

## HE ASCENDED UP ON HIGH

– ACTS 1:1-14. – JANUARY 3. –

**Golden Text:** – "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven."

– Luke 24:51.

THE Sunday-School Committee has arranged lessons for 1909 on the expansion of the early Church. Accordingly, our lessons for the year will be drawn principally from the book styled The Acts of the Apostles. St. Luke is the author of this, which some have described as the best of all Church histories. As the record closes abruptly, before the death of St. Paul, it is but reasonably supposed that the Book was finished about A.D. 63. The first verse of our lesson alludes to his previously written work, the Gospel by St. Luke, in which he set forth what Jesus began to do and to teach. There is a bare suggestion that the writer had in mind that his present treatise related to a continuation of our Lord's work by his holy Spirit through his apostles and followers. This standpoint of view given is a glorious sweep or vista and connects up the work which our Lord began at Jordan and finished at Calvary, and has since been carrying on by his Spirit and through his Church, and will continue to the consummation of the Church, which is his Body, and its glorification in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom blessing then to go forth to the blessing and uplifting of man. The small beginning, the trials and triumphs of the work, are yet to yield the abundant fruitage expressed in the declaration that unto Jesus every knee must bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God, the Father. And whosoever will not thus bow and confess and yield obedience to the Messianic Kingdom, will be utterly "destroyed from amongst his people" – in "the Second Death."

"St. Luke, a poet, and more than a poet, tells us how the beacon light of Christianity flashed from Jerusalem to Antioch – from Antioch to Ephesus, and to Troas, and to Philippi – from Philippi to Athens and Corinth, until at last it was kindled in the very palace and pretorium of the Caesars at imperial Rome. The light of the world dawned from the little Judean village and brightened in the Galilean hills, and then it seemed to set upon Golgotha in the midst of a disastrous eclipse. The Book of Acts shows us how, rekindled from the embers in the brief space of thirty years, it has gleamed over Aegea and over Hadria, and has filled Asia and Greece and Italy, with such Light as has never shone before on land or sea."

– *Farrar*.

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This is a beautiful description, yet we need to modify it to the extent of remembering that the Son of Righteousness did not dawn there, but is only now dawning. Our Lord's expression was the truer one, namely, that each one of his followers was a lamp or candle lighted from his, which must not be put under a bushel, but elevated, that the darkness might be dispelled. It was the lighting of fresh candles, so to speak, that carried the enlightening blessing. God's Word is the Lamp for his people, to guide their steps and, as they become illuminated, the world is proportionately blessed. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psa. 119:105.) "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn." – 2 Pet. 1:19.

## **HE SHOWED HIMSELF ALIVE**

Briefly the historian reminds us of the forty days between our Lord's resurrection and his ascension, that he showed himself

to his apostles and gave them certain instructions respecting the holy Spirit; that they should wait for its endowment, as the Father's seal of their acceptance to membership in the Royal Priesthood and to the ministries of the Truth as his ambassadors. All of these instructions, etc., were "pertaining to the Kingdom of God." This central thought needs to be kept in mind. God's Kingdom has been promised – that it may overthrow the kingdom of Satan and deliver mankind from the bondage of sin and death. Messiah was to be the King, and Israel, the seed of Abraham, to be his assistants and joint-heirs in that Kingdom and its work. Natural Israel had proven unworthy of the favor, as God had foretold through the prophets, and the privileges taken from them were to be given to the remnant of "Israelites indeed," and a sufficient number from amongst the Gentiles to complete the number Divinely intended and foreordained. Properly, therefore, everything said and done, directly or indirectly, appertained to the Kingdom.

As St. Luke, in his Gospel, has set forth the personality of Jesus as the Magnet to draw the hopes and establish the confidence of the "Israelites indeed," so in the Acts he uses it to still point to our Lord as the central figure, the Magnet. Indeed, seen from the standpoint of the Resurrected, the Glorified One, highly exalted, far above principalities and powers, the magnetic qualities of the Messianic personality are greatly enhanced. While never forgetting his earthly life and sacrifices, our hearts and minds look to him now as the one who ever liveth, the Head of the Church, the King of Glory, waiting for the completion of his Bride, and in due time to take possession of earth's dominion, and to begin the great work of Restitution.

It is as important today as ever that we keep before our minds the thought of our Lord's personal relationship to every feature of his work. If it was his message to the early Church to remember his words, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age,"

the [R4305 : page 6] thought of the Lord's personal presence now in the harvest should be still more impressive to us. If he kept a supervision or control of all the affairs of his people throughout the Age, does not the thought of his Second Coming and still more intimate association with every little detail of what is planned make us rejoice to be more careful, more zealous? To the extent that we are able to keep this clearly before our minds, it will make us happy in respect to right fighting and right doing. For instance, should the Adversary make suggestions to us of discontent or dissatisfaction with the manner in which things pertaining to the Lord's people have been progressing, let us answer him that we know he is mistaken, because the Lord himself is present and is supervising his work. If at any time matters seem to be going contrary to our hopes or expectations, let us not think the Lord has neglected the supervision of his work and is allowing the Adversary to dash it to pieces. On the contrary, let us establish our hearts in the fact that the Lord is too wise to err and is as able as he is willing to make all things work together for good to us and to all the called ones, according to his purpose. If tempted to intermeddle with matters that the Lord has put into the hands of another, let this thought restrain us and counsel us to give closer attention to that which the Master has committed to our care, and that "To his own Master each servant stands or falls," and it is for him to approve or disapprove. It is not, therefore, for us to grasp management or control or in any degree to force our views upon others, but rather to do our part as faithfully as possible, and to leave the results to the Lord, realizing his presence and his care, his wisdom and his love.

