



LESSON,—SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 1909.

## The Ascension of Our Lord.

Acts i., 1-11. Memory verses 8, 9. Read Acts i., 1-14.

### Golden Text.

And it came to pass while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. Luke xxiv., 51.

### Home Readings.

Monday, December 28.—Acts i., 1-14.  
 Tuesday, December 29.—Luke xxiv., 36-53.  
 Wednesday, December 30.—Mark xvi., 14-20.  
 Thursday, December 31.—Eph. iv., 1-10.  
 Friday, January 1.—Psalm 96.  
 Saturday, January 2.—Eph. i., 15-23.  
 Sunday, January 3.—Phil. ii., 1-11.

#### FOR THE JUNIOR CLASSES.

The transition from the course of studies in Old Testament history to the New Year's course in the New Testament should be helped in the minds of the children by the recent Christmas lesson. The scholars can easily tell you the story of how and where Christ came to earth. It was at Bethany (Luke xxiv., 51), but a few miles from the little town of Bethlehem that the story of our lesson to-day takes place. Christ has lived on earth for some thirty-three years, he has carefully taught his disciples, has suffered, died, and been buried, has risen from the dead again, and several times during the forty days following his resurrection, has appeared to his disciples. Now he has to go away from earth to heaven, and before going he gives his disciples a parting message. He promises them a wonderful new power and he gives them a great work to do. This great new power from heaven was not meant for the disciples of Jesus at that day alone; Christ meant it for us, too. The work that the disciples were given to do was not meant for them alone, but for us, too, and, indeed, the disciples could not nearly do it all; they just did all they could and left the rest for us. So it is our work now and we must all remember that what Jesus said when he was going up into heaven, he said for us just as much as he did for his disciples then, so let us find out carefully what it was that He promised us and what work He has given us to do.

#### FOR THE SENIOR CLASSES.

The whole course of this year's studies is in the New Testament. The past six months' lessons have been dealing with God's care for a special nation, the opportunities and advantages given a special people, and their failure to rise to the occasion. This year's study is the abrogation of that special privilege and the offer of the Word of God to the whole world. The story starts with Christ's last commission to his disciples, and closes with the last words of his great missionary and apostle Paul to his young successor Timothy. It is well to glance briefly over the ground to be covered. It is all of the greatest concern to us. None of it is merely past history. We are in the concession, and the work is by no means done, so that every direction for its accomplishment, every step of the way taken by those who went before us is of great consequence, and we cannot afford to slight any. If mistakes were made we can avoid these, where successes were won, we can profit by the example, but these great men of the early days are only members with us of the great church invisible who have passed their unfinished work on into our hands. They labored under the helpful thought of Christ's continued presence with them (Matt. xxviii., 20), and we have that

just as surely to-day. Our Lord's parting promises and commission are our encouragement and endowment to labor to-day. It would be impossible to escape the missionary element in this Sunday's lesson even if the teacher so desired. 'The great commission' of verse 8 is ours to-day. Home and foreign missions are enjoined there and it is our privilege to work with our Master in His great plan of salvation for the world as well as our unmistakable duty if we call ourselves by his name at all. The disciples were not to stand gazing into heaven, but to lose no time about obeying their Lord at once. Luke xxiv., 49-53, Mark xvi., 19, 20, and the concluding verses of Matthew should be studied in connection with this lesson.

(SELECTIONS FROM TARBELL'S 'GUIDE.')

Verse 7. 'In the Fulness of Time.' Great inventions and discoveries familiar to us were denied the old civilizations. Why did God so long jealously guard these secrets? Not because He was arbitrary or ungenerous, but in loving care for His creatures. The welfare of man regulates progressive illumination. The tyranny and slavery of Egypt and Assyria were terrible enough with horses and chariots; what would they have been with steam and electricity! The Jews were in constant peril because the navy of Solomon every three years brought gold, ivory and peacocks; what would have been their state had the fleets of the world anchored in their ports, as they do in ours! The Romans were destructive enough with bows and arrows, slings and stones, swords and spears; think what they would have been with gun powder and dynamite! The Greeks were voluptuous enough with the modest resources of their age; imagine their carnivals of ruinous pleasure had they commanded the diamond mines of Kimberley, the gold-fields of Johannesburg, the luxuries of all climates! God denied the treasures which would have rendered progress impossible; He withheld them until the race had attained those higher qualities without which excessive material power is a curse.

