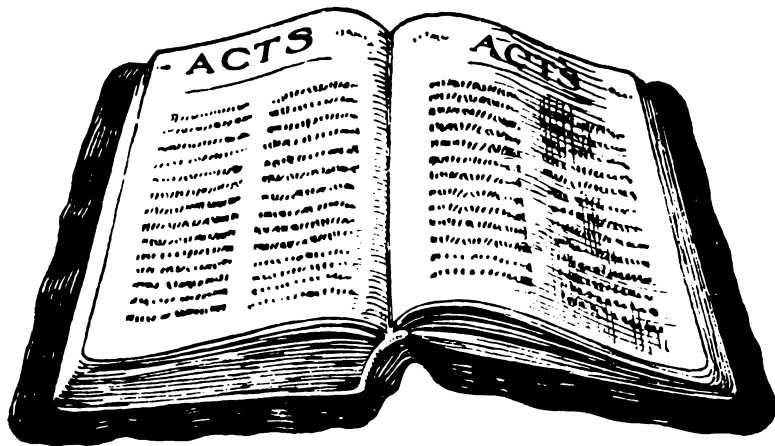


STUDIES IN ACTS

PART ONE



CHAPTERS 1:1-12:24.

By
W. R. Walker

STUDIES IN ACTS

PART ONE

Embracing Acts 1: 1—12: 24

For Adult and Young People's Classes

By W. R. WALKER

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JUST A MOMENT, PLEASE

Permit me to call attention of both teacher and class to a few important things in connection with the use of these lessons.

First, it will be best for the teacher to make careful preparation far enough in advance of the class to enable him to assign certain definite work to a few individual students. For instance, if the lesson a week ahead covers the conversion of Cornelius, ask one member of the class to make a special study of the reasons for the miracle, another to describe the life and character of Cornelius and tell why a man of such righteousness needed anything more, and still another to state what the baptism of the Holy Spirit was, and what was the purpose of it.

Second, it will be necessary for the class to study each lesson at home through the week. This course is too valuable, and the information it contains too greatly needed, to make neglect or careless preparation excusable.

Third, at the close of each lesson you will find "Questions" and "The Lesson Condensed." If your lesson period is too short, or if you are not experienced in rapid classwork, it will be well for you to make these questions and this shortened form the base of your classwork. After thorough preparation at home this plan will be a very happy one.

Fourth, the entire course in Acts, of which this is the first half, is designed to cover six months. W. R. Walker, the man who prepared the lessons, probably is better qualified than any man among us to help the average man or woman to a better knowledge of this important book in the New Testament.

E. W. THORNTON, Editor.

STUDIES IN ACTS

By W. R. WALKER

PART I. CHAPTERS I.—XV.

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION

Devotional Reading—Psalm 19

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.
- 2 Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night showeth knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech nor language;
Their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their line is gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,
- 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoiceth as a strong man to run his course.
- 6 His going forth is from the end of the heavens,
And his circuit unto the ends of it;
And there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.
- 7 The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul:
The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple.
- 8 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart:
The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes.
- 9 The fear of Jehovah is clean, enduring for ever:
The ordinances of Jehovah are true, and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb.
- 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned:
In keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.
- 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me:
Then shall I be upright,
And I shall be clear from great transgression.
- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in thy sight,
O Jehovah, my rock, and my redeemer.

Memory Text.—"The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart:
The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes."
—Ps. 19: 8.

LESSON PLAN

1. Title.
2. Author.
3. Date of the Writing.
4. Sources of Luke's Information.
5. Value of the Book.
6. Purpose of the Book.

INTRODUCTORY FACTS

Certain information and items of interest, such as authorship, date of writing and purpose, are presented here under the general head "Introductory Facts."

The facts and discussions given will be helpful to the student in an understanding of the book and its proper use.

TITLE

It is not probable that the original manuscript of the Acts bore a title. In the first century of the Christian era, it was the custom of writers to send out their books without title, undated, and anonymously. The Acts exhibits all three of these peculiarities. This fact is one argument for its authenticity.

Manuscripts and versions, now in our possession, give a variety of titles; such as, "Acts of Apostles," "The Acts of the Holy Apostles," "The Acts," and, simply, "Acts."

The title most generally approved today is that used by the American Revised Version, "The Acts." It is fitting to use the definite article, because the events recorded have been definitely chosen by the Holy Spirit for our use in this day.

The book is a record of "the acts" of certain of the apostles and other prominent workers in the early history of the church. "Acts of the Apostles" is somewhat misleading, for the labors of only a few of the apostles are narrated, and a number of Christians, not apostles, figure in the narrative.

All in all, "The Acts" is the title that best describes the contents of the book.

AUTHOR

Notwithstanding the fact that the book is anonymous, there is an abundance of evidence establishing the authorship beyond reasonable doubt.

1. The writer was an intimate companion of Paul.

This is learned from the "we" passages, in which the writer deals with incidents in the life of Paul, but uses the first person plural pronoun. (Acts 16: 10-17; 20: 6-16; 21: 1.)

The above references disclose the fact that the author was with Paul on both his second and third missionary tours,

2. That the writer was a physician is evident from the frequent use of technical medical terms. Allusion to some of these will be made in the lessons to follow.

3. So far as known, Luke is the only companion of Paul who was a physician. (Col. 4: 14.)

4. The same person wrote both the third Gospel and Acts.

The Gospel of Luke is addressed to "Theophilus." Acts begins: "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach."

There is no sufficient reason for questioning the commonly accepted belief that Luke wrote the third Gospel. That being true, it establishes almost beyond doubt that he also wrote Acts.

5. The external evidence, consisting of quotations from the early church fathers such as Irenæus and Tertullian, and early documents like the Muratorian canon, are a unit in favor of authorship by Luke.

The above facts establish conclusively that Luke was the author of this most interesting and informing piece of history.

DATE OF WRITING

There has been much discussion on this point, largely between radical and conservative scholars. The former have tried to date it near the end of the first century, with the purpose of casting doubt on the traditional authorship.

Harnack, a German radical, argued strongly in favor of the late date, but more recently he has repudiated his former belief, and places the date before 70 A. D., the date of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The abrupt end of the book (read 28: 30, 31) indicates that it was written at the close of the two years' imprisonment of Paul in Rome, but before his case came up for hearing by Cæsar.

Had Luke known the result of that hearing, it is scarcely conceivable that he would have failed to tell it. Every reader feels the keenest interest in what disposition Cæsar made of Paul when he came before him. The writer of Acts

would surely have told us that, had be known.

Festus was appointed to office, and came to Cæsarea in either 59 or 60 A. D., probably the latter date. This would make Paul reach Rome in the spring of 61. Two years of imprisonment would extend the time to the spring of 63, the most probable date for the writing.

SOURCES OF LUKE'S INFORMATION

Much of the material for his book Luke obtained at first-hand. He was an eye-witness of many incidents, and heard some of the addresses that he records.

Of course, Paul and other apostles and prominent church workers gave him much information. He was with Paul for long periods of time, being his private physician and companion in travel and imprisonment. This would afford ample opportunity for receiving Paul's version of events.

Nor should it be forgotten that the Holy Spirit doubtless guided him in selecting material for his history and safe-guarded its accuracy.

VALUE OF THE BOOK

The contents of Acts are of the highest historical value. Without this volume we would possess no definite information concerning the beginning of the church and the spread of the gospel through Palestine and into Asia Minor and Europe. The time and manner of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit to "guide into all truth," to "bring to remembrance," and direct the utterances of the apostles could only be conjectured by Bible students, were we deprived of this writing.

It is doubtful whether there is another book in the entire New Testament collection of equal value. As a historical document, it has no rival. Its theological worth is also unique.

It alone deals with the subject of conversion, both teaching its necessity and illustrating it by citing many object-lessons, so that we are without excuse for ignorance on the plan of salvation.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The introductory statement and the contents of chapter 1 are both so

plain that we can not be mistaken here.

1. It was to inform Theophilus (and others who might read the document) of the founding of the church. A detailed description of this most important event is written with scrupulous care. It is found in chapters 1 and 2.

2. Minute records of both the teaching and practice of apostles and other inspired men on the subject of conversion are found only in this book. "What shall I do to be saved?" is a question that must be answered by all who ever hear of Christ. In Acts, Luke answers it so plainly that all who study the book are led to see it alike. Had Acts not been preserved, we should have had no categorical reply to that question.

It was the evident intention of the Holy Spirit that this volume should be used as a guide by every evangelist of all time. Those who honestly so use it "all speak the same thing," as Paul admonished in 1 Cor. 1:10.

3. It is also the greatest missionary book ever written. It breathes forth the missionary spirit on every page. Its heart throbs with missionary passion. The zeal of its choice characters is that of the missionary who counts martyrdom a joy. No one can study the book and escape the missionary urge. It has sent forth more heralds of the cross than all conventions and conferences combined. These have gone out to light the dark places of earth by the glory of the missionary flame which burned in their hearts like the fire in Moses' bush, blazing, but consuming not.

4. Certain events and experiences of the apostles, which might be of value to leaders in the church at a later period, are also recorded. The Jerusalem conference on circumcision may be cited as an example.

Such cases are of much importance, revealing, as they do, the legitimate realms of faith and opinion. Precedents like this enable us to walk on solid ground while seeking solutions for our own perplexing situations. They often reveal *principles* of action that are just as clear as if an order had been on the subject.

An apostolic people is a people seeking to know the mind and follow the lead of the apostles.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The name of the author of "The Acts" is not given, but for several reasons it is practically certain that the book was written by Luke.

2. Though for a long time there was dispute as to when the Book of Acts was written, most scholars have concluded that the evidence favors the year 63 A. D.

3. The author of Acts was an eye-

witness of most of the things recorded in the book, and was a close friend of eye-witnesses of the rest.

4. Because the Book of Acts contains the only authentic account of early conversions and the beginnings of the church, it is of great importance.

5. No other book associated with the history and growth of Christianity is so intensely missionary as the Book of Acts.

QUESTIONS

1. Where did the title of the book of "The Acts" come from? 2. Just what was the purpose of the author in writing the book? 3. Name the reasons why it is practically certain that Luke wrote "The Acts." 4. Why have scholars concluded that it must have been written as early as 63 A. D.? 5. What opportunity had Luke for writing with ac-

curacy? 6. What is the peculiar value of the Book of Acts? 7. Why has the religious world failed to give proper emphasis to this book? 8. How does this book compare with other literature as a missionary message? 9. What would be the effect if all of Protestantism would simultaneously study the Acts with an unbiased mind?

LUKE, THE WRITER OF ACTS

According to Eusebius, as already quoted, and Jerome, who may be supposed to represent the opinion of their times, Luke was a native of Antioch. As he appears in the Acts to have spent so much time at Philippi, some modern writers have conjectured that he may have been a native or an inhabitant of that city. The historical testimony deserves more regard than an inference of that nature. That he was a Gentile by birth appears to be certain from Col. 4: 11, 14, where Paul distinguishes him from those whom he denominates those who are of the circumcision. Some have inferred this also from his Greek name; but it was not uncommon for Jews, as well as Romans and other foreigners, to assume such names at this period. Whether he was a proselyte to Judaism before his conversion to Christianity, or not, is a question on which critics differ. The supposition that he adopted first the Jewish religion, and had done so, perhaps, in early life, accounts best for his intimate acquaintance with the opinions and customs of the Jews, his knowledge of the Septuagint, and the degree of Hebraistic tendency which shows itself in his style.

Of the manner in which the writer of the Acts was brought to a knowledge of the gospel we have no information.

According to Gregory Nazianzen, whom several later writers follow, Luke suffered martyrdom; according to others, and those whose testimony has greater weight, he died a natural death.—*Hackett's Commentary on Acts.*

LESSON TWO

PREPARATORY EXPERIENCES

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 1: 1-26

Memory Text.—And ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—Acts 1: 8.

LESSON PLAN

1. Explanatory Statement.
2. A Final Restraining Order.
3. Curiosity Not Gratified.
4. A Visible Bodily Ascension.
5. Waiting-place and Those Who Waited.
6. Busy, Though Commanded to Wait.

COMMENTS

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

(Chapter 1: 1-3.)

Verse 1.—The first three verses constitute Luke's introduction.

The "former treatise" referred to is the Gospel of Luke, written to "Theophilus," an unknown Greek friend of Luke, with the purpose of confirming what had been taught him by "word of mouth." Theophilus had been instructed orally. Theophilus means "a lover of God." Some regard it not as the name of an individual, but a general term applicable to any seeker after God, and used as we use such terms as "Dear Reader," or "Mr. Taxpayer."

No good reason exists, however, for denying the personality of Theophilus.

The third Gospel narrates such events and teachings of Jesus as would appeal to a cultured Greek mind. Theophilus may have been a close friend of Luke's days as a medical student, and the Gospel intended to explain why the writer abandoned the practice of his profession to become a traveling preacher of a new faith.

Theophilus evidently became a Christian, or Luke would not have written this second letter to him.

This book gives an authentic history of the founding of the church; exhibits sample teachings of inspired preachers, thus showing how Spirit-guided men "all spake the same thing," and narrates some of the early trials and conquests of Christianity.

Note the order of Jesus' ministry.

He "began both *to do* and *to teach*." Had the order been reversed, no pupils would have enrolled in His school. This is the only order that is effective to-day.

Verse 2.—The "day" was the day of His ascension. (Luke 24: 50-53.)

Just prior to this, Jesus "gave commandment" to His apostles to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16: 15, 16; Matt. 28: 18-20.)

The "commandment" refers to the great commission, which is the key to the whole Book of Acts. It is a history of the work of certain men in carrying out that commission.

Their earlier teaching had been like that of John the Baptist, "The kingdom is at hand." Chapter 2 tells of its establishment.

Verse 3.—Jesus appeared only to chosen disciples after His resurrection. (Acts 16: 40, 41; 1 Cor. 15: 4-8.) The "many proofs" of this verse were all of the same kind—personal appearances, oft repeated and under differing circumstances.

It is rather strange, but true, that the unbelieving Jews remembered what He had said about destroying the temple and raising it in three days, whereas the disciples either forgot it or misunderstood Him. The Jews asked for a Roman guard to prevent the disciples stealing the body, but it was needless.

When the body was placed in Joseph's tomb, the disciples buried all their hopes there also. Nothing was further from

LESSON TEXT

1 The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, 2 until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen: 3 to whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God: 4 and, being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: 5 for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

6 They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. 8 But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in

their thought than that they should see Him again.

Repeated appearances were necessary, therefore, to convince them that He was the same person with whom they had been associated for three years.

We are glad both of the skepticism of His enemies and the "hardness of heart" of His friends. The difficulty encountered in proving His identity adds to the evidence on which our faith rests to-day.

References to His appearances may be found in the following passages: Matt. 28: 9, 10, 16-20; Luke 24: 14-35, 44-53; John 20: 19-29; 21: 1-24.

Doubtless the Lord used the forty-day period between the resurrection and ascension in recapitulating His teachings before the twelve. Before His death, they could not rid themselves of the expectation of an earthly kingdom. Now that they see Him in a spiritual body, they can understand His spiritual kingdom.

"Why did Jesus appear only to His disciples?" is a question frequently asked. The implied criticism is that, if He had appeared to the general public, the proof of His resurrection would have been strengthened.

In reply it should be said that all, except those who saw Him after His resurrection, must base their faith on the testimony of those who did see Him after that event. The testimony of those who knew Him best would be stronger than that of mere acquaintances. The character of witnesses has much to do with the credibility of their testimony. The number and character of those who have left us this evidence, make it as strong as human testimony can be made. They sealed their honesty by a martyr's death in defense of the simple fact that

they saw, talked with, ate with, and touched Him after He arose from the dead. They could not have been mistaken in so simple a fact.

A FINAL RESTRAINING ORDER

(Verses 5, 6.)

Verse 4.—The "promise of the Father" was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, inspiring the apostles that they might infallibly preach the terms of forgiveness of sin and teach churches in all matters essential to salvation and service. This "promise" is in John 16: 7-13, and Acts 1: 8.

Verse 5.—John's baptism was a baptism of penitent believers unto the remission of sins, and was administered by men. It was divinely authorized and valid until supplanted by the baptism of Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was administered by the Lord Himself, and always imparted miraculous gifts. (See Lesson III. for fuller discussion.)

CURIOSITY NOT GRATIFIED

(Verses 6-8.)

Verse 6.—This verse shows that the disciples were expecting Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom, even after His resurrection.

How hard it is to uproot a false doctrine or interpretation of Scripture. These were the men on whom Jesus must depend to establish and propagate His spiritual kingdom, but they seem unable to think of it in other than earthly terms.

Their question makes clear the reason for the descent of the Spirit as promised. Miraculous guidance of their thinking was necessary, otherwise the mistake of a union of church and state would have been made by the apostles at the beginning.

all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.

Before their baptism in the Spirit, their understanding is merely that of men ambitious for a national empire. After that miracle, their ideals stand out in marked contrast to that.

They never confuse the kingdom of God with the idea of earthly governments. How strange the Catholic hierarchy tries to defend its claims by Scripture!

Verse 7.—Jesus' reply indicates that the *purpose* or *desire* of God is always fully revealed, but the time of fulfillment is not.

This is a general characteristic of prophecy, and should warn us to be slow in following interpreters who set dates for the fulfillment of certain prophecies. The wisdom of concealing dates of great events of the kingdom is easily seen. If men knew the exact time of the end of the world, they would live carelessly until its near approach, then in panicky fashion as they saw the end at hand.

Verse 8.—The "power" conferred by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (see Lesson III.), and subsequently, enabled those receiving it to perform miracles. (Acts 3: 6; 9: 40, 41.)

The "witness" of the apostles was to consist of testimony such as would be competent in any court.

They were to "begin in Jerusalem" and preach in the prescribed order for two reasons.

First, they were in Jerusalem. They were to begin right where they were, just as soon as they were Spirit-qualified.

