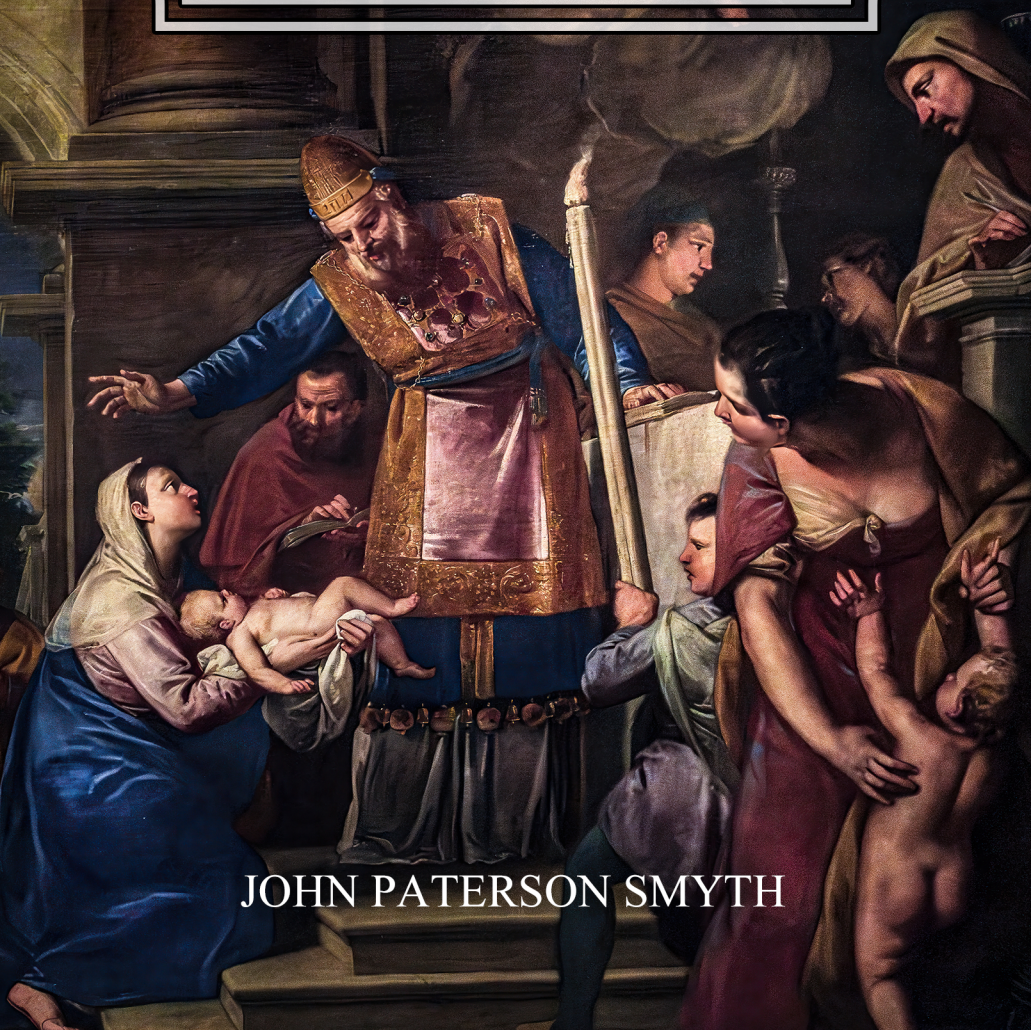


The Bible for Home and School

THE HIGHLANDS OF GALILEE

WHEN THE CHRIST CAME

Volume 5



JOHN PATERSON SMYTH

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The Highlands of Galilee

by

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH



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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I

This series of books is intended for two classes of teachers:

1. For Teachers in Week Day and Sunday Schools.

For these, each book is divided into complete lessons. The lesson will demand preparation. Where feasible, there should be diligent use of commentaries and of any books indicated in the notes. As a *general rule*, I think the teacher should not bring the book at all to his class if he is capable of doing without it. He should make copious notes of the subject. The lesson should be thoroughly studied and digested beforehand, with all the additional aids at his disposal, and it should come forth at the class warm and fresh from his own heart and brain. But I would lay down no rigid rule about the use of the Lesson Book. To some it may be a burden to keep the details of a long lesson in the memory; and, provided the subject has been very carefully studied, the Lesson Book, with its salient points carefully marked in coloured pencil, may be a considerable help. Let each do what seems best in his particular case, only taking care to satisfy his conscience that it is not done through laziness, and that he can really do best for his class by the plan which he adopts.

