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BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER.
STUDIES IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.
(Condensed from Foloubet's Select Notes.)
Lesson I. July 3. Acts 1: 1-12.
THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

GOLDEN TEXT.
"When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight."—Acts 1: 9.

THE BOOK OF ACTS.—I. THE AUTHOR was Luke, who wrote the third Gospel.

II. THE DATE OF WRITING. Not far from A. D. 63, for the narrative breaks off abruptly at the end of Paul's two years' residence at Rome (his first imprisonment). Why is this? Evidently because there is no more to tell at the time. The writer continues his history up to the date of his writing and stops there. If he had been writing after the death of Paul, he would certainly have told us of the circumstances of his death. There is no rational explanation of this abrupt ending except that the book was written about the time when the story closes. This was certainly about A. D. 63.

III. THE PLACE OF WRITING was Rome, as is generally agreed among critics.

IV. THE TITLE should be *Acts of the Apostles*. "The book is not *The Acts of the Apostles*, but merely some Acts of certain Apostles."

EXPLANATORY.
I. THE INTRODUCTION. 1. *The former treatise.* The Gospel of Luke (Luke 1: 1). Literally, the first treatise or narrative. *O Theophilus.* The same person to whom the Gospel of Luke is addressed (Luke 1: 3). The title given to him, "most excellent," denotes rank, and was applied to high officials, as to Felix (Acts 23: 26) and to Festus (Acts 26: 25). He was, no doubt, a convert to Christianity, of high rank. The manner in which the book terminates favors the supposition that he may have lived at Rome or Italy. *Of concerning all that Jesus began both to do and teach.* "Began" is equivalent in sense to "from the beginning," viz. of His career. The former treatise related what Jesus began to do and to teach; and this relates to what He, the same Jesus, continued to do and to teach. *To do and teach.* The Christian is first, indeed, to do, and then to teach.

2. *Until the day in which He was taken up.* With which the Gospel of Luke ends. *Had given commandments unto the apostles.* At various times during these forty days Jesus appeared to His disciples, and instructed them in their work of founding the church (ver. 3), as recorded in the Gospels, and in this chapter.

II. THE RISEN LORD. Ver. 3. *To whom also He showed Himself.* Not merely "appeared," but showed Himself, made Himself appear. *Alive.* The same Jesus who was crucified, but alive on the earth, as He was before His crucifixion. *After His passion.* His sufferings and death on the cross. *By many (emphatic) infallible proofs.* The adjective here has no representative in the original. The Greek word signifies some sign or token manifest to the senses, as opposed to evidence given by witnesses. *Being seen of them forty days.* Not continuously, but at intervals, on ten or eleven different occasions, at various times and places. *Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* The reign of God in the hearts of men, and the new principles and truths and powers and instrumentalities by which that reign should be accomplished. They were now prepared, in view of the Ascension completed on the cross, to understand many things which before were incomprehensible.

III. THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER. 4. *And being assembled together with them.* After the conference was held by Christ to be held in Galilee (Matt. 28: 10), or an assembly in Jerusalem on the day of Ascension, whence Jesus led them out as far as Bethany (Luke 24: 50) commended them (the apostles) . . . *not apart from Jerusalem.* The reasons appear to be: (1) That the great gift might come upon all at once and alike, so that all could preach the gospel from one experience and with one power, and all testify to the same event. (2) Because the Lord thus expressed the unity of the church, being endowed with one spirit, at one time, in one place. (3) Because of the prophecies in Isa. 2: 3, Micah 4: 2, that the Christian law might go forth from Jerusalem. (4) Because it was most fit that this great work of Christ's power should be there displayed where had been His greatest humiliation; that those who were not convinced by the resurrection might be convinced by this miraculous gift of the Holy Ghost. (5) It would be at the next great festival after the crucifixion, when strangers from all parts of the world would be gathered at Jerusalem, who would carry back the tidings of that manifestation into all lands. *But sent for the promise of the Father.* The Holy Spirit promised by Joel (2: 28, 29), by Isaiah (44: 3), and through Jesus Himself (John 14-16). It was the sum and substance of all the Old Testament promises. *Which . . . ye have heard of Me.* The allusion is not to Luke 24: 49, for there also the last interview of Christ with His disciples is probably related, but rather to the promises made by our Lord in His last discourse before He suffered (John 14: 15, 26; 15: 26, etc.).