They were to preach next in Judea, because in going anywhere from Jerusalem they must pass through Judea, and the Lord desired them to preach everywhere as they went. Samaria and the uttermost parts would be reached next in order. The program, outlined by Jesus, was not so much a geographical division of effort, as it was one of continuous gospel preaching.

Second, a struggle between the champions of the two systems was inevitable, the first test of strength should be made where the law was most deeply en-

trenched. If the gospel could win there, its success elsewhere was assured.

A VISIBLE, BODILY ASCENSION

(Verses 9-11.)

Verse 9.—Note how artlessly simple is the account of the ascension. Nowhere does an inspired writer make an attempt to describe the most sacred scenes in the life of Christ. They are stated as facts to be expected of such a person as Jesus.

The natural bent of the mind is to explain the mysterious and describe the difficult. No New Testament writer tries this anywhere. All content themselves with a plain, straightforward statement of what actually happened. It is not in human nature to write thus. The very method of recording miracles by these writers is strongly suggestive of their Spirit guidance.

Verse 10.—The two men were angels in human form. This was the ordinary form in which angels appeared.

Verse 11.—The angels' promise makes certain the visible, personal coming again of Jesus. Some day our eyes shall behold Him as the apostles saw Him when He departed to heaven. What a glorious sight to those who shall await His coming with joy!

Jesus must rule in heaven till enemies have been overcome, the last of which is death, then He will come again.

Read Acts 3: 20, 21; 1 Pet. 3: 21, 22; 1 Cor. 15: 24-26.

Nowhere are there any data from which the *time* of His coming may be deduced. The *fact* is clear, but the *date* unknown.

A WAITING-PLACE AND THOSE WHO WAITED

(Verses 12-14.)

Verse 12.—The place of ascension was the Mount of Olives, a mountain just east of the city, separated from it by the deep gash of the Kidron Valley, and rising a little more than a hundred feet higher than Jerusalem. The summit of Mt. Olivet was about three-fifths of a mile from the eastern gate of the wall

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off. 13 And when they were come in, they went up into the upper chamber, where they were abiding; both Peter and John and James and Andrew, Phillip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14 These all with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

15 And in these days Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said (and there was a multitude of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty), 16 Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus. 17 For he was numbered among us,

of Jerusalem, and as that was about "a sabbath day's journey," it is likely that the ascension took place near the highest point of the mountain.

It was also "over against Bethany," a village just over the eastern slope. This enables us to fix the location of this wonderful event with accuracy.

Verse 13.—Nothing is known of the location of this chamber, except that it was in the city of Jerusalem. A rather persistent and not unlikely tradition has come down to us that the "upper room" was in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, in which also, the same tradition affirms, the Passover was eaten and the Lord's Supper instituted. A part of this tradition is that Mark, a mere stripling, awakened by the singing of Jesus and the twelve just prior to their departure for Gethsemane, followed, not taking time to dress, but caught up the cover under which he had been sleeping. Near the garden, soldiers tried to arrest him, but he left the covering in their hands and fled naked. Mark 14: 51, 52 is perhaps the source of this tradition. It is harmless if false, interesting if true.

Judas is omitted in this list of the twelve, his fate being told in verse 18. Other lists of the twelve are found in Matt. 10: 2-4; Mark 3: 14-19; Luke 6: 13-16.

It is interesting to compare these four lists, noting that they are arranged in three groups of four each, with Peter, Philip and James, or Alphæus, leading each group. It suggests that the Lord probably divided the labor among them, distributing work and responsibility according to their individual abilities, each group being well balanced for its special task. Jesus doubtless gave attention to organizing His followers.

Verse 14.—Matt. 13: 55 mentions the names of these brethren of Jesus. They were, no doubt, the natural sons of Joseph and Mary, hence all younger

than Jesus. There is no historical basis for the Catholic dogma that Mary remained a perpetual virgin.

The James mentioned by Matthew is the same one who later came into prominence in the Jerusalem church. (Acts 15: 13-21; Gal. 1: 19.) He also wrote the Book of James. Another brother, Judas, is the author of the New Testament book of that name.

It is reassuring to find Jesus' "brethren" now in the company of waiting disciples. When last mentioned (John 7: 2-5), they were in the list of unbelievers. They sneeringly taunted Him with a dare to go to the religious capital and declare Himself the Messiah. How that cruel spirit must have cut Him to the heart! Their change of attitude in so short a time can be due to one thing only—His resurrection. His word to the two Marys, in Matt. 28: 10, to go tell His brethren that He would see them in Galilee, was, perhaps, a message to these fleshly brothers.

How poetically beautiful the thought of His taking them back to the scenes of their childhood sports and tasks, to go over events with them again, revealing the significance of many things in His conduct that must have caused them to wonder at the time.

It is most probable that, all during their life together in the home, they had regarded Him as a natural brother. Joseph and Mary would scarcely take the later born children into their confidence in the matter of His virgin birth.

Jesus would do this, and they would be convinced easily since He has the evidence of sonship with God, sworn to by His resurrection.

BUSY, THOUGH COMMANDED TO "WAIT"

(Verses 15-26.)

Verse 15.—"Those days" were the days of waiting for the Holy Spirit. The

and received his portion in this ministry. 18 (Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. 19 And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood.) 20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be made desolate, And let no man dwell therein:
and,
His office let another take.

activity of Peter in this instance was due to his natural leadership qualities. He must be doing something. The apostles were told to wait for the promised Spirit, but Peter holds an election to fill a vacancy while waiting. His conduct proves the need of divine guidance. Hence, the Spirit endowment.

Verse 16.—The "Scripture," which condemns not only Judas, but all in his class, is found in Ps. 69: 25. It forecasts the fate of all covetous and treacherous enemies of the Lord.

Verse 17.—Judas had been "numbered" with the twelve, and assigned certain tasks in connection with their organizations, having been made treasurer. He fell through covetousness. It is a dangerous, foolhardy thing for a covetous man to accept a treasurership.

When one knows his peculiar temptation, he should refuse a position exposing him to its power.

John 12: 6 states that Judas, "having the bag, took away what was put therein." This is an illuminating remark.

Recent papyri discoveries throw a fresh light on this verb "took away." It means he had regularly embezzled the small amounts finding their way into the treasury. The "wages of sin is death," not only to the sinner, but also to the innocent who may be associated with the sinner.

Verses 18, 19.—Luke here interrupts Peter's speech to insert a parenthetical explanation concerning the death of Judas. In the Gospel he does not mention the fate of the traitor.

In connection with this account of the death of Judas, compare Matt. 27: 3-10. While they differ, they do not contradict each other. On the contrary, they dovetail perfectly.

Seized with remorse, not repentance, Judas carried the money back to the priestly authorities who had hired him to perform the dastardly deed. As blood money, it was polluted, according to their code, and they dared not ac-

cept it. Flinging it at their feet, he went out to end his life. Tradition says he chose a tree on the brink of a precipice, hanging himself on a branch overhanging the chasm. Here his body would hang indefinitely.

Who would seek him when missed? No one cares for a traitor. The disciples would be glad he was gone.

No Jew, who might see the body swinging in the wind, would make himself unclean merely to bury an unknown suicide. He hung there, the body rapidly decaying in that hot climate, until the breaking of rope or branch let the rotting body fall, and the concussion caused "all his bowels to gush out."

The authorities had to do something with the money, so what more fitting disposal than to buy a potters' field and call it "The Field of Blood"? It was Judas' field, in a sense, for his money had bought it. It is thus clear that both accounts fit perfectly.

Verses 20, 21.—An apostle must be qualified to give personal testimony to the fact of Jesus' resurrection. This would require an intimate personal acquaintance with Him before His death, so that the impossibility of imposture might be reduced to a minimum.

Peter suggests that such acquaintance should date as far back as the "baptism of John," and continue till His ascension.

How absurd, in the light of these verses, is the claim, of popes and Mormon apostles, to be successors to the apostles.

The Lord made no provision for successors, nor have there ever been any. Testimony on the resurrection, such as later men might give, would be immediately thrown out in any court.

Verse 23.—Neither of these men is heard of after this event.

We admire the disciples for their care in making choice.

They had seen the tragedy of having in their number one whose heart

21 Of the men therefore that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection. 23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place. 26 And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

was wrong, so they pray for divine guidance.

It is a mooted question as to whether the Lord directed the lot and recognized Matthias as an apostle. The only Bible evidence that he did is the statement here: "He was numbered with the eleven."

But who so numbered him, the Lord or the disciples?

The language is not decisive.

This action by the eleven was prior to their baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore it was not a Spirit-guided procedure. Jesus had personally chosen the original number, and later He calls Paul personally. These facts render divine approval of this choice very doubtful. However, it is a matter on which we can not be dogmatic.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Luke, the author of the third Gospel, writes to his friend Theophilus a letter that we call "The Acts." His purpose was to give a history of the founding of the church of Christ. (Verse 1.)

2. When Jesus was crucified and buried, His disciples gave up utterly. His repeated appearances were necessary to revive their faith and convince them that He was the same Christ they had known. (Verse 3.)

3. John's baptism of repentance was valid until supplanted by the baptism Jesus commanded. Only Christ Himself administered the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it always imparted miraculous gifts. (Verse 5.)

4. Though, humanly speaking, everything depended upon Jesus' disciples, their vision embraced nothing higher than a political kingdom with themselves occupying leading positions. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was necessary to change this. (Verse 8.)

5. The program outlined by Jesus was not so much a geographical division of effort as it was one of continuous preaching wherever they went. (Verse 8.)

6. The ascension and all other miracles are simply related as facts. That the narrators did not play them up with great headlines as wonderful phenomena and baffling mysteries, is proof of divine guidance. (Verse 12.)

7. The cumulative evidence of Jesus' miracles, His resurrection, His appearances, His ascension, and the later experiences on Pentecost, compelled His own brethren and the rest of His disciples to believe in His deity. (Verse 14.)

8. In the light of this and other Scripture, the claims of later men to be divinely appointed successors of the apostle are absurd and preposterous. An apostle had to be a personal witness to the fact of the resurrection.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of the writing of the Book of Acts? 2. What was the "commandment" to which Luke refers? 3. Why were Jesus' repeated appearances necessary? 4. Why did Jesus appear only to His disciples? 5. What was the "promise of the Father" in verse 4? 6. Why did not the apostles fully understand Jesus' kingdom

immediately after the resurrection? 7. Tell the story of the ascension. 8. How did the apostles spend their time while waiting for the Holy Spirit? 9. How many disciples were in the entire company at this time? 10. What was the fate of Judas? 11. What were the essential qualifications of an apostle?

LESSON THREE

THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 2:1-47

Memory Text.—“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.”—Acts 2:42.

LESSON PLAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Marvelous Miracle. 2. A Tongue for Every Tongue. 3. The First Gospel Sermon. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A New Law of Forgiveness Promulgated. 5. A Company Blessed by Obedience. |
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COMMENTS

Obedient to the command of Jesus, in Acts 1:4, 5, the apostles had returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promised Holy Spirit.

How eagerly they must have looked forward to that experience. They doubtless had a very imperfect idea of what the promise implied, but they knew that he would miraculously aid them in preaching the gospel. How anxious they must have been to start on the great adventure! They prayed daily for the promised endowment that their labor might begin.

A MARVELOUS MIRACLE

(Chapter 2:1-4.)

Verse 1.—The feast of Pentecost came at the close of the harvest season and was really a sort of thanksgiving festival. (Lev. 23:15, *seq.*)

It was also called “The Feast of Weeks” (Deut. 16:10), because its date was seven weeks after the day following the Sabbath of the Passover week. Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fiftieth.”

Seven weeks, as we count time, would be fifty days as the Jews reckon, hence, “Pentecost.”

“They who were together in one place” doubtless refers to the apostles only, not to the entire 120 of their company.

This is the natural conclusion from the fact that Acts 1:26 mentions the “eleven apostles,” the nearest antecedent of “they.”

The place where they assembled is usu-

ally understood to have been a room or apartment of the temple, though of this we can not be certain.

Their preaching must have been in the Court of the Gentiles, that being the only space in the temple area sufficiently large to accommodate the thousands who heard them preach. It seems rather strange that the temple should be called “the house where they were sitting.” It may be that they were in some private house when the phenomenon occurred, and they repaired to the temple when the crowd, attracted by the miracle, became too large to be accommodated elsewhere.

The date of this Pentecost can not be determined with absolute accuracy. Some place it as early as 28, others as late as 34 A. D. Available information is more or less confusing, and one can not be dogmatic, but it is probable that 29 A. D. is the best guess.

It is to be hoped that archeology will yet bring to light facts making a definite conclusion possible.

It is significant to observe that the disciples, all of whom had been Jews, devoutly keeping the law up till this time, were not observing this Pentecost according to the law of Moses.

This shows they knew of the abrogation of that law before their baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus must have taught them that fact during the forty days He was with them after His resurrection. He had “come to fulfill” the law. They saw that, when fulfilled, it was annulled. A fulfilled obligation is no longer binding. Jesus fulfilled the law on Calvary,

LESSON TEXT

1 And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galilæans? 8 And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judæa and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, 10 in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God. 12 And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 But others mocking said, They are filled with new wine.

hence Paul could be explicit in saying, "He hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross." (Col. 2: 14.)

Verses 2-4.—The "sound" that "filled all the place" was not produced by wind, but was like wind. All present heard it.

The tongues, also, could be seen. One probably rested on each of the apostles.

The miracle here described was a "baptism of the Holy Spirit." (Cf. Acts 1: 5; 2: 1-4; 10: 44-48; 11: 15, 16.)

From these passages the following important facts are learned:

First, Jesus promised a baptism of the Holy Spirit within a few days after His ascension.

Second, on Pentecost a miraculous outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles occurred.

Third, a similar instance took place at the time of the conversion of Cornelius and his household.

Fourth, that Peter calls these two occurrences baptisms of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of these facts, it is clear that those who were baptized by the Holy Spirit performed miracles. Some to-day profess to have had such a baptism, yet they can not work miracles.

Others seek this baptism with no thought that it would confer such power. Careless use of Scriptural expressions in this manner is unfortunate. It gives scoffers and skeptics much usable material. There is a gift of the Spirit, universal to all believers, as will be noted at the close of this lesson, but such a gift is not to be confused with the baptism.

The last verses of Luke's Gospel inform us that those who witnessed the ascension returned to Jerusalem with

great joy and "were continually in the temple, blessing God." The state or frame of mind in which we place ourselves determines largely the spiritual blessings received. Not as deluded people sometimes teach, that we might have another Pentecostal scene any time if we had sufficient faith. It would be better for them to demonstrate that than assert it. There is no need for such a miracle to-day. But the Spirit operates through godly lives, and He uses only such vessels as are prepared for His abode.

There seems to have been no exception to the rule that those who were "filled with the Spirit" in apostolic days wrought miracles of some sort. They healed the sick, spake in tongues and prophesied. The purpose of all such miracles was to produce faith in those who witnessed them. Jesus said, "Believe me for the very works' sake." (John 14: 11.)

The special purpose of the miracle of tongues on Pentecost was to convince unbelieving Jews who heard Peter and the others.

The tongue is a symbol of enlightenment, and "tongues parting asunder" symbolize different languages. People hearing the apostles speaking in languages they had never learned would know that God was giving the message, and that commands spoken through these men were His commands.

No more fitting method of attesting the divine approval of these men and their message can be imagined.

It is well to note the figurative use of the term "baptize" here. They were so completely under the influence of the

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them, saying, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words. 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day; 16 but this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 And it shall be in the last days, saith God,

I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:

And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

And your young men shall see visions,

And your old men shall dream dreams:

18 Yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days

Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show wonders in the heaven above,

And signs on the earth beneath;

Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

Spirit, their own personality so overwhelmed by Him, that baptism is a fitting figure. The word means dip, or immerse, and its figurative use to a Greek reader would suggest absolute control of the personality by the Holy Spirit in the delivery of His message.

A TONGUE FOR EVERY TONGUE

(Verses 5-13.)

Verse 5.—Jerusalem, being the religious center of the nation, would attract devout men of the Jewish faith. Then, as now, the Jews were scattered among all nations. Their genius for trade and adaptability to environment have always made them cosmopolitan.

A fortune acquired in other lands, it was natural for them to migrate to the ancestral home to spend their declining years where privileges of temple worship might be found.

Verses 6, 7.—The mental state of the people at hearing the sound of a wind with no wind blowing is graphically described by Luke. They were "amazed," "confounded," "perplexed," they "marveled." They knew that the men speaking were Galileans, without education as the world looked upon education. Galilee offered few cultural advantages. They probably knew the two or three languages with which everybody in that region was familiar—Greek, Aramaic, possibly Latin. But none had been trained in all the languages in which they spoke. Those who have mastered any foreign language can bear witness to the wonderful character of this miracle.

Verses 8-12.—A wide area of country is included in the regions from which the fifteen nationalities had come, but less than fifteen tongues would suffice that every man might hear "in his own lan-

guage," as some of the regions cited had the same speech.

All were Jews, but, having been reared in various places, they used the speech of the land where they grew up, as Jews do to-day.

Parthia was the region southeast of the Caspian Sea.

Media was immediately west of it. Elam and Mesopotamia occupied the great basin of the Euphrates-Tigris valley. Judea surrounded Jerusalem. Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia were provinces of what is now known as Asia Minor. Egypt was the Nile valley, and Libya the north shore of Africa west of it. In Crete, an island in the eastern Mediterranean, Greek would be the native speech. Arabia was southeast of Palestine.

It may seem strange that, since all could understand Greek, a variety of languages was used. It was because this was the first time in history that men were told what to do to be saved by faith in Christ, and it was important that it should be delivered in the language each could best understand. However proficient one may become in another tongue, that in which he was reared provides the best means of communication for him.

Naturally, those witnessing this marvelous miracle would try to explain it, but they got no further than to say, helplessly, "What meaneth this?"

It is probable that each of the eleven addressed the multitude in a different language. People would naturally gather round the man using their own native tongue. We may thus imagine eleven congregations assembled within the same large area, all listening to the same sermon, in substance at least, but each "in his own language."

