

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, June 8th, 1879.—The Valley of Dry Bones.—Ezekiel xxxvii. 1-10.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."—John vi. 63.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Ezekiel xxxvii. 16-33. Tuesday, Ezekiel xxxvii. Wednesday, Deut. xxxii. 29-43. Thursday, Vs. 3; John v. 19-29. Friday, Vs. 4; Galatians i. 6-20. Saturday, Vs. 5; Ephesians ii. 1-10. Sunday, Vs. 10; I Cor. ii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Valley of dry bones. Vss. 1, 2. II. The dry bones addressed. Vss. 3-6. III. Result:—(a) Human form taken. Vss. 7, 8. (b) Life and action. Vss. 9, 10.

QUESTIONS.—Against what city did our last lesson utter a doom? Why does the Bible, everywhere, unite mercy with Divine judgments? Nehemiah ix. 17.

I. Vss. 1, 2.—Where did God take Ezekiel? Literally, or in vision only? To behold what? What moral state did these bones indicate? In what state are all unrenowned men? Ephesians ii. 1.

II. Vss. 3-6.—What question is put to Ezekiel? What is the force of his reply? Whose word is Ezekiel bidden to utter to the dry bones? Why God's word only?

III. Vss. 7-10.—What is meant by "O breath"? When this Spirit came, what followed? How only can the Jews now be restored? What, then, should be the prayer of all?

The judgments of God pronounced in the Bible against the ungodly are everywhere off-set with mercies promised to the righteous. This is particularly true of that prophecy that predicts not only the downfall of proud and idolatrous empires, but also the rise of an empire in the last days, or the Messianic times, that should be characterized by pervading spirituality.

EXPOSITION.—I. The Valley of Dry Bones. Verses 1, 2.

Verses 1.—The hand of the Lord [Jehovah] was upon me.—No prophet so frequently and emphatically represents himself as acting and speaking solely by Divine direction, revelation and inspiration. The reason for this is to be found in part, at least, in ii. 3-5. "The hand" here, as usual, represents executive action, and it was "upon" Ezekiel to cause him to do God's will. The whole was from God, with nothing of the prophet's own separate origination. Carried me out. Literally and better, caused me to go forth. In the Spirit of the Lord [Jehovah]. Clearly the thought here is not, "in mind," as opposed to body, for the Spirit is Jehovah's. The thought is that this Spirit led or guided the prophet, as Christ was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Set me down, caused me to rest; that is, to stop and remain. Whether the prophet did actually go forth in body, is not asserted. The valley may well enough have been that of the river Chebar, a branch of the Euphrates, by the side of which Ezekiel lived in captivity (i. 1). Full of bones. The field of vision was as that on which had been waged long before a mighty battle where the slain had been left unburied, until nothing was now left but the bleached bones.

Verses 2.—Caused me to pass, etc.—The death here typified is explained in vs. 11, as national, which in turn typified spiritual death. Very many. This recalls such promises as Gen. xxii. 17, 18, and the whole vision with its annexed explanation is a virtual re-affirmation of that promise. Very dry. At once reminding of the long time since the slaughter and the utter hopelessness of revival—certainly from any inward, self-activity. Nothing here of the piety of mere self-culture or evolution.

II. The Dry Bones Addressed. Verses 3-5.

Verses 3.—And he said, etc.—"The Spirit of Jehovah" (verse 1) said this, or Jehovah in the person of the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is not in the Old Testament as fully disclosed as in the New, though it is none the less there. Son of man. This title is applied to Ezekiel in the book of his prophecy about eighty times, always by Jehovah, never by himself, while in the New Testament the same title is applied to Christ about the same number of

times always save once or twice by himself, and not by others. Can these bones live? What would reason, sense, sight, science, infer? The question is asked not to test the prophet's faith, but to call attention anew to the utter impossibility of revival in the way of nature. O Lord [Jehovah] God, thou knowest. A humble and reverent recognition of three things: (1) of his own ignorance as to this matter; (2) of God's power to raise the dead even; and (3) of God's knowledge of his own purpose. Mark the contrast between "the Son of man," and "Jehovah God thou."

