

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, December 14th, 1879.—
The Heavenly City.—Rev. xxi. 21-27.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 1-5.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”—Hebrews xi. 10.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Rev. xiv. Tuesday, Rev. xv-xvi. Wednesday, Rev. xvii. Thursday, Rev. xviii. Friday, Rev. xix. Saturday, Rev. xx. Sunday, Rev. xxi.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Description of its Gates. Vs. 21. II. Its worship without a temple. Vs. 22. III. Its brightness without a sun. Vs. 23. IV. Its glorified inhabitants. Vs. 24-27. V. Its river of life. Vss. 1, 2. VI. All evil removed. Vss. 3-5.

QUESTIONS.—About what did we study last Sunday? What did we learn was the theme of this song? In what will the consummation of the plan of redemption appear? Why the need of a city of God? When will this be revealed? Rev. xxi. 1, 2. Why is it called the “holy Jerusalem?” Why is the number twelve frequently used in its description? Rev. xxi. 12, 21.

I. Vs. 21.—Do you suppose all these pearly gates and golden streets are to be literally seen in the heavenly city?

II. Vs. 22.—Why has the heavenly city no temple worship? How is sanctuary worship, in time at least, helpful? Comp. Ps. lxxxiv. 1.

III. Vs. 23.—What material splendors are not seen in heaven? What is the light thereof?

IV. Vs. 24-27.—Why are nations instead of individuals referred to here? Comp. Ps. xxii. 27; Isa. lx. 3. Why kings and not peasants? Psalm lxxii. 10, 11. Will it be part day and part night in heaven? Ps. xxx. 5.

V. Vs. 1, 2.—What is the equality of the river? Its source? What tree grows near it? Where has the Bible spoken of this before? Gen. ii. 9.

VI. Vs. 3-5.—What has now come to an end? Does this intimate Christ's human form in heaven?

THE PERFECTION OF SOCIETY.—The larger part of the instructions of the Gospels and of the Epistles is occupied with statements of the relations of religion to the individual. But all this is preliminary to the perfection of society. First the unit, then the multiple. First the preparations for the end, then the end itself. In the closing chapters of the Revelation we have undoubtedly the consummation of the great scheme of redemption in the city of God. In human history everything has tended to centralization of power.

In the history of redemption we observe no visible decay, but a constant advance toward the culmination of its glory. The city is the most perfect realization and the most convenient representation of society in its maturity. Take, then, from the Bible the final vision of the ‘heavenly Jerusalem,’ and what have been lost? But when shall this consummation come? Not until after the appearing of the Lord, the resurrection, and the judgment, and the heavens and earth which are now, are passed away. Rev. xxi. 1. This is the city of God, the final home of all the saved from among mankind.

TO TEACH THE LESSON.—Do not go into the Millenarian controversy. Try to make the class see and appreciate the beautiful imagery of the lesson, and it will sink into their hearts and do them good. The lesson presents three things:

I. The Outward Beauty of this Heavenly City.

(1.) For the “twelve gates” of vs. 21; you will, of course, go back to vs. 10-12, etc. These gates always open.

(2.) The light of the city. No sun and moon, and no lamp. (Vs. 23, and xxii. 5.)

(3.) The clear stream flowing through the street—coming from the throne—water of life. (Vs. 1.) All along, on each bank, the tree of life, bearing fruit twelve times a year, and its leaves a medicine to heal. (Vs. 2.) Charming picture.

II. Its Moral Glory and Purity.

(1.) In vs. 24 and 26, the comparison is to an Oriental capital, whose subject countries bring into it their jewels, works of art, literature—whatever will help to make it a glorious city.

(2.) In vs. 27, a delightful thought—a city containing only good people.

III. The Happiness of them that dwell in it.

(1.) No more curse. (Vs. 3.) Be sure to compare xxi. 4. There will be something as beautiful and blessed as all this, and far more beautiful and blessed than our minds could now conceive. As John Bunyan said: “Which when I had seen, I wished myself among them!”

EXPOSITION.—The Scripture of our lesson describes the city itself. (vss. 21-23), its inhabitants (vss. 24-27), and their enjoyments and employments (vs. 1-5).