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the day of the Lord come,
That great and notable day:

21 And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; 23 him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. 25 For David saith concerning him,

The mockers who said the preachers were "filled with new wine" were not sarcastic. The ordinary sour wine, which was intoxicating, was sometimes called "new." They knew, however, that their explanation did not explain. It is usual for light-headed fellows to offer an absurd explanation of something baffling.

The foolish remark gave Peter his starting-point.

This Pentecost occasion was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to Peter in Matt. 16:19. He gave him "the keys of the kingdom," which he used on Pentecost, opening or establishing the church.

THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON IN ITS FULLNESS

(Verses 14-36.)

Verse 14.—Luke's statement that "Peter stood up with the eleven" hints that Matthias was not in the group.

It seems probable that Peter, speaking to Judeans, used the Aramaic tongue, the spoken form of Hebrew at that time. It differed from classic Hebrew about the same as German differs from English.

Verse 15.—The charge of drunkenness was easily refuted. There were no saloons, where men could buy drink whenever thirst prompted. Wine, usually of light alcoholic content, was used only after the evening meal, and if they "tarried long at the wine" they might become drunken. The "third hour" was nine o'clock A. M.

Verses 16-21.—The quotation is from Joel 2:28, *seq.* Prophetic vision had not overlooked the wonderful beginning of the church.

The careful reader will note that Peter uses only that portion of the prophecy referring to the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, the more extensive quotation being to help the hearer get the context.

Men who use the Word carefully al-

ways do as Peter did. Every religious fad and false doctrine seeking support of Scripture uses disconnected passages as proof-texts. If all preachers would use a quotation as it is used by the inspired writer, all would preach the same doctrines.

Verses 22-24.—The sermon proper begins in verse 22. Peter here says Jesus of Nazareth was a "man approved of God," citing His miracles and mighty works, personal knowledge of which many present possessed, as proof.

This masterly sermon is worthy of the Divine Spirit. The theme, "God hath made him [Jesus, the carpenter] both Lord and Christ," is not stated till the end, because those to whom he is speaking are hostile to his belief. He produces the proof first, then draws his conclusion. It was no small task to convince prejudiced, bigoted Jews that they had slain their own Messiah of prophecy. Had he revealed his purpose at the beginning they would have either steeled their hearts or refused him liberty to speak.

The reference to Jesus' death at the hand of "lawless men" alluded to the illegal phases of His trial.

It is marvelous how God works out His purposes, using good men, if possible, but, if necessary, overruling the schemes of evil men, compelling them to accomplish His purpose.

Peter relies on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus to establish his proposition. It is still the strongest evidence that can be cited. If He arose, all He claimed follows. If He did not, He was earth's meanest impostor. Paul staked everything on that fact. Preachers and teachers to-day should stress it above every other argument.

The "pangs of death" can not be interpreted as teaching the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. It can not refer to

- I beheld the Lord always before my face;
 For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:
 26 Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
 Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope:
 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades,
 Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption.
 28 Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;
 Thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance.

suffering after death, which is the purgatorial doctrine. If this expression had been used of any one else, it would have been seized on by Rome as proof of her theory. But it is nowhere used of any one else, and even Catholics would not dare assert that Jesus suffered purgatorial fire. It refers to His natural shrinking from death, knowing the tremendous responsibility He carried to the grave. It was a three-day struggle, with the final fate of humanity hinging on the result.

If He failed in death, there was no hope for a lost race. If victorious there, as He had been in every other trial, salvation would be possible for all. He asked for the "cup to pass," not because of physical pain, but because of spiritual responsibility.

What a thought world is opened in Peter's expression. "It was not possible that he should be holden of it." Every sense of justice would have been outraged if Jesus had not left Joseph's tomb. Death might legitimately claim all who sinned, but became a usurper when laying its hand on the sinless One. Divine justice demanded that it should be overthrown by its victim, just as sooner or later oppressors receive their punishment at the hands of the oppressed.

Verses 25-31.—The quotation here is from Psalm 16. Hades is the name of the state where the dead remain between death and resurrection. It is temporary, and will cease at the general resurrection. Both good and bad are there, but with an impassable gulf separating them. See the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19, *seq.*). At the resurrection the good will enter heaven; the wicked, hell.

It is unfortunate that the King James' Version translates the word "Hades" here by the term "hell." This expression puts Jesus in hell, a place He most certainly never was in. Impenitent sinners alone enter hell. The proper word

for "hell" is "Gehenna," a very different term indeed. Jesus was in Hades.

Peter uses the quotation to prove that David foresaw Jesus' resurrection. The language could not refer to David himself, for they knew where his body was at that time. The one whom the prophet has in mind was not to remain dead long enough for his flesh to seriously decay. David's calling Him "Lord" was also proof that he had a divine person in mind. That term was only applied to those who had been deified. It was not a title of nobility, as we use it to-day.

Verse 32.—The most convincing argument for the resurrection he reserves to the last—that of personal witnesses. He and the eleven had seen Him after His resurrection. The truth of the story was attested by the miracle of tongues. The Spirit would not bestow such gifts upon liars.

There was a dual purpose in this Spirit baptism. It fulfilled Jesus' promise to "guide them into all truth and bring to remembrance;" and attested the inspiration of the apostles.

Verse 33.—This was the first official act of Jesus as ruler of heaven and earth. "He hath poured forth this."

The Holy Spirit, the heavenly executor of Jesus' will, made known to the apostles, the earthly executors, its contents.

Verse 36.—Peter declares Jesus to be "both Lord and Christ." The title "Lord" acknowledged His deity.

"Christ" identified Him with the Messiah of prophecy, the Anointed of God.

A NEW LAW OF FORGIVENESS PROMULGATED

(Verses 37-40.)

Verse 37.—"Pricked in their heart" means they were convicted of sin. In John 16: 8 Jesus promised the Holy Spirit for that purpose. We here see how He did it. It was through the preaching of Peter. So far as known, the Spirit always produces conviction of sin in the

29 Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; 31 he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. 34 For David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself,

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35 Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet.

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.

same way. Their anguished cry, "What shall we do?" elicits the first answer to that question ever given by an inspired man under the Christian dispensation.

Verse 38.—Peter does not say "believe," for they already believed. His sermon and the miracle had produced faith. He begins with them where they are and commands them to "repent." That meant "change your will," for that is what repentance is always.

They were next to be "baptized." All this was to be done "unto the remission of sins." Here, then, is the divine rule for forgiveness of sin. Salvation is promised in the Word on no other basis than that. Believe, repent, be baptized.

When we do that, we have the Lord's promise to forgive us.

The "gift of the Holy Spirit" is the divine indwelling in every Christian's heart, to strengthen in trial, to help in weakness and in a thousand other respects. Here is one advantage the Christian has over the non-Christian. The latter has no help from God. The Christian has.

Verse 39.—No one is omitted from this promise, hence Jew and Gentile are to be saved on the same terms.

Verse 40.—We can only guess the nature of Peter's exhortation, but how effective it was!

A COMPANY BLESSED BY OBEDIENCE

(Verses 41-47.)

Verse 41.—The three thousand baptized, together with the 120, constituted the nucleus of the church, which was founded on that day. Before this, the church was always referred to in the future tense. After this, it is always spoken of as existent. This is of vital importance. The church is composed of forgiven sinners who have accepted salvation through obedience to Christ, and what made men

Christians on Pentecost makes them Christians now.

Verse 42.—Luke next gives Theophilus a glimpse of the early church life. What a picture of loyal devotion to the apostles this verse gives. Their inspiration was unquestioned, their word authoritative. The same delightful fellowship would exist to-day if all followers of Jesus did as this Jerusalem church, and the lost unity of the body of Christ would be restored.

Verses 43-47.—This "fear" was due to their consciousness of the presence of divine power in their midst; evidence was shown by the "wonders and signs" of the apostles.

The authority of the apostles sets lightly on some consciences to-day. The modern Pharisees, as their prototypes of the first century, piously pretend to have superior "spiritual perception." They are ruled by their "inner consciousness."

This is their authority for willful perversion of plain Scriptural teaching. Those who carefully obey what the Spirit commanded the apostles do not claim Spirit guidance—they do not need to. They obey His teaching, and that is evidence of their loyalty to Him. But the disobedient must find pious pretext for their conduct. The continuance of the authority of apostolic teaching can not be stressed too much in this age. It is a proud and arrogant time.

The communistic experiment will be treated under Lesson VI. It is perhaps regrettable that human nature makes such theories unworkable.

The exemplary life of the first Christians won favor. No one can find fault with genuine Christian living. Even heathen approve it. The result of continued preaching, miracles of apostles and blameless lives of the converts added, daily, members to the body of Christ. It is the Lord who adds to His church.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? 38 And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. 40 And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. 41 They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need. 46 And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.

He has instructed us how to receive them into fellowship, which is the extent of our

authority. He alone adds to His spiritual body.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Pentecost, meaning fiftieth, was a sort of thanksgiving festival, also called "The Feast of Weeks," held seven weeks, or fifty days, after the day following the Sabbath of Passover week. (Vs. 1-4.)

2. The disciples of Jesus were not here observing Pentecost. That they had ceased to observe it shows that they knew Jesus had fulfilled the Mosaic law on Calvary. The fulfilling of the law annulled it. (Vs. 1-4.)

3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit carried with it the power to work miracles, therefore there is no such baptism now. The "gift" of the Spirit, possessed by each true Christian to comfort and strengthen, must not be confused with the baptism of the Spirit. (Vs. 4, 38.)

4. The word "baptize" means to dip or immerse, and therefore the baptism of the Holy Spirit means a complete envelopment in the Spirit as when the body is completely submerged in water. The miracle gave a divine setting to the beginning of Christianity.

5. It is probable that each of the eleven addressed a portion of the multitude in a

different language. The crowd knew that the men speaking were Galileans without education. Hence the certainty that it was a miracle. (Vs. 5-13.)

6. The theme of Peter's sermon, "God hath made him both Lord and Christ," was reserved till the end, because its early statement would have aroused such hostility as to prevent an unbiased hearing. (Vs. 36.)

7. This remarkable sermon anchors everything upon the fact of the resurrection. Paul did the same thing. It is our anchorage to-day. (Vs. 24, 32.)

8. Peter declared Jesus to be "Lord and Christ." The title "Lord" attests His deity, and "Christ" identifies Him with the Messiah of prophecy. (Vs. 36.)

9. Those who cried, "What shall we do?" already believed, therefore they were told to repent and be baptized, thus securing the promise of forgiveness. This is the unvarying order. (Vs. 37, 38.)

10. The early church was made up of forgiven sinners who had entered into salvation through obedience to Christ. That which made people Christians then makes them Christians now. (Vs. 41.)

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the scene on Pentecost. 2. What was the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? 3. So far as Pentecost was concerned, what was the effect of Jesus' teaching upon His disciples? 4. What ability did the baptism of the Spirit carry with it? 5. How do you know people are not baptized in the Holy Spirit to-day? 6. What was the

theme of Peter's sermon? 7. What was the sermon's effect upon his hearers? 8. What acts of obedience were required? 9. What are the terms of forgiveness for sinners to-day? 10. How much stress did Peter place upon the resurrection? 11. What do the titles "Lord" and "Christ" signify? 12. Who composed the early church?

LESSON FOUR

PETER AND JOHN IN THE TEMPLE

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 3: 1-26

Memory Text.—“Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”—Acts 3: 19.

LESSON PLAN

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|---|---|
| 1. A Worshiper Who Received More than He Asked. | 3. A Prophecy Fulfilled, Another to Be Fulfilled. |
| 2. A Sermon with a Miracle as a Text. | 4. The True Mission of the True Prophet. |

COMMENTS

This incident of the healing of a lame man was recorded to place before Theophilus, and subsequent readers, the historical background of the first persecution of the church.

What started a concerted movement against a people whose life was above reproach, is a legitimate question.

The narrative is given in full that the reader may see that it was not the abstract doctrine of the resurrection to which the Jewish leaders objected, but to the idea that the resurrection was contingent on Jesus and His own resurrection.

The same hatred that caused the Sanhedrin to demand His crucifixion still burned in their breasts. They determined to leave nothing undone in their attempt to blot His name from the earth.

It is passing strange that anybody should have objected to a miracle that healed an unfortunate sufferer, but the perversity of human nature is one of the strangest of common things. It is human to refuse to believe a plain fact if that fact necessitates a revision of beliefs already held.

A WORSHIPER WHO RECEIVED MORE THAN HE ASKED

(Chapter 3: 1-10.)

Verse 1.—Peter and John were not going to the temple to worship. It was one of the regular prayer periods of the temple service, and the gathered worshipers constituted an audience to whom they might preach Jesus. Acts 2: 46 informs us that the Christians sought the temple

daily, for the best prepared people for the gospel message would be found there. The hour was 3 P. M.

There is always more hope of a religiously inclined man obeying the gospel than there is of a worldly minded one.

It is sometimes said that a moral man is worse than a wicked one, but that is not true. The better a man is, the nearer he is to the kingdom. These people were not only moral, they were also religious, but not Christian.

Verses 2, 3.—The “Beautiful Gate” of the temple was its eastern entrance. It led directly into the Court of the Women, and was therefore used by them especially, though not exclusively, as the entrance of Peter and John shows. This gate was of Corinthian brass, handsomely carved and ornamented, seventy-five feet high and sixty feet wide. Its highly polished surface reflected the rays of the morning sun with dazzling brilliancy.

In that day a cripple’s only means of support was alms. The words “carried” and “laid” are both in the imperfect tense, indicating that it was a daily custom of his friends to carry the unfortunate man to this gate. These caretakers knew where to place him. If people would ever be generous, it would be when going to worship. The gate used by women would be at least doubly remunerative to alms-seekers. Notice how women to-day drop money into the cup of the blind. Women act impulsively, and out of compassion relieve the sufferer by the speediest method. Men organize their charitable work that it may be

LESSON TEXT

1 Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. 2 And a certain man that was lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3 who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. 5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. 7

done efficiently. Thus, in the matter of alms, as in everything else, the divine wisdom in creating us "male and female" is demonstrated.

Both methods are commendable. Caring for unfortunates in institutions is better than dependence on chance contributions. It provides constant and trained care, whereas alms alone is a precarious means of support. It distributes the burden of caring for poor among those best able to bear it. It makes it possible to discriminate between impostors and those who are worthy.

Verses 4-6.—Peter really said, "Look attentively on us." This was good psychology. His looking at the cripple, and the cripple returning the gaze, would attract the attention of the incoming worshippers—the deeper motive for the miracle. The silent challenge of Peter and the lame man would center all eyes on the miracle. As for the man, he would expect an unusual gift from men inviting public notice of what they are about to bestow. His heart must have sunk leaden in his breast when Peter informed him he had no money.

When God has a better, more spiritual gift in store for us than the temporal one for which we ask, He frequently disappoints us first, causing us to think He is refusing to grant our request altogether. If the desire for the thing of lesser worth persists, He may crush it by a harsh process, that we may be willing to accept the better gift.

The sudden, explosive command to walk burst so unexpectedly on the ears of the cripple that he seems dazed by it. Its effect on the onlookers may be imagined. How critically and incredulously they would look, now on Peter, then on the alms-seeker.

Some would laugh outright at the absurd command, thinking Peter to be coarsely joking with him. A few would wait without prejudice to see what would happen.

The phrase used by Peter is worthy of a word. "In the name of Jesus," repeated over and over in the New Testament, always means "by the authority of Jesus." It was an acknowledgment that the power through which the deed was wrought was divine.

Demons were cast out in His name. That is, He authorized those exorcising them to perform that service for the afflicted, and applied the necessary power to compel them to depart.

In the baptismal formula as found in Matt. 28:18-20 we are commanded to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This means that all three personalities of the Godhead have a part in the forgiveness of sin, and the formal act of submission to divine authority must express that fact. It was the Father's part to plan for redemption. The Son executed the plan. The Holy Spirit was commissioned to proclaim the plan to a lost world. In the ordinance of baptism the candidate enters into *covenant relationship* with the Godhead, so that he is entitled to the divine protection and provision for spiritual needs. He also comes under the *authority* of the Godhead in that act of obedience. It is the sinner's oath of allegiance to the kingdom of heaven, and public renunciation of the kingdom of Satan.

Peter here merely asserts that his authority and power to heal the cripple is in Jesus, whom God has exalted to be the Messiah of the Jews.

Verses 7, 8.—The lame man was so astonished at Peter's command that he apparently made no effort to obey until taken by the hand and assisted to rise. When he helped himself, he found new strength.

In the spiritual realm the same law frequently obtains.

Those whom we would aid spiritually must be encouraged and helped as tenderly as a mother guides the first steps

And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up: and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength. 8 And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10 and they took knowledge of him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11 And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. 12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this man? or why fasten ye your eyes on us, as

of her babe. Especially is this true of one who, for a long time, has been an outcast and has almost abandoned hope.

It would be self-evident to all witnesses that the healing was not according to natural law. They knew a miracle had been performed.

Note how accurately Luke describes the man's movements. He "leaped up." Never having walked, his first effort would result in such a motion as leaping. Then, balancing himself, "he stood." That would be a distinct triumph to him. He then "walked." His mastery of locomotion is skillfully told.

His joy in the newly found strength defied restraint, so he entered the temple, "leaping and praising God." It was natural and fitting that he enter the temple dedicated to the worship of God, and there praise Him who had healed him.

How strange that so many to-day, who have been subjects of great favors from God, never even thank Him, much less seek His house to acknowledge Him as Saviour. Thanklessness is one of our American sins. We take all our unnumbered blessings for granted, assume that we are entitled to them, that God is obligated to honor us especially because we are in America. We should remember that we have nothing that may not be lost, and, unless faithful in stewardship, our trust will pass to others.

Four technical medical terms are found in the narrative of this healing. The importance of this fact, as it bears on the authorship of the book, can be appreciated. It amounts to a practical demonstration that the book was written by a doctor. If by a doctor, who but Luke, the "beloved physician," could it have been?

Verses 9, 10.—The healing was performed in the sight of all, thus opening the way for Peter to proclaim Jesus as the One who had really done the healing. Yet the people could scarcely believe their eyes.

