

Chas. A. Eaton: Cannot give subject and date; Dr. Keirstead: Series upon "The Relation of Higher Education to the Development of Christian life"; H. F. Waring: "The Bridge of Education," and "Sermonettes on Sin"; J. A. Gordon: Three articles on "Church Finance"; G. O. Gates: Upon Palestine; M. A. McLean: "Some Phases of Christian Life"; W. W. Weeks: "Flashes from My Forge"; Dr. Sawyer: Four articles—subject not given; J. D. Freeman: "The Sunday School as an Evangelistic Opportunity"; W. H. Warren: 1. Impressions of English Churches. 2. Echoes from English Pulpits. 3. Glimpses of London. 4. The Land of Scott and Burns. 5. A Ride Among English Lakes; De. Trotter: A series; Dr. Steel: A series; W. B. Hinson: A series (once a month); W. Camp; H. R. Hatch; C. W. Townsend: "A Reminiscent Gossip about Famous Preachers"; O. C. S. Wallace; C. W. Cory.

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