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INTERNATIONAL LESSON

First Quarter Lesson 1 Jan. 5 1902

THE PROMISE OF POWER.
—Acts 1:1-11.

Study Verses 1-14. Read Acts 1:1-11.

* GOLDEN TEXT.—While he blessed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.—Luke 24:51.

SETTING OF THE LESSON.

Time.—Spring of A.D. 30 The forty resurrection days, from April 9 to May 18; and the ten days of waiting, May 18-28.

Place.—The ascension was from the Mount of Olives, in the outskirts of Bethany. The prayer-meeting was in an upper room of some well-known house in Jerusalem.

Place in the history.—The connecting link between the seen and the unseen life of Jesus, the Messiah. The development of the kingdom of God committed to the disciples, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.—The former treatise, or history.—the Gospel according to Luke,—deals with the ascension as the close of the earthly life of Jesus; in the Acts "the ascension is contemplated as the opening of the heavenly life," as the founding and development of Christ's church.

O Theophilus. A proper name, not uncommon among the Greeks and the Jews. All that Jesus began both to do and teach. Either what Jesus did from the beginning, or, implying that the former treatise related what Jesus began to do and teach; and this relates what he, the same Jesus, continued to do and to teach. Until the day. Luke closes his Gospel with the account of the ascension. Taken up to heaven. Through the Holy Ghost. Showing that the commission was from a divine source. Had given commandments unto the apostles. At various times during his life, but especially at his last appearance. To whom also he showed himself alive. The same Jesus who was crucified, and with the body that bore the wounds of the cross. The great change of his body into a spiritual body seems to have occurred at the ascension. After his passion. "Too sacred a word to be expunged from this the only place where it occurs in the Bible." By many infallible proofs, proofs that carried certainty of conviction with them. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested fact in history. Forty days at intervals, ten or eleven times. Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, which was to be unfolded and carried on through them.

Relation to the succeeding history. 1. The fact that Jesus was alive after his crucifixion was essential to the certainty that Jesus was the promised Messiah. All the hope and faith of the apostles was built upon this fact.

2. It was impossible to build up a kingdom with a dead king, a mere memory, as its ruler. The first thing in the new kingdom was the king.

THE PROMISE OF POWER.—Vs. 4-8. The next essential after the king was a power by which the kingdom could be established, gain adherents, transform sinful men, overcome obstacles, and change the whole world into a kingdom of God. The work was one of inconceivable magnitude and difficulty. It was the height of absurdity, except by divine power working through the disciples. And being assembled together with them, the twelve. They assembled probably in Jerusalem on the day of ascension, whence Jesus commanded them. Emphatic, charged them. Should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait. They waited by prayer, by conference together, by doing necessary duties. Waiting is not sleeping with folded hands. They waited ten days. For the promise of the Father. For the fulfillment of the promise which the Father had given. It was the promise, as being the most important, all-embracing promise,—the Holy Spirit promised by Joel (2:28, 29; see Acts 2:17, 18); by Isaiah (44:3).

The new dispensation was to be the dispensation of the Spirit, by whose power the transformation and triumph were to come. Which ye have heard of me. This promise is alluded to in Luke 24:49, and found in John 14:16, 26; 15:26.

"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever."

For John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, truly baptized with water, the symbol and type of a better baptism. Many were brought to repentance then. But something higher, better, was needed. While John was baptizing with water, he pointed to Jesus as the one who should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire

(Matt. 3:11). Jesus says that this promise is about to be fulfilled. Ye shall be baptized with (or in) the Holy Ghost. As the element in which the baptism is performed.

Not many days hence. About ten days, on Pentecost. When they therefore were come together on the Mount of Olives. They asked. Kept asking. Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel? As promised again and again in the Scriptures. Israel was then subject to the Roman power. And he said, implying that their expectation of some kind of restoration was correct. It is not for you to know the times or the seasons. The duration of future periods of church history. Which the Father hath put in his own power. Kept within his own absolute disposal.

It would have been of no use to them if they had known. It would have taken their thoughts away from their work, and interested them in useless questions.

All they needed was the fact, as a certainty, toward which God would gradually lead them, and the power to accomplish the desired results.

But instead of this useless knowledge ye shall receive power to accomplish the things you desire. You cannot know the future, but you can make it.

This power given includes (1) moral and spiritual power; (2) power to overcome temptations, and to do right under the most trying circumstances; (3) power to lead men to the Saviour; (4) power to overcome enemies and obstacles; (5) power to work miracles; (6) power to lead the church; (7) power to bring the kingdom of heaven. The power comes from the Holy Ghost. Ghost is Old English for "Spirit."

THE GREAT COMMISSION.—V. 8. Having an ever-living king, and the promise of power, the next step was an authoritative commission. Ye shall be witnesses unto me. The words strike the keynote of the whole book, which is the history of the way and the places in which the commission was carried out. The gospel is built upon facts. The Gospels are the summary of the witness of the apostles. And still the power of preaching and of teaching is not in arguing, but in witnessing, in declaring the truths known and tested by experience. Witness unto me. Unto Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, that he was the deliverer of the people from their sins.