"They took knowledge" indicates

that they demanded absolute proof of the identity of the man. It was natural that they should be filled with wonder and amazement. This state of mind was the Holy Spirit's way of preparing the soil of their hearts for the seed of gospel truth, which Peter immediately sows.

It may not be out of place here to remark that every miracle of Jesus and His disciples was performed to direct attention to the message of the One through whom the miracle was wrought.

Not once did sympathy or compassion alone move Jesus to heal, or raise the dead. He loved and sympathized with those whom He did not heal as much as He did those He healed. He was ever alert to use an opportunity which would prepare the people for a proclamation of His gospel, either then or at some later time, and the beneficiary of every miracle was chosen with that objective in mind. The paralytic needed his sin forgiven more than he needed bodily healing. But, to prove that He had authority to forgive sin, Jesus healed him immediately. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins, then saith he to the sick of the palsy, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." It is conceivable that had the Pharisees not objected to His claim to forgive sin, the man might have received that for which he came, forgiveness, and been carried back a paralytic. But when His authority in the realm of sin was questioned, Jesus demonstrated His power in the unseen moral nature by a miracle in the seen physical body.

A SERMON WITH A MIRACLE AS A TEXT

(Verses 11-16.)

Verse 11.—The healed man, like a child who has just received a coveted present, held on to the ones through whom the blessing had come, to express his gratitude and love. It is likely, also,

though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? 13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had determined to release him. 14 But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, 15 and killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. 16 And by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is through him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of

that he dreaded losing sight of these men until he tested the permanency of his healing.

The joy of this poor man rebukes every one of us who has always enjoyed health. We forget our riches in the possession of strong bodies, sane minds, friends, ability to come and go as we please, and complain because some one else may have a little more money, honor or finer clothes. We should be heartily ashamed of ourselves for our base ingratitude.

Solomon's porch (or, more properly, portico) was a colonnaded roof extending along the eastern wall of the Court of the Gentiles.

It is mentioned three times in the New Testament, in connection with the teaching of Jesus and His disciples, as a place where audiences assembled.

Peter waited for the full effect of the miracle on his audience before he began his sermon. He addressed them as "men of Israel." The expression would include all who were included in the covenant promises—both Jew and Gentile proselyte.

His saying, "Why do ye marvel?" would serve to increase their interest in what he might have to say in explanation. They would think they had abundant reason for marveling. He had known the power of Jesus so long that it seemed strange to him that any should be surprised at a case of miraculous healing.

He hastened to disclaim any credit, personally, for the miracle. Neither his power nor goodness could accomplish it.

This fact should be remembered to-day when we hear certain exponents of "faith power" insist that we can do what the apostles could, if only as full of faith and righteousness as they were. Such wonders were performed only by those miraculously empowered. The apostles themselves clearly taught that such gifts were temporary (1 Cor. 13: 8). "Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues,

they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away."

Verse 13.—Peter affirmed that it was the God whom they worshiped, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who had glorified Jesus.

The "glorification" consisted in raising Him from the dead and coronating Him as King of heaven. His title, "Servant," would direct their minds to the prophetic use of this term in Isa. 52: 13, where His suffering is unmistakably foretold. He fastened on them the guilt of delivering Jesus to Pilate, boldly accusing them of crucifying their own Messiah. He proved the resurrection by the testimony of himself and John, the truth of whose testimony had just been attested by God himself in granting power to heal the cripple. His argument was that God would not use impostors or wicked men as agencies through whom miraculous healing was done. The purpose of the miracle is again made clear—a means of producing faith in Jesus as God's Son.

Verse 15.—Peter's choice of title for Jesus, "Prince of Life," when he spoke of His death, would seem paradoxical to them. He doubtless deliberately used the expression for that purpose. He could then pass to the fact of His resurrection—the great outstanding fact of history.

Verse 16.—Faith in the "name" is faith in the power or authority of Jesus. The power was in the faith of the apostles, not that of the man. There is no reason for supposing that the man himself had knowledge of Jesus. The care of Peter in explaining the case indicates that it was for the benefit of the man on whom the miracle was wrought as well as on the spectators.

It was not necessary that the beneficiary of a miracle should himself have faith. The claim of "faith healers" to-day that one must have faith to be healed, shows that their power differs from that of the apostles. It suggests

you all. 17 And now, brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. 18 But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: 21 whom the heaven must

hypnotism rather than divine power as the cause of whatever healing they perform.

Divine power is not limited by human weakness. Jesus healed the son of the centurion when not in the presence of the sick boy. It is scarcely probable that the faith of the boy entered into the healing in the slightest manner.

A PROPHECY FULFILLED, ANOTHER TO BE FULFILLED

(Verses 17-21.)

Verse 17.—Seeing the deep mental suffering of certain ones in his audience, He softened His indictment by attributing it in part to their ignorance. Ignorant sin may cause as dire effects as conscious transgression, but it is less heinous. It is easier repented of. Also, when the transgressor has repented, he will seek to atone for his mistake.

Verse 18.—Peter next showed how various prophets had foretold this very blindness on the part of the Jewish rulers. The passage cited above (Isa. 52: 13—53: 12) would doubtless be used by the preacher in particularizing on this point. It is a passage which no Jew can explain to this day. The reader should turn to this wonderful prophecy and see the clearness with which certain phases of Jesus' trial and crucifixion are predicted.

Verse 19.—"Repentance," reduced to its simplest terms, is a "change of will." The word literally means "a change of mind." But it never refers to the intellect or reason, nor to the emotions or feelings. It always appeals to the supreme court of the human life—the will. The will is the crowning characteristic of the mind. God always makes His approach to man through that phase of his nature.

The command to "turn again" assumes the freedom of the will to act as they determined. They were to "turn themselves" around and pursue a different policy toward Jesus, whom Peter had proven to be their Messiah. This they had absolute power to do.

The student may note the difference between the American Revised Version and the King James' translation here, which latter rendering is "be converted," as if the sinner had no choice, but was passive. This translation is neither good grammar nor good theology. From every consideration, the rendering of our text is to be preferred.

The result of their repenting and turning (which would include the entire process of conversion) would be the forgiveness of sin.

"Seasons of refreshing," which were to follow their turning to the Lord, probably allude to the rains that come with such refreshing effect in Palestine after the ground has been parched long in summer heat. There is a new springing into life of vegetation. So when the soul has turned to God, there is a renewal of spiritual interest and preception that is indeed "refreshing" to one who has felt his spirituality burned out in the drouth of worldliness and sin. It may also be that the words convey a promise of scenes such as Pentecost witnessed, when the disciples "were filled with the Spirit." Such phenomena were frequent in the apostolic age.

Verses 20, 21.—That the second coming of Christ is contingent upon certain results being accomplished is clear from Peter's statement that "the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things."

Jesus is now in heaven, reigning at God's right hand. There He will remain until we on earth have done the allotted work of preparing for His return. The general teaching of the New Testament on this subject is that the time of His coming depends on the vigor with which His followers execute their task of world evangelization.

It is a sobering thought that we are either hastening or delaying the return of the Lord. God's plans must be worked out by His children. What an honor! What a responsibility! May we deserve the one and be equal to the other.

receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old. 22 Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you. 23 And it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. 24 Yea and

It is perhaps impossible to understand the significance of the expression, "The restoration of all things."

The words stimulate the imagination. Does he mean that the earth shall again be without sin, and that everything contrary to the will of God be banished from earth? Will paradise be restored?

Whatever the condition when things shall be restored, it will be a state in which the Holy Spirit is interested, for He has spoken of it by many prophets. God has always counseled with man in the sense that He has given notice of His plans, and invited man to co-operate in the realization. This should enable us to realize our value in God's sight.

THE TRUE MISSION OF THE TRUE PROPHET

(Verses 22-26.)

Verses 22, 23.—Peter next cited an illustration of what God had said through his holy prophets. Moses had foretold of Jesus in Deut. 18:15-19. This is a clear warning that those refusing to hear the later prophet (Jesus) would "be cut off from among my people."

That means they should have no inheritance in spiritual Israel. God's covenant with Abraham was henceforth to be kept only with those accepting Christ, hence reliance on blood descent was valueless. This was a "hard saying" to the Jews.

It would irritate the proud and self-sufficient, but in the face of such a miracle how could they resist its note of warning?

Verse 24.—There is no recorded prophecy of Samuel specifically stating what Peter here attributes to him. He either knew of some prophecy now lost, or gave

liberal interpretation to Samuel's predictions.

Verse 25.—They were "sons of the prophets" in the sense that they were heirs to the prophetic promises. They were included in the covenant promises to Abraham, but they, as well as Gentiles, must obtain forgiveness through Jesus and rely on His power and authority to procure salvation from their sins.

Verse 26.—Special favor was shown the Jews in being the first to receive the message of salvation. The "blessing" consisted in being "turned away from iniquities."

What a revolutionary interpretation that must have been to Peter's audience. They had thought of the "blessing" as a Jewish state ruling the world, and themselves profiting by the subjugation of the world. Gentiles would be "blessed" in having the honor of being ruled by Jews! They now hear that they are to be personally righteous, and that right-doing is the only blessing the world will ever acknowledge.

It is easy for men to-day to interpret the Scriptures according to their desires. And they usually desire what will advantage them personally. Constant struggle is necessary to prevent interpreting Biblical teaching in harmony with a preconceived philosophy, either physical or theological. Every heresy that hides behind a Scriptural passage seeks that refuge to escape the necessity of abandoning some earlier opinion. When all become honest enough to let every passage speak for itself, every one will teach the same thing. Especially is this true concerning things that are matters of faith, not plainly matters of opinion.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Peter and John sought the temple because there they found morally and religiously inclined people. These would be the most promising hearers of the gospel. The preaching of a benevolent gospel and the working of benevolent

miracles, strange to say, were the beginning of what grew into persecution. (V. 1.)

2. The "Beautiful Gate" of the temple was its eastern entrance leading to the Court of the Women. Unfortunates

all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. 25 Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

seeking alms sought this gate because women are more impulsively charitable. (Vs. 2, 3.)

3. The healing of the lame man was plainly a miracle. It was done "in the name of Jesus Christ." This New Testament phrase always means by the authority of Jesus Christ, and is meant to be understood as the authority of Deity. (V. 6.)

4. It is important to note that all New Testament miracles were performed for the purpose of directing attention to the gospel message of those through whom the miracles were wrought. (Vs. 9, 10.)

5. Peter hastened to disclaim any credit for the man's healing. The apostles taught that miraculous gifts were temporary and for a divine purpose. Ordinarily a man with such a gift would ad-

vertise himself. The apostles preached Christ, and Christ only, and sought no distinction for themselves. (V. 12.)

6. The claim of so-called "divine healers" and "faith-cure" advocates to-day that the one to be healed must have faith is not borne out by Scripture. It was not necessary for the beneficiary of apostolic miracles to have faith. (V. 16.)

7. The command to "turn again" is in the old version "be converted." "Turn again" is the correct rendering, and means that the sinner must change his mind, and is himself responsible for changing it. (V. 19.)

8. The second coming of Christ is contingent upon our doing our part of the work of preparation. It is a sobering thought that we are either hastening or delaying His coming. (Vs. 20, 21.)

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly tell the story of the lame man of this lesson. 2. Why did Peter and John seek the temple when they themselves had forsaken the temple religion? 3. What good reason had the lame man's friends for placing him at the "Beautiful Gate"? 4. What testimony on the authorship of Acts is given in the terms describing the man's ailments? 5. What is the significance of the phrase "in the name of Jesus"? 6. Why should we not be just as grateful for continuous health as the lame man was for restored

health? 7. What was the purpose of the New Testament miracles? 8. How do you account for the fact that Peter disclaimed all credit for the lame man's healing? 9. What is the bearing of this incident upon the present-day "faith cure" doctrine? 10. What important truth is made clear in the expression "turn again"? (V. 19.) 11. Upon what is the "second coming" of Christ contingent? 12. Explain the fact that there is not more agreement in the interpretation of Scripture. 13. Why do not people read the Bible more?

ROCK OR SOIL

The limit of what Christ gives is His boundless wealth; the limit of what you possess is your faith. The rainfall comes down in the same copiousness on rock and furrow, but it runs off the one, having stimulated no growth and left no blessing, and it sinks into the other and quickens every dormant germ into life which will one day blossom into beauty. We are all of us either rock or soil, and which we are depends on the reality, the firmness and the force of our faith in Christ. He Himself has laid down the principle on which He bestows His gifts when he says: "According to thy faith be it unto thee!"—*Alexander Maclaren.*

LESSON FIVE

FIRST PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 4:1-31

Memory Text.—“And they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.”—Acts 4:13.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. A Foolish Move by “Wise” Leaders.
2. Prosecutors Made Defendants.</p> | <p>3. A Humiliated Court Drops a Case.
4. A Liberated Prisoner Makes a Case.</p> |
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COMMENTS

The discourse of Peter and John must have continued for some time, for the officials of the Sanhedrin, hearing of the healing, evidently called a meeting of the court, decided to stop the teaching and reached the temple before the apostles had finished their sermons. It is probable that we have only an outline of the sermons in this brief narrative.

A FOOLISH MOVE BY “WISE” LEADERS

(Chapter 4:1-4.)

Verses 1, 2.—The immediate cause of the irritation of the Sanhedrin was twofold. First, they were grieved that the apostles taught the resurrection through Jesus. This reveals the fact that Sadducee influence was dominant on the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees denied the resurrection and the reality of spirit existence. They were the rationalists of the period.

They were the religious fathers of the modern school of those “higher critics” who deny the inspiration of Biblical writers, deny the occurrence of miracles, question the virgin birth of Jesus and dissect the Bible into myth, legend and doubtful history.

They manifested the same spirit that their descendants do to-day. While declaiming loudly against the “intolerance” of devout believers who refuse to turn over the management of all educational, missionary and organizational activities of the church to them, they themselves manifest the most conceited intolerance for all of reverent faith.

Perhaps their contempt for the doc-

trine of the resurrection would not have driven them to such extreme measures, had it been taught as an abstract theory. But to connect this hope with the man whom they had ordered crucified a few months before was more than their official dignity could bear. It was a reflection on their spiritual insight and ability to interpret the Scriptures. Jesus had been put to death through their trickery, and at their orders. If the people were to reach the point of believing that He arose from the dead, the Sanhedrin’s standing as a court would be gone forever.

The second cause for Sanhedrin opposition was *that the disciples were teaching the people. Teaching was their special prerogative.* They had been elected to positions of authority, and now their places were being usurped by “ignorant” Galileans.

It is not human for worldly-minded people to submit to loss of authority without a protest. It is human to use power in the protest, if power is possessed. This the Sanhedrin had. Rome would protect them in exercising it, in the temple area at least. Being the ruling class, it was natural that they should have first consideration with Rome, whose religious policy was always conciliatory.

Verse 3.—Their attempt to intimidate the disciples by imprisoning them overnight was also an attempt to discredit them in the eyes of the multitude. Jailbirds were no more popular then than now.

The first persecution of the church was rooted in the jealousy of Jewish official

LESSON TEXT

1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in ward unto the morrow: for it was now eventide. 4 But many of them that heard the word believed: and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this? 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders, 9 if we this day are examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man, by what means this

classes who feared loss of prestige and power over the people. They were unwilling to meet the apostles in open debate, compare arguments and trust the judgment of the people to decide which had the truth.

Like all bigots, they preferred persecution to investigation.

This jailing of the apostles was illegal. No charge was placed against them. It was a high-handed abuse of authority.

Verse 4.—Honest observers and listeners were affected very differently from the Sanhedrists. "Many of them believed." How could they help it? They knew that a notable miracle had been wrought, and, seeing that the apostles demanded only righteous living, decided to accept the new doctrine. Five thousand believers was a most encouraging beginning.

Within a few months every honest-minded Jew in Jerusalem had an opportunity to hear and accept the gospel. This city being evangelized, the disciples should have started forth to the task of world evangelization assigned them by Jesus in the Great Commission. At rare intervals only has evangelism been stressed as the Lord desires. It is more than possible that we are devoting less energy to this supreme work of the church to-day than we should. It is well to "grow in grace and the knowledge of the truth," but certain phases of that growth are attained only by gospel extension.

PROSECUTORS MADE DEFENDANTS

(Verses 5-12.)

"Rulers, elders and scribes" is the Scriptural designation for the Sanhedrin, though this term is not found in the New Testament. The Greek word from which it comes is usually translated "council." It means a "sitting together." This

court was composed of seventy men, chosen from among the priests, elders of synagogues, and scribes—those qualified to pass on technicalities in religion. It was a court with much authority. Rome granted it final jurisdiction in cases arising out of Jewish law and custom.

It could pass death sentence only in case of violation of the sacred area of the temple by a Gentile. It appointed a "lesser Sanhedrin" of twenty-three members, who sometimes sat with the larger body.

Jewish tradition traces its origin to the appointment of seventy men by Moses, as recorded in Num. 11:16-25. Ezra restored the court after the exile. The high priest presided at its sittings. When in session, the court sat in a semi-circle, so that each could see all the other judges, the presiding judge being in the center. A prisoner on trial, robed in sackcloth and meanly dressed, would be placed before the entire court. It was a solemn procedure when the body was in session. Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests when Jesus was tried, were still holding office when the disciples were brought before the court. Annas was the lawful high priest according to the law of succession of the Jews. Because he exceeded the authority granted by Rome he had been deposed, and his son-in-law, Caiaphas installed instead.

To the Jews, however, Annas was still high priest, so they held court with him presiding to satisfy their own scruples, then another session under Caiaphas, to comply with Rome's demands. This occasioned no friction, since a perfect understanding existed between Annas and Caiaphas, as shrewd Roman politicians well knew. By appointing Caiaphas when it became necessary to depose Annas, they upheld the majesty of their own

man is made whole; 10 be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11 He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. 12 And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.

13 Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a

authority, and conciliated the Jews also. It was a happy stroke of diplomacy that killed two birds with one stone.

