

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1881.

FIRST QUARTER.

Lesson III.—JANUARY 16.

THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS. Luke i. 67-79.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 76-79.

Luke next tells of the birth and naming of John, after which the speech of Zacharias returned, and he prophesied concerning Jesus and John (Luke i. 57-79). This occurred at the home of Zacharias in the hill-country of Judea, John's personal history for the thirty years which followed is summed up in the few words of vs. 80.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The day spring from on high hath visited us."—Luke i. 78.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Prophecy of Zacharias, Luke i. 67-79.
- T. Filled with the Holy Ghost, Acts ii. 1-21.
- W. Prophecies concerning the Son, Psa. ii. 1-12.
- T. Prophecies concerning the Son, Isa. liii. 1-12.
- F. Prophecies concerning the Son, Isa. xlii. 1-9.
- S. The Herald and the Son, Mal. iii. 1-6.
- S. Prophetic View of the Son and his Herald, Luke i. 67-79.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 67: Joel ii. 28; John vii. 39; 1 Cor. vi. 19.
- With vs. 68: Psa. lxxii. 18; Psa. cxli. 9.
- With vs. 69: Psa. lxxv. 10.
- With vs. 70: Acts iii. 21; Rom. i. 2.
- With vs. 71: John xxx. 10, 11.
- With vs. 72: Lev. xxvi. 42.
- With vs. 73: Gen. xii. 2, 3; Heb. vi. 13.
- With vs. 74: Rom. viii. 15.
- With vs. 75: Eph. iv. 24; Titus ii. 12.
- With vs. 76: Isa. xl. 3; Mal. iii. 1; Matt. xi. 10.
- With vs. 77: Acts v. 31.
- With vs. 78: Num. xxiv. 17; Mal. iv. 2.
- With vs. 79: Isa. ix. 2.

PROPHETIC VIEW OF THE SON AND HIS HERALD.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Prophetic View of the Son, Vss. 67-75. II. Prophetic View of the Herald, Vss. 76-79.

QUESTIONS.—Of whom was John the appointed herald? What is meant by the "day spring"?

I. Vss. 67-75.—Under whose influence did Zacharias speak this prophecy? Did Zacharias probably know the full meaning of what he said? What three reasons for blessing God are given in vs. 68, 69? What is "a horn of salvation"? For what ends did God raise up this horn? (Vss. 72, 73.) What blessings are by this means secured to us? (Vss. 74, 75).

II. Vss. 76-79.—What is meant by "a herald"? Who is the herald of whom Zacharias speaks? What statement in vs. 76 shows that John was a herald? What other name is given John in vs. 76? What statement of his work is given at the end of vs. 76? What was John to give to the Lord's people? (Vs. 77.) By what does salvation come? (Vs. 77.)

NOTES.—I. Concerning the Messiah (vss. 67-75.)

Was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied. The expression of the aspirations and hopes of a pious Jew, waiting for the salvation of the Lord. He hath visited. After four centuries of the silence of all prophetic voices, a visit of grace. See Matt. xxv. 36. Redeemed. Wrought redemption, or ransom. The work of salvation is one of redemption. It could only be accomplished by the payment of a price. Deliverance through a ransom was a familiar thought, and ran through all the Messianic expectations of the time. See ii. 38. Also, Matt. xx. 28. Horn of salvation. The single horn, in the middle of the forehead, was the symbol of great strength. This metaphor is a frequent one in the Old Testament. See Deut. xxxiii. 17; Psa. lxxv. 10; Dan. vii. 8. See reference to the horns of the altar, as a place of refuge, in 1 Kings i. 50. In the house of his servant David, Zacharias recognizes Mary as of Davidic descent. As he spake, etc. Parenthetical. Holy prophets. Holy, as all believers are. Called to be saints. (Rom. i. 7.) Also in the sense of being free from error in their prophecies. Every word spoken by them of Christ was fulfilled. Saved [or salvation] from our

enemies. Designating the scope of the salvation by the "horn" of vs. 69. Primarily, the "enemies" in Zacharias' mind may have been the Roman oppressors; and "all that hate us" may have reference to such as Herod and his court. But what follows gives the thought a wider reach, as extending to spiritual foes. His holy covenant and oath, given to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 16-18), were "two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. vi. 17, 18), and included the great blessing to all nations through his seed. Gal. iii. 16, shows to us that Christ was this "seed." Might serve him without fear, etc. The seed-thought of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Holiness. The inward condition. Righteousness. The outward walk. Omit of our life,—not found in best MSS.