2. For Parents

Who would use it in teaching their children at home. They need only small portions, brief little lessons of about ten minutes each night. For these, each chapter is divided into short sections. I should advise that on the first night only the Scripture indicated should be read, with some passing remarks and

questions to give a grip of the story. That is enough. Then night after night, go on with the teaching, taking as much or as little as one sees fit.

I have not written out the teaching in full as a series of readings which could be read over to the child without effort or thought. With this book in hand, a very little preparation and adaptation will enable one to make the lesson more interesting and more personal, and to hold the child's attention by questioning. Try to get his interest. Try to make him talk. Make the lesson conversational. Don't preach.

II

Hints for Teaching

An ancient Roman orator once laid down for his pupils the three-fold aim of a teacher:

1. PLACERE (TO INTEREST)

2. DOCERE (TO TEACH)

3. MOVERE (TO MOVE)

- 1. To interest the audience (in order to teach them).
- 2. To teach them (in order to move them).
- 3. To move them to action.

On these three words of his I hang a few suggestions on the teaching of this set of Lessons.

1. *Placere* (to interest)

I want especially to insist on attention to this rule. Some teachers seem to think that to interest the pupils is a minor matter. It is not a minor matter, and the pupils will very soon let you know it. Believe me, it is no waste of time to spend hours during the week in planning to excite their interest to the utmost. Most of the complaints of inattention would cease at once if the teacher would give more study to rousing their interest. After all, there is little use in knowing the facts of your subject, and being anxious about the souls of the pupils, if all the time that you are teaching, these pupils are yawning and taking no interest in what you say. I know some have more aptitude

for teaching than others. Yet, after considerable experience of teachers whose lesson was a weariness to the flesh, and of teachers who never lost attention for a moment, I am convinced, on the whole, that the power to interest largely depends on the previous preparation.

Therefore, do not content yourself with merely studying the teaching of this series. Read widely and freely. Read not only commentaries, but books that will give local interest and colour—books that will throw valuable sidelights on your sketch.

But more than reading is necessary. You know the meaning of the expression, "*Put yourself in his place.*" Practise that in every Bible story, using your imagination, living in the scene, experiencing, as far as you can, every feeling of the actors. To some this is no effort at all. They feel their cheeks flushing and their eyes growing moist as they project themselves involuntarily into the scene before them. But though it be easier to some than to others, it is in some degree possible to all, and the interest of the lesson largely depends on it. I have done my best in these books to help the teacher in this respect. But no man can help another much. Success will depend entirely on the effort to put yourself in his place.

In reading the Bible chapter corresponding to each lesson, I suggest that the teacher should read part of the chapter, rather than let the pupils tire themselves by "reading round." My experience is that this "reading round" is a fruitful source of listlessness. When his verse is read, the pupil can let his mind wander till his turn comes again, and so he loses all interest. I have tried, with success, varying the monotony. I would let them read the first round of verses in order; then I would make them read out of the regular order, as I called their names; and sometimes, if the lesson were long, I would again and again

interrupt by reading a group of verses myself, making remarks as I went on. To lose their interest is fatal.

I have indicated also in the lessons that you should not unnecessarily give information yourself. Try to question it *into* them. If you tell them facts which they have just read, they grow weary. If you ask a question, and then answer it yourself when they miss it, you cannot keep their attention. Send your questions around in every sort of order, or want of order. Try to puzzle them—try to surprise them. Vary the form of the question, if not answered, and always feel it to be a defeat if you ultimately fail in getting the answer you want.

2. Docere (to teach)

You interest the pupil in order that you may *teach*. Therefore, teach definitely the Lesson that is set you. Do not be content with interesting him. Do not be content either with drawing spiritual teaching. Teach the facts before you. Be sure that God has inspired the narration of them for some good purpose.