The places named express the order in which the witness should be borne, and corresponds to the great divisions of the book. (1) In Jerusalem, where the facts of his death and resurrection were best known. (2) And in all Judea and in Samaria, when the disciples were driven from Jerusalem by persecution (Acts 8:1-2). (3) Unto the uttermost part of the earth, to the remotest corners of the earth, to the remotest period of time.

Practical. 1. All Christians are to be witnesses, testifying to the reality of religion, to fulfillment of the promises, to the living presence of Jesus, to his power to save from sin, to guide into righteousness and support in trouble; to the superiority of Christianity to all other religions. Just in proportion as the Christian has experienced what Christ can do, and his nature and his life have been transformed, can he do effective work as a Christian.

2. He bears witness (1) by his words, for there is much which can be made known only by his expressing what Christ has done within him. (2) By his life and character, showing a specimen of what Christ does for a man. His family life, the way he does his business, his conduct in public affairs, are all witnesses as to what Christ has done for him, and can therefore do for others. (3) By sending witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth.

THE ASCENDED LORD.—V. 9. We come to the connecting link between the earthly and the heavenly life of Jesus. The same Jesus who lived and taught on earth now rules in glory and power in Heaven over His earthly kingdom.

While they beheld. That they might have clear proof of his ascension. He was in the act of blessing them when he was taken up. A cloud received him out of their sight. Perhaps it was like the "fiery, cloudy pillar," or Elijah's storm chariot, or the bright cloud of glory which overshadowed him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Place of the ascension in redemption. 1. It showed the continued reality of Christ's existence, linking this world with the other.

2. His bodily presence could be only in some one place. A present bodily Jesus involves a geographical church. Now abiding on the right hand of God, he is enabled to be the omnipresent Saviour of all men. His Holy Spirit is everything to all men everywhere that he himself would be if present with each one

3. Only by his going away could the Holy Spirit come and take his place.

4. His children are taught to live by faith and not by sight, and are trained in character and manhood by the responsibility of carrying on his work.

THE PROMISED RETURN.—Vs. 10, 11. This was the assurance that Jesus was to be with his people as he had promised, and would carry out his work. And while they looked. They gazed with intense eagerness, questioning what it meant. Behold. Implying suddenness. Two men. Angels in the form of men. In white apparel. No doubt, like the angel in Matt. 28:3, "his raiment white as snow." As his advent and his resurrection, so his return to heaven was accompanied by ministering angels. Ye men of Galilee. All of them were Galileans. Why stand ye gazing up as if you had lost your Master. This same Jesus. The very same, but in another form. The physical body was changed into the spiritual. Shall so come in like manner. This apparently refers to the final coming of our Lord at the completion of his earthly mission, when shall be fulfilled the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21, 22.

Note. The hope, the joy, the strength the glory of the church, is in this promise of the coming again of Jesus, of the triumph of his cause, of his glorious reign. We are not warring and laboring against hope, but with the certainty of the victory through an ever-living, ever-present Saviour, who is sure to come again in his kingdom.

WAITING FOR THE PROMISE.—Vs. 12-14. Returned they unto Jerusalem. Where they had been commanded to remain. A Sabbath day's journey. About three fourths of a mile, according to one interpretation of Num. 35:5 and Josh. 3:4. The air line distance from the eastern gate of the city to the traditional site of the ascension is twenty-two hundred and fifty feet, but the path is longer. As we are told that Bethany was fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem (John 11:18) the place of the ascension must have been in the very outskirts of the town. An upper room. Evidently some well-known place of resort. Where abode. Not a home, but as a regular place of meeting, the church home. The eleven apostles, as named, were the central company. Both Peter, etc. The list of apostles is here given (1) in order to show that all had returned except Judas, who had committed suicide, and were accepted by Christ as his apostles. With the women. Both Erasmus and Calvin interpret this as meaning "with their wives." Doubtless there were present the women mentioned in the Gospels as ministers to Jesus, and watching around the cross,—Mary Magdalene; Mary the mother of James and Joseph; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Salome, the mother of John; Susanna (Luke 8:3; John 19:25); and why not Martha and Mary of Bethany. Especially named was Mary the mother of Jesus, who is here mentioned for the last time. And with his brethren. James, Joseph, Simon, Jude (Matt. 13:55; 27:56). There had been much discussion whether these were the sons of Joseph and Mary, or of Joseph by a former wife, or were his adopted sons, and only cousins of Jesus by blood-relationship.

How they waited. 1. Steadfastly. They continued. Against all obstacles and enemies.

2. With one accord, one feeling, desire, purpose.

3. They waited with prayer in expectation of the fulfillment of the promise.

4. They were also doing the duties that came to hand—choosing another apostle in the place of Judas.

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