II. Concerning John (vss. 76-79.)

Prophet of the Highest. But Jesus was called Son of the Highest (vs. 32). Face of the Lord. In Isa. xl. 3, to which Zacharias here refers, the Lord is Jehovah. Did he recognize the Son of Mary as Jehovah? The Holy Spirit, within him, did; as he also does in Mark i. 2, 3, and elsewhere. To give knowledge of salvation, etc. To awaken in them the need of the true salvation, and then to point to the Lamb of God (John i. 29). The Jews thought that political deliverance would remedy every ill. John was to teach them that salvation is not temporal emancipation, but forgiveness of sins. See Matt. iii. for his bold declarations of this truth. Tender mercy. Literally, bowels of mercy—a favorite phrase with Paul. See Phil. ii. 1; Col. iii. 12. This, the source of salvation. See John iii. 16. Day spring from on high. The dawn, as of the sun, giving light to those in darkness. Isa. lx. 2, 3. The lesser lights of Reason and Learning can never take the place of the Sun of Righteousness, to reach to the "shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

1. This Song of Zacharias shows that his discipline of enforced silence was blessed to the increase of his faith and spiritual knowledge. A hint of the meaning of trials.

2. Our worst and most fatal enemies are our sins. It is from them that we need to be saved. Yet men trouble themselves about their sorrows. Christ's salvation strikes at the root of all our ills.

For nine months Zacharias had been dumb. He had dared to doubt, and had asked for a sign. He got one that he did not like. Let us be warned by his temerity.

The moment Zacharias' mouth was opened, he began to praise God; and this is the noblest use to which a mouth can ever be put.

Provision is made in the gospel for putting it away so completely that it shall never rise up in judgment against us, but shall be "blotted out as a thick cloud." Isa. xliv. 22. And this is done, not because God was under obligation to do it, but just because of his "mercy."

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Zacharias and Elisabeth waited many days after the angel came. From the time Zacharias saw the angel in the temple, until his little son was born, he did not speak one word. It was a long time to keep from speaking—nearly a year. But Zacharias could not speak. What do we call people who cannot speak? Explain the cause of Zacharias' loss of speech, as in vs. 18-20. When did the angel say Zacharias should speak again? (Vs. 20.)

On thinking of a name for the little boy, Elisabeth's friends said, "Zacharias." Why?

The rest of the story is told in such simple language, that it may be read directly from the Bible. Vss. 60-64. Question back the points after reading. The first words Zacharias spoke were words of praise to God.

The people all over the country talked about the child John, and about the strange things that happened before his birth. They said, "What manner of child shall this be?" Zacharias knew what kind of a child John would be. Who had told him?

Zacharias' heart was full of joy. He had often read God's promises in the

Old Testament. He knew what God promised Abraham. Learn the words Zacharias spoke about John. Teach vs. 76.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Booth's Department.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 106.

A thing of ancient fame,  
Who can declare my name?  
If I my deeds confess,  
Who will my nature guess?

- I held up Jacob's head,  
When he from Esau fled;  
Yet, though I seemed so kind,  
He left me still behind.
- In priestly service oft,  
I bore the flame aloft.
- With man's resemblance rude,  
Or beast's similitude,  
Great princes bowed the knee,  
And offered praise to me.
- Once was I made to stand,  
To show God's helping hand.
- Once, with a vigorous stroke,  
A giant's skull I broke.
- When, as the years rolled on,  
God's earthly temple shone  
In sanctity and state,  
I bore its massive weight.
- 'Twas I the entrance closed,  
Where Lazarus once reposed.
- I shut the Saviour in,  
Where He was laid for sin;  
Yet could not bar the way,  
Upon his rising day.
- I am what Christ was made  
To those who disobeyed,  
Who stumbled when they heard  
God's true and faithful word.
- Yet I'm the same to some  
Whose hearts to Jesus come;  
Their faith still works by love,  
With the same hope in view,  
Their hope is fixed above;  
Say, am I such to you?

—Selected.

CURIOS QUESTIONS.

