INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

A. D. 8. LESSON II. THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS; or, Preparing for Work. Luke 2. 40-52. July 14.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 40. THE CHILD. Jesus was a child during the age of childhood, with no divinity bursting out of his infantile form. His tender years were thoroughly natural, and no one save the brooding mother beheld in him the tokens of coming greatness. *Grew.* That it was no unnatural, precocious development is shown by the fact that afterward his townspeople, who had grown up beside him, were surprised at his fame, and rejected him. *Strong in spirit.* This does not mean, with masterful will and unchecked passions, but with a leading, and controlling, though harmonious, character. *Wisdom.* Not only large stores of knowledge, but aptness and readiness in their use. Not every knowing person is wise. *Grace of God.* God's favour manifestly rested upon him, even in early youth. Evidently, he was thoroughly a child, but a holy child, while possessing a strong character. The "Apocryphal New Testament" in its "Gospel of the Infancy" contains many legends, which are utterly at variance with his true character, such as his working miracles for sport, smiting his playfellows with palsy and death, and making himself an object of dread and terror through the whole community. Nothing will more clearly show the divine origin of the Gospel narratives than the comparison with them of the puerile, man-made fictions concerning the childhood of Jesus.

41. HIS PARENTS. Mary and Joseph are both termed "his parents," because they appeared as such in the community. *Went to Jerusalem.* The law of Moses required the attendance of all adult males at the temple three times in each year, at the feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles; but people from the distant province of Galilee generally contented themselves with the visit at Passover only. Women and children under twelve years were not required, but their presence was not unusual. The attendance of Mary is an evidence of her deep religious interest, and earnest care in the right training of her holy trust. (1) *Mothers cannot be too faithful in setting their children an example of attendance upon the house of God. Feast of the Passover.* This was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts. It was held in the spring, about the time known as Easter, and lasted seven days. It was called also the "feast of unleavened bread," as that was the only kind of bread eaten during its progress. It commemorated the departure of Israel from Egypt, when the angel of death "passed over" the houses sprinkled with the lamb's blood. During its celebration Jerusalem was crowded with nearly a million people, at least four or five times its ordinary population.

42, 43. TWELVE YEARS OLD. The age at which the young Jew was first considered subject to the law, and under obligation to observe the customs of the church. As the Christian usages are easier and simpler, we should begin their practice earlier. *Up to Jerusalem.* So said because Jerusalem is almost the most elevated city in Palestine, being two thousand seven hundred feet above the sea-level. *Fulfilled the days.* The thoughtful boy, into whose mind the consciousness of his origin and mission was beginning to dawn, would see deep meanings and foreshadowings in the slain lamb, the offered sacrifice, the sprinkled blood, and the solemn services of those eight days of the feast. *As they returned.* (2) *"God's services may not be so attended that we should neglect our particular callings."—Bishop Hall.* After the services of the temple come those of Mary's household and Joseph's carpenter-shop. *Tarried behind.* This may not have been by absolute intention of the young Jesus, nor for want of care on the part of his parents; but as an accident in the rush and press of the immense throng. Becoming separated from the company, he remained in the place of deepest interest to himself; and they felt less uneasy on account of his intelligence and trustworthiness of character. [*Teacher*, suggest the thought to boys and girls of having such traits as to enjoy the confidence of others.]

44, 45. SUPPOSING HIM.....IN THE COMPANY. This is not remarkable, as the company was probably a company traveling together for safety. (3) *What a blessing when parents cannot only suppose, but be sure, that their children are to be found in good associations only! Went a day's journey.* The first day's journey of so large a company would probably take them not more than ten or fifteen miles from Jerusalem. *Kinsfolk.* The family of the Saviour had their relationships among the plain people of Nazareth, many of whom had come as pilgrims to the feast. *They turned back.* Leaving the caravan at its first halting-place, and searching along the path of travel back to Jerusalem. *Seeking him.* (4) *Those who have lost their Saviour should at once turn back and seek him.*

