

[R1415 : page 190]

STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

OUR LORD'S ASCENSION.

III. QUARTER, LESSON I., JULY 3, ACTS 1:1-12.

Golden Text – "When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." – Acts 1:9.

VERSES 1,2. The writer of the account of the Acts of the Apostles was Luke; and the "former treatise" was that called the Gospel by Luke.

VERSE 3. Although the previous account had covered many of the incidents of the forty days following our Lord's resurrection (See Luke 24), it had by no means told all; and this further account, explanatory of the opening work of the Gospel dispensation, properly linked with the other, tells us that the special theme of our Master in the instructions of those forty days was – "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

Luke does not give us the particulars; but we are safe in assuming that they required considerable instruction, as they not only had the hopes common to all Jews, that God would, under Messiah, exalt Israel to be the chief nation of earth (and use that nation as his channel for communicating his laws to the world, and thus bless all the families of the earth in the seed of Abraham), but they had in mind, too, the special promises which the Lord had made to them before his death: that they should sit on thrones in Israel in his Kingdom. So great a power had these promises of the Kingdom in their minds that they had willingly left business prospects and endured the scorn of their fellows that they might become joint-heirs with Christ in his Kingdom. And the Master had invariably encouraged these hopes and ambitions.

His reproofs were merely against their strifes as to which should be greatest and sit the one on his right and the other on his left in that Kingdom. – Matt. 18:1-4; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 22:24-26. [R1415 : page 191]

They had seen all these hopes and prospects dashed when the Lord was crucified. Naturally, therefore, after they realized their Lord's resurrection, their thoughts and questions, and consequently his teaching, would be of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. It was needful to explain to them that the nation of Israel had been rejected from joint-heirship in his Kingdom because, although naturally Abraham's seed, they did not have Abraham's faith, and hence could not be recognized as heirs with Christ of the promise made to Abraham. It was necessary to tell the little handful of faithful disciples ("about five hundred brethren") that they had not been rejected with the nation, but were still recognized as heirs of the Kingdom, although the *time* for *setting up* the Kingdom was necessarily deferred until the full number (predestinated) should be selected. But they would *speedily be recognized* of the Father and granted blessings of the Spirit as sons of God and prospective joint-heirs with Christ, even though their exaltation to the honor and glory of kingdom power would be deferred. Accordingly we read, in

VERSES 4,5, that he instructed them to tarry at Jerusalem, to expect and wait for the begetting of the spirit of God as sons and heirs – pointing out that so it had already been foretold them by himself and by John the baptizer. [R1416 : page 191]

VERSES 6-8. But having been thus assured of their divine recognition as prospective joint-heirs with Christ in his kingdom "not many days hence" (verse 5), they put the question still close to their hearts – How about the kingdom in the full sense of the word? will it come at the same time? Will it, too, come not many days hence?

The Master's answer was not a reproof, nor even a correction or contradiction of their expectations in general. He merely told them that the times and seasons for the full establishment of the Kingdom God had in his own power, and that it was not then proper for them to know; *but* that they should receive power [*ability* to understand the deep things of God – 1 Cor. 2:10 – and be guided (gradually, as it would be due) into all truth, and shown "things to come" – John 16:13] after the holy Spirit had come upon them – the spirit of adoption, of sealing, as no longer servants but sons (John 15:15); and then they should be his *witnesses* everywhere – witnessing to the truths which he had taught them: that he is to be the King of the world – Jehovah's Anointed representative, whose kingdom is to be *under* the whole heavens; and all nations and kingdoms shall serve and obey him. They were to witness that God's promises concerning the establishment of his kingdom to bless the world are all true; that our Lord's death was merely a means toward that great end; that it was needful that Messiah should die for the sins of the world before those sins and their penalties could be remitted, and before those sinners could be blessed and restored to divine communion and favor. They were to tell believers to keep on praying as the Master had instructed, saying: Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. They were to witness that none of his words or promises were false, but that all things promised should be fulfilled "in *due* time."

VERSES 9-12. Our Lord's ascension might have taken place without being seen by any; for since his resurrection he is a spirit being, and "a spirit hath not flesh and bones." He was indeed put to death in the flesh, but he was quickened or made alive in spirit. He was there born of the spirit, "the first-born from the dead;" and as that which is *born* of the flesh is flesh, so that which is *born* of the spirit is spirit, and can go and come as the wind, without being seen of men. (John 3:8.) But as our risen Lord, a spirit being, in order to prove his resurrection, appeared at various

times and in various forms or bodies (some of which resembled the body of flesh which had been crucified), so he showed himself *in* a body of flesh when he ascended, to prove this fact to his disciples.

