

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

A. D. 27. LESSON VI. THE CENTURION'S FAITH; or, Confidence in the Lord. Luke 7, 1-10. August 11.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 1. ENDED ALL HIS SAYINGS. The particular sayings here referred to are the sermon on the mount, which was delivered on an eminence known as "the horns of Hattin," near Capernaum. Audience of the people. The multitude. (1) Our privilege is no less high than theirs. They could hear the better, but we, taking in the full measure of the Saviour's words, can understand the better. Capernaum. A town on the north-west of the Sea of Galilee; the home of Christ after his rejection at Nazareth. It is now in ruins, and not certainly identified; though the weight of opinion fixes it at Tell Ham. (2) The most highly favoured places and people will not be saved from destruction by their abundant opportunities.

2. CENTURION. An officer in the Roman army corresponding to a captain at the present time, since he was in command of a company of a hundred soldiers. It is noticeable that every centurion to whom reference is made in the New Testament receives an honorable mention. The centurion who was in charge of the guard at Christ's crucifixion gave testimony to his divinity; "the centurion Julius," who was the guardian of the apostle Paul during his voyage to Rome, showed great kindness to his noble prisoner; and the centurion Cornelius at Caesarea was the first Gentile convert to Christianity. (3) Even the bloody trade of war and the wicked surroundings of the camp cannot keep men back from God. General Havelock and Captain Hedley Vickers have shown what kind of Christians may be found in the profession of arms. Servant. In Matthew's Gospel the word here used would indicate that he was youthful and probably a boy. Dear unto him. The inequality of their condition did not prevent a warm attachment, showing that there was fidelity on one side and sincere regard on the other. (4) Good masters and good servants are generally found together. [Teacher, impress the lesson of kindness to servants and superiors.] Sick. Of a paralysis, as we learn from Matthew. In the East this disease attacks people of all ages, and is frequently accompanied with a contraction of the joints causing great pain and speedy death. (5) The young as well as the old need to be ready for death at any hour.

3. HEARD OF JESUS. Though he had not seen Jesus, he believed in him. (6) An example of faith without sight. Sent unto him. Matthew says, "came unto him." There is between the two accounts a variation, but no contradiction. Matthew's account is the more concise and general; Luke's the more exact and specific. He came not in person but by the messengers whom he sent. Just as a king builds a palace or a pyramid, not by his own hands, but through the workmen whom he employs. He sent, rather than came, because he was a foreigner, and aware of the prejudices of the Jews. Had he known more of Jesus he would not have doubted of a gracious reception. Elders. Officials who were the rulers of the city in ecclesiastical affairs, and might be supposed to possess influence with the worker of miracles. (7) As these elders interceded with Jesus, so Jesus himself, our elder Brother, intercedes for us before God. Beseeching him. (8) Those who expect answer to their prayer must plead earnestly. Come and heal. There was no doubt about his ability to do the wonderful work. If he would come, he could heal.

4. 5. INSTANTLY. Earnestly, zealously. Worthy. They deemed him worthy, though in his own humble estimate he deemed himself unworthy. (9) It is well when others rate us higher than we rate ourselves. Loveth our nation. An uncommon trait, for the Romans generally felt a great contempt for the Jews as a subject people, and received in turn their bitterest enmity. This centurion had lived among the Jews long enough to realize that, while they were base, their religion was the noblest in the world; and was probably a "proselyte of the gate," who had accepted the Jewish doctrines without being adopted into their church. He loved their nation because it was the people of God. (10) We should love God's church in the world, however unworthy may be some of its members. Built us. Such liberality was not unusual among the Jews, though rare from a Gentile to the Jews. (11) Money contributed to build churches is well invested. A merchant who had lost nearly all his property, pointed to a handsome church and said: "Well, I shall never lose the ten thousand dollars I put there!" Synagogue. A building not, like

the temple, for sacrifice, but used as a meeting-place for worship and reading the Scriptures. It was not often large, but generally accommodated two or three hundred people. The men occupied the door, and the women witnessed the services from a latticed gallery. Perhaps among the marble ruins on the summit of Tell Hum there are yet remaining some fragments of this tribute of Gentile generosity.

6. JESUS WENT. Matthew represents him as saying to the centurion, "I will come and heal him," to which the officer makes answer as given. Luke states the precise manner of the conversation. Jesus sent the word to the centurion, and was on his way to his house, when new messengers arrived from him. The Gospels supplement, but never contradict, each other; showing independent narrators. Trouble not. As if to help a helpless one were a burden and trouble to the Physician. (12) Jesus is always ready to bless and save the needy. Not worthy. An instance of signal humility. (13) "The best men have always the lowest opinion of themselves.—Burkitt. Under my roof. He was unwilling that the great prophet should contract even the slightest taint of ceremonial defilement by entering the house of a Gentile.

7. 8. NEITHER... WORTHY TO COME. (13) Not worthy, but need, is the title to Christ's notice. Say in a word. (14) Christ's word outweighs other men's work. A sentence from him will do more than a lifetime of effort from all the world. Under authority. Having above him the orders of his commander and the Emperor. Under me soldiers. Notice this allusion to the systematic drill and discipline of the Roman army, which made them the conquerors of the world. He recognizes that as he has his own subordinates, so Christ has his unseen instruments to execute his behests. (15) Faith enables one to see the invisible. The eye saw no servants around the Son of man, but faith beheld legions of angels ready to obey his bidding.

9. 10. MARVELED. "What is more wonderful than to see Christ wonder?"—Bishop Hall. So great faith. That which inspired the wonder of Jesus was—1. Faith which arose in so strange a quarter; 2. Faith which so clearly discerned deep spiritual truths; 3. Faith which so fully realized his divine mission; 4. Faith which showed such absolute confidence. Not in Israel. Where he had looked for faith he found unbelief, and where he might have expected unbelief he found faith. (16) See in this a type of the relations of Judaism and Gentilism to the Gospel. What a lesson was this to the doubting Jewish leaders. Servant whole. The faith of the master is rewarded in the healing of the servant. (17) So the prayers and trust of parents receive answer in the salvation of their children.

GOLDEN TEXT: According to your faith be it unto you. Matt. 9, 29. DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: The healing power of Christ. The next lesson is Luke 7, 11-17.

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