When you are dealing with Old Testament characters, do not try to shirk or to condone evil in them. They were not faultless saints. They were men like ourselves, whom God was helping and bearing with, as He helps and bears with us, and the interest of the story largely depends on the pupil realizing this.

In the Old Testament books of this series you will find very full chapters written on the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the election of Jacob, the Sun standing still, the slaughter of Canaanites, and other such subjects. In connection with these, I want to say something that especially concerns teachers. Your pupils, now or later, can hardly avoid coming in contact with the flip-pant scepticism so common nowadays, which makes jests at the story of the sun standing still, and talks of the folly of believing that all humanity was condemned because Eve ate an apple

thousands of years ago. This flippant tone is in the air. They will meet with it in their companions, in the novels of the day, in the popular magazine articles on their tables at home. You have, many of you, met with it yourselves; you know how disturbing it is; and you probably know, too, that much of its influence on people arises from the narrow and unwise teaching of the Bible in their youth. Now you have no right to ignore this in your teaching of the Bible. You need not talk of Bible difficulties and their answers. You need not refer to them at all. But teach the truth that will take the sting out of these difficulties when presented in after-life.

To do this requires trouble and thought. We have learned much in the last fifty years that has thrown new light for us on the meaning of some parts of the Bible; which has, at any rate, made doubtful some of our old interpretations of it. We must not ignore this. There are certain traditional theories which some of us still insist on teaching as God's infallible truth, whereas they are really only human opinions about it, which may possibly be mistaken. As long as they are taught as human opinions, even if we are wrong, the mistake will do no harm. But if things are taught as God's infallible truth, to be believed on peril of doubting God's Word, it may do grave mischief, if in after-life the pupil finds them seriously disputed, or perhaps false. A shallow, unthinking man, finding part of this teaching false, which has been associated in his mind with the most solemn sanctions of religion, is in danger of letting the whole go. Thus many of our young people drift into hazy doubt about the Bible. Then we get troubled about their beliefs, and give them books of Christian evidences to win them back by explaining that what was taught them in childhood was not *quite* correct, and needs now to be modified by a broader and slightly differ-

ent view. But we go on as before with the younger generation, and expose them in their turn to the same difficulties.

Does it not strike you that, instead of this continual planning to win men back from unbelief, it might be worthwhile to try the other method of not exposing them to unbelief? Give them the more careful and intelligent teaching at first, and so prepare them to meet the difficulties by-and-by.

I have no wish to advocate any so-called “advanced” teaching. Much of such teaching I gravely object to. But there are truths of which there is no question amongst thoughtful people, which somehow are very seldom taught to the young, though ignorance about them in after-life leads to grave doubt and misunderstanding. Take, for example, the gradual, progressive nature of God’s teaching in Scripture, which makes the Old Testament teaching as a whole lower than that of the New. This is certainly no doubtful question, and the knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent study of Scripture. I have dealt with it where necessary in some of the books of this series.

I think, too, our teaching on what may seem to us doubtful questions should be more fearless and candid. If there are two different views each held by able and devout men, do not teach your own as the infallibly true one, and ignore or condemn the other. For example, do not insist that the order of creation must be accurately given in the first chapter of Genesis. You may think so; but many great scholars, with as deep a reverence for the Bible as you have, think that inspired writers were circumscribed by the science of their time.

Do not be too positive that the story of the Fall *must* be an exactly literal narrative of facts. If you believe that it is, I suppose you must tell your pupil so. But do not be afraid to tell him also that there are good and holy and scholarly men who think of it as a great old-world allegory, like the parable of the Prodigal

Son, to teach in easy popular form profound lessons about sin. Endeavour in your Bible teaching to be thoroughly truthful: to assert nothing as certain which is not certain, nothing as probable which is not probable, and nothing as more probable than it is. Let the pupil see that there are some things that we cannot be quite sure about, and let him gather insensibly from your teaching the conviction that truth, above all things, is to be loved and sought, and that religion has never anything to fear from discovering the truth. If we could but get this healthy, manly, common-sense attitude adopted now in teaching the Bible to young people, we should, with God's blessing, have in the new generation a stronger and more intelligent faith.