I. Verse 21-23.—Verse 21.—And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, etc.—See for the description corresponding to this and introducing it, vs. 10-21. The whole description is symbolic. We find symbolized by the city, organized society; by its name Jerusalem, its divine laws and government; by the costly materials, the supreme excellency of that state of being; by the form of the city, its perfect harmony; by the numbers used, its completeness; and, in short, by all the symbols, singly and collectively, in themselves and in their relations, the varied perfections of the promised society, redeemed humanity as perfected in Jesus Christ. Twelve gates. The twelve tribes constituted the whole Israel. The street. Even that, the part to be trodden by feet, was of gold, and supremely fine and beautiful gold.

Verse 22.—No Temple.—Forms of worship are helps to the end, to worship; scaffolding, needful in building a house and not to be cleared away or discarded till the house is finished. For the Lord God, etc. In Christ “we have access unto” the Father; and so, when forms pass away, spirit dwells wholly in spirit; ours in Christ with God.

Verse 23.—The need of the sun, etc.—“God is light,” and Christ is “the brightness [effulgence] of the Father's glory,” and in him we are light. Sin, ignorance, sorrow, all evil, is shadow, darkness.

Verses 24-27.—Verse 24.—The words “of them which are saved,” are to be omitted, according to the genuine text. The nations are conceived of as taking on the character of its citizens and so belonging to it.

Verse 25.—The gates, etc.—There were to be no dangers to this city and its inhabitants, because there was continuous and eternal day.

Verse 26.—And they shall bring, etc.—Perpetual life and glorious commerce between the glorious centre and the glorified regions beyond.

Verse 27.—There shall in no wise enter, etc.—“The Lamb's book of life” has all the means of those who have in themselves the life of the Lamb—that holy divine life.

Verses 1-5.—Verse 1.—A pure river of water of life, etc.—Omit the word “pure,” as it is not in the most approved text. “The water of life” is best understood from the words of Christ, in John iv. 15.

Verse 2.—In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river. On each side of the river, parallel with it, runs a street; and the trees grow along the two banks of the river beside each of the two streets. Which bare twelve manner of fruits, etc. Literally, making twelve fruits, rendering fruit each month. The thought is of the perpetuity of the ever new and palatable food. John vi. 35-59. The leaves of the tree, etc. The garden of Eden is in mind—but the garden with its one solitary pair has become transformed into a populous city, metropolis of the world if not of the universe.

Verse 3.—No more curse.—A backward look to the first Paradise. His servants shall serve him. There will be praise, but there is here a hint of much besides.

Verse 4.—They shall see his face.—God's face in the Lamb's. His name shall be in their foreheads. They need make no professions, or tell what church they are of.

Verse 5.—No night.—Nothing of which darkness or night is symbol. For the Lord God, etc. See above on xxi. 23. The inheritance is unfading, unfailing—the treasure beyond the touch of rust and the hand of thieves.

(1.) The city.—Our future abode shall be a real place—a statement that needs to be emphasized, because we so frequently hear it said that heaven is a

state rather than a place; and so the whole future realm seems shadowy and unsubstantial.

(2.) The symbols of life.—Food and drink—these are the things by which man lives, and these are perpetually set before us in the Scriptures as the types of all gospel blessings. An earthly immortality to fallen man, would have been nothing short of hell at once. In mercy, therefore, the Lord “drove out the man.”

(3.) The saved.—As to their employment—they “shall serve him.” Inactivity would be almost equivalent to annihilation. Our ransomed powers must have occupation—a place of rest, but what sweeter rest than perpetual activity, without any painful strain of heart or brain, or any sense of weariness?

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

In your attempted description of the glories of heaven make the children understand that we cannot tell exactly what it is—whether the gates are really pearls like those we have seen, only much larger; whether the streets are really gold like that we use, only so fine and clear that we could see through it. John had to compare it to things we have seen, so that we could try to imagine what it is, from what he says it is like. Only we may know that it is more glorious than anything we can think of. Use Paul's words in 1 Cor. ii. 9, “Eye hath not seen,” etc.

Speak of its size, there will be room enough in heaven for all. Jesus says, “In my Father's house are many mansions.”

We must be made fit to live there. Read 27th verse.

Speak of the employment; His servants shall serve him. They love to praise, pray, and work for him here.

