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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Studies in Matthew.

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SUNDAY, July 6th.

The Child Jesus.—Matt. ii. 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT—"When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Matt. ii. 10.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 1, 2, 1-10.

SUMMARY.—The birth of King Jesus filled King Herod with fear; but the star led wise men with joy.

ANALYSIS.—I. Herod consulted. vs. 1, 2. He od advised. vs. 3-6. III. The wise men directed. vs. 7, 8. IV. The wise men proceeding. vs. 9, 10.

EXPOSITION.—Preliminary.—We leave the Old Testament, and begin the New Testament. Of the Testaments we say—The New is in the Old concealed; The Old is in the New revealed.

And the Saviour, whom to-day we see as an infant, said once during his ministry, "Search the Scriptures [i. e., the Old Testament], for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they that testify of me." If we failed to find this Jesus in Genesis, it was not because he was not there. The fact is, Christ is not only everywhere in the Bible, but also everywhere in creation. We live in his world, a world made by him, and to him—but he cannot be seen unless we have eyes. Without these we shall fail to see him even in the Gospel.

Verse 1.—Jesus, the same name as Joshua, and the form constantly used for Joshua in the Greek [Septuagint] translation of the Old Testament. Compare Heb. iv. 8. It means, "help of Jehovah." Jesus was not only the helper helper given to mankind by Jehovah; he was also Jehovah coming in person as a helper. See John i. 1, where the higher nature of this Jesus is made known. Thus this very name, which is true to fact, and not an arbitrary thing, declares to us both our need, helplessness, ruin, and where relief lies. Born in Bethlehem of Judaea. For the reason why the parents were here, rather than at their home in Nazareth, see Luke ii. 1-7. There was another Bethlehem in Zebulun, near the Sea of Galilee. Josh. xix. 15. Says Grove: "The modern town of Beth-lehem lies to the east of the main road from Jerusalem to Hebron, six miles from the former. It covers the east and northeast parts of the ridge of a long, gray hill of pure lime-stone, which stands nearly due east and west, and is about a mile long. The hill has a deep valley on the north, and another on the south. The west end shelves down gradually to the valley, but the east end is bolder, and overlooks a plain of some extent. The slopes of the hill are in many parts covered by terraced gardens, shaded by rows of olives, with figs and vines, the terraces sweeping round the contour of the hill with great regularity. On the top of the hill lies the village, in a kind of irregular triangle." "Bethlehem" means "house of bread," and "Ephrath" means "fertility. In the days of Herod the King. Distinguished from the other Herods, his descendants, by the title, THE GREAT. By race he was an Idumean, i. e., a descendant of Esau, though professing the Jewish faith. First appointed Procurator of Judaea by Julius Cæsar, B. C. 37, he was made King of Judaea, B. C. 40, by the Roman Senate, and by the help of a Roman army took Jerusalem, B. C. 67, as for several years the Syrians had had possession of it. He was a most wicked and cruel wretch, putting to death his wife and her grandfather, and three of his own children, from mere personal jealousies and suspicions. Still other atrocious murders or massacres are reported of him. Yet he rebuilt the temple, "with scrupulous care that it might seem to be a restoration of the old one, rather than a new building." He commenced B. C. 20, and completed the main part in a year and a half, but continued to rear adjacent buildings for years. John ii. 20. At the same time, he showed the utmost contempt for Jewish feeling, sacrificing as a heathen to Jupiter, introducing heathen games into Jerusalem, and raising to high stations foreigners, to the neglect of Jews. He died B. C. 4, so that the Christian era, as commonly reckoned, though intended to begin with Christ's birth, really begins four years after it;

i. e., it would now be 1877, were we to date from the Lord's birth. It is quite uncertain in which month, and on what day of the month he was born. Wise men [or magi] from the east, probably Arabia or Persia. These magi were "the sacerdotal caste of the Medes and Persians, not idolators, but hating idolatry. Hence, perhaps, distinguished among the heathen by God, and chosen to be the first-fruits of Gentilism to behold and worship Christ."—Wordsworth's Commentary. Many think that to this class belonged Balaam. Came to Jerusalem Because that was the capital of the nation, and hence the place to learn about "the King of the Jews."