Verse 7.—What must have been the sensation of the disciples when they were arraigned before the same court which had condemned their Lord a few weeks before! The presence of relatives of the high priest indicates the importance attached to this hearing on the part of the Jewish leaders. They had hoped to erase the name and memory of Jesus from history when they crucified Him.

Now that His followers had been multiplied manifold within a few weeks, they were filled with consternation. If Christianity succeeded, Judaism must pass. That meant that their positions as religious leaders would be lost, and they would be discredited for obstinate fighting against God. The new faith must be stamped out at whatever cost. This will help us understand the tense interest in this first hearing since the unprovoked murder of Jesus.

The zealous religious persecutor is an interesting psychological study. Almost always he holds theoretical theories on toleration which would guarantee against persecution. But he easily finds pretexts whereby he decides that these principles of toleration do not hold in the particular instance he has before him. It has been hard for humanity to learn that persecution always helps a cause more than it hinders it.

The formal arraignment of the apostles began with a question, "By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?"

The Sanhedrin well knew the answer to their question. It was asked to extract a confession in open court that they claimed to work miracles through the power of the Jesus who had been crucified by the order of this court.

By reviewing the evidence on which Jesus had been condemned, it would be

a simple procedure to reaffirm that sentence and apply it to any who might be convicted of having any connection with Him or His teaching. They probably thought their solemn arraignment would terrorize the disciples into a repudiation of Jesus. Some of them would remember the denials entered by these same men at Jesus' trial, and reason that it would be easy to extort a similar denial by threats. They little realized the power of Jesus, not only to perform wonders, but to transform character also. Simon, the unstable and cowardly, has become Peter, a rock. John, hot-tempered and vindictive, as illustrated by his request for the Lord to call down fire from heaven and destroy the inhospitable Samaritans, has been transformed into the apostle of love. This power of Jesus over character is even more wonderful than His authority over nature. It is the strongest visible argument we see to-day for His deity. The day of miracles has passed, but His power to regenerate is observed in even a larger way than in the first century.

Verse 8.—Peter the impetuous, as usual, is the spokesman. Yet it is not he alone who speaks. The promise of the Holy Spirit, who should give them in that hour what they should say, is fulfilled again. Note the skill and courtesy of Peter's defense. His address to the court was in the formal phraseology of the time. We say "Your Honor" instead of the words he used, "Ye Rulers and Elders," titles which delighted the ears of the Sanhedrists.

This was wise, for it prevented the court from action against them on some minor charge of contempt.

Verse 9.—The skill in shifting the issue raised is also worthy of notice. The court asked, "By what power, or in whose name, have ye done this?" Peter replied, "If you wish to examine us about a good deed done to an impotent

notable miracle hath been wrought through them, is manifest to all that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18 And they called them, and charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: 20 for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard. 21 And they, when they had further threatened them, let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was more than forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was wrought.

man." Of course they would not willingly go on record as opposing a generous, helpful act of mercy. But Peter's unexpected statement of the point at issue would necessarily place them in that light before the people.

The people would say, "It was a good deed." No law was broken in its performance. The court could have no sufficient ground for opposing it, except a prejudiced attitude toward Jesus, in whose name the work was wrought. If they condemn the act, they place themselves on record as unwilling that good shall be done, unless in the manner they specify. A most intolerable and unwarranted stand to take.

Verse 10.—Peter's unhesitating mention of the name of Jesus undoubtedly disturbed the court. They had trusted to their record for severe handling of heterodox teachers (as they construed heterodoxy) to silence the apostles concerning that hated name.

Peter, however, after having politely addressed the court, showing commendable deference to its dignity, hurls a challenge to it.

He minced no words in stating who was responsible for the death of Christ, and then affirmed that the healing had been made possible because God had raised Him from the dead. "This healing is an evidence of his resurrection" is the substance of Peter's defense. The healed man was standing in their presence. His feet and ankle bones bore mute testimony to the truth of Peter's statement. The apostle's adroit defense shifted the intended course of investigation so that it was impossible for the Sanhedrin to go on record against Jesus and the new teaching without finding fault with this case of healing. They were sensitive to the remarks of the people, in case they should take such a stand. Their position was pitiable.

Verse 11.—The reference to the stone

set at naught by the builders recalls an interesting tradition that has come down to the present.

At the building of Solomon's temple a certain stone of peculiar shape was brought to the temple site. It will be remembered that all stones were dressed in the quarries, so that no cutting was done as the walls were building. When the artisans in charge saw this particular stone they thought it dropped there by accident. Presently it became covered by debris from the scaffolding. When ready for the corner-stone, it could not be found. At last some one remembered the peculiar stone rejected by the builder and searched in the rubbish till it was found, when, behold, it proved to be the desired corner-stone. The same tradition is referred to in Ps. 118: 22 and Mark 9: 12.

A more telling illustration of stupidity among the religious leaders of the Jews could not have been used.

Jesus, rejected by the Jewish rabbis, crucified as a malefactor, had been owned by the God they worshiped as His Son, and proof of the fact furnished in the healing of the forty-year cripple.

Many, many times in the world's history true religion has suffered at the hands of those who pretended to believe, or honestly did believe, that they were the divinely appointed champions of the faith. Religious power is a most dangerous thing to possess.

It is human to abuse authority, and religious leaders are human. They soon come to believe that no one else is qualified for such leadership and bitterly resent any opposition. Our own day has its illustrations of this fact.

Verse 12.—It is glorious to see Peter, who once denied his Lord, now remind these men who hold his life in their hands that "there is salvation in no other name" but that of Jesus.

He meant that Jesus alone had authority to forgive sin, and had taught His

23 And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them. 24 And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say,

Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the peoples imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
And the rulers were gathered together,
Against the Lord, and against his Anointed:

disciples the terms on which it would be forgiven, empowering them to declare them to the world. We shall find the apostles and disciples frequently stating these terms in our study of the Book of Acts.

Too much stress can not be placed on the above fact in this age. We are living in a time when it is popular to treat sin lightly. Many are inclined to substitute their own way for Jesus' plan for forgiveness. Some even imagine themselves so lovely in God's sight that He simply could not afford to damn them. This "loveliness" may be either of character or culture. Both classes of these self-righteous bigots are equally certain that heaven would be impoverished without them. They feel that they need no forgiveness. The parable of the publican and the Pharisee was given especially for such.

A HUMILIATED COURT DROPS A CASE

(Verses 13-22.)

Verse 13.—The Sanhedrin marveled at two things. First, at the boldness of men who had formerly shown the white feather. Second, that these "unlearned and ignorant men" could, without aid of counsel, present such a defense. Their only explanation, that "they had been with Jesus," is a tribute to the respect the Sanhedrin had for His influence.

It may be remarked, parenthetically, here that radical critics have found more fault with the grammar of Peter and John than with that of other New Testament writers. The phrase "unlearned and ignorant" shows their standing, as to scholarship, among other contemporaries. The critics have unwittingly given testimony tending to establish the genuineness of the books they attack, in this matter, and also unconsciously join the unbelievers of Jesus' time. They should

be proud of their company! Peter and John had no university training, hence were "unlearned" in that sense.

Verses 16, 17.—The court decree did not prohibit their healing, but did enjoin them not to heal in the name of Jesus. We like Peter for his bold refusal to abide by the decision. Immediate punishment was postponed, because the court itself was afraid—of the people.

There has never been a government that was not more responsive to the people than it cared to admit, if an autocracy.

A LIBERATED PRISONER MAKES A CASE

(Verses 23-31.)

Verse 23.—The anxiety of the company of the faithful, awaiting the result of the hearing, may well be imagined. It was not strange that they broke out into a psalm of praise on learning that Jesus had been boldly defended.

Verse 24.—How reverent are Bible prayers. Some praying we hear now lacks that element. It is not uncommon for one praying to talk to God as if He were a sort of "hail fellow well met." It is little less than blasphemy. It was a sad day for true faith when men lost all sense of fear of God.

Verse 25.—The early disciples regarded the Psalms as inspired. Inspiration, to them, was not mere genius, nor natural foresightedness. It was a special miraculous impartation of God's Spirit. Of course, that would cause the utterances of one thus inspired to have authority.

The contents of the Psalm here quoted confirm its Messianic character.

Verse 28.—This verse is another "hard saying" for some. How harmonize the freedom of the human will with this sovereignty of God? Is man a mere machine, helpless in his heredity and under the domination of an over-ruling

27 for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, 28 to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, 30 while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of thy holy Servant Jesus. 31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Providence? The whole of apostolic teaching on this subject clears up all the difficulty.

The will of man is supreme so far as his own acts are concerned. He can obey, or refuse to obey, even his Creator.

God, on the other hand, has certain eternal plans for working out eternal purposes. These He works out through man. In some of them certain men only can be used. To illustrate, no one but Cyrus could have issued the decree permitting the Jews in exile to return to Jerusalem. He thus became God's servant in that plan. The men whom God employs may or may not work in harmony with His will, but in His providences He will overrule man's actions that His will may be carried out.

Some men try to ascertain His will and work in harmony with His designs for its accomplishment. Others are rebellious, but God accomplishes His purposes despite their opposition.

In the case in hand, God desired the salvation of men through Jesus. Wicked men decreed that Jesus should be put to death. God decreed that through that death the world should be saved. It is idle to speculate as to how the death of Jesus made atonement for sin. This is one of the deep, unrevealed things of God. The fact of the atonement is so clearly set forth that no believer can doubt it, but there is not the suggestion of a philosophical explanation of it. We must wait till we see God face to face to learn this mystery which angels desired to look into, but were not permitted.

Men generate much heat in argument on this subject, anathematize and excommunicate each other for not agreeing on the philosophy of it, but no one this side of heaven knows anything about it.

It is an article of faith with us, and as such can not be fully understood, as no matter of faith is fully understood.

We must learn to be patient with each

other in opinions held, but not let go of the fact that, in some way, the shedding of blood opened the way for remission of sins. It is not so necessary for us to know the mystery as to know the fact.

Verse 31.—The timely earthquake reminded them of God's power in spiritual things, as in earthly, assuring them that He will not forget to come to their aid.

The Holy Spirit again filled them, and, unmindful of the threat of the Sanhedrin, they continued to preach.

We shall not receive the Spirit in any such measure to-day, but we shall have His indwelling and help to the extent of our need, as they had for their need.

All those miraculous events were necessary in the beginning, when God was establishing a new dispensation. Only by miracle could such a new revelation be attested. Therefore miracles abounded in the apostolic age. Our faith rests upon the testimony of truthful, reliable men, whose honesty is proven by their yielding up life in defense of what they saw and heard.

The best argument *we* can produce for Christianity is to be true to it, in both doctrine and life. Neither alone will suffice. There are some who insist that the life alone counts, and that what one believes is of no particular importance. This is a fatal mistake. Men will come to live as they believe. If they doubt the miracles, they will lose respect for the authority of the word of God. That lost, they will follow the leadings of their own will. They may remain respectable, but they are not really religious.

On the other hand, if one believes implicitly the miracles of the Bible, he can not help regarding the Bible as authoritative in his life. This is sure to make him more careful of his conduct.

The life God will accept is one in which both faith and good works abound. Neither alone will save. The two together will save, despite all the demons of the underworld.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The Sanhedrin was probably dominated by Sadducee members, who denied all resurrection and reality after death. Peter and John not only preached the resurrection, but resurrection through Christ, which also displeased the rest. (V. 2.)

2. The leaders and rulers of the temple, fearful of losing popularity and prestige, illegally imprisoned Peter and John. As official personages these leaders felt themselves to be the only real teachers. Like all bigots, they chose to persecute rather than to investigate. (V. 3.)

3. The Sanhedrin was the "supreme court" of the Jews. It was composed of seventy men chosen from among the priests, elders and scribes. The high priest presided. (Vs. 5, 6.)

4. The disciples were brought before

the same court that so recently had condemned the Christ. Peter was no longer unstable, but like a rock. He minced no words. In the presence of threatened death he proudly preached the Christ as the chief corner-stone, and charged the Sanhedrin with His crucifixion. (Vs. 7-12.)

5. Members of the Sanhedrin were astonished at the courage and ability of these unlearned disciples, and could account for it only on the ground that "they had been with Jesus." (Vs. 13, 14.)

6. The prayer of the disciples, beginning in verse 24, brings up the question of God's foreordination and our freedom. Much of this whole question will be clear only when we see the Father face to face. (V. 28.)

QUESTIONS

1. What fundamental doctrine of Christianity did the Sadducees deny? 2. Of what school of modern critics were they the religious fathers? 3. Why did the disciples' work of teaching particularly displease the Sadducees? 4. Why did the whole Sanhedrin apparently adopt the Sadducee point of view? 5. What was the Sanhedrin, and who composed it? 6. What change is here manifest in Peter since the day he denied his Lord? 7. Why were the Jewish officials unwilling to meet the apostles in open discussion?

8. Why did the ability and courage of Peter and the others surprise the Sanhedrin? 9. What is the bearing of this lesson upon evangelism? 10. Why was the Sanhedrin so anxious to stamp out the new religion? 11. Why is religious persecution never entirely justifiable? 12. What punishment was administered to the apostles? 13. How can we harmonize God's providence and man's free will? 14. What is the best argument we can produce for Christianity? 15. What is to be gained by discussing foreordination?

THE APOSTLES' PRAYER

It is quite refreshing to observe the tone of this apostolic prayer. These men were not in danger of losing some mere political power or privilege, but the dearest and most indisputable right they had on earth was denied them, and they were threatened with death if they did not relinquish it; yet, in their prayers, they manifest no vindictive nor resentful spirit; but, in reference to their enemies, they simply prayed, "Lord, behold their threatenings." Their gentle spirits never could have conceived that unblushing impiety which now so often brings men upon their knees for the very purpose of pouring out, in the ears of God, those violent and destructive passions which He has forbidden us to allow a place even within our hearts.—*McGarvey*.

LESSON SIX

EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNISM AND ITS RESULTS

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 4:32—5:16

Memory Text.—“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul.”—Acts 5:32.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. Industrial Idealism Tried.</p> <p>2. An Illustration Showing Why Communism Failed.</p> | <p>3. To Make It More Emphatic.</p> <p>4. A Church Growing in Works and Power.</p> |
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COMMENTS

Having narrated the faithfulness of the disciples in their first persecution, Luke now gives Theophilus a glimpse of the beautiful spirit of fellowship pervading the Jerusalem church.

Unrighteous persecution is a fine cement for binding faithful and heroic souls together. In addition to that, they had the fellowship of a common faith, which they felt would speedily sweep the world, and their enthusiasm for it led them to forget self and all plans for personal gain and enjoyment. It appears that all thinking was in terms of the brotherhood, not in terms even of the family. All rejoiced in the good fortune of any one of the number. All grieved and shared sorrow with the unfortunate. Self was submerged in the interest of the group.

INDUSTRIAL IDEALISM TRIED

(Chapter 4: 32-37.)

Verse 32.—Not every member of the Jerusalem church entered this communistic arrangement. “The multitude,” which means the larger part of the congregation, voluntarily entered the pact.

A minority, for some reason, withheld themselves from the socialistic party, yet they were members of the body of Christ, and as such were members of the congregation there. The common treasury was a special financial arrangement agreed to by a part of the church.

There is an attractiveness in the thought of all sharing alike that has made its appeal to people of every cen-

ture. A truly unselfish soul has no desire to be prospered beyond the average.

The motive prompting these early disciples was doubtless similar to that leading to the organization of mutual insurance companies of various sorts, in addition to being an expression of brotherliness. If ever a communistic plan could have been successful, it would have been in this case. It was confined to people of identical purposes in life, unselfish, altruistic to an unusual degree. Mutual helpfulness and love for one another were their motives, rather than purposes of gain or equal distribution of the rewards of toil. Yet it continued for a short time only, for not long after this Paul carried relief to the Jerusalem brethren. This shows that the plan failed to guarantee against want.

Nor is there evidence that the scheme was ever tried elsewhere. Had it met the expectation of its originators it is likely it would have become the general policy of Christians in property matters.

This leads to the very proper inquiry as to why it failed. It failed because human nature, unchanging through the ages, must have the stimulus of necessity to do its best.

A scheme making it easy to live without strenuous effort encourages shiftlessness and lack of prudential foresight. Both business and mental flabbiness result from a life of ease.

If every one lived an ideal life, perhaps socialism might be an ideal industrial system. But, on the other hand, if

4: 32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. 33 And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34 For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.

LESSON TEXT

everybody lived an ideal life, practicing "love for neighbor as for self," such a system would be unnecessary. The only place where the plan would work would be in a state of society where it was immaterial what industrial system prevailed.

Socialism, as usually expounded, is as selfish at heart as capitalism. Both are to be condemned. The typical capitalist has a motto: "All I can get is mine, to do with as I please."

Socialism differs not in spirit, only in the scope of its application, for its motto is: "All we have or can get is ours, to divide among ourselves as we please."

Contrast with these two ideals the Christian conception of property and its use. Stewardship in property is recognized, and the Christian motto is: "All I hold is not mine, but God's, entrusted to me for employment in his service."

It is apparent that both capitalism and socialism make an appeal to the self-seeker. There may be as much selfishness in "ours" as in "mine." Neither recognizes a fundamental basis of stewardship or responsibility to God, the creator and owner of all things.

How different the outlook on every aspect of life when we realize that we are being tested on earth, in property's use as in everything else, that the amount of true riches entrusted to us hereafter may be determined. Both capitalism and socialism regard wealth as an end. Both assume that material prosperity is essential to righteous living. Both maintain that poverty is the cause of most sin, and that by relieving people from the worry of want, incentives to crime will be minimized and every one will live an ideal life. Christ lived and taught a life of righteousness, not in any sense dependent on prosperity. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," is the doctrine of Christ. Maintenance of

right relations with God is possible either with or without money. The materialistic conception of morality is the curse most to be dreaded to-day.

Verse 33.—This mutual sharing of property among the Christians had one distinct advantage, however. It evidently challenged attention to Christianity as a religion. We read that "with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection."

