



LESSON VII.—MAY 19.

Jesus Ascends Into Heaven.

Luke xxiv., 44-53; Acts i., 1-11. Memory verses, 9-11. Read Mark xvi., 19.

Golden Text.

While he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven.—Luke xxiv., 51.

Lesson Text.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, (2) Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: (3) To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: (4) And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. (5) For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (6) When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (7) And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. (8) But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem; and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (9) And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Lesson Hymn.

Send the gospel of salvation
To a world of dying men;
Tell it out to every nation,
Till the Lord shall come again.

'Tis the Church's great commission,
'Tis the Master's last command:
Christ has died for every creature,
Tell it out in every land.

Christ is gath'ring out a people,
To His name from every race;
Haste to give the invitation,
E'er shall end the day of grace.

Go and tell them, go and tell them,
Jesus died for sinful men;
Go and tell them, go and tell them
He is coming back again.
—A. B. S.

Suggestions.

(From 'Peloubet's Select Notes.')

In the first three verses of Luke's second book, The Acts, he connects it with his Gospel by a brief résumé of the Resurrection period. The former treatise related what Jesus began to do and to teach; and this relates what he, the same Jesus, continued to do and to teach.—Alford. 'The gospel story is a book of mighty deeds as well as of wondrous speech.'—Professor Stiffler. Everything that Jesus did or taught was but a beginning, a seed from which far greater things were to grow, as he himself taught (John xiv., 12; xiii., 7; xiv., 26). 'The book is the second part of the Acts of Jesus.' 'The fact is both curious and significant that what is found in the Gospel Narratives, in the form of precept or teaching, reappears in the Acts of the Apostles

in the form of practice or example.' On the other hand, 'this book we may, perhaps, venture to call the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" for, from first to last, it is the record of his advent and activity.'—A. T. Pierson.

'By many infallible proofs. "Proofs by sure signs." The single Greek word, translated infallible proofs, is used frequently by Plato and Aristotle, and denotes "the strongest proofs of which a subject is capable," "an irresistible proof."—Schaff. Forty days. At intervals, ten or eleven times. Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, which was to be unfolded and carried on through them. During all this transition period the disciples were being trained to understand and to do the work that was before them. There was much that it was impossible for them to understand before. (Comp. Luke xxiv., 44-48.)

And, being assembled together with them. Probably in Jerusalem on the day of ascension, whence Jesus led them out toward Bethany, (Luke xxiv., 50). Commanded them . . . not depart from Jerusalem, but wait. They waited by prayer, by conference together, by doing necessary duties (vs. 13, 14, and rest of the chapter). Waiting is not sleeping with folded hands. 'Tarry at the promise till God meets you there.'—D. L. Moody. For the promise of the Father. For the fulfilment of the promise which the Father had given. It was the promise, as being the greatest, most important, all-embracing promise. The Holy Spirit promised by Joel (ii., 28, 29; see Acts ii., 17, 18); by Isaiah (xliv., 3). It was really the sum and substance of all the promises of the coming of the kingdom of God, and the redeemed world to Abraham, to David, and through the prophets, especially Isaiah. For the new dispensation was to be the dispensation of the Spirit, by whose power the transformation and triumph were to come. Which . . . ye have heard of me. This promise is alluded to in Luke xxiv., 49, and found in John xiv., 16, 26; xv., 26. 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.'

Lord, wilt thou (R. V., 'dost thou') at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? As promised again and again in the Scriptures. Israel was then subject to the Roman power. They probably imagined that the world would be converted to Judaism, and that Jerusalem, the holy city, would be the resort of all nations, the centre of light and power and religion for the world. They probably had no conception, and could not have, of any other way in which the hopes of the Jews and the promises of the Bible could be accomplished.

Light from History.—In 1773 there was discovered in Abyssinia a book called the 'Book of Enoch,' which was written in the first and second centuries before Christ. It expresses the inner mind of the Jewish people at the time of Christ. The people were daily expecting the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom, but a scene of material glory, where 'the Jews would be exalted above all surrounding nations, and the hated invader expelled.' 'This eager expectation,' says Professor Stokes, 'dominated every other feeling in the Jewish mind, and was burned into the very secrets of their existence by the tyranny of the Roman rule.'