3. *Movere (to move)*

All your teaching is useless unless it have this object: to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God, and the will toward the effort after the blessed life. You interest in order to teach. You teach in order to move. *That* is the supreme object. Here the teacher must be left largely to his own resources. One suggestion I offer: don't preach. At any rate, don't preach much lest you lose grip of your pupils. You have their attention all right while their minds are occupied by a carefully prepared lesson; but wait till you close your Bible, and, assuming a long face, begin, "And now, boys," &c., and straightway they know what is coming, and you have lost them in a moment.

Do not change your tone at the application of your lesson. Try to keep the teaching still conversational. Try still in this more spiritual part of your teaching to question into them what you want them to learn. Appeal to the judgment and to the conscience. I can scarce give a better example than that of our Lord in teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. He first interested His pupil by putting His lesson in an attractive

form, and then He did not append to it a long, tedious moral. He simply asked the man before Him, "Which of these three *thinkest thou?*"—i.e., "What do you think about it?" The interest was still kept up. The man, pleased at the appeal to his judgment, replied promptly, "He that showed mercy on him;" and on the instant came the quick rejoinder, "Go, and do thou likewise." Thus the lesson ends. Try to work on that model.

Now, while forbidding preaching to your pupils, may I be permitted a little preaching myself? This series of lessons is intended for Sunday schools as well as weekday schools. It is of Sunday-school teachers I am thinking in what I am now about to say. I cannot escape the solemn feeling of the responsibility of every teacher for the children in his care. Some of these children have little or no religious influence exerted on them for the whole week except in this one hour with you. Do not make light of this work. Do not get to think, with good-natured optimism, that all the nice, pleasant children in your class are pretty sure to be Christ's soldiers and servants by-and-by. Alas! for the crowds of these nice, pleasant children, who, in later life, wander away from Christ into the ranks of evil. Do not take this danger lightly. Be anxious; be prayerful; be terribly in earnest, that the one hour in the week given you to use be wisely and faithfully used.

But, on the other hand, be very hopeful too, because of the love of God. He will not judge you hardly. Remember that He will bless very feeble work, if it be your best. Remember that He cares infinitely more for the children's welfare than you do, and, therefore, by His grace, much of the teaching about which you are despondent may bring forth good fruit in the days to come. Do you know the lines about "The Noisy Seven"?—

“I wonder if he remembers—
Our sainted teacher in heaven—
The class in the old grey schoolhouse,
Known as the ‘Noisy Seven’?”

“I wonder if he remembers
How restless we used to be,
Or thinks we forget the lesson
Of Christ and Gethsemane?”

“I wish I could tell the story
As he used to tell it then;
I’m sure that, with Heaven’s blessing,
It would reach the hearts of men.

“I often wish I could tell him,
Though we caused him so much pain
By our thoughtless, boyish frolic,
His lessons were not in vain.

“I’d like to tell him how Willie,
The merriest of us all,
From the field of Balaclava
Went home at the Master’s call.

“I’d like to tell him how Ronald,
So brimming with mirth and fun,
Now tells the heathen of India
The tale of the Crucified One.

“I’d like to tell him how Robert,
And Jamie, and George, and ‘Ray,’
Are honoured in the Church of God—
The foremost men of their day.

“I’d like, yes, I’d like to tell him
What his lesson did for me:
And how I am trying to follow
The Christ of Gethsemane.

“Perhaps he knows it already,
For Willie has told him, maybe,
That we are all coming, coming
Through Christ of Gethsemane.

“How many besides I know not
Will gather at last in heaven,
The fruit of that faithful sowing,
But the sheaves are already seven.”

LESSON I

How the Christ-child Came

ST. LUKE II. 1-17.

The teacher should dwell on the age-long preparation for the coming of Christ and emphasise and explain the few prophecies here quoted. Try to leave the impression of God's great design waiting through ages for its fulfilment.

This is the Fifth Course of our Lessons, The Bible for School and Home.