46, 47. AFTER THREE DAYS. They had spent one day in journeying, another day in retracing their steps to Jerusalem, and a third day in searching among the throngs in the city and the temple. *In the temple.* Probably in one of the colonnades or porches surrounding the court of the women, where many people congregated, and where the rabbins gave their instructions. (5) *Those who love God love his house, and as children are found in his courts. Sitting in the midst.* The religious teachers, called rabbins, sat on a raised platform, with their disciples also seated around them, while the general audience stood or sat outside the circle, and all present were privileged to ask questions. Jesus was there, not as a forward leader in the discussion, but as an intelligent listener and inquirer; "an eager-hearted and gifted learner, whose enthusiasm kindled their admiration, and whose bearing won their esteem and love."—*Farrar. Of the doctors.* Teachers of the law. Some of the most distinguished of the Rabbins were living at this time, as Hillel, Simeon and Gamaliel. *Hearing and asking.* In these Oriental schools there was great liberty of questioning. Contrary to our customs, the scholars interrogated their teacher, and proposed doubts and difficulties for their instructor to answer. *All that heard.* A large company assembled around, as at the passover season the temple was crowded with strangers. *Astonished at his understanding.* They saw that this child had thought on the Scriptures, and could penetrate below the husks and shells of the teachers to the kernel of the truth.

47, 49. THEY SAW HIM. Mary and Joseph, coming suddenly upon a crowd in the court of the temple, were surprised to find their Son in the midst, an earnest participant in the discussion, while the witnesses stood wondering at his intelligence. *Son.* A gentle, loving rebuke. Those who must reprove should do it very tenderly, *Sorrowing.* Her anxiety shows some lack of faith, and perhaps a slight consciousness of having neglected the great trust committed to her. *How is it?* These are the first recorded words from the lips of Jesus, and contain the characteristic features of all his utterances, an utter forgetfulness of self, conjoined with complete consciousness of his nature, and a thorough devotion to his work among men. *My Father's business.* Already he knew, though not from his mother's lips, the mystery of his divine origin; and the thought of his vocation was beginning to stir his soul. The expression may be translated "In my Father's house," preferred by some commentators, as Meyer and Whedon, but rejected by Oosterzee. (6) *We should be early interested, both in God's house and in God's cause.*

50, 51. THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT. They failed to comprehend fully the import of his words. (7) *So ever, the utterances of Jesus fall upon dull ears and darkened minds. Went down with them,* Though conscious of his own higher intelligence, he left the congenial courts of the temple at their bidding, fully submissive to his human lot. *Nazareth.* A village in a lovely vale, girded with hills, two miles from the plain of Esdraelon, six west of Mount Tabor, and about twenty west of the southern one of the Sea of Tiberias. Now En-Nasirah, with a population of about four thousand. *Subject unto them.* [*Teacher*, urge from the holy example of Christ the duty of honor to parents.] *His mother kept.* Another mysterious event in connection with her Son was added to the themes of thought already in Mary's heart. Silently she brooded over these strange incidents, destined to have their explanation afterward.

52. INCREASED. For eighteen years after, the record of Jesus' life is unwritten. From Mark 6, 3, it would appear that he followed the avocation of Joseph as a carpenter. *In wisdom.* Trained by the teachings of a pious mother, by the communings of nature, by the oracles of the Old Testament, and the Sabbath services of the synagogue, his mind advanced in natural growth. *Favor with God.* God's grace was manifested in him by the sweetness of his character and the earnestness of his piety. *And man.* (8) *True godliness of the right sort does not repel, but attracts the love of others by its own power.*

GOLDEN TEXT: And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2, 52.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: *Growth in grace.*

The next lesson is Luke 3, 15-22.

It is told of Spurgeon that it is his habit to shut himself up on Saturdays, and that one Saturday a man called and insisted on seeing him. "Tell him," said the visitor to his servant, "That a servant of the Lord wishes to see him." The message was delivered and the following answer returned: "Tell him that I am engaged with his Master."

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