No Tears.—Children shed more tears than all others. Speak of some things that make them cry; of mother drawing her child close, wiping away tears. God is more tender than any mother.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Youths' Department.

Answer to Enigma.

No. 48.

Manslaughter—Mam's laughter.

ANSWERS TO CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

No. 13. Solomon, Canticles iii. 9, 10.

14. Nebuchadrezzar, Jer. lii. 12, 13.

Enigma.

No. 49.

In Paradise I dwelt before the creation of man, and was with Adam all his days, but not with Eve, I was in that garden and have visited every other garden since. I was first in the dreadful consequences of their sin, and first also in subsequently driving them out of it, and also in their deliverance. I was with David all his days, yet neither Saul nor Goliath knew me. I lived in Chaldea but not in Egypt, yet could not be driven from any ancient kingdom. I choose to be with children but do not dwell with men or women, yet I never forsake a lady and take double delight in a wedding, and still I am the first and last in attending the solemnities of the death bed.

CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

No. 15. If three cats would kill three rats in three minutes, how many rats would a hundred cats kill in a hundred minutes?

A hundred, to be sure! Wrong: Try again.

16. When did iron appear lighter than water?

The Ancient City Pompeii.

THE CONTENTS OF A CHAMBER JUST OPENED AFTER BEING COVERED WITH ASHES FOR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED YEARS.

(From Correspondence of the London Times.)

No sooner was the excavation of this chamber commenced than as I have already told you, a number of bronze and terracotta vessels, bronze fibulae, bracelets and rings, iron keys, kitchen utensils, and other articles of household use were found almost in a heap together near the door, and among them a considerable number of small earthenware pots, which I somewhat incredulously heard described as drinking cups for birds; but there soon followed abundant proof that this had been the shop of a seed merchant and seller of singing

birds, and very little imagination was required to see the place as it was the day before the fatal eruption of '79. At first the room seemed to have been a mere receptacle for a miscellaneous collection of bronze and earthenware objects. There was no special character about it. The walls bore no traces of painting, but, as the clearing was continued, to the left of the door on entering a heap of millet seed was found, so carbonized that on taking up a handful it flowed between one's fingers, for every grain was separate and distinct. It was taken away in basketsful. Close to this a quantity of hemp seed, and of what appeared to be small beans in the same preserved condition, were found, and amongst them considerable fragments of the sacks in which they had been kept, the fibre and texture clearly distinguishable. Behind these heaps and against the wall more seed was dug out, mixed with pieces of carbonized wood, iron hinges, and nails, and some iron hoops, evidently the remains of small barrels and bins which had been ranged on this side, while along the opposite wall a double row of terra-cotta olla for holding grain was gradually revealed. Suddenly there arose a cry, “un ossa,” “un scheletro,” and the excitement became intense; but the bones were small—at first they seemed mere fragments, and then the Director exclaimed, amid quickly following laughter, “A chicken.”

Kere the filling in had become somewhat solidified, and as it broke apart a complete skeleton was revealed. It was that of a little singing bird, entirely imbedded in the mass, and near it were fragments of other tiny bones. There could no longer be any doubt that the use of the little terra-cotta pots had been correctly described. It became clear why so many of them were found there, and that the number of plain bronze rings of about an inch and a half in diameter, and pieces of fine chain-work discovered, had been used for hanging bird cages. But what connection had all those bronze vessels and ornaments near the door with a seed and bird-seller's shop? This also soon became evident. As the excavators continued further into the room great masses of carbonized beams of wood were found, each somewhat inclined downward, and among them a quantity of fragments of intenc and stucco wall-facing, coloured porphyry, with a border of green and white. These were at once seen to be the remains of the floor of the room above with some of the plastering off its walls, and from the direction in which the beams were lying it was evident that the floor had given way in the middle and towards the floor of the shop below, precipitating the greater part of the contents of the upper room in that direction, the remainder falling towards the middle, and it was here the elegant, long-stemmed candelabrum was found among the masses and fragments of carbonized wood. Did the worthy bird-seller live above his shop? Did this candelabrum and the various bronze vases and other utensils form part of his domestic furniture? Who can tell? They were elegant in form, but for the most part unornamented, and not out of character with the requirements of a person of that condition. There were some finger-rings of bronze, but none of richer material; there was a strigil with a plain handle; there were women's bracelets and fibulae of delicate workmanship, but only of bronze, some glass beads, and a delicate blue glass cup broken in pieces. The smaller terra-cotta vessels were all of the plainest workmanship. Among them were three small amphorae with flat bottoms, for standing on the table, and the bronzes were of the variety of size and form adapted to household purposes. Some were like jugs with one handle, others were in the form of flat oval tazze with two handles, and one of these had two others of smaller size lying within it. There was one the exact counterpart of a pint pot, several of flat shape, like casseroles, with a straight handle on one side, and some without handles, like deep bronze soup plates.

