

251

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

A. D. 27. LESSON VII. THE WIDOW OF NAIN: or, The compassionate Saviour. Luke 7, 11-17. August 18.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 11. THE DAY AFTER. Wonders come in close succession in the wonderful life of Jesus. Every day has its deed of mercy. (1) Let us be like our Lord in daily works of usefulness. He went. He probably set forth from Capernaum very early in the morning, in order to enjoy the cooler portion of the day; sailed down the lake to its southern end, and thence walked still further south along the bank of Jordan to one of the ravines leading westward to the village which was his destination, and which he reached about noon. He knew at the first stroke of the oar where his journey would end: for he saw afar the scene of sorrow. (2) So he feels our troubles long ere he comes to relieve them. Nain. The name means "fair, lovely," and was doubtless derived from its picturesque location in the north-western slope of Little Hermon, in full view of Mount Tabor. It is now a small village, dilapidated, and mostly ruined, called Nain. Many of his disciples. Not only the twelve recently appointed apostles, but also a throng who had a vague belief in him, and considered themselves his followers. This was the popular period of his ministry, while as yet the multitude cherished great expectations, and the enmity of persecutors was not yet aroused. (3) Popularity is not the surest token of success. The true results of Christ's labors were not the throngs around him, but in the one hundred and twenty who afterward formed the nucleus of his church. (4) Genuine disciples follow their Lord, not only to Nain, but to Golgotha. —Starke. Much people. The crowd assembled by curiosity, or by individual self-interest, or by the peculiar fascination of a multitude, which grows as it advances. (5) Are we in the throng that follows Jesus? with what motive and for what purpose do we find ourselves among his people?

12. GATE OF THE CITY. Most large cities in the East are surrounded by walls and even the unwall'd villages are entered through gates opening to the principal street, where the people assemble for the transaction of business. Dead man carried out. In Oriental countries the dead are buried inside the towns, and generally the traveller approaches the cities through avenues lined with graves. The hill-sides around Nain are honey-combed with rock-hewn sepulchers, many of which are, doubtless, as old as the time of Christ. In an Eastern burial no coffin is used, but the body, wrapped in linen clothes, is laid upon a bier and carried to its resting-place by four bearers. Only son. The death of a friend is always occasion for mourning: the loss of a son, in the dew of young manhood, is one of the hardest blows that can fall; but for a widowed mother to lose her only son seems the culmination of sorrow. "To a mother in Israel the shock was embittered manifold for to have a son was to have an interest in the Promised Seed; and to be without a son was to be cut off from that sweetest, noblest expectation."—Edward Irving. She was a widow. The condition of widows in Oriental society has been in all ages peculiarly lonely, helpless and sad. Much people. An indication of the honorable character of the young man, and the sympathy which was felt for his bereaved mother. (6) Let us not fail in showing feeling for those that mourn. A kind act and a silent pressure of the hand in such times have a wonderful power to comfort.

13. THE LORD. A title rarely applied, to Christ in the gospels, but especially appropriate when such power was manifested. Saw her. He saw her sorrow, and felt for her: (7) So he feels in himself the burdens of our common humanity. He came, not to shun our troubles, but to relieve them. Compassion on her. Others had appealed to his sympathy through the intercession of friends; the centurion by the elders, and the nobleman for his son; but this woman needs no pleader save her own sorrow. (8) We need no one to intercede with Christ for us. This was a perverted, false view of his character, depicted in a Romanist painting representing the Son about to destroy the world, and Virgin mother interceding for mercy. Weep not. Others came to weep with the weeper: Jesus came to dry up her tears. (9) Our "Weep not" has no power; his is almighty.

14. CAME AND TOUCHED. To touch the bier was an act of ceremonious defilement, forbidden by the traditions. But conventionalities and customs stood but little in his way when works of mercy

were to be wrought. (10) Let no one dread to lie down on the bier since Christ has touched it. Stood still. The touch of the Master compels submission. They may have been awed by the majesty of his demeanor or on recognizing him as the Great Prophet whose wonderful deeds and words were spread abroad, they may have paused in a hope that he might work some miracle. Young man. He addresses a pale, still corpse, as though it could hear and obey. What folly, unless he were divine! (11) The conduct of Jesus can be explained only by recognizing his personality. I say unto thee. Others had wrought miracles in the name of God: he alone works them in his own name, and by his own authority. Arise. When Elijah and Elisha restored life to the dead it was only through the most intense supplications, stretching themselves upon the cold flesh and engaging in agonies of prayer. Thrice Jesus brought the dead to life; the daughter of Jairus, just passed within the veil; this young man at Nain, ready for burial; and Lazarus, four days in the charnel-house. And each miracle was wrought simply by a word of command. His summons broke the spell of death and recalled the soul to its deserted tenement. (12) He who could awaken can transform souls by a word from his lips.

SAT UP. Though encumbered with the long robes of the dead. Began to speak. The evangelists have not recorded the first words spoken by a soul just returned from the unseen world. They might gratify our curiosity, but would not serve our faith. Delivered him to his mother. "O, mother! mother! wast thou more favored than other mothers? Or was it that, for the sake of all mothers as well as thyself, thou wast made the type of the universal mother with the dead son—the raising of him but a fore-taste of the one universal bliss of mothers with dead sons?"—Geo. M'Donald.

16, 17. FEAR ON ALL. A sense of awe and reverence for one who possessed such supernatural power. (13) To know Christ is to realize his divinity. Glorified God. These inhabitants of Nain gave God the glory for sending his Son. (14) Let us see the finger of the Lord in the events of life. Great prophet. More than eight centuries had passed away since Elisha had brought back the dead to life, and more than four centuries since the voice of prophecy had been heard. It seemed as if God had forgotten his people, and left them to perish. Now they see the token that the chosen nation is still remembered, and the line of inspired seers remains unbroken. (15) God watches over this world which he has made, and will not leave it in darkness. When earth requires a prophet, the prophet appears. Bumor. Report or fame. This miracle, the most remarkable yet wrought, carried his name over all the land. Throughout all Judea. The news was borne southward through Samaria to Judea, and the crowds at the feasts in Jerusalem carried it to their distant homes. The region round about. That is, round about Nain, the province of Galilee. Thus the land was awakened in interest from end to end. (16) It is well when a people begin to inquire after Christ.

GOLDEN TEXT: And when the Lord saw her he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. Luke 7, 13.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: Victory over death. The next lesson is Luke 7, 40-50.

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