The unselfish life of the Christians created an atmosphere favorable to the consideration of gospel truth. Then, as to-day, faithful living on the part of professing Christians was the best argument for Christ's religion. The argument of a life is hard to answer. Periods of great awakening have been those in which devout souls were practicing as well as preaching the doctrine of the Saviour.

Verse 35.—It appears that at first the apostles acted in the capacity of dispensers of the common bounty. Later they declared such work secondary, and insisted on being relieved from its burden of detail book-keeping duties. This scheme did not originate with the apostles, nor did the Holy Spirit authorize it. The apostles refused to interfere in it, permitting the people to try the experiment for themselves. They showed no paternalistic attitude toward the church.

Verses 36, 37.—This is the first we hear of Barnabas. He will be prominent in connection with the labors of Paul later in the book.

The name given by the apostles is itself illuminating.

Names meant something in that age. Some prominent characteristic was usually reflected in the name borne. Jesus named Simon "Peter" (rock) because of his personal character. James and John He called "Boanerges" (sons of thunder) because of their temper. So

36 And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, Son of exhortation), a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race, 37 having a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5: 1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 While it remained, did it not remain

we can imagine that, after listening to some of the soul-stirring exhortations and messages of comfort to distressed disciples by Barnabas, his friends called him "Barnabas" (son of consolation or exhortation). A name like that, conferred as a result of what one is, is more to be prized than a pedigreed title reaching back through centuries of "blue blood." What a fine name to be chiseled on a monument! It is not probable that a monument was ever erected in his memory, so troubled and violent was the age in which he lived. But multitudes who have read of him have carved his memory in their hearts, and that inscription can never be erased.

Truly, "he, being dead, yet speaketh."

AN ILLUSTRATION SHOWING WHY COMMUNISM FAILED

(Acts 5: 1-6.)

Luke has here recorded the first tragedy in the history of the first church, the result of unfaithfulness.

Ananias and Sapphira sold property, deducted a part for their private use, then brought the remainder and asked to be admitted to the communism, representing themselves as without other means.

They probably intended to try this new plan out, and if it proved successful, they would be fortunate, but if unsuccessful, they would still have something on which to live. They doubtless also made emphatic pretense of possessing a spirit of benevolence and brotherhood. As a matter of fact, they were simply carrying double insurance at the price of one premium.

That was a dramatic moment when Peter, moved by the Holy Spirit, suddenly denounced Ananias as a hypocrite, openly accusing him of withholding a part of the price. His language, "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" is striking. It recognizes Satan as the source of temptation, and rebukes Ananias for not resisting him.

The only way in which Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit was in lying to the apostles.

They had claimed they were Spirit-guided. Here is an opportunity for the Spirit himself to witness the truth of the claim.

He revealed to Peter the duplicity of this couple.

This, together with the sudden deaths, would strengthen the faith of newly made disciples in the inspiration of the apostles.

They would know that God was with them in other ways besides miracle working.

Verse 4.—While they had a right to enter or refuse to enter the communism, as Peter stated, they had no right to lie about their money. What a lesson for all who try to hide their hideous covetousness under a cloak of brotherhood! A few moments might be spent profitably by the student in considering certain institutions which pretend to be "profit-sharing," yet keep back enough to guarantee favored officials and stockholders against loss.

Verse 5.—The death of Ananias was providential, whether he died from heart failure or a direct stroke from God. So was that of his wife. It came at a time and in a manner to impress the disciples with the folly of trying to outwit the Holy Spirit.

Those who deny inspiration of the apostles now are in the same company as Ananias and Sapphira. They may deceive themselves into thinking they are saintly, but God will not overlook a slight to His Spirit. How strange that the force of such lessons is lost so easily. His speedy burial without notifying his wife would indicate that the carcass was considered so polluted with his sin that it must not be kept in sight for a moment. It was an object-lesson that God will not tolerate a hypocrite. A "hypocrite" is literally an "actor." He is one playing a part. Acting may not be conducive to sincerity.

thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power? How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all that heard it. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him round, and they carried him out and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much.

TO MAKE IT MORE EMPHATIC

(Verses 7-10.)

Verse 7.—What interest Sapphira's entrance would arouse! Peter knew that the death of the husband was not the end of the tragedy. Can you imagine the silence as her examination proceeded in verse 8? Her unhesitating reply proves that they had conspired together.

Verse 9.—Does Peter's reply indicate that they had plotted to test the reality of Spirit guidance of the apostles by testing their knowledge? This is not likely, for they had seen many evidences of miraculous powers exercised by these men, who invariably attributed them to the Spirit of God.

They may have deliberately agreed to see whether deception was possible, little realizing that so severe a penalty awaited. Such small misrepresentation would seem to them but a minor matter. It is so easy for us to persuade ourselves that our particular sin is one of no seriousness. The lesson taught by God's dealing with sin throughout the entire Bible is that sin—all sin—is a deadly thing. God does not grade and catalog sin as do our legislatures and the Catholic Church. With Him the magnitude of sin is determined rather by the spirit of disobedience it reveals than by its immediate temporal consequences.

Because the results of certain crimes, such as murder and robbery, are so shocking, we legislate a heavier penalty against them, and properly so. But God, who judges sin by the motive prompting it, punishes according to the degree of rebellion in the heart. It was seemingly a righteous act for Uzzah to lay his hand on the ark to steady it when being drawn over rough ground on an ox-cart. But the act was a twofold violation of a plain command.

The law specified that priests only were to touch the ark, and even they were to carry it on poles, not load it on a cart.

Uzzah's sin was a trivial departure

from the divine order, as it seems to us, and done with evident good intent, but it was fatal to him nevertheless. Yet his disobedience was not more serious than that of thousands of Christians who pride themselves on their spirituality. They acknowledge that their conduct is not quite according to the standard of the New Testament, but indulge the delusion that because they are generally good, generous and sweet-spirited, the Lord will not care whether they obey certain ordinances or not. But God thought Uzzah's thoughtlessness worthy of being made an object-lesson for Israel. The ark had been in captivity for years, and now that it was coming back to fill its lawful place in the religious life, the nation must learn that it was holy. Its mercy-seat was the place where God had promised to meet His people and reveal His will, and as such it must be approached with reverence and according to God's will. Uzzah's fate would be a certain deterrent to others from attempting to touch the ark, and a new reverence for God's decrees would be instilled.

Verse 10.—So, in this incident of Ananias and Sapphira, the Holy Spirit gives an object-lesson that should warn, so long as time endures, that the church is no place for people who would use it for selfish purposes. Some business and professional men maintain a connection with the church for the same reason they pay their insurance—it is a good investment. Membership in its ranks confers a certain standing and respectability, is a means of introduction to good society, and will probably bring patronage from a class noted for paying its bills, and thrifty enough to become profitable patrons. Such people receive their reward in full for their "righteousness" in this life. And their punishment hereafter will be all the more severe for their hypocritical pretensions.

It should not be overlooked that the crime of these lying hypocrites related to their financial standing in the church.

And she said, Yea, for so much. 9 But Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to try the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them that have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. 10 And she fell down immediately at his feet, and gave up the ghost: and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her by her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things.

They desired to appear more liberal than they were.

They could not deceive as to the amount given; that was a matter of record. But by pretending it was all they had, they sought to place themselves in the class of the widow of two-mite fame, but they belonged with Judas. Had sins of this character gone unrebuked in the beginning, the church would have been filled with self-seeking adventurers in a short time, and its holy mission obscured. The Lord has never encouraged unregenerate people to enter the church, but some ministers and congregations have become so anxious for numbers and prestige that they will enroll any one who is respectable on terms of his own choosing.

It was a sad day for the church when it lowered its bars of admission at the demands of those on the outside. So-called "associate membership" schemes, placing names on a list as "members of the congregation," but not counting them as being in full fellowship, may be proposed by very good people, but all such departures root in a lessened regard for the authority of the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit doubtless intended this incident to stand through the ages as a warning to all who would deal unfairly with the Lord in money affairs. The New Testament does not legislate a definite, specific sum or per cent. as the Lord's, but the obligation to support to the extent of one's ability is enjoined. What we may have is not our own, but a trust from the Lord, to be administered for Him. The New Testament plan of leaving to each member to determine for himself the amount of his contribution is a better means of testing one's devotion than was the Jewish system of the tithe. The Jew paid his tenth as we pay taxes. Not many do so "hilariously," as we are commanded to give under Christ's plan. "Let each give as he may prosper" is Christ's law. There is no court in the church with a right to decide on "prosperity." Each for himself decides that.

This plan is a perfect test of loyalty to Christ, liberality and honesty with God.

Another purpose of the Lord in this tragic punishment of hypocrisy was to plant in our hearts a spirit of godly fear.

A CHURCH GROWING IN WORKS AND POWER

(Verses 11-16.)

Verse 11.—The severity of God in dealing with transgressors should never be forgotten. The Bible abounds in illustrations of His intolerance of rebellion. Despite this fact, it is rare now to hear of this phase of His character. His mercy, love and willingness to forgive, are magnified. It is even denied that He cares for justice. Many preachers encourage the conception that sins are mere unfortunate pranks, and that God will deal with them as an indulgent father winks at mischief in his son.

Never before has there been such need for emphasizing the heinousness of sin. A new conscience must be created. Polite preachers may joke about hell, or deny it altogether, but that does not abolish it.

Verse 12.—Miracles, continually wrought, gave indisputable evidence that God was with the disciples, thus sanctioning the messages proclaimed. The cumulative effect of miracles in that age was irresistible by honest inquirers.

Solomon's porch was a double-columned colonnade, or promenade, running along the eastern side of the Court of the Gentiles. It was a favorite assembling-place.

The popularity of the apostles and good standing of the brethren were such that Jewish authorities dared not expel them from the temple area.

Verse 13.—The statement that "believers were the more added to the Lord" shows that the fate of Ananias and Sapphira did not deter true converts from being made and taking their stand with the disciples.

This simple expression is worthy of notice. They did not "join the church," but "were added to the Lord." There

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people: and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. 13 But of the rest durst no man join himself to them: howbeit the people magnified them; 14 and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women: 15 insomuch that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might overshadow some one of them. 16 And there also came together the multitude from the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folk, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

is a vital difference between the two. It is our relationship to Christ that saves. Formal membership in the church is essential to complete obedience to His will, but it is a means, not an end.

Being added to Christ is an end. More emphasis should be placed on uniting with Christ and less on joining the church.

When one unites with Christ he automatically becomes a member of His body, the church. Paul says in Gal. 3: 27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." This leaves no room for quibbling.

Verse 14.—The membership of the church then consisted of "men and women." It was adult in character. There were no babies in it. Not being sinners, they were ineligible to membership.

Jesus came to save the lost—sinners—and babies were not in that list. He declared that the kingdom of heaven pertained to such as they, thus assuring us of their being saved in the state in which they then were. Sinners, however, must be reconciled to God.

Preaching, as true to the Lord's commands as that of the early disciples, would produce identical results now. All who obeyed would come to Christ in the same way, and all would remain in the same fellowship. All preached the same gospel in every respect, demanding the same obedience of every sinner. This obedience brought men and women into Christ. What a blessing it would be if all preachers would preach the same message of the New Testament now, add nothing, omit nothing, bind nothing on any not authorized in its teaching, yield none of its commands.

This simple procedure would restore the lost unity of the church.

Verses 15, 16.—It is not surprising that people came from the territory surrounding Jerusalem with their sick. News of healing power, such as exercised by the

apostles, would speed in every direction. None was disappointed in the relief sought. "They were healed, every one." Please notice that Luke does not make excuse for a single failure. He does not say "those with faith" were healed. "Favorable progress" was not reported. He did not say they were advised to repeat "Day by day, in every way, I am growing better and better," as a means of self-deception.

The plain categorical statement that every one "was healed" indicates the immediacy of their recovery, and assures of its permanency.

Those claiming healing power now fail so continuously that some explanation of failure must be sought. They take refuge in the statement that the sick can not be healed without faith. This would not be so serious did they not insist that even the healing power of Jesus and His disciples depended on the faith of the sick. There is no truth in that assumption. Jesus and the apostles healed independent of faith or other co-operation on the part of the one healed. As brought out in Lesson IV., the lame man healed by Peter and John at the gate of the temple was probably the most surprised of all to see his ankle bones made strong. It is well to remember this when faith-cure frauds come into our midst. If they cure only those who expect to be cured, they do no more than Christian Scientists, mental healers, hypnotists and all the other charlatans and impostors.

Let the student not forget that this power to work miracles was limited in time. It ceased with the apostolic age. In 1 Cor. 13: 8-10 Paul tells us that miraculous gifts would pass. He does not state just when, but makes it clear that all such powers were temporary. They were all performed to produce faith in Jesus as the Christ. The only way God could attest His approval of the messages of the disciples was by means of miracles.

When a sufficient number had been performed, it was as necessary that they cease as that they begin, else such power would become a "law of nature," and its evidential value would be neutralized. There is absolutely no reason for miracles

to-day, and none will be performed. We stand in need of no new revelation. That which came through Jesus is complete and final. There will be seen no miracle until He comes again, raising the dead and sitting on His throne for judgment.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. So beautiful was the fellowship brought about by persecution of the early disciples that a group in the Jerusalem church tried the experiment of communism, but later gave it up. (4: 32.)

2. The socialistic and capitalistic theories, in the last analysis, are both self-centered. Christ's doctrine is right, for in principle it says, "All that I hold is God's and is entrusted to me to be used in His service."

3. Barnabas, later associated with Paul, here makes his first appearance. His name was Joseph, but he was called Barnabas by the apostles, "Barnabas" meaning "son of exhortation" or "consolation." (4: 36.)

4. The death of Ananias and Sapphira was the first tragedy within the early church, and was the result of unfaithfulness. (5: 3-10.)

5. The death of these two was providential, whether from heart failure or not. It was God's striking rebuke of hypocrisy at the very beginning of the church.

6. Christ's law of giving is, "Let each give as he may prosper," and not the tithe, or tenth, which the Jew paid as we pay taxes. Our voluntary giving is a test of our loyalty.

7. The early disciples did not "join the church," as it is often phrased, but were "added to the Lord." (5: 14.)

8. There were no babies in the apostolic church. It was a church made up of those old enough to believe and obey and be responsible for their acts. (V. 14.)

9. This power to work miracles ceased with the apostolic age, modern isms to the contrary notwithstanding.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the immediate effect of the persecution of the early church? 2. What good can come of persecution? 3. Why did the early communistic scheme fail? 4. What was the extent of the experiment, and why was it tried? 5. Why must the socialistic and capitalistic theories both ultimately fail? 6. Who was Barnabas? 7. Briefly tell the story of Ananias and Sapphira. 8. What was the

direct providential design of this tragedy? 9. How much more were they sinners than many who are living now? 10. What is the difference between tithing and Christ's law of giving? 11. How do you account for the remarkable growth of the early church? 12. How do you know there were no babies in the apostolic church? 13. Quote Scripture showing when miracle-working power ceased.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Terrible as this divine judgment was, we can not wonder that it should be inflicted, for it was so done to check that kind of offense which brought in all the troubles of the early church, and which, though they be not so punished now, when Christ's church has attained more firm hold on the world, yet would, if not terribly visited in these earlier days, have overthrown the whole work of the apostles.

The death of Ananias and his wife is the finger of God interposed to save His church from danger, just as He interposed to build it up by stretching forth His hand to heal, and that, through the name of His servant Jesus, mighty works might be wrought by the first preachers.—*Cambridge Bible (Acts)*.

LESSON SEVEN

SECOND PERSECUTION AND SELECTION OF
FIRST DEACONS

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 5:17—6:7

Memory Text.—“But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men.”—Acts 5:29.

LESSON PLAN

1. A Lawful Jail Delivery.
2. A Bold Defense before an Awed Jury.
3. An Unlawful Punishment by Law Administrators.
4. Selection of First Church Officers.

COMMENTS

The popularity of the apostles, and high regard in which the Christians were held, promised the complete triumph of Jesus within a short time. To counteract this, Jewish leaders felt it necessary to resort to drastic measures.

Luke introduces his history of this attempt in the first eight verses of the text of this lesson

A LAWFUL JAIL DELIVERY

(Chapter 5:17-24.)

Verse 17.—The leader in this opposition was the high priest, who, being the religious head of the nation, naturally felt resting on his shoulders the responsibility of checking the growth of the church. With him were associated the Sadducees.

Two reasons existed for this combination. First, the Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection, and a large part of apostolic preaching was the proclamation of that doctrine; not merely as an abstract theory, but a fact demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus.

Second, the leading priests were at that time members of the Sadducee sect. Both priests and Sadducees were thus eager to second any effort the high priest might make to stamp out the new faith. Luke says their dominant motive, however, was jealousy.

What a fiend jealousy is, wherever found. How much innocent blood it has shed, how many homes disrupted!

These persecutors belonged to the sect that for many years had ruled the nation religiously with a rod of iron.

Intoxicated with power, they would resort to any extreme to retain their place. Had they themselves accepted Christ, their ability and training, as well as their position, would have guaranteed to them a continuation of leadership. But since Jesus demanded that His leaders should be humble and real servants of the people, these autocratic despots were unwilling to conform to any such requirements. Their only hope of retaining authority in the nation was in stamping out the hated doctrine of Christ.

How strange that in all ages men have sought to advance causes in which they were interested by persecuting those opposed to their program. A surer and speedier plan of silencing opposition would be to answer the arguments advanced. A cause that is wrong may be shown to be such by intelligent opposition. Yet narrow-minded or bigoted men are likely to resort to the more dangerous and less successful method of persecution.

Verse 18.—In this particular instance great violence was avoided. An arrest of Peter and John was procured, and they were placed in a carefully guarded jail. That means that they were locked within the inner prison, with a guard standing on duty both outside and inside. All doors would, of course, be locked. This reduced the danger of escape to a minimum and

LESSON TEXT

5: 17 But the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy, 18 and laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward. 19 But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out, and said, 20 Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life. 21 And when they heard this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison-house to have them brought. 22 But the officers that came found them not in the prison; and they returned,

rendered outside attempts at rescue hopeless.