Verses 4.—Prophecy upon these bones.—Concerning them. The prophecy was both to them and of them. O ye dry bones, hear, etc. We are reminded of Christ at Lazarus' tomb. The sound of the natural voice could not be heard by the dead, but the word of God represents God's power put forth, and that power does make itself known even to the dead when it is, as here, life-giving power. Men destitute of spiritual life do yet have some understanding of Divine truth.

Verses 5.—Thus saith the Lord [Jehovah] God.—In this, as in the previous words, the dead, while dead, are to take note both as to what is the promise, and by whom.

Verses 6.—And ye shall know, etc.—They might doubt the word, but the experience would silence doubt. Even if the word alone brought knowledge it was not like experimental knowledge.

III. The Results. Verses 7-10.

Verses 7.—So I prophesied, etc.—Duty was his, results God's. The obedience of faith, punctual obedience. As I prophesied, etc. While prophesying, and according to the prophecy. Some refer to I Thess. iv. 16. What was the nature of the noise or "voice" is uncertain. It may have been a sign that the silence of the grave was to be broken. The "shaking" was probably the shaking of the bones, the first motion which signified that the activity of life was to begin. Bone to his bone. Each skeleton restored to its original integrity, with all, and only its own bones, identity preserved.

Verses 8.—When I beheld, etc.—The process continued after the prophecy closed; God's prophets wonder at the fulfilment of their own words. Sinews; flesh; skin. Completing the body. No doubt a reference to Gen. iii. 7. No breath. No animal life before the human life, as though our life were not from one indivisible life-principle.

Verses 9.—Then he said, etc.—A new act of prophecy and also a new act of God, as in the creation of man. Gen. ii. 7. This marks the distinction between the origin and nature of our bodies, and the origin and nature of our spirits, our true selves, wherein we bear God's image. Say to the wind, etc.—Our breath is the means, and so the sign of life. The "four winds" symbolize the universal presence of God's spirit. These slain. The Jews were scattered, and nationally dead, as by slaughter, in judgment for their sins.

Verses 10.—The breath came into them, etc.—A preliminary fulfilment was the return from Babylonian captivity. The great fulfilment is that described in Rom. xi. 25, 26.

TOPICS.—Three analogous displays of the power of God are very naturally suggested.

(1) In Revival.—In Ezekiel's time, the Lord's people were in a land of captivity, and were in a condition so abject, helpless, hopeless, that they were sorrowfully saying, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost."

It is possible for a Christian church to be reduced to a similar condition—where it is like a valley "full of bones." The songs are dry, and the prayers, and the so-called religious talk—some forms still survive.

One of the surest precursors of revival is a disposition of the bones to come together—"bone to his bone"—brethren and sisters, who have long been estranged in feeling, uniting again "in the bonds of peace." When, in answer to devout invocation, the Holy Spirit comes, to give new life to the perfected form, then "they stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army." Then the revival is complete.

(2) Regeneration.—Physical life, intellectual life, there may be; but spiritually, there is no more life than in a heap of bleaching bones. "Can they

live?" Is a question for the Lord to answer; and this is the way he answers it: "Prophecy unto these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

Our business is to speak the word, and trust to God to give it power.

(3) Resurrection.—The world is a great charnel-house. Uncounted millions slumber beneath our feet. "Can these dead men arise?" The skeptic says, "Impossible." He affects to be scientific, and undertakes to show how, in case of a resurrection, there would be innumerable claimants for the same corporeal particles. But Faith, meekly answers, "Lord, thou knowest." He has said, "All they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and come forth."

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 15th, 1879.—The Need of God's Spirit.—Zechariah iv. 1-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."—Zechariah iv. 6.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Draw out, by questioning, the oft told story of the Captivity. Though they had to be punished, God loved them still, and sent good men to teach them. Sometimes he taught in strange ways.

Now tell the story of the strange sight which the Lord showed to Ezekiel.

Tell how all who do not love Jesus, are not trying to lead new lives, are "dead in sin," their souls are dead.

Live plants grow, bear fruit, etc.: dead plants do not, even though the same sun and rain shines on and waters both.

The bones heard God's voice and moved; but that was not enough. Teacher, mother, pastor, can tell you what God says, but only the Holy Spirit can put new life into your soul.