Verse 2.—Where is he, etc. It is not said to whom the magi put this question, though that it was to men high in authority, is certain. If not to the king, it was to those who soon brought it to his ears vs. 3. The time when these men arrived is not stated, but it was certainly after the presentation in the Temple, Luke ii. 22-24; forty days after the child's birth. Lev. xii. The parents had returned to Bethlehem. King of the Jews. The title given to Christ by Pilate when he was crucified, though disowned by the Jews. The prophecies of the Old Testament virtually give him this title. See Daniel's prophecies, and especially Daniel ix. 24. His star in the east. It is well known that great account was made of the stars by the eastern magi; hence the name astrologers given to one class of them. God revealed to them the truth in a way calculated to make the best and deepest impression on them. On the nature of this "star," or luminous body, Elliott says it was "a veritable heavenly body, moving apparently in the limits of our own atmosphere, and subject, not to astronomical, but to special and far-ordered laws." Compare Ex. xiii. 21, "the pillar of fire."

Verse 3.—When Herod the king had heard. Most likely by report, and that while sick, nigh unto his horrible death. Was troubled. Or better, agitated, vehemently disturbed, jealous. All Jerusalem with him. The city shared in the excitement, though it did not generally take just the form which it had in Herod's mind. Some there already knew of the Saviour's birth, Luke ii. 25-39, and were deeply moved with holy joy; but they were God's chosen and hidden ones.

Verse 4.—The chief priests and scribes. "The class of the 'chief priests' included the high priest for the time being, together with all who had previously filled this office; for though the then head of the Aaronic family was the only rightful high priest, the Romans removed them at pleasure, to make way for creatures of their own. In this class, probably, was included also the heads of the four and twenty courses of the priests. The 'scribes' were at first merely transcribers of the law and synagogue rulers, afterwards interpreters of the law. The first of these classes, a portion of the second, and the 'elders,' i. e., as Lightfoot thinks, 'those elders of the laity that were not of the Levitical tribe,' constituted the supreme council of the nation, called the Sanhedrim."—Jamieson. This council was, doubtless, now convend. For a like omission of the mention of the elders, see Matt. xxvii. 1. Herod would wish for a formal authoritative answer, and would look for this to the national council. Demanded of them. In recognizing the fact of such prophecy and its truth, he seems to act in behalf of the magi. His real motive was far different. Christ. From the Greek, means the Anointed. "Messiah," from the Hebrew, means the same.

Verse 5, 6.—The prophet. Micah. See Micah v. 2. Verse 7.—Privily called the wise men in. "Privily," because he had a foul purpose, which he wished to hide from the people. Inquired diligently, etc. The time of the star's first appearance seems clearly enough to be taken both by him and the magi as the date of birth. Verse 10 does not teach that it was now nearly two years since its appearance; for we must remember that he was terribly enraged, and determined to make sure work in his butchery.

Verse 8.—Sent them to Bethlehem. Pretending to be as glad as they at the news—the old hypocrite. They thought him sincere, though it must have seemed to them strange that the event was not better understood in Jerusalem. That I may come and worship him. Thus covering with a garb of reverence a murderous purpose—a most terrible purpose against God's appointed King—the hope of the Jews and the Saviour of the world.

Verse 9, 10.—Lo, the star which they saw in the east. This naturally implies

that the star had appeared to them in the east, but had disappeared. Compare verse 7. They understood that it betokened the birth of the King of the Jews, and did not need it to go before them to Jerusalem. Now it re-appears, moving before them till it stops over Bethlehem, to which place the Sanhedrim's answer also directed them. Exceeding great joy. They were so near the object of their desire and search—the Being so long and widely and anxiously awaited—the desire of all nations." Conclusion.—Matthew has often been called, "The Gospel of the Kingdom." It exhibits Christ as king in his regal character. Hence the genealogy of the first chapter.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. The subject of this lesson? Meaning of the name Jesus? What is said of him in John i. 1? Where was he born? Was that his parent's home? How came they to be there? Luke ii. What can you tell of Bethlehem? What do you know of this Herod? What is meant here by "wise men"? Whence came they?

Vs. 2 Why came they? How could they have known of Christ? Why should they have cared for him? What was "his star"? Why should God have used a star as a sign for these men, rather than for others?

Vs. 3. Why was Herod "troubled"? Who else was troubled? Had any one in Jerusalem learned of the birth? Luke ii. 25-39.

Vs. 4. What did Herod do? Who were these high priests, etc.? Meaning of the name Christ? Messiah? Why the name?

Vs. 5, 6. The answer? From what place do they quote? Is the quotation exact?

Vs. 7. Herod's next step? Why privily? Why the careful inquiry? Do you suppose the star first appeared at the time of the birth?