Verse 19.—Before leaving earth for glory, Jesus had said to these men, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The descent of the angel who opened the doors and led the apostles into liberty was in fulfillment of that promise.

Jesus' presence with the disciples in prison was not more real nor certain than is His presence with us to-day. He does not release by miracle now. Nor did He release them always by miracle. Many of them finally died in prison, but this one incident revealed to them the fact of His presence and abiding sympathy when they were distressed. If He permitted them to remain in prison, it was because they could advance His cause better bound than free. Why are we so slow to learn that fact? "To them that love God all things work together for good," and loving disciples must learn to trust His word when the way of release is closed and the path of duty is clear.

Verse 20.—Note the use of the capital letter in "Life." Jesus had said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." The apostles were teaching and preaching that Jesus' religion was given to beget Life—eternal Life. The peculiar use of this word "Life" and "Way," in Acts 22: 4 and 24: 14, shows that these terms both stood for the whole system of faith as taught by the apostles. They meant what we to-day mean by "Christianity."

Verse 21.—It seems strange to us that worshipers should be in the temple at daybreak. We have difficulty in getting them together by nine or ten o'clock. In explanation, we must remember that the city of Jerusalem was always filled with worshipers who had come from the ends of the earth expressly to worship in that

sacred place. Many could remain but a short time, and would use to the fullest extent the opportunity of having their sacrifices offered. Once in a lifetime was as much as many could hope to have the privilege. Such worshipers would spend much of their time within the temple area rather than in sight-seeing.

They would gather at daybreak to begin offering sacrifices, for there were so many priests then that no difficulty would be experienced in arranging for worship as early as any might desire. Even when every hour of the day was thus devoted to worship, there were many priests who would wait for months, or years, for the privilege of officiating. It is not strange, therefore, that a group of people had already assembled when the apostles entered the temple at daybreak. Such worshipers, being so deeply interested in religion, would provide a favorable audience for the gospel story also.

The name for the Sanhedrin here is "the council" and "senate." These two words express characteristics of the body. It met for planning and action in behalf of the people, as our city councils, and it was composed of elderly men, for the most part—seniors.

The Sanhedrin might be summoned at any time after daylight by the high priest, its presiding officer. The place of sitting was near the prison, so the court would be called to order and a quorum assured before the prisoners were ordered in.

The tension of feeling may be imagined when old, dignified men would forsake the morning nap to convene at the earliest possible legal moment for court session. It is not unlikely that fear of the people led them to meet early to carry out their dark schemes, as they had done a few weeks before when they were terrorized into breaking the law by trying Jesus before daylight.

and told, 23 saying, The prison-house we found shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would grow. 25 And there came one and told them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people. 26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them, but without violence; for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, We strictly charged you not to teach in this name:

Verses 22, 23.—The amazement and confusion in the court when this report was brought in may be imagined. How could the escape have been made? No rescue from outside had occurred, for the keepers were at their doors in ignorance of the release of the prisoners.

Inner doors were also secure. The report of the bailiff would doubtless remind some of the Sanhedrists of that similar story of an empty tomb which these disciples so persistently told.

The cause for this miraculous delivery was, no doubt, to convince the Sanhedrin that God was with the apostles.

Miracle after miracle had been performed in their midst to compel their attention to the message. Sign after sign was given the hard-hearted leaders of Israel, but they remained adamant.

The persistence of the Lord in His efforts to win His own nation is full of pathos. To be rejected by those who should have been first to accept Him was anguish indeed. What "wailing and gnashing of teeth" there will be when they stand in His presence at the judgment!

A BOLD DEFENSE BEFORE AN AWED JURY.

(Verses 25-32.)

Verse 25.—The rescue of the apostles was accomplished without the knowledge of the guards on the inside or the outside. This shows that the release was by miracle. The men had gone forth invisible to their keepers, though they were wide awake. Obeying the angel's command, they went immediately to the temple and resumed their preaching.

The report which the messengers brought regarding the prisoners caused deep concern in the Sanhedrin. They must have realized that only a miracle could have freed Peter and John.

Should the exact circumstances of their escape become generally known, it would add greatly to the already in-

creasing popularity of the apostles, and cause many new converts.

The perversity of unregenerated human nature is awful to contemplate. Here was this court, with sufficient evidence of divine favor on the apostles to convince any honest-minded individual, deliberately plotting to withstand God. But they were no worse than multitudes to-day. Notwithstanding all the evidences in favor of Christianity, because it demands honesty, morality, service, it is either perverted or openly scorned by many of the world's leaders. What a hold the god of this world has on our race! Small wonder that Jesus warned so vehemently, again and again, concerning the peril of riches and honor-seeking. Most people who will be banished from the presence of God on the day of judgment will be sent away because of deliberate perversity of spirit, refusing to listen to God.

The saddest part of it all is that we so frequently see this spirit possessing the guardians of the faith, those who have been entrusted with positions of leadership and authority.

Verse 26.—Despite their hate, the officers and court had learned discretion. "They feared the people." Many of these people, or their friends, had been healed by the apostles. That would make them strong partisans of the accused, of course.

Luke's simple statement here throws a strong sidelight on the popularity of the apostles. The officials of Judaism were held in high esteem by the people, their mere wish being law on ordinary occasions. But for the time the sentiment for the apostles is so pronounced that even the officers of the law fear being stoned if they offer opposition to teaching in the name of Jesus.

Verse 28.—The counts in the indictment were stated by the high priest as presiding officer. The first was that they had violated the injunction "not to

and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree. 31 Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

33 But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and were minded to slay them. 34 But there stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in honor of all the people, and commanded to put the men forth a little while. 35 And he said

teach in this name." The form of language employed by the high priest reveals his own bitter hatred of Jesus. He refuses to use His name, but uses the evasive term "this name."

A fine testimony to the faithfulness of the apostles is in the confession that they had "filled Jerusalem with your teaching." One can imagine the smile of gratification that spread over the faces of the prisoners when this acknowledgment was uttered. Though commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation," they were to "begin at Jerusalem." A good beginning they surely made. The statement of the high priest justifies our conclusion that the religion of Jesus was the subject of common conversation among all the people.

The second count in the indictment against the apostles throws a peculiar light on the mental state of the high priest and his fellow-conspirators. "You intend to bring this man's blood on us." While Jesus was yet on earth, speaking to some of these same men, perhaps, He had pronounced on them a seven-fold woe because they had been guilty of shedding the blood of the righteous (Matt. 23:35). During His trial before this same body a few months before, Pilate had taken water and washed his hands, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it." They answered back, "His blood be on us and on our children." In their frenzied hate they hesitated not to assume full responsibility for shedding Jesus' blood. They even invite divine retribution to curse their children for the awful crime.

To what length uncontrolled temper and religious bigotry lead men. In a fit of passion a word may be uttered or a deed performed that will cause lifelong regret. Little did these men think, when clamoring for His blood during Jesus'

trial, that within a few weeks they would be whiningly complaining because they were charged with this guilt. Just now they would gladly place all the blame on Pilate. Peter's answer was respectful, dignified: "We must obey God rather than men." What a motto for to-day. Few pause to ask, "Will it please God?" before beginning anything.

Those who would obtain praise of men dare not raise that question. Yet no one can live the life he should without constantly asking it.

Verse 30.—Simon demonstrated his right to be called Peter (rock) in his bold accusation of these men as being responsible for the death of Jesus. The "tree" was, of course, the cross—a common figure of speech.

Verse 31.—God exalted Jesus by raising Him from the dead and placing Him on His right hand, the position of rule or authority.

It meant that God had entrusted the rule of both heaven and earth to Jesus. This was more than the proud court, dominated by Sadducee influence, could stand. Peter's statement that God had thus honored and exalted Jesus to bring "repentance to Israel" inflamed them still more. They were as much incensed as a body of bishops in the church would be to-day if the same charge should be made against them. They had absolute confidence that their descent from Abraham guaranteed them complete possession of every promise of the Old Testament. Repentance was needed on the part of the Gentiles, but not on theirs.

Verse 32.—The "witness" of the apostles concerning the resurrection was corroborated by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said, "Ye shall be my witnesses," He meant that they should testify to the fact of His resurrection. The Holy Spirit, by inspiring the apostles on Pentecost, gave his testimony that they

unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves as touching these men, what ye are about to do. 36 For before these days rose up Theudas, giving himself out to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed, and came to nought. 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the enrolment, and drew away some of the people after him: he also perished; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. 38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: 39 but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God. 40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles unto them, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and

were men of truth and veracity. He would not have aided any others in that manner. With the evidence of a miraculous jail delivery and the healing of the lame man before them, we should think the high priest and his companions would have been convinced that Peter was telling the truth.

AN UNLAWFUL PUNISHMENT BY LAW ADMINISTRATORS

(Verses 33-42.)

Verse 33.—The student will recall the promise of Jesus, as recorded in Lesson III., to send the Holy Spirit, who was to “convict the world of sin.” This he accomplished on Pentecost through the preaching of the apostles. Here he does the same thing. Even these rebellious, unrepentant officials of the Jews are convicted of sin, for this is the legitimate interpretation of Luke’s statement that “they were cut to the heart.” But how different their conduct from that of the Pentecostians. These latter repented, as the Spirit desires all to do who are convicted of sin, or “cut to the heart.” But the members of this court decide to kill the preachers who bring them to conviction. The method of trying to dispose of unwelcome truth by killing its proclaimers has been a popular one with impostors and bigots of all ages.

This incident makes it clear that after the Holy Spirit has produced conviction of sin his work is finished, until the one under conviction repents and obeys the gospel. He will not compel obedience; that is left entirely to the individual. We are all supreme sovereigns of our own souls, so far as obedience is concerned.

Verse 34.—Gamaliel, here mentioned for the first time, is an interesting character. He is called “a doctor of the law,” LL.D. as it were.

He conducted a school in Jerusalem, at which the apostle Paul studied. He is mentioned in other than New Testament writings.

He was noted for moderation and wisdom, two characteristics which stand out in his speech here. His greatest claim to fame, however, is the honor of having been the teacher of Paul. The pupil added luster to the teacher. His speech indicates that he was not quite certain in his own mind as to whether these men were performing their mighty deeds through the power of God, but he was partly of that opinion, no doubt.

His advice regarding falsehood and truth is always safe to follow. We can not overthrow God’s truth; but error can not stand the light of investigation. The men he mentioned are not referred to by historians. Josephus mentions a Theudas as leading a movement somewhat like that referred to by Gamaliel some fifteen years later, but he is not the same man evidently.

False prophets were constantly arising, winning a few followers, then being exposed and their work brought to naught. So it is ever. We can not afford to persecute advocates of false doctrine, but we should oppose their error by argument and refuse to render it any support in any manner.

Verse 40.—Never did men submit to scourging more willingly. This was to them an initiation into the sacred order of sufferers with Christ, and they knew that one of rewards was expressed in this saying, “If we endure, we shall also reign with him.” That was satisfactory pay.

Though fearing the people, the Sanhedrin deemed it safe to whip Peter and John in the court, for the general public would not be present at that time in the morning. They dared not keep them in prison, however, much less execute them

let them go. 41 They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. 42 And every day, in the temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ.

6: 1 Now in these days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 2 And the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of

yet. The people must be prepared for such measures by propaganda.

Verse 42.—The temple was still open to them. It was a sort of free forum for all Jews. Somewhat later it was closed against Christians as a place of preaching. They could only enter homes for teaching, with the consent of those living there.

What rapid progress would be made now, if all pretended followers of Jesus were as zealous in proclaiming Jesus as were the first Christians! How few homes now talk about Christ!

A revival of fireside preaching would be worth more to the church than stupendous campaigns for raising millions of dollars.

And why should we not talk of Christ and His teaching in the homes? Where else can we find a subject of so universal interest? Where find teaching so simple that children see the beauty of it, yet profound enough to compel the admiration of adults? House-to-house work must be restored in the church.

Home impressions are perhaps more permanent than those received anywhere else. The memory of quiet evening talks in the home will abide after other things are forgotten. This field for sowing the seed of the kingdom must not be longer neglected.

SELECTION OF FIRST CHURCH OFFICERS

(Chapter 6: 1-7.)

The above paragraph gives us a glimpse of the inner life of the church and an illustration of the spirit characterizing the disciples in what they did. How long the experiment in communism had then been in operation we can not say. The church had become a numerous body. Chronologically, the incident here narrated joins on the end of chapter five.

Two classes of Jews—Grecians (or Hellenists) and Hebrews—are mentioned as being the communism. The "Grecians"

were those Jews born outside of Palestine, whose native tongue was Greek. The larger number of Christians was recruited from this group, it would seem. The Hebrews were native to Palestine, and spake the Aramaic as the mother tongue. Both were Jews in blood.

The complaint that Grecian Jew widows were not sharing equally in the daily ministrations was adjusted in a mass-meeting of the disciples, called by the apostles. The method of settling the difficulty is an illuminating example of wisdom.

From the names of the seven men chosen to administer the daily bounty, we know that every one was a Grecian—a member of the neglected party. By this act, the church said to them: "Brethren, we are sorry this happened. We are willing to trust your own group to do the right thing here, so you may take the matter in charge. You know the needs of your own group, and we trust you to do the right thing by all concerned." This spirit in the church to-day would prevent any trouble becoming serious. Here was a threatened split speedily and satisfactorily adjusted.

The office to which these men were elected was that of deacon. It would appear that for some time the church had been worshiping without officers, the apostles themselves being leaders in everything, as would naturally be the case. But "serving tables" (food distribution) was a task others could perform. They could render larger service by preaching, so they refuse to burden themselves with detail of administration.

Congregations should not require their preachers to "serve tables" now. Loose them from such duties, that they may devote themselves to the ministry of the Word.

The manner of selecting deacons should not be overlooked. The church itself made the choice, then the apostles "appointed" or "ordained" them, "laying

wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch; 6 whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

hands'' on them in a fitting formal service. This shows the government of the apostolic church to have been absolutely democratic. If apostles refused to select officers, surely a preacher, elder or bishop should not assume that authority. Authority in administration in everything connected with congregational activity inheres in the local church.

It is human to abuse authority, and

even good men do this when religious power is bestowed on them. The extreme example of the danger of autocratic forms of government is found in the Catholic Church, but many Protestant bodies are also guilty.

Local congregations can not, with safety, yield their sacred right to conduct their own affairs in their own way to any dictatorship whatever.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The popularity of the early Christians caused a combination against them in which the Sadducees took a leading part because of their disbelief in the resurrection. (V. 17.)

2. The two words "Life" and "Way" are sometimes so used in the New Testament as to stand for the whole cause of Christianity. (V. 20.)

3. People were in the temple at "day-break," because worshipers were in Jerusalem from everywhere, and many made the visit but once in a lifetime. They worshiped at all possible hours to enjoy to the fullest the rare privilege. (V. 21.)

4. That the imprisoned disciples were out preaching proved that a miracle had delivered them. The stupid members of the Sanhedrin failed to see the plain evidence of the presence of God. (Vs. 22, 23.)

5. Ordinarily the officials stood in high esteem, but so popular were the apostles that even the officials feared the people when opposing them. (V. 26.)

6. So earnest were the apostles that they "filled Jerusalem" with their teaching and stood fast in their contention that they must obey God and not men. (V. 29.)

7. They who listened to Peter were "cut to the heart," as those on Pentecost, but with different results. Under Gamaliel's moderating speech they softened to the point of simply whipping the apostles and letting them go. (Vs. 34-42.)

8. In absolutely democratic fashion the early church selected seven deacons who were then ordained by the apostles. The authority for the selection of deacons lies in apostolic precedent. (6: 1-7.)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the imprisonment and release of the apostles. 2. Why did the Sadducees start a persecution against the apostles? 3. How did worshipers happen to be in the temple at daybreak? 4. What other words than "Sanhedrin" are used to designate that body? 5. Why was a miracle justifiable in releasing the apostles? 6. Why did the Sanhedrin flog the

disciples secretly? 7. When Jesus was crucified, why did the Sanhedrin object to bearing the responsibility? 8. What do you think of Gamaliel and his speech? 9. What situation led to the selection of deacons? 10. Who really chose the deacons? 11. Why did they select all from the Grecians? 12. What part did the apostles take in the matter?

LESSON EIGHT

MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN

Scope of Lesson—Acts 6: 8—8: 1

Memory Text.—“For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.”—Matt. 16: 25.

LESSON PLAN

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|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stephen Charged with Blasphemy. 2. Historical Introduction to Defense. 3. How Israel Came to Sojourn in Egypt. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Another Prophet Predicted by Moses. 5. Stephen's Bold Peroration and Glorious Death. |
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COMMENTS

Luke gives, with much detail, the account of the persecution of Stephen, perhaps to leave permanently on record a sample experience of the suffering of many early Christians.

STEPHEN CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY

(Chapter 6: 8-15.)

Stephen was the first named among the deacons chosen. His power to work miracles was doubtless conferred by laying on of hands of the apostles.

Verses 9, 10.—There were more than a hundred synagogues in Jerusalem at that time, perhaps even hundreds. People who migrated to the city from certain regions would form a congregation of their own, where acquaintance and fellowship of the old home would be maintained.

Opposition to Stephen centered in these synagogues of outsiders. We wonder whether Saul was a member of the synagogue of Cilicians.

It was a compliment to the might of Stephen in argument when his enemies decided he must die. Had they been able to answer him, they would not have desired to kill him. The enmity of some people is an item in one's favor. A man is known by the opposition he arouses as well as by the friends he makes.

“Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you,” is one of the keenest of Jesus' sayings.

Verses 11-14.—The charge against Stephen, a vague one of blasphemy, is another commendation of the man. Had they found it possible to sustain some criminal charge they would have been

delighted, but no crime was laid at his door. The blasphemy accusation was proven only by bribed and false witnesses. Stephen had doubtless used expressions which, taken from their proper setting and distorted by skillful misrepresentation, gave some semblance of truth to the charge. The student will note the similarity between the accusations of Stephen and his Lord—both tried for blasphemy against Moses and the temple—a holy place to Jews.