5. *For John.* The Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. *Truly baptized with water.* The symbol and the type. But while John was baptizing with water, he pointed to Jesus as the one who should baptize with the Holy Ghost and in the Holy Ghost. As the element in which the baptism is performed. Not that this would be the first time that the Holy Spirit had been received, but that it would come with peculiar manifestation, in great abundance and upon all disciples. *Not many days hence.* Only about ten days, for Christ's ascension was forty days, and Pentecost was fifty days after the Resurrection.

6. *When they therefore were come together.* On a subsequent occasion. On Mount Olivet, near Bethany, at the close of the forty days. They asked of Him,

saying, Lord, wilt Thou (Rev. Ver. 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 authority for the world.

7. *And He said unto them.* The Lord's reply in the 7th and 8th verses tacitly sanctions their expectation of a great restoration. *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.* Not "the times or seasons" of this one case merely, but "times or seasons" generally.

8. *But ye shall receive power.* Jesus does not satisfy users' curiosity, but gives us what is far better. "Compare Luke 24: 49; Rom. 15: 13, 19; 1 Cor. 2: 4; 2 Cor. 12: 9; Phil. 3: 10; 1 Thess. 1: 5. These references will give the student an idea of the meaning of Christ's promise. After that the Holy Ghost is come. The power of the church is in the Holy Ghost, as we shall see in our next lesson. *Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.* The words which are apparently identical with those of Luke 24: 48, strike the keynote of the whole book. And this witness was twofold: (1) Of the words, the teachings, and, above all, of the resurrection of Jesus; (2) of the purpose of the Father as revealed in the Son. *The uttermost part of the earth.* By uttermost both time and space are included; to the remotest corners of the earth, to the remotest period of time. Christ's answer thus implies that He will not immediately restore the kingdom to Israel. The then existing generation measurably fulfilled this command. This verse is table of contents of the whole book of Acts.

IV. THE ASCENSION. 9. *While they beheld.* That they might have as clear proof of His ascension to assure them that there was no deception. *A cloud received Him out of their sight.* Compare Matt. 17: 5; Luke 9: 34. The cloud was, I believe, the Shekinah of the Old Testament, the symbol of the divine presence and glory. As He rose, a cloud passed under Him,—the bright cloud of glory which overshadowed Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and which, in the wilderness journey of Israel, was like a fire pillar, now like a cloud pillar, sailed through the air before the people as their guide. On this "glorious chariot," as Chrysostom calls it, did the eternal Son of God ascend from earth to the heaven of heavens. The ascension of Elijah may be compared to the flight of a bird, which none can follow; the ascension of Christ is, as it were, a bridge between earth and heaven, laid down for all who are drawn to Him by His earthly existence. "He maketh the clouds His chariot." "The ascension,—that pole-star of our night."

V. THE PROMISED RETURN.—10. *And while they looked steadfastly.* Gazing with great eagerness, and longing to understand what it meant. *Behold!* Implying suddenness. *Two men.* Angels in the form of men. Compare Matt. 28: 2-5, with Luke 24: 4. *In white apparel.* No doubt like the angel in Matt. 28: 3, "his raiment as snow," and "his shining garments" (Luke 24: 4). The brilliant whiteness showed their pure nature, and the bright home whence they came.

11. *Why stand ye gazing up?* Not without some hope, perhaps, that He might reappear. Under any circumstances, heavenward gaze, contemplation, seraphic vision, must be exchanged a while for earth's duty. We must come down from the mount, whether it be the Mount of Beatitudes, or of Transfiguration, or of Olivet. *This same Jesus.* Jesus in heaven is the same as He was on earth. Because He is the same, we call Him Him, trust Him, make Him our real, ever-present friend. *Stand as ye have seen Him go.* Not merely, as surely as He has departed, so surely will He return, but in the manner in which He has departed He will return. He will come in power and glory, on the clouds, and with His holy angels with Him.