We have come now to the most solemn and wonderful and important part of all our teaching of the Bible. This is the climax. Everything before was but leading up to this, the most tremendous thing in all history. The Son of God actually coming down from that great kindly world beyond the stars, which had been watching sorrowfully the sins and struggles of men—actually coming down Himself to live with us, to die for us, to reveal to us the tenderness of the love of God. "I am troubled about them," He said. "I cannot bear to let them perish. They will not listen to the prophets and teachers. I must go down myself. When once they know how much God cares, that must touch their hearts."

This is the most interesting and wonderful story in the world. But to keep up its interest and its wonder, two things are necessary. (1) We must exert our imaginations to picture vividly the scenes, and try to live in them, as it were, so as to escape the deadness which comes from knowing the story already. But also

(2) we must take care in our vivid picturing not to become too familiar, not to think of “the Boy Jesus” as lightly as we should think of a boy in the next street. We must remind ourselves of His being God, and of the solemn meaning of the Miraculous Birth—God becoming manifest in the flesh.

1. PROPHECIES OF THE COMING

If writing your life, what first? Birth. Yes, that is the beginning of you. Is that so of our Lord? (John xvii. 5). Millions of ages before the world was—so far back that brain reels at the thought—still He was there. He was God. Was He at Creation? (John i. 1-3). And at the sad fall which we thought of? Was He sorry? Then began His promises that He would come and help up the poor world again.

These hints and promises coming down through the ages created in the Jews a strong expectation that some day a great Deliverer should come. They did not understand clearly. They were confused. And since they were not very good people, many of them rather expected that it should be some human king or leader who should fight great battles for them and make them victorious over all their enemies. This made trouble when Jesus came to earth and disappointed them by not leading them out to earthly triumph. But the best and holiest had higher thoughts, though they, too, did not quite understand.

The Old Testament has many hints of His coming through types and ceremonies and prophecies, etc. We have only time to glance at a few.

First comes that prophecy to the early world (Genesis iii. 15). The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent shall bruise his heel. What would that mean? Who was the serpent? And how did men kill a serpent? By bruising his head, i.e., the Coming One should crush the devil and destroy

his power, but He should suffer in doing it. The serpent shall bruise His heel.

Now look a long way forward. God chose out one nation to teach religion to the world. And God chose a great good man, Abraham, to be the religious head of the young nation. What did He promise? "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis xii. 3; xxii. 18). Don't you think that would mean that One of his race should be a great blessing to the world?

Now we pass over most of the Old Testament types and prophecies—we have not time for them—and just look at some of the hints given by the great prophet Isaiah (Isaiah ix. 6, 7; xxxii. 1 and especially ch. liii). With such hints and prophecies through the Old Testament you can understand why the Jews expected some Great One to come—the Messiah they called Him. (Teacher should read and put special emphasis on Isaiah liii. If there is not time he might merely read the other two.)

So for centuries the world went on and still He did not come. But the world was waiting. And God was preparing all the time, watching the world, getting all things ready. At last "fulness of time come" (Galatians iv. 4), when our story to-day begins. All the separate little nations welded into one great Roman empire, with its one language; with its splendid roads reaching everywhere from Rome; with the people getting worse and more in need of the Christ. Everything ready for the founding of His Kingdom. And people seemed to feel that the King must be coming. Everywhere amongst the Jews an excited expectancy. When John the Baptist came "all men mused in their hearts if he were the Christ or not." "Tell us, art thou Elijah who should prepare the way?" "Art thou the Christ?" And John asks of Jesus, "Art thou He that should come?" Evidently there was an attitude of tense expectation (see St. Luke iii. 15).

2. NAZARETH

At last, "in the fulness of time," God sent forth His Son. The Christ came! To-day we have the story of His coming. A simple, beautiful story. A betrothed couple in a country village of Nazareth. Ever see a village carpenter's shop? Where? Describe? Like that, a village workshop in the Nazareth street, and a strong, broad-shouldered carpenter working at his bench with saw and hammer and chisel, making tables and chairs, and ploughs and cattle-yokes for the country-people. Working hard and joyfully to prepare a new home. Why? Engaged to be married soon. To whom? Living in the other end of the village with her mother, working in the house, making bread, and spinning, and drawing water from the well with other village girls in the evenings. Don't you think she was very beautiful? At any rate, surely beautiful in soul, gentle and modest, loving and religious.