We must remember that he was *present* with the disciples for forty days before he ascended, yet was *visible* to them at most only seven times, and for only a few moments each time, during all those days; and to the world he was *always* invisible, as he had said before, "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more." The Apostle Paul, enumerating these manifestations of our Lord after his resurrection, says, "He was seen of above five hundred *brethren*," "and, last of all, by me also." It was the same Jesus who appeared in flesh and *as a gardener* to Mary, who appeared in another form *as a stranger* to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and who appeared in the midst of the disciples while the doors were shut and showed them *a body* of flesh and bones pierced by nails and a spear as an evidence or proof of his resurrection, but who the next instant showed them that he was now highly exalted and *different* from flesh and blood, by *dissolving* the flesh and bones and clothes before their eyes and vanishing out of their sight. It was this same Jesus, no longer flesh and bones but "a quickening spirit," who appeared also to Saul of Tarsus, but without any vailing of the spirit body under a fleshly one, and gave him a [R1416 : page 192] glimpse of the glory of a spirit being which felled him to the earth and cost him his sight. (Acts 26:13,14; 9:8.) This is the glorified Jesus, who was raised from death a spirit being (1 Cor. 15:40-44), but who veiled the glories of that spirit-body from his disciples, under bodies of flesh, in order that he might teach them the things pertaining to the Kingdom, who is to come again as the angels declared.

Many stumble over the statement of the eleventh verse – especially our dear brethren who call themselves Second

Adventists. They think of the passage as reading – Ye shall *see him come* in like manner as ye have seen him go. But it does not so read. Those disciples who *saw* him go are long since dead, and if others even should *see him come* they would not. But the angels do not say that any one will *see* him come: they merely affirm that the *manner* of his coming will be like the *manner* in which they had seen him go.

Now what was the *manner* of his going? What was there peculiar about the *manner* of his ascension? Whatever it was, that is the peculiarity to be expected as marking his coming again. Let us note again that the manner of his going was quiet, *unseen* by the world, *unknown* to the world, *unbelieved* by the world. It *was known*, however, by the "brethren," it was *manifested* to the "brethren," and it was *believed in* by the "brethren." So his second coming is as a thief – secretly – without outward demonstration – unknown to the world – known only to the brethren who are not in darkness, but who as children of the light are walking in the light. (1 Thes. 5:1-5.) For a fuller explanation of the Manner of our Lord's Second Coming, see Millennial Dawn, Vol. II., chapter 5. [R1416 : page 192]

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION SHED FORTH.

III. QUARTER, LESSON II., JULY 10, ACTS 2:1-12.

**Golden Text – "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth,...and he will show you things to come."
– John 16:13.**

VERSES 1-4. The most notable day in the history of the Church is the day of Pentecostal blessing which followed our Lord's ascension. It marks definitely the beginning of Church history by marking the beginning of the Church. For although the disciples were called, and followed the great Teacher during the three and a half years of his ministry and sacrifice, they were

not *recognized* by God as his sons until Pentecost, when the spirit of adoption was given.

True, they had consecrated themselves; they had even left all to follow Christ; but yet they were under *condemnation* as sinners and could not be recognized or treated as sons until their sins had been atoned for by the great sin-offering of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." For this they must wait. And even after the Redeemer had "poured out his soul unto death" as our sin-offering, and after he had been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, they must still wait until by the gift of the spirit of adoption God should recognize them as sons and empower them to teach in his name the forgiveness of sins: they must wait until he who *gave* our redemption price should ascend on high and there appear in the presence of God and offer to justice that sin-offering *on our behalf* – making it applicable to all those who believe in and obey him. The Pentecostal blessing was *of* the Father, but *by* the Son (Acts 2:33). It was the Father's recognition of the merit of the sin-offering.

True, the Master had sent them out to declare the Kingdom at hand, etc., and they returned rejoicing, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us in thy name;" but the power by which they did their miracles then, while it was holy spirit or holy power, was not their own, but the Lord's. He sent them forth in his name and *gave them power* over all manner of diseases, etc., but they received no power, no other recognition, direct from God, until Pentecost. Our Lord Jesus had the holy spirit or holy power, and that without limit, because he was a holy, harmless, undefiled son (John 3:34), but all others were debarred from this, because they were sinners until he had made reconciliation for iniquity. The disciples, then, had merely imputed or delegated holy power or holy spirit until the sacrifice was made and offered and until the Pentecostal blessing gave evidence to them and to

us and to all that God accepted of Christ's sacrifice – "the just for the unjust." – 1 Pet. 3:18.

To this agrees the statement that "the holy spirit was not yet given, *because* Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39); and that other statement that to "as many [of the house of servants] as received him, to them gave he liberty [ability, power, privilege] to *become* SONS OF GOD." – John 1:12.

VERSES 4-12. Concerning the *gifts* of the spirit which followed the begetting by the spirit in the early Church, for the purpose of attesting God's favor to the newly begotten "sons," as well as for manifesting them as teachers to those without, and the distinction between *those gifts* and the *fruit-gifts* of the spirit which now give evidence of divine favor and begetting, the student is referred to the leading article of this issue of this journal.