Vs. 8. What was Herod's pretended purpose? His real purpose? Did the wise men suspect it?

Vs. 9, 10. What is said of the star? Of the wise men's feelings?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 126, 127.

SUNDAY, July 13th.—Flight into Egypt. Matt. ii. 13-23.

Youths' Department.

"HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY."

"To-morrow will be my last day in the office at the brick yard," said Willie Jamieson to his mother as they sat at supper in their humble, quiet home.

"Why, my son?" said his mother kindly, for she saw by his sad countenance that something was troubling his mind very much; "what is the reason of that, Willie?"

"O nothing, mother, only the bricks are nearly gone; there is but one lot left now, and they are to be taken away in the morning. I feel really sorry to think that I shall have nothing to do through the winter, and then, of course, there will be a more weekly wages coming to our poor home."

"Well, my dear boy, you need not distress yourself too much about that; I have no doubt but that some other place will be open for you in the winter, and I am certain that Mr. Wood will give you the same situation next spring when their work commences. I was talking to him a few weeks ago, and was glad, and thankful, too, to hear him speak so well of you. He said that you were in every way reliable, and that he had found you perfectly honest. This is what your mother always taught you, my dear boy, and I am proud to-night to have an honest son, though he may be without a situation to-morrow evening."

"Yes, mother, it is pleasant to be honest, and to be well spoken of, but then it looks to me a terrible thing to be idle, and I cannot bear the thought of lying around home for six long months when I ought to be working for you and myself."

"Keep up heart like a man," kindly answered his mother. "How do you think I got along before you were given that place? I had to trust in God, and he brought me through; and now you must do the very same, and he will give you enough to do, and contentment with it, too."

Poor Willie gave a long, deep sigh, but answered not a word; he had not learned to commit his way to God as confidently as his mother had, and could at present see nothing before him but a long idle winter, and that in his estimation was a thing absolutely intolerable.

He had cheered up somewhat next morning, however, and was promptly in his place at the proper time. Engrossed in

checking the books and balancing the different accounts, he had entirely forgotten the doleful prospects of the evening before, when his employer suddenly entered the office, and hastily opening his pocket-book, said, "Take this ten-dollar bill, Willie, run down to town as quickly as you can, pay two dollars to Smith and three to Young, and bring back the change to me in single bills. I want to pay it out as soon as you return."

And Willie, cramming the money in his pocket without even looking at it, snatched up his hat and was gone in the twinkling of an eye. He had almost reached town when it occurred to him that he had not looked at the money, and pulling it out at the moment, what was his surprise to find, instead of the ten, a hundred-dollar bill. "Ah, he has made a mistake, but it is no matter, I will take it down to the bank, and then carry back the change," murmured Willie to himself, as he replaced the valuable bill in his pocket, and walked the faster with a proud and dignified step at the recollection of having so much money in his pocket; and then the happy thought flashed upon his mind that he had one more opportunity before he left the employment of Mr. Wood, to show him that he was truly honest. He had now reached the town, and was walking down the principal street, leading to the bank, when he suddenly met a former schoolmate, Harry Edson. The boys were pleased to see each other, and Willie paused a moment to speak to his old friend.

"Guess how much money I have got," whispered Willie, after a minute's conversation.

"I don't know," said Harry. "How much?"

"Only a hundred dollars!" proudly answered Willie.

"All your own? Has Mr. Wood paid you off?"

"No, it's a mistake;" and Willie told him how he came by so much.

"Surely you don't intend to return it, do you?"

"Of course I do!" promptly answered Willie.

"But you say Mr. Wood made a mistake when he gave you so much; if so, I would keep the balance. He may think some one else got it, or perhaps he will never miss it at all; and if he does, you can tell him that he must have given it to some one else."

"But it is not my money, Harry, and besides, I cannot tell him a lie. He often gave me charge of more than this in the office, and I would not take a cent for all the world, and he knows that too."

"Then he will not suspect you; and besides, you tell me that this is your last day in his office. It may be a good long time before you get another situation, and a longer time before you have it in your power again to make ninety dollars so easily. Mr. Wood is rich, and you are poor; and I think you are very foolish if you take it back to him."

Willie's pride was hurt a little at the thought that he was "poor," and he promptly replied: "It is very true I may not get a situation for a long time, but I can't help that, and I have not earned ninety dollars; besides, I am not so poor but I can get along. Mother and Mr. Wood both think me honest, and I would not deceive them for a thousand dollars."

