

International Lessons.

OPENING TALK WITH TEACHERS.

We are to travel together, God willing, through the lessons for the coming year, and I trust that our study will be mutually pleasant and profitable; there is everything in the study of God's Word to ensure both, especially if our study be with the object of imparting the truth to others, not to be as the sands of the desert which drink in the rain of heaven and give nothing in return, but as the goodly field where every shower and every dewdrop is given back in increased fruitfulness.

As one of yourselves, a Sunday school teacher, I should like to preface these notes with a few words on an important topic in connection; I mean the necessity of STUDY. I fear that, sometimes, such helps as these are used in a different way to that for which they are intended, they are only for *helps* to study; are they not, by some teachers at any rate, made to *take the place* of study. There are good men to-day, not a few, who deprecate all helps, who think the only book a teacher should study is his Bible, with, perhaps, an unwilling consent to the use of a concordance; and there are teachers who go upon that rule and find in the Bible itself all the explanation and illustration of the lesson for which they care. I think these are mistaken, but it is a mistake on the right side, better to have no book but the Bible and be compelled to study that, than to have half a dozen series of helps and rest upon them.

I would put the subject in the shape of answers to three questions.

1. *When should I study?*
2. *What should I study?*
3. *How should I study?*

1. *When?* Begin early; it is *not* sufficient to take up your notes an hour before the school opens on the Sabbath. I remember walking to school on one occasion with a superintendent and his wife, who taught the infant class. When about half way to the school she exclaimed, "Oh, by the way what is the lesson to-day?" and thereupon began searching among some papers she carried for a magazine containing notes on the lessons, at which she glanced for a few minutes as we walked, and I fancy that was all the study she gave to the subject. There may be some extraordinarily brilliant genius in the world who could teach effectively with such preparation, but I have failed to meet one specimen. Preparation should begin, I would suggest, not later than the previous Sabbath evening, some teachers that I know have two or even three week's lessons "on the stocks," as they term it, at one time. In some aspects of the study, such as making a continuous whole of the series, shaping the teaching of one Sunday so that it may bear in the most effective manner upon subsequent lessons, this plan may be useful, but I cannot, as a rule, advise it, but when the duties of the Sabbath are past, worship and service done, it is good to take the lesson of the following Sabbath, to read it through, look at its connection with the lesson just taught, and the bearing of the latter upon the former, get its thought and purpose into the mind, it will be laying a foundation upon which you will be able to build during the week. You will find thoughts, experiences, reading, aggregate to it, and when your opportunity for more thorough study comes, that will be much more easy and pleasant as a result. I would say, then, begin early in the week, glance at the subject every day, and give as many hours study to it as you are able, the more you study the better you will teach on the Sabbath, but, on no account, leave your study until the time of teaching is at hand.

2. *What should I study?* First, foremost and chiefest, the Word itself, let it be *first* in every sense, don't rush to helps until you have patiently gone through the lesson with parallel texts, marginal readings, similar incidents, and so

on, comparing Scripture with Scripture. When you have done this then take down your commentary or your notes and use them. We shall strive to give in the INDEPENDENT as much as we can condense into the short space at command, but what we can do will only be suggestive, it is for you to weave all together and bring out the pattern of living truth in the passages. To those whose means are not limited there is a wide range of commentaries, select notes, critical notes, illustrations, and such like, also valuable monographs on various books of Scripture, people, nations, special incidents, etc., but unless time is unlimited as well as means I would not recommend a wide range of reading, read what you have time to master, thoroughly to understand and to use; men overload their mental as well as their physical stomach, and there is such a thing as mental indigestion and dyspepsia. The mental life of one suffering from these is not of much value to himself or others.

3. *How should I study?* SYSTEMATICALLY, regularly, not spasmodically, have, as far as possible, your regular hours for the lesson, nothing more definite can be said, as the engagements of almost every one vary, and so must of necessity their opportunities for study, but whatever those opportunities are, try that they shall be regular, if it is only possible to have one hour a week—a very extreme supposition—keep that one hour sacred for the purpose, let it not be used at any time for any other purpose. Not only in your time, but in your plan of study, be systematic. It will be surprising to those who have not tried it, how much more can be done that way than by irregular dashes, first at one plan then at another, that is almost sure to end in no plan at all.

THOROUGHLY.—Some learned professors have lately been endeavouring to cast ridicule upon a certain part of teaching that which may be termed the explanatory, if you followed their lead you would make the great blunder of turning your lesson into a sermon. No, no, bring in everything that has a part in the lesson, if it be about the journeyings of the children of Israel through the wilderness; tell in a few brief words something about that great and terrible wilderness; it will help your scholars to understand better the spiritual lessons you will seek to bring out. So, if your lesson be of the Good Samaritan, you may say a few words about the road to Jericho. An understanding of that will help to a better understanding of some points which you would miss. While you should always endeavour to find the spiritual teachings of every lesson, you must not neglect any point that will make more vivid and practical such lessons.

Need I say that you should study PRAYERFULLY, ask the aid of that Divine Teacher by whom alone you can fully understand the lesson. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and only that teacher whose mind is filled with the light of God's Spirit can understand His Word. Thus going forth to your class prepared both mentally and spiritually, doing your work in the fear of God and from the love of souls, your teaching will not be in vain. May God make us all such teachers.

FIRST QUARTER.

LESSON I.

Jan. 6, } **THE CONFERENCE AT JERUSALEM.** } Acts 15:
1834. } 1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they."—Acts 15: 11.

TIME.—A.D. 50 or 51.

PLACES.—Antioch in Syria and Jerusalem.

Introductory.—In resuming from last year the narrative of apostolic work as given in the Acts, it will be helpful to take a short review of the past lessons from chaps. 1 to 14, so that we may be the better able to connect them with those before us. Chaps. 1 to 14 have been divided