The way Christ left this question was the best for all. We find two lines of prophecy in relation to the second coming, in one of which it is depicted as near, while the other points to a dim and distant future. They are not contradictory, but only two views of the same thing, which began very soon, with different eras, and is to be consummated at the end of the world. So that all the real power of an imminent coming, of a great transcendent event to be . . . for and hoped for, is brought to bear on the disciples of Christ.

But ye shall receive, instead of a knowledge of the future, power to do your work, to do your part toward making the future. This includes (1) power to lead men to the Saviour; (2) power to overcome all enemies and obstacles, though they were like mountains to be cast into the sea; (3) power to work miracles; (4) power to lead the church. This power must come from the Holy Ghost. Ghost is Old English for Spirit. The American revisers wished that 'Holy Spirit' should be used always instead of 'Holy Ghost.'

Illustration.—The apostles were like the

wires, the Holy Spirit like the electric current flowing through the wires, and enabling them to give light or carry sound.

Ye shall be witnesses.—Greek, 'martures,' from which our word 'martyrs,' i. e., those who bear witness to Jesus Christ by suffering and dying for him. The Gospel is built upon facts, not theories. The Gospels are the summary of the witness of the apostles. They were written many years after the apostles began to preach, and are the story that had been told many hundreds of times by these witnesses. And still the power of preaching and of teaching is not in arguing, but in witnessing, in declaring the truths known and tested by experience.

All Christians are to be witnesses testifying to the reality of religion, to fulfilment of the promises, to the living presence of Jesus, to his power to save from sin, to guide into righteousness and support in trouble; to the superiority of Christianity to all other religions, by what it does for them more than other religions can do for their votaries. Just in proportion as the Christian has experienced what Christ can do, and his nature and his life have been transformed, can he do effective work as a Christian.

He bears witness (1) by his words, for there is much which can be made known only by his expressing what Christ has done within him. (2) By his life and character, showing a well-known specimen of what Christ does for a man. His family life, his religion at home, the way he does his business, his conduct in public affairs and social life, are all witnesses as to what Christ has done for him, and can therefore do for others. (3) By sending witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth.

While they beheld.—That they might have clear proof of his ascension, to assure them that there was no deception. He was in the act of blessing them when he was taken up, (Luke xxiv., 51). A cloud received him out of their sight. (Compare Matt. xvii., 5; Luke ix., 34.) Perhaps it was like the 'fiery cloudy pillar,' the symbol of God that led the Israelites through the wilderness, or Elijah's storm chariot, or the bright cloud of glory which overshadowed him on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was at this time, doubtless, that the great change came over his body described in I. Cor. xv., 51-53. For such a change is signified by his appearance as John saw him, (Rev. i., 12-16).

It showed the continued reality of Christ's existence, linking this world with the other, and showing how he could be the ever-living Saviour in heaven, whom Stephen saw at the right hand of God, who came to Paul on the way to Damascus, who is ever with his people, even to the end of the world. The last view of Christ is not upon the cross, but ascending from Olivet into glory; not in agony of atonement, but in the act of blessing; not in seeming defeat, but in manifest triumph. We worship, not a dead, but a living Saviour, to whom we shall go, with whom we shall be in glory, and whom we shall love and serve through endless ages.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, May 19.—Topic—A nameless girl heroine. (II. Kings v., 1-4.) (A union meeting with the Juniors.)

Junior C. E. Topic.

AN UNNAMED HEROINE.

Mon., May 13.—The heroic roll.—Heb. xi., 32-34.

Tues., May 14.—A child's faith.—Mark x., 15.

Wed., May 15.—Love conquers difficulties.—I. Sam. xx., 17-23.

Thu., May 16.—Hero-making.—Dan. iii., 16-18.

Fri., May 17.—Christian courage.—Acts v., 19, 20.

Sat., May 18.—Jesus the hero.—John xix., 5.

Sun., May 19.—Topic—A nameless girl heroine. II. Kings v., 1-4. (A union meeting with the older society.)

Free Church Catechism.

51. Q.—What has Jesus told us of his second advent?

A.—That at a time known only to God, he shall appear again with power, to be glorified in his saints and to be the Judge