### **WAIT FOR THE PROMISE**

The holy Spirit had been promised and must be waited for as the realization and beginning of the new work, the development of the Christian Church. This was pictured to them as a baptism and immersion with the holy Spirit, and contrasted

with John's baptism or immersion in water. This baptism of the holy Spirit would represent to them the fact that he died for human sin, had been received into the Father's presence and had offered of his merit on behalf of those who believed in him and accepted him. It would constitute the sign, evidently, or mark, not only that their sins were forgiven, but that their consecration had been accepted, and that they were now adopted into God's family, begotten of him as spiritual sons, who, if they would develop in harmony with their covenant, in the School of Christ, would, in due time, be born of the spirit in the resurrection to the divine nature.

It was while they were with him and being instructed in things pertaining to the Kingdom, and regarding the necessity for tarrying for the spirit baptism, that they asked the Lord an important question: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" But he replied, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power," or authority.

The disciples understood well enough that the restoration of Israel to a place of influence and power as a nation would be an incident of our Lord's great triumph in taking the dominion of earth, but they did not fully comprehend, for this Gospel Age, has been, as it were, a parenthesis, in which the Bride Class has been in course of selection from amongst all mankind. They perceived that the Master was leaving them and were anxious for information, but in substance they were told that they could see but one step in advance and that they must walk by faith and not by sight. Elsewhere we are informed that our Lord told his followers that not only no man knew the day and hour marking the developments of the Divine Purpose in connection with the opening of the new dispensation, but neither did the angels in heaven, nor our Lord Jesus; that the Father had kept the whole matter in his own hands, in his own power. This is better

illustrated in the symbolism of Revelation, fifth chapter, where the Divine Plan is represented as sealed, and given to our Lord after his demonstration of his faithfulness at Calvary and his ascension to glory. Nothing in the statement, however, implies that our Lord and his disciples and the angels of heaven would never know of the times and seasons. In due time each feature will be revealed to those for whom it would be "meat in due season," for "To you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to outsiders all these things are spoken in parables."

But while the due time had not come for the apostles to understand the particulars of the restitution of Israel, etc., other knowledge and other work were awaiting, as soon as the Father marked them by the outpouring of the holy Spirit. It was not due time then to discuss matters that were a long way in advance. The thing immediately in hand was their work of witnessing for Jesus, of telling out all that they knew about him, that others might know and be blessed through their ministries. In due time they would not be confined to Jerusalem and Judea, but might go to Samaria, yea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth; for eventually the message would be for every creature.

The word here rendered *witnesses* is in the Greek, *martyres*, from which comes our English word *martyr*, signifying those who witness at a cost of suffering or death. It may have seemed strange to the apostles that the telling of the good tidings would cost them suffering, and it may seem still more strange to us today that the proclamation of the true Gospel of Christ should bring persecution and call for martyrdom. But it is true, and the Master explained the reason, saying, "The darkness hateth the light." The world in general, including Christendom, is more or less under the Adversary's delusions, and whoever is faithful in telling the message of the Lord in its length and breadth will speedily find opposition where least he might have expected it. The goodness

of God, his love, and the length and breadth and height and depth of his Plan of Salvation are so foreign to the benighted mind that it induces persecution, because the Truth is stranger than the fiction. A lesson here for us is that this witnessing is not yet finished, and that to meet our Lord's approval as his representatives we must be martyrs to one degree or another. The more faithful we are, probably the more we shall have opportunity for suffering and correspondingly will be our share in the eternal weight of glory, which God has in reservation for those that thus love him and serve him.

### SO COME IN LIKE MANNER

While speaking our Lord began to ascend and soon a cloud had enveloped and hid him from their sight. They waited, looking as though expecting him to descend again, but instead two angels appeared and said, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is received up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11.) The statement is not that they would see him coming as they saw him go, for surely they did not. They died. And not until after he had [R4306 : page 7] come again could their awakening, their resurrection, take place. Nor did the angels say that any one would see him coming. They merely declared a great fact, that he would so come, and that his coming would be in like *manner* to his going. Noting this carefully we ask ourselves, What will be the manner of his second coming? The answer is that as his departure was quiet, secret, unknown to the world, known only to his most intimate and dear followers, so his second coming will be in like manner – not with shouts and voices and trumpets, but secretly, quietly, "As a thief in the night."

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