

ception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I Tim. 1: 15.

12. March 21.—CHRISTIAN SELF-RESTRAINT.—I Cor. 9: 19-27. Commit vs. 25-27. (May be used as a temperance Lesson.)

Golden Text—Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. I Cor. 9: 25.

13. March 28.—REVIEW. Golden Text—The word of God grew and multiplied. Acts 12: 24.

WHAT THE BOOK OF THE ACTS WAS MEANT TO TELL.

The book of Acts describes the fulfilment of the promise of the Father to baptize the followers of Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and the results of this baptism. It begins with Pentecost, and ends with the first visit of Paul to Rome. It dwells at great length on the outpouring of the Spirit, and on all the events which led to a wider range in the preaching of the gospel. It has two marked characteristics; it dwells on the continual presence of Jesus with his disciples, and on the preparations for, and the beginnings of each new spread of the gospel.

(1) *The main purpose of this book is to trace all through the interval, the continued action of the risen Lord.* The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was the first fulfilment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway unto the end of the world," and in the Acts of the Apostles this first fulfilment is repeated over and over again in the acknowledgement of the continual presence of the living risen Saviour. The word "Lord" meaning not God, but the Lord Jesus, the Saviour, occurs nearly one hundred times (18: 9, 10; 23: 11).

(2) This presence of the risen Lord was the presence of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father, and if the Gospels record the mission of the Son, the book of Acts describes the mission of the Spirit. *The book is the Gospel of the Holy Ghost.*

Jesus had promised that there should be a double witness-bearing for Him: the witness of faithful loyal men who had been with Him from the beginning, and the witness of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, whom He was to send to His disciples (John 15: 26, 27), and this promised presence and witness-bearing of the Holy Spirit is everywhere made manifest in the Acts of the Apostles (1: 2, 5, 8, 16).

(a) *All service in the Church is dependent on the gift of the Spirit.* The Seven, the first office-bearers in the Christian community, "were full of the Holy Ghost" (6: 3). When Stephen's work is mentioned, it is recorded that he was "full of the Holy Ghost" (6: 5), and because he had this gift of the Spirit he was able not only to preach and bear witness but to see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (7: 55). Compare also ch. 9: 17; 11: 24; 13: 2-4; 8: 29; 20: 28.

(b) *All living fellowship in the gospel of Jesus Christ is recognized to be the result of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.* The disciples of the Church of Jerusalem received a second baptism after prayer for increased zeal and power of work (4: 31); Peter and John were sent down to Samaria that the converts there might receive the Holy Ghost (8: 14, 15); the churches of Judea and Galilee and Samaria are described as "walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (9: 31); and the twelve disciples of Ephesus who had heard only of the baptism of John received the Holy Ghost when Paul had made them know Jesus Christ and Him crucified (19: 6).

(c) *Every advance made by the Church towards catholicity was guided and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.* It was the Holy Ghost Who inspired the freer teaching of Stephen, and Who prompted the mission journeys of Philip. The gift of the Holy Ghost fell upon Cornelius and his friends while Peter was addressing them (10: 44-47), and Peter was at pains to vindicate his conduct by appealing to the witness of the Spirit (11: 15-17; 15: 8). The Holy Spirit justified the men of Cyprus and Cyrene when they preached the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles (11: 21); sent Paul and Barnabas to be Apostles to the Gentiles, and guided the decision of the brethren assembled in council at Jerusalem.

(d) *The sins of false brethren were against the Holy Ghost, and were rebuked by Him.* Ananias "lied unto the Holy Ghost" (5: 3), and he and his wife conspired "to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" (5: 9); while the sins of Simon the sorcerer (8: 18-20), and of Elymas (13: 9), were rebuked in the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Everywhere the Spirit is seen working, guiding, and upholding the infant Church of Christ. and the book of Acts is a record of the beginnings of the dispensation of the Holy Ghost.

(3) *The Acts, like Genesis, is a book of beginnings or origins.* The analysis makes us see at a glance that Luke dwells upon the spread of the Church. He describes his Gospel as an account of what Jesus began to do and teach, and his book of the Acts may be similarly spoken of as a description of what Christ's Apostles began to do and to teach. He is at pains to note each beginning, and what leads to the beginning, and having done so he is content to be silent about the growth which must follow the beginnings. The book fills up the gap between the Gospels and the Epistles, not in a detailed history of the churches of Jerusalem, Corinth, Galatia, Rome, etc., but by describing the beginnings in each place, and in such a fashion that the reader must insensibly be led to feel more the rapid spread of the kingdom of Christ than the special shape it took in any one place. —Thos. M. Lindsay, D. D.