- Where do we find the first example of letter writing.
- Who was it that "made Israel to sin"?
- Which of the cities of Canaan was first taken by the Israelites?
- What was the first prayer that is recorded in the Bible?
- DIAMOND WORD PUZZLE.
  - The first consonant.
  - A proper name.
  - The great chart of life.
  - The more aged.
  - The end of me.

Answers next week.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 105.

Noah removes the covering of the ark on New Year's Day. Gen. viii. 13.

ANSWERS TO CURIOS QUESTIONS.

- A Diamond of words.

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J A C O B  
P A S T U R E  
P I C T O R I A L  
T O U R I S T  
B R A S K  
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L

- West, vest, vast, East.
- Soup, soul, soil, foil, fowl, fool, foot, coat, cost, cast, fast, fiat, Fish.
- Road, road, root, coot, coat, coal, cost, toil, tail, Rail.
- Cat, fat, fit, fig, dig, Dog.
- Boot, soot, shot, Shoe.
- Hash, hath, hate, mate, male, mile, Milk.

BIBLE QUESTION ENIGMA.

- A dramytium.....Acts xxvii. 2.
- N. Icanor, Nicolas.....Acts vi. 5.
- T. ertullus.....Acts xxiv. 5.
- I. conium.....2 Tim. iii. 11.
- O. nesiphorus.....2 Tim. i. 16.
- C. yprus.....Acts xxi. 16.
- H. ebrew.....Acts xxi. 40.

ANTIOCH. Acts xiii. 16; xi. 26.

The Daily Western Times publishes the following letter from "A Puzzled Layman"—I looked in on my clergyman the other day, and having some business to transact with him some days hence, I asked him if the 3rd of May would do for us to meet and talk it over. He is a good sort of man—but he exclaimed, "The 3rd of May! I am under obligation to observe silence on that day!" and he put into my hand a programme of taciturnity and reflection which the bishop had cut out for him. On the 3rd of May the clergy of the deanery are to retire or to retreat from the world. It is the desire of the bishop that absolute silence be preserved throughout the day.

Select Serial.

A Thorny Path.

BY HESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER I.

IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

A dark dreary, November day with not a single break in the clouds. The naked branches of the trees in Kensington Gardens crossed each other in a network of black lines against the gray and gloomy sky. There had been a dense fog in the morning, but it had lifted a little and you could see the thick low clouds overhead, and the closely planted trunks of the trees crowding together. Underfoot lay a brown carpet of fallen leaves, rotting under the constant dripping of moisture from the boughs above them. The air was not cold, but it was damp, and there seemed no life in it. The short afternoon begun, yet there were no groups of children playing in the long vistas and broad paths. The thick drizzle of a November day had kept most people prisoners at home.

There were a few passers-by, however, who made their way hurriedly along the soft wet walks, with no sauntering foot steps, or wandering glances on the dismal scene around them. They were all too much occupied with their own discomfort to pay much heed to a melancholy little group, which, with sad, slow steps, loitered along under the dank, moist trees. A woman, whose ragged clothing hung about her, was the centre of it. She carried on one arm a baby some few months old, with the other she led an almost barefooted child of three years. A blind old man walked at her side, guiding himself by keeping his withered hand upon her shoulder. Neither the old man nor the little girl got on quickly; and very slowly the faltering, wearied footsteps of this little knot of poverty and suffering passed along one of the by-paths. Even the child's prattle was stilled for the time by weariness and hunger; and no sound except the baby's half-formed words broke the silence among them.

"Where are you leading us to, Hagar?" asked the old man, after a while.

She made no answer. The moment was come at last when despair had gained full possession of her. She had been struggling hard for a living ever since her husband had died, six months ago, just as the summer was coming, with its lighter hardships and fewer claims. But now winter had set in, and the burden of this old man leaning on her shoulder, and the child dragging at her hand, was too heavy for her. She had turned aside into the almost deserted gardens, because she could no longer endure to see the stream of people along the main road, all of them hastening to get their work done and hurry home to their own fireside. There was neither work nor home for them. Her own hands might have kept herself and her baby, but she had been unable to earn enough for her father and her little girl. All was gone now, even the poor shelter of the bare room, for which she could no longer pay the rent. There was nothing left but to starve together.