12. *Then returned they unto Jerusalem.* To wait and pray for the fulfillment of the promise of the Father. *A sabbath day's journey.* According to the Talmud, 2,000 cubits, or three-fourths of a mile.

Mr. Beecher's Love of Books.
When we had been a few years in Brooklyn he could in some degree gratify his tastes for works of art, gems, paintings, and especially books, writes Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher in the *May Ladies' Home Journal*. He had always earnestly desired to possess a large, well-selected library, and now intended, by degrees, to secure it. But temptations in a large bookstore were almost irresistible, and sometimes, before he was aware, he had indulged beyond his intentions, and these mistakes were often the cause of great amusement to us both.

Returning from some unusual "raid" he would come to me with the semblance of great distress, but making a laughable failure of it, and lament over the great temptations that waylaid him in every store. "And where is human nature so weak and helpless as in a bookstore," he would say. "The appetite for drink cannot be half so powerful as the temptations which beset a book-lover in a large, richly-furnished bookstore."

"Well, how largely have you invested in books to-day?" I asked once. "Did I say I had bought any? I was speaking of the temptations. But you know how little skill I have in figures. When tempted to buy expensive books, I endeavor to take account of stock" (that is the proper business expression) and learn just how much I can afford to spend, but you know the bill comes in much ahead of my reckoning. You needn't laugh! Am I to blame because I am not expert in figures? Of course, I knew there was a box of books on the way. But no one could resist the quaint humor mingled with this pretence of penitence.

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"And, Dear Lord, Please Make Us All Very Stylish."

MARGARET MEREDITH.

So prayed the little girl after her fashionable uncle's visit. So pray all of us in our heart of hearts. Would it not be just as well for us to realize that being stylish is one of the things a Christian has for the most part to deny himself?

What is it to be stylish? Is it not to attain in a high degree to that which the worldliest worldling most approves? It does not stop with dress, of course, or pose, or outside trappings. I heard a good man gravely assert as a reason for returning to wine-drinking that it was "the thing." I really honored him for giving his true reason, instead of every other, as most of us plausibly do. But it gave me also an easy ground for argument on my side.

Yet it is not generally appreciated that "what is expected of you," what is "according to your station," is not a rule for a Christian's living. Who "expects" these things? Who has decided "the requirements of your station?" People in general, of course; i. e., the almost wholly godless world. Are they the fitting ones to decide your duty? Study up the instructions of your Master, and you may be startled at the hard words. You will probably agree in the assertion, "Dress thyself and take only one of 'tis thy Redeemer's great commandment.'" His words do not leave it very likely that the world's ways are the right ways for you to walk in; do not leave it possible that you can hold up the world's dictum to yourself as a rule of action.

We are so strangely constituted, so strangely under the influence of past habits and examples, so strangely in need of watching ourselves. I have seen a young man, who in fear and trembling whether it was his duty to be a foreign missionary, and at the same time in little daily matters not only power before the "public opinion" of his worldly college circle, but argue on his side, and feel—that is the point I would make—his opinion to be an actual factor in his argument. It is a special risk, too, to your religion to shape your course as closely as possible into the windings of the worldly lives at your side. Beware, and take heed of many who, "having loved this present world," have "forsaken" their God.

Yet I am not just now inveighing against "worldly" actions. Indeed, I do not care to use that vague adjective in a decision. I prefer to decide by the test of "right" and "wrong." What I am inveighing against is, doing a thing, and feeling justified in doing it, because it is worldly.—*Morning Star.*

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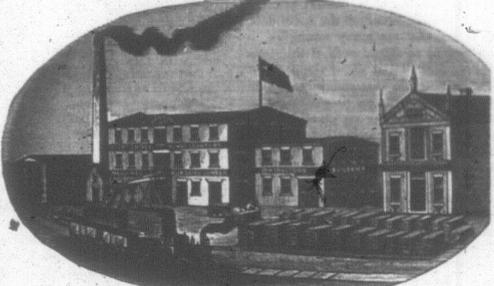


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