Christ came only 'in the fulness of time;' before then the Advent would have been worse than useless. Even when He came He observed a striking reticence in addressing the multitude. 'And with many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it: and without a parable spake He not unto them; but privately to his own disciples, He expounded all things.' Nay, even to the disciples He could not tell all. 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you unto all the truth.' William L. Watkinson, in *The Duty of Imperial Thinking*.

Verse 8. Ye shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, said Jesus to His disciples, and also unto the uttermost part of the earth. One often hears foreign missionary work decried on the ground that home missionary work is so much needed. This argument Bishop Phillips Brooks scathingly rebuked in these words: "There are heathen here in Boston," you declare; "heathen enough here in America. Let us convert them first, before we go to China." That plea we all know, and I think it sounds more cheap and more shameful every year. What can be more shameful than to make the imperfection of our Christianity at home an excuse for not doing our work abroad? It is as shameless as it is shameful. It pleads for exemption and indulgence on the ground of its own neglect and sin. It is like a murderer of his father asking the judge to have pity on his orphanhood.

I have long since ceased to pray, Lord Jesus, have compassion on a lost world. I remember the day and the hour when I seemed to hear my Lord rebuking me for making that kind of prayer. I seemed to hear Him say to me, 'I have had compassion on a lost world, and now it is for you to have compassion. I have given my heart; give your heart.'—A. J. Gordon.

'During my early years in India, I spent several months in a village where we gained only thirteen converts,' remarked Bishop J. M. Thoburn. 'I returned there two years later and found eight hundred converts. No missionary had been in that village since I left. Who did the work of evangelization? Every Christian became a witness for Christ.

This is the way the world was won in the first century, it is the way the world is to be won to-day.'

Loyalty to Christ means carrying forward in our century the work He began in His.—C. H. Parkhurst.

### Religious News.

'Is it to be Western or Eastern?' is a question asked in the 'Record' of the United Free Church of Scotland by the Rev. John Torrance, formerly of Poona, India, he says, is in the throes of a great new movement, which will have its intellectual, social, political, and religious sides, and he believes the influence of the Church of Christ in India on this movement will depend considerably on whether the Church is to be painted in foreign Western colors, or whether it can be made to appear to the men of India as something suited to their own soil in Eastern dress. He calls for a radical change of policy in the treatment of the Indian churches, giving them a free hand as regards organization, relaxing the too rigid rules of ordination, and doing everything to encourage the spirit of spontaneous effort, independence, and responsibility. It is quoted as an instance of how little this has been the practise in the past that after 100 years of missionary work in India the Church of England cannot yet point to an Indian bishop or even archdeacon. Another question might be asked—Is it really necessary that the Indian Church should be either Eastern or Western? Will not the ideal Church be one in which all racial distinctions will be obliterated, and every element of good, from every possible source, conserved and consecrated?—'Statesman.'

From the coral island of Apaiang, one of the Gilbert Group, five thousand miles southwest of San Francisco, the mail has just brought news of a remarkable celebration last November.

The American Cyclopaedia said of those islanders in 1859: They 'are sullen, passionate, cruel, treacherous, . . . fond of war. . . . eat human flesh occasionally.' In November, 1857, the Rev. Hiram Bingham and wife landed at Apaiang, and began their work by reducing its language to writing.

The semi-centennial of this event was commemorated by 30,000 Gilbertese Christians, whose pastors were trained in the schools founded by Dr. Bingham, with the aid of the books prepared by him and Mrs. Bingham. Six more native pastors were ordained at the recent jubilee. Every year there is a demand for some 2,000 books in Gilbertese. The islanders have purchased some 11,000 copies of Mr. Bingham's translation of the Scriptures.

A touching letter of thanksgiving, recording what he had done for them since the time when 'the minds of the people were very dark,' was despatched to the veteran missionary by the churches assembled at the jubilee. Since 1875, the climate of Apaiang having become no longer endurable, Dr. Bingham has resided at Honolulu, still prosecuting literary work for the Gilbertese.—'The Outlook.'

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