Among other things I have not mentioned found in this room were a number of small bronze bells, slightly depressed into a rectangular form, like the tiny gold bell found on the Esquiline some years back, and which is so well known as the Margherita bell from the number of copies made for ear-drops; two double bronze ink-stands, the chain

and other fragments of a balance, a bone paper cutter—a knife of large size, with a bent blade like those used by gardeners—a small square Corinthian pilaster cap of marble, and in one corner of the shop against the wall the remains of a mensola. It may interest archaeologists if I mention that the excavation was made in the insula parallel to that numbered five in the north region, according to Florelli's plan, and the shop is entered from the Decumanus Major, commonly known as the Strada de Nola, leading to the gate of that name.

The Miracle.

Two men were talking once in England.

“Well, you may say what you please,” said one, “I, for my part, can not believe that God would first impose laws on nature and then go on to violate his own laws. What would be the use of making them if they are so easily to be set aside?”

“I dinna ken, sir, what God may do, or not what he winna do,” said the Scot, very reverently. “But I don't regard a miracle to be a violation o' the laws o' nature; there is nae violation o' the laws o' nature, or rather the laws o' God, that I ken, save the wicked actions o' wicked men.”

“And what, then,” asked he, “do you make a miracle to be?”

“I regard it to be merely such an interference wi' the established course o' things as infallibly shows us the presence and the action o' supernatural power. What o'clock is it wi' you, sir, if you please?”

“It is half-past twelve, exactly, Greenwich time,” replied he.

“Weel, sir,” said the Scot, pulling a huge old time-piece from his pocket, “It's ane o'clock wi' me. I generally keep my watch a little forward, but I may have a special reason, the noo, for setting my watch by the railways, and so you see I'm turning the hands of it round. Noo, wad ye say I hae violated the laws o' the watch? True, I hae done what watchdom wi' a' its laws could not hae done for itself, but I hae done violence to none o' its laws. My action is only the interference o' a superior intelligence for a suitable end. But I hae suspended nae law, violated nae law. Weel, then, instead o' the watch, say the universe; instead o' the moving o' the hands, say God acting worthily o' himself, and ye hae a' that I contend for, a miracle: that is, the unquestionable presence o' a mighty hand working the Divine will. And if he sees fit to work miracles, who can hinder him, what can hinder him? He has done it oftener than once or twice already, and who dare say that he'll no get leave to do it again?”

Is there a better illustration of a miracle than this of the old Scotchman? Looked at rightly, there need be no difficulty about this matter of miracles which so many rationalizing people so coolly assert is so beyond belief as to be unworthy of a thought.

ABOUT CASTE.—At the railway stations in India the passengers are served with water by a Brahmin, from whom, being of the highest caste, all persons may take without defilement. He goes along the train with his brass vessel; a sudra, or low-caste man, stoops, and in his open hands placed together and raised to the level of his mouth, receives the precious liquid. The vessel of the Brahmin is not touched, else he would be defiled. A Brahmin asks water, and is served with it in the smaller vessels, from which he drinks, there being no defilement between Brahmin and Brahmin.

REV. DR. GUTHRIE SAYS: “Whisky is good in its own place. There is nothing like whisky in this world for preserving a man when he is dead; but it is one of the worst things in the world for preserving him when he is living. If you want to keep a dead man, put him in whisky; if you want to kill a living man, put whisky into him.”

The Baptist University at Rochester, N. Y., has had \$100,000 pledged by three wealthy New Yorkers to wipe out its floating debt, and will try to raise as much more to establish itself on a sound financial basis.

A priest asked of a condemned criminal in a Paris jail, “What kind of a conscience have you?” “It is as good as new,” replied the prisoner, “for I have never used it.”