"I am sorry you are so foolish," Harry answered with a sarcastic smile. "You will probably regret your honesty about Christmas, when you find yourself without a situation or a cent. Good-by."

Now Harry was a boy of seventeen, and more than three years Willie's senior, and ought to have known better, but honesty does not always go by age, and knowing and doing are two different things.

Willie had the money changed at the bank. He rolled up the ninety dollars carefully, and placed it in an inside pocket of his vest, and then walked off to make the required payments. No one else was in the bank at the time, and the banker was not a little surprised to see so small a boy with so much money, and was just half afraid that he had helped himself from some man's drawer. Willie paid the bills to Smith and Young, and was almost back again when, coming around a curve of the road, he saw Mr. Wood driving toward him very fast. "Willie," he called aloud as soon as he saw him, "did you see anything of those two men who were in my office a little before you left?"

"No, sir; is there anything wrong?"

"Yes, enough is wrong; I must have given one of them a hundred-dollar bill in mistake for a ten. I am sure I did, and if so, I am never likely to receive it back.

They are both strangers to me, and they have been gone some-time."

Willie knew the secret well, and with an arch smile he quietly said, "Why, you gave me a hundred-dollar bill instead of ten," and pulling his long purse out of his inside pocket, handed up the money with an air of triumph. "Thank you, Willie," Mr. Wood kindly said; "you are an honest boy, and I must see that you have another situation when you leave my office."

He was true to his word. Only a few days elapsed before Willie took his place in the very bank at which the hundred-dollar bill had been changed, and it was through the influence of his warm and faithful friend of the brick-yard office, who also himself became his first security. Willie is now a worthy and influential banker in a large and prosperous city, and if you could see the motto according to which his life and reputation have been modelled, you might read from large golden letters over his private desk, "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY."—Observer.

IS WINE A BLESSING?

I wish to say that the clergymen of the Church of England are positively doing more for the temperance movement than Dissenters; and the same is true of their wives. I was invited to church, with a clergyman who is now Bishop of Carlisle, and we had a discussion for about two hours. A titled lady was present, and she helped him. I was alone, and had to bear the whole brunt of the battle in the Scriptural argument.

"The Bible permits the use of wine," said he.

"Very well, said I. "Suppose it does."

"The Bible sanctions the use of wine."

"Very well, suppose it does."

"Our Saviour made wine."

"I know he did."

"Why, we thought you were prepared to deny this."

"I do not deny it. I can read."

"Wine is spoken of in the Bible as a blessing."

I replied, "There are two kinds of wine spoken of in the Bible."

"Prove it."

"I do not know that I can, but I will tell you what it is, the wine that is spoken of as a 'blessing,' is not the same wine that is a 'mockery,' and the wine that is to be drunk in the kingdom of heaven, cannot be the wine of the wrath of God." [Great cheering.] So that, although I cannot prove it learnedly, I know it is so.

Now, there are others who go further than I, and you will please let me go just as I can understand it, and if I cannot go any further don't find fault with me. I hold that the Bible permits total abstinence; and I would rather search the Bible for permission to give up a lawful gratification for the sake of my weaker-headed brother, who stumbles over my examples into sin, than to see how far I can follow my own propensities without committing sin, and bringing condemnation upon any one's soul.

Another gentleman who came to me for a long talk, said, "I have a conscientious objection to teetotalism, and it is this: our Saviour made wine at the marriage of Cana in Galilee."

"I know he did."

"He made it because they wanted it."

"So the Bible tells us."

"He made it of water."

"Yes."

"Well, he performed a miracle to make that wine."

"Yes."

"Then he honored and sanctified wine by performing a miracle to make it. Therefore," said he, "I feel that if I should give up the use of wine, I should be guilty of ingratitude, and should be reproaching my Master."

"Sir," said I, "I can understand how you should feel so; but is there nothing else that you put by, which our Saviour has honored?"

"No, I do not know that there is."

"Do you eat barley bread?"

"No," and then began to laugh.

"And why?"

"Because I don't like it."

"Very well, sir," I said, "our Saviour sanctified barley bread, just as much as he ever did wine. He fed five thousand people with barley loaves manufactured by a miracle. You put away barley bread from the low motive of not liking it. I ask you to put away wine from the higher motive of bearing the infirmity of your weaker brother and so fulfilling the law of Christ." I wish to say that that man signed a pledge three days afterwards. [Renewed cheering.]—John B. Gough.