Jesus himself tells how souls may be made alive. "He that heareth my word." You have heard his word. Is that enough? Listen; "And believeth on him that sent me"; your body will die; but, by-and-by, all who are dead will hear God's voice, and those whose souls have been made alive here, shall be gathered from wherever they have been buried, and raised up to eternal life in heaven.

Answer to Scripture Enigma

No. 22. Rain-bow.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 23.

My first draws life's first breath, Sees light's first gleam, Hears want's first cry, And pain's first scream.

My next gives each man's due, And heaven's just claim, The law's best plea, And youth's true aim.

My whole brings kings to crowns For which they ne'er have striven; And heirs to unbought lands, And saints to heaven.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER XVIII.—The New Church and Home.

"Home January, 7th.—We are having very precious praying times with our people here, for this is the 'week of prayer' for all the world. How precious the thought that from all parts of the earth is ascending a constant stream of united prayer! Did you remember on the avenue, mother and Fleda, Hattie and John, that we in Micronesia began the week of prayer for all the rest of the world? Being fifteen hours before you, we were praying that the Lord would prepare your hearts before your day began.

"January 20.—I have written you of the new home Dwight is building on the other side of the island. On his last trip over he took me with him again. The tide being against us, we stopped for the night at an uninhabited island. It was dark, and I groped about for shelter from the wind, and from behind the trunk of a cocoanut tree called

Miriam and wee Willie to creep under the folds of my cloak. The boys were trying to strike fire without matches, which they are very skillful in doing, only this time the high wind kept putting it out. But presently they had a cheerful blaze, which showed us our way into a deserted house, where we spread our mats and lay down ourselves to rest after lurching from our basket on pigeons and bread-fruit. At break of day we were up for a fresh start, and while the canoes were preparing I had five minutes for exploring.

"What a gem of a little island it was! Nearly circular and no larger than I could run across in three or four minutes, covered with a velvety carpet of grass, studded with young cocoanut trees, with a white sand-beach strewn with shells and corals, it seems like a mimic island only, brought up by some magic wand as a home for the fairies.

"We seated ourselves on the beach while we worshipped and sang 'All hail' to the Maker of heaven and earth, then launched our canoe and away. The morning was cloudy, earth and sky all of an inky purple. The mountains, however, were darker except a streak of light struggling through a break in the clouds and reflected over the waves. I can never tell when Ponapé is prettiest, she is so beautiful in every mood. Now the dark clouds are mostly gone. On one side of blue sky, streaked with silver, is smiling down on the green-robed hills, but on the other the grand old mountains veil themselves still in mist.

"Such exquisite shades of coloring! As we ride along, the shore is lined with a thick growth of light and delicate green. Then the taller trees behind are of a darker hue, the vine-clad hills are of a rich, full shade, the mountains rising in the distance, each one darker, and darker, till the tip of the farthest rises almost black in gloomy grandeur, relieved by its wreath of snowy clouds. Do you see the beautiful contrast? But they are never two days alike. Sometimes the prevailing color is blue, and the soft, hazy effect is indescribable.

"Now we turn into the river, where rows of the moss covered limbs of the bread fruit trees stretch across till they meet above. We know by the roar of the waters that we are nearing the falls, but cannot see them till a sudden turn brings us into a complete chamber shut in by a rocky wall about thirty feet high, a door at the point where we enter, and a beautiful sheet of water pouring over one side; 'Nature's bath-room!' we cry but we had come to the shallows. The tide was falling, Dwight must get out and with the natives tug the canoe over, and I perforce pulled off shoes and stockings and waded across, which with memories of childish days, was glee enough.

"We reached Canaan on Saturday night, and on Lord's Day morning had a congregation of three or four hundred. What a beautiful sight it was to see the canoes with their white sails coming across the bay in all directions up to the house of God!

"On Monday morning the people came together to work for the Lord, clearing off the ground around the church. Meanwhile, I was teaching the women in the house amid the sound of their brisk axes and the crashing of falling trees. Dwight tugged away at house-building for a week, and then, the fierce trade-winds being favorable, we started for home. We scudded through the water much as a bird flies through air, stopping only to dine on board the whaler 'Sunbeam,' which lay in the Pontatik harbor, then hurrying on to prepare letters to send by its German captain, whom we shall venture to trust in hope of gladdening your hearts some day.