"Father!" she said, after a long pause, and speaking in a loud, hoarse whisper, as if ashamed and afraid of being overheard; "you could not make up your mind to go to the poorhouse for a bit?"

"I'd lie down and die like a dog first," he answered passionately.

He had said the same words often; but Hagar's heart was hardened by them, as it had never been hardened before. Many and many a time had she given him more than his share of their hard-earned food, and when he still asked for more, she had taken the morsel off her own plate, and gone hungry and famished herself. She had parted with all her own spare clothing before she touched one article of his. She had toiled and slaved for him. Yet, now they were homeless and penniless, he gave the same old answer; his pride would not bend, if she and her children died for it.

"Die like a dog!" There was nothing but that before them, if they did not go into the poorhouse. "It is better to die than to live," she muttered to herself. The baby's fingers played about her face, but awoke no smile upon it. The blackness of despair was all about her. She looked up, and saw

only the unbroken and deepening gloom of the clouds, behind which the winter sun was going down rapidly, with night following swiftly in its track. Her little girl dragged heavily at her hands, and the blind old man, groaning and stumbling at her side, seemed to lean more of his weight upon her shoulder. She could bear it no longer. Surely the baby was load enough for her.

"Dot," she said, stopping suddenly, "run round those trees there, and see what you can; and, father, stay here a minute till I come back."

She did not wait for any word of peevish remonstrance from the wearied old man, but dropped the child's hand, and shook off his close grasp. Swiftly and noiselessly on the thick carpet of dying leaves, she hurried away. She did not dare to turn round for a last glance. More and more quickly grew the distance between them, until at last she began to run, as one afraid of some pursuer, and ran breathlessly to lose herself among the busy throng of people in the main road. She had thrown off her burden.

The blind man stood still in the path where she had left him, tapping the ground with his stick to feel for the roots of the trees, over which he feared to stumble. Two or three persons passed him, but no one spoke. Very soon he grew impatient, and listened eagerly for Hagar's return, with his gray head bent down, and his hand to his ear to catch the faintest sound of her approaching footsteps. But he could hear nothing, save the ceaseless roll of wheels passing along the streets, and the low splash of the raindrops falling from the branches overhead; the few feet passing to and fro made no sound until they were close upon him, and then he knew they were not hers. At length he lifted up his head and called:

"Hagar! Hagar! Hagar!"

It was strange and thoughtless of her to go so far out of hearing, and leave him there in the way of passers-by. It was high time, too, that she found some place for them to put their heads into for the night. It must be getting late; he felt how dreary the gloom of the evening was, though he could not see the darkness of the sky.

"Hagar!" he called again, in a louder voice; "Hagar!"

There was no voice calling back again, strain his ear as he might to catch it. His uneasiness deepened into a vague dread. At all times his blindness made him lonely; but now loneliness seemed an utter and fearful solitude, as if he had been abandoned in some wilderness, unknown to any human being. Where was he? How was he to move on, and reach any place of refuge, thus left to himself? He groped about with his stick, and touched only the trees, which seemed to hem him in. All round him he could hear the stir and roar of busy life; but he could not find his way to it. He had never realized before what Hagar had been to him.

"Hagar!" he cried for the third time.

No answer. He would have been angry had not tears come into his sightless eyes, and sobs into his throat. He leaned his head against the rough bark of the tree under which he was standing, and wept bitterly. He began to ask himself, was it possible that he was really forsaken? Or was Hagar only gone away in a sulk, keeping aloof for a little while, to make him feel how helpless and dependent he was? Perhaps, if he could only see, he would find her sitting down on one of the benches a little way off, waiting till she thought he was punished enough. Ah? if he could only see!

"Where's my mother?" asked a little voice, close beside him.

"Is that you Dot?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, it's Dot that's here," answered the little girl; "where's my mother?"

"Can't you see her anywhere?" he said, clasping the child's cold hand in a firm grasp, lest he should lose her again.

"Look all about you, Dot, among the trees, and tell me, can't you see her?"

"No, no," sobbed the little child, "Dot can't see her nowhere; and I want her. Dot's so hungry."

"Hagar! Hagar!" he shouted at the highest pitch of his weak old voice; and Dot called "Mother!" in her shrill young tones. Then they listened for a minute in silence, standing together, hand in hand under the winter trees.