And Joseph the carpenter loved her dearly. I think he was older than she was, and he was very tender to her, and liked to watch her passing, and liked to think of the little home he was making for her. And it must have been pleasant to her to meet him, and to hear him talk of all his brave hopes and plans for their future. I think, too, they cared so much for religion, that they often talked of God's promise of the Messiah. And I can imagine the girl going home after her talks, and kneeling down at her bedside to pray for God's blessing on her lover's life and her own. Little she dreamed how wonderful would be the answer.

Then came a day that she could never forget.

One day—perhaps at prayer—suddenly a wonderful visitor. Who? (Luke i. 26). What did he announce? Think of the awe, and astonishment, and trembling joy! She to be the mother of the Messiah that all the nation hoped for. Fancy her excitement! So the angel departed and she remained awestruck, wondering,

thinking, hoping—pondering in her heart. And so the months passed on.

3. THE MANGER AT BETHLEHEM

I think it must have been she herself through whom St. Luke learned the story how the Lord Jesus was born. Try to make a picture of it in your minds. On the valley road to Bethlehem a straggling procession of travellers, and amongst them a young countrywoman wearily riding, with her husband beside her leading the ass. “For there had gone out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. And Joseph also went up from Nazareth unto the city of David which is called Bethlehem to enrol himself with Mary his betrothed wife being great with child.”

So they draw near to Bethlehem through a land alive with historic memories. In the pastures beside them Ruth long ago gleaned in the fields of Boaz. In the hollow to the right outside the gate brave men had died to bring David a drink from the Well of Bethlehem. A little off the road is a memorial sacred to all Jews, where the light of Jacob’s life went out when “Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan and I buried her by the roadside on the way to Ephrath (which is Bethlehem).”

But they had greater thoughts in their minds. And also Mary is getting very tired, and there is anxiety about lodgings. For the travellers for the census have crowded the town, and they hear that there is no room even in the inn. They were glad to take refuge at last in one of the natural caves in the hillside where cattle were bedded. And there, with no kindly woman’s hand to aid her, came the pains of childbirth on that lonely woman, and “she brought forth her son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes”—there was no one else to do it—and laid Him in the manger for His first infant sleep.

Did ever baby enter this world in lowlier guise? And do we not all love Him the more for it? Somehow it would spoil the picture if He had been born in a palace, with princesses to wait on Him and high priests in attendance. That poor little baby whom nobody noticed comes to us in His helplessness with such clinging appeal, as if trusting Himself utterly to us, as if bidding for our affection, wanting us to be fond of Him. So touchingly, appealingly, did the Christ-child come.

4. THE ANGELS' CHRISTMAS ANTHEM

But that is only half the story of His birthday. The angels are coming in. You remember how we thought of that great kindly world above that sent the Lord Jesus to us. How they must have watched and looked forward to this! For every incoming of God into human life, every spiritual uplift which this world receives, is begun in that kindly world before we know anything about it here.

Simply, ordinarily as the coming of the dawn, happened this tremendous thing in the history of the universe—the coming of the Lord of Glory into human life. On the earthly side, just a stable, a manger, the cattle in the stalls, a woman wrapping her baby in swaddling clothes. Nothing of wonder in it. Nothing of awe. Until the world from which He came flashes in upon the scene, where high over the stable outside in the starlight was the heavenly host stirred to its depths at the coming of the Christ-child.

So we read that lovely story familiar to us all from infancy—how “shepherds were abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night,” how the heavenly music swelled and died over the pasture fields of Bethlehem with its glad tidings of great joy which should be to all people—how the Angels, as they listened, could not restrain their delight, breaking forth

into the eternal anthem of their world above, Glory to God in the Highest!

Let us read over again that little story as we close (Luke ii. 8-14) and try to think why the angels were so glad for us, and why we should be glad for ourselves that Jesus came on that first Christmas night long ago.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON I

- Why were the Jews “in expectation” of Our Lord’s coming?
- Tell me some of the prophecies about Our Lord’s coming.
- Describe the *earthly* scene on that first Christmas.
- Describe the *heavenly* side.
- Do you think the angels knew of it before that night?