"March 1st.—We had expected to move ere this, but many things have caused delay. Dwight has been building a great scow which is to carry timber and goods. This has taken much time, but is done now. Dwight looks pale and worn, and we should both be sick with difficulties and anxieties if we allowed ourselves to carry burdens ahead.

"March 8th.—Let me give you a little sketch of last Thursday as a specimen of the difficulties to be overcome on Ponapé. It was the day chosen for the launch. Dwight was out early, putting some last touches to the great paddle, and came in drenched with perspiration and an occasional shower; indeed, he was wet through from one of these

causes through all the day. Willie's flag waved in front of the lumbering old scow. Dwight named her 'Lady Alice,' though perhaps it was a questionable honor, considering the style of the craft. The natives came crowding about, attracted by the novel proceedings; but when Dwight wanted help, no one could be found willing to work for the fair wages offered. Ponapéans are not only indolent, but have most absurd ideas as to the value of their commodities. It is up-hill work to teach them better, but we must not, if we could, yield to their demands. What could Dwight do? Give up moving? He reminded them of what we were doing for them and their obligation to help us. After a deal of talk they yielded, but not without grumbling. Dwight bore all patiently, but I fairly cried with sympathy for his trials and sorrows for their naughtiness.

"After loading it was found that the scow would not carry more than half what he had hoped, necessitating another trip. They launched it about four o'clock, to take advantage of the night tide, expecting to have moonlight, but it proved a dark and rainy night, and has poured ever since. What a forlorn set of drenched and weary people they must be!

"But enough of this shady side: There is so much light on this dark shore that I am ashamed of low spirits. This is the time of loneliness that I have been long dreading, but how guilty should I be not to record how much better the Lord has been than my fears predicted! This old house is gloomy enough on a dark stormy night, such as housebreakers love, but I slept as quietly and sweetly as if in mother's arms or in my old place by Hattie. No rude alarms disturbed our rest. Miriam and little Will slept by my door, and Nicholas was self-constituted police.

"March 20th.—Dwight was away five days, returning to rest one night only, and then commenced reloading. That was another trying day. The natives quarreled about their pay, and were unwilling to return. They are such poor ignorant children. At prayers Dwight appealed to the Christians: 'How could we preach and labor for them if we had no home?' He referred to what I had left to come to them, and quite broke down at the remembrance: It was the first time I ever saw him cry so. But it did good. The natives were touched, many of them coming up to their duty ever since. My work was to get things ready for Dwight's long absence. Having occasion to go to my box of bedding to get a quilt for his use, I found a rat's nest in my pretty album quilt completely ruined. All had been packed with much care, with camphor-gum to protect them from moths, but behold the result. It is well that we do not expect to keep anything here. Bed-linen and other bedding were also ruined. I had been thinking that the trials came to my husband, but here was a little one for me, as any housekeeper can tell. Indeed, I valued very highly this souvenir covered with the dear names and mottoes of school-days. But I folded it away and went to work again.

"The grand trial of the day came at leaving-time, and through 'Titus,' one of our deacons, whom we love well and have great faith in. The 'old Adam' seemed to have got into him, and his ungenerous talk wounded us sore. Dwight sailed away looking pale and discouraged; and the thought of his going alone to meet so many trials was almost too much for me. Weeping inconsolably, I did not see how I should ever be comforted; but the Master did. The tide proved too low, and the old scow had to come back again. About eight o'clock Dwight walked in upon us, and at three the next morning was up and off in better spirits. Nicholas and I prepared him a nice little breakfast at that early hour. We comfort ourselves during the evening with some of Beethoven's grand 'Sonatas' on the harmonium. Oh how soothing to chafed, weary spirits! I am so happy to find that these, and some of Mendelssohn's 'songs without words,' and a few of my Cramer studies, are quite possible on the little instrument.

April 1st.—Since Dwight's absence I have not had time to be lonesome, having had to attend to his duties as well as my own. At morning devotions I read and expound the Bible to the natives; at evening, question them on