He had taught that Jesus' system was superior to that of Moses, and would supplant it; that the temple, as the only place appointed for the worship of God, was to be superseded by temples of human hearts, just as Jesus had taught.

How inconsistent are some religious consciences. These Jews who swore to a falsehood, and the judges who knowingly admitted such testimony into court, were all conscientious. They would not have “worked” on the Sabbath, tithed their garden plants even, and kept every ceremonial of the law; yet they broke its spirit every day, and hesitated not to employ every device of deceit and trickery in the name of the law, to illegally convict and execute one whom they deemed heretical.

Likewise, we find some now who are too conscientious to worship in a church where a musical instrument is used, yet are not disturbed at all because they neglect assembling on the first day to break bread. To cultivate a whimsical prejudice they neglect a plain command. Others are conscientiously opposed to any form of modern dress, but will not hesi-

LESSON TEXT

6: 8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called the synagogue of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake. 11 Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. 12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and seized him, and brought him into the council, 13 and set up false witnesses, who said, This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: 14 for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us. 15 And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

7: 1 And the high priest said, Are these things so? 2 And he said,

Brethren and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and he said unto him, Get thee out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. 4 Then came

tate to cheat in a business transaction. Some will not smoke or drink, but will use profane or obscene language.

All in all, we are a sort of "job lot" collection of humanity.

This fact but emphasizes the world's need of such a gospel as Stephen was preaching.

Verse 15.—How much the face reveals. It is a reflection of the life within. We have all seen faces of aged saints lighted as with a heavenly glow while in communion with God. Faces may be furrowed by the plows of suffering and care, yet reflect the glow of heavenly beauty within. On the other hand, some faces shock and strike terror to our souls as we look upon them. It is hard to conceive of demons being more wicked and repellent than are some folks whose evil is betrayed openly in their faces.

Luke's vivid narrative of this trial, including Stephen's defense in detail, reads like the testimony of an eye-witness.

It is next to that. His information came from Paul, who at that time was hearing some of his first cases as a young judge in the court. He was a zealous Sanhedrist, yet he never forgot the look on the prisoner's face. He must have been puzzled by it.

He probably remembered that angelic look afterward, when he gazed on the face of his Lord on the plain of Damascus.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO DEFENSE

(Chapter 7: 1-8.)

After the testimony of the prosecution was all in, the high priest, as presiding officer, gave Stephen permission to speak

in his own behalf. The court, while resorting to bribery to obtain perjured testimony, was nevertheless scrupulous to preserve the form of legality. Their contemplated verdict may be unjust, but it must not be illegal.

Stephen's defense was historical in character, showing how the nation of the Jews, from the beginning, had persecuted and killed its leaders.

He began with Abraham, because they all prided themselves on their descent from him, depending on that for their salvation.

Verses 3, 4.—From the account of Abraham's call, as given in Genesis, one would not learn that Jehovah gave him the call in Ur. It mentions his call when in Haran. But this makes it clear that he was first called in Ur, then again in Haran. He, his father Terah, brother Nahor and nephew Lot went out together from Ur. No reason for their stopping there is assigned, but since Terah died there we may suggest that infirmities of age made it impossible for Terah to go farther. Nahor remained with the bones of his father, Abraham and Lot going on into the country to which God had called them.

Stephen made it clear that Abraham's going to Canaan was providential. Though he lived in the promised land, yet he had "no inheritance in it" himself.

What a wonderful test of faith! Of all the characters of history Abraham best deserved the name "father of the faithful."

He was seventy-five years old when the call came. He obeyed fully God's leading, dwelling one hundred years in

he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, God removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell: 5 and he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: and he promised that he would give it to him in possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. 6 And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and treat them ill, four hundred years. 7 And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. 9 And the patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt: and God was with him, 10 and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time. 13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's race became manifest unto Pharaoh. 14 And Joseph sent, and called to him Jacob his father, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. 15 And Jacob went down

the land promised to him, without realizing just what the promise implied.

He therefore lived in tents, waiting for God to reveal where he wanted him to be. He was wealthy enough to have built a mansion, but to have done so would have been to make his own plans.

What a lesson for those who build palaces and add broad acres to-day. Many plan and act as if they were to remain here forever. More years are sometimes spent in building a mansion than the builder can hope to live in it after completion.

Another interesting observation in connection with God's warning Abraham of the bondage of his posterity. A less heroic or weaker personality would have been deterred from going to Canaan thereby. This was another test of his faith. He had been assured God called him there, yet it would be the means of bringing disaster for centuries on his descendants. Despite that, he resignedly, bravely, faced the event. He trusted God to bring good out of it all. What a marvelous faith!

Why was Abraham summoned from Ur? We can only guess, but it is reasonable to suppose it was to remove him from his idolatrous relatives. Ur was the center of the worship of heavenly bodies. Abraham worshipped the true God. He could keep himself fitted to be the "father of the faithful" better in a land free from the pollution of idols. Circumcision was a rite that would insure separation from the heathen people of Canaan, and was a sign of the covenant between Abraham and his descendants on one side, and Jehovah on the other.

HOW ISRAEL CAME TO SOJOURN IN EGYPT.

(Verses 9-16.)

Stephen first uses the case of Joseph to illustrate his charge that it had been characteristic of the Jews through all their history to reject God's messengers. Joseph, thus rejected, rose to honor and was a savior of his race as a result of their ill treatment. His point was that through the rejection God worked for the redemption of His chosen people. He will lead up to the conclusion that the rejection of Jesus was the means of opening a way for the redemption of Israel.

When he explained Joseph's brethren's treatment of him as due to jealousy, it must have caused the Sanhedrin to wince.

Verse 14.—The careful student may note a discrepancy in the number of Jacob's family that went into Egypt. In Gen. 46: 27 the number of migrants to Egypt is given as seventy. Stephen quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation much used by Paul, in which are included two sons of Manasseh and Ephraim each, and a grandson of Ephraim, thus adding five to the count.

ANOTHER PROPHET PREDICTED BY MOSES

(Verses 17-43.)

Verse 18.—The Pharaoh ruling in Egypt when Joseph was viceroy was one of the Hyksos or Shepherd kings, a race of Semites, and distinctly related to the Hebrews by blood. This will explain their friendliness to Joseph, for "blood is thicker than water" after all. The Pharaoh mentioned in this verse was an

into Egypt; and he died, himself and our fathers; 16 and they were carried over unto Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor in Shechem. 17 But as the time of the promise drew nigh which God vouchsafed unto Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 18 till there arose another king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. 19 The same dealt craftily with our race, and ill-treated our fathers, that they should cast out their babes to the end they might not live. 20 At which season Moses was born, and was exceeding fair; and he was nourished three months in his father's house: 21 and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. 22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works. 23 But when he was well-nigh forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian: 25 and he supposed that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them a deliverance; but they understood not. 26 And the day following he appeared unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? 27 But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Wouldest thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday? 29 And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. 30 And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. 31 And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold, there came a voice of the Lord, 32 I am the God of thy fathers, the God

Egyptian, and his reign marked the restoration of native government.

The following verses (20 *seq.*) cite another illustration of Jews rejecting God-chosen leaders. Moses was so treated.

The religious leaders of Stephen's day were persecuting him because they regarded him as blaspheming Moses. He reminds them that their fathers in their day persecuted Moses, and mentions the familiar incident of his first attempt to lead them, and their refusal (vs. 27, 28). This fact he used again to emphasize the national consistency in rejecting Jesus. Consistent in that they did as their ancestors had done.

We might have guessed it, but could not have been certain that Moses had been thoroughly educated in Egyptian learning had not Stephen told us the fact. Being adopted by the princess, she naturally would train him for a princely position.

To reject such a one as he was inexcusable. It was an unwelcome bit of history that Stephen cited on this point. He used it to prove that in killing Jesus, who was greater than Moses, that generation was following in the footsteps of their fathers.

Verse 35 makes his point clear here.

Stephen compels our admiration in forgetting his own safety in defending his Lord. He knows that he has no hope of acquittal. Like the earlier instance of Jesus' own death, the case had been decided before the formal calling of the court.

He therefore determined to do what he could to make an impression on those hard-hearted Jews. What a noble man he was!

Verse 37.—He had another reason for mentioning the case of Moses.

It was he who had prophesied of another who should supersede him as lawgiver and savior. He had saved his nation from slavery, but the new Moses should save them from sin—a thing Moses was not able to do. The Sanhedrin was familiar with that prediction of Moses, but they would not accept Stephen's interpretation of it.

Verse 38.—“Living oracles” is a significant title for God's word, whether it be applied to the Old Testament or to the New.

Other nations had oracles, such as the Delphian of the Greeks, but their prophecies were ambiguous or false. They were the product of dead religions. The word of God is “living and powerful,” because it is always abreast of the times, and able to save all who accept its teachings.

“Living oracles” came through living men. Of all the different methods by which God might have made a revelation to man, that through man was the best. One mediated by angels might have been refused on the ground that it was too high for us. It would be absurd to think of God speaking to every man personally, for the selfish and brutish man would only use such information to his own and others' hurt. But one given through choice, obedient men, written

of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not behold. 33 And the Lord said unto him, Loose the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the affliction of my people that is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I am come down to deliver them: and now come, I will send thee into Egypt. 35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? him hath God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. 36 This man led them forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. 37 This is that Moses, who said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me. 38 This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel that spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received living oracles to give unto us: 39 to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them, and turned back in their hearts unto Egypt, 40 saying unto Aaron, Make us gods that shall go before us: for as for this Moses, who led us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. 41 And they made a calf in those days, and brought a sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned, and gave them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets,

Did ye offer unto me slain beasts and sacrifices
Forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

for the guidance of later generations, is the best possible plan for communicating with men.

Verses 40, 41.—It was a sore spot touched when reference was made to the idolatry of their fathers. They could not deny it, for it was taught by all the prophets that idolatry was the cause of their being carried away in both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Human sacrifices were even offered, for that was the manner of worshipping Moloch.

The idolatry of the ancestors of this court was, perhaps, of coarser variety than that practiced by the members of the Sanhedrin itself, but it was not more detestable to God. They showed idolatrous devotion to their own interpretations of the law, using its forms as heathen nations might have used fetiches or charms.

STEPHEN'S BOLD PERORATION AND GLORIOUS DEATH.

(Verses 44—8:1.)

Verses 44-50.—In this section Stephen answers their charge that he blasphemed the temple. In a sense, he had doubtless given some ground for the accusation. He would teach the same as Jesus, that the hour had come when God could be worshiped anywhere. Instead of having one sacred place where He would meet His people, God would now, through Christ, accept their worship if it were in the true spirit. "Neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem; God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Stephen had never uttered a disrespectful word

about the temple. He had boldly taught that the system of Moses was forever obsolete, and as a result the forms and ceremonies of the law were abrogated.

The law had not been ruthlessly destroyed, but fulfilled, and hence was no longer operative. Such teaching would lay him open to a charge of blasphemy against the temple.

He also proved to them that the temple was not itself an essential part of the law. The law provided for a tabernacle, but it was David and Solomon who had built the temple five hundred years after the giving of the law. Quoting Isa. 66:1, "heaven is my throne," he proves that God can not be contained in houses made with hands.

There are vital applications of this truth for us.

First, God's laws or dispensations may change. When they do, however, He always attests the fact by miraculous approval of those entrusted with ushering in the change.

Second, God can not be limited by any creation of man. His work or ministry to man is not confined to any set form or ceremony of worship. Churches claiming divine approval for ritual and form of purely human origin can not substantiate the boast.

Formally dedicated altars are not more sacred than a grove or sandy beach. Neither is essential; either may be fitting to use under proper circumstances. We dare not restrict our worship to time and place, lest it become formal and lose vitality.

- 43 And ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch,
And the star of the god Rephan,
The figures which ye made to worship them:
And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.
- 44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, even as he appointed who spake unto Moses, that he should make it according to the figure that he had seen. 45 Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought in with Joshua when they entered on the possession of the nations, that God thrust out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; 46 who found favor in the sight of God, and asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built him a house. 48 Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet,
- 49 The heaven is my throne,
And the earth the footstool of my feet:
What manner of house will ye build me? saith the Lord:
Or what is the place of my rest?
- 50 Did not my hands make all these things?
- 51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. 52 Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; 53 ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not.
- 54 Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven,

Third, that while God does not insist on certain places set apart for worship, yet He is pleased with our offerings of suitable buildings for His praise.

Verses 51-53.—The fierce close of the sermon was intended to strike terror to his hearers by the very suddenness and vigor of the onslaught. It was a psychological climax, designed to stun and compel a conviction of sin by hurling an accusation of having broken connection with Abraham. "Uncircumcised in heart and ears" meant that they lacked the faith of Abraham, in that they refused to follow God's leading as he did; and that they would not hear Jehovah's messenger—Jesus. No words were minced. They had killed the Son of God, and without attempt to soften the sting he boldly hurled their guilt in their faces. The sad feature was that they committed the outrage while pretending to keep the law.

It is so easy to permit attachment to men or institutions to overshadow our loyalty to God. Because certain men have been entrusted with religious responsibility, appointed to carry on work which we are sure God approves, we sometimes mistake loyalty to these appointees for loyalty to the cause they have been chosen to further.

Verse 54.—The effect of this sermon proves that the work of the Spirit—to convict of sin—is always accomplished when the gospel is preached. Jesus promised the Spirit for that purpose.

We have already observed how He did his work on Pentecost through Peter's preaching. On that occasion "they were pricked in their heart," and asked what they should do. When told, they obeyed to the number of three thousand. In this instance they were "cut to the heart," almost the same words used to describe their mental state, but their conduct was very different from that of the Pentecostians.

Stephen's hearers "gnashed on him with their teeth," and rushed him off to an illegal execution. Some, convicted of sin, repented. Others hardened their hearts and persisted in a life of sin, gradually becoming worse and worse.

Verses 55, 56.—What a glorious death Stephen died. It was terrible in its injustice and brutishness, but one could endure such maltreatment for the privilege of the vision seen by the martyr when his spirit was leaving the body. Death surely had no terror for him when he entered the eternal world with his eyes beholding the Son of God. We may all have exactly that vision when we depart if we are worthy to behold His face. He is no respecter of persons, and will be first to greet all His own when death admits to the other side.

Verse 58.—Saul was doubtless a member of the Sanhedrin and cast a black ball when the ballot-box was passed, that being the method of determining the fate of one accused. A white ball meant "not guilty"; black, "guilty."

and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8: 1 And Saul was consenting unto his death.

We can not believe he was a party to the bribery and other unlawful incidents of the procedure, but he was a prejudiced judge. He afterward tells us how he had given votes against Christians condemning them to death. He never forgave himself for his part in this unholy work, though he did it ignorantly. When the

roll of sinners was called, he responded to the title "chief." But when forgiven by his Master how loyal he became!

Stephen's last words were like Jesus' own. He was a worthy disciple; a faithful deacon; a courageous preacher; an ideal martyr; an inspiration to every reader of his death.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Stephen was the first-named New Testament deacon. Being opposed by synagogues of outside Jews in Jerusalem, he answered so ably that, through rage, they falsely charged him with blasphemy. (6: 8-15.)

2. At the trial, though the court had bribed the witnesses, the high priest hypocritically pretended to give Stephen a fair chance. Stephen's speech is one of the most remarkable in the New Testament. He reviewed the history of the Jewish nation, showing that from the beginning it had killed its leaders and defied Jehovah. (7: 1, 2.)

3. Stephen showed Abraham's call to Canaan to have been providential, and emphasized Abraham's complete obedience. The inference is that Abraham was called out of Ur of Chaldea to get him away from idolatrous associates and influences. (Verses 3-8.)

4. Stephen's argument concerning Jo-

seph's rising to honor in spite of unjust treatment implied that God overrides opposition. He made it possible for the Sanhedrin to see that their rejection of Jesus would open the way for redemption. (Verses 9-14.)

5. Knowing from the beginning that he was doomed to die, Stephen made the best of his chance to tear the veil of hypocrisy from his persecutors so they might see themselves and be seen in their true light. (Verses 17-43.)

6. As he approached the close of his speech, Stephen did not denounce the temple, but sought to show that through Christ sincere worship is acceptable anywhere. (Verses 44-50.)

7. At the very last, Stephen hurled fierce denunciation upon his accusers, not moving them to repentance, but bringing to a close the scene that resulted in the conversion to Christ of untold multitudes. (7: 51—8: 1.)

QUESTIONS

1. Where do we first hear of Stephen in Acts?

2. Why was Stephen chosen as the first one to suffer death?

3. Were the members of the Sanhedrin honest? What do you think of conscience as a guide in religion and morals?

4. What fact concerning the call of Abraham do we learn from Acts, additional to what is told in Genesis?

5. Why was Abraham content to live in tents, though rich?

6. Why did Stephen cite the cases of Joseph and Moses?

7. Why did the Israelites reject these two men?

8. What prophecy did Moses make concerning Jesus?

9. What basis for the charge that Stephen had blasphemed Moses, and spoken against the temple?

10. What great man is introduced for the first time in connection with the execution of Stephen?

LESSON NINE

FURTHER EXTENSION OF THE GOSPEL AS THE RESULT OF PERSECUTION

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 8:1b-40

Memory Text.—"They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word."—Acts 8:4.

LESSON PLAN

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|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. The Fire of Persecution Blazing. | 4. An Apostolic Prerogative Employed. |
| 2. Brands Plucked from the Burning. | 5. A Surprising Conversion. |
| 3. The Fire of the Gospel Purifying. | 6. An Epochal Conversion. |

COMMENTS

THE FIRE OF PERSECUTION BLAZING.

(Chapter 8:1-3.)

Verse 1.—The bitterness of the Jewish persecution was a splendid tribute to the zeal of the disciples and the inherent power of the gospel. They were making inroads on Judaism.

They were not deterred in their task of bringing all men to Christ by fear of "proselyting."

Some professed followers of Jesus today would pronounce such conduct as "discourteous" to the Jewish faith, and would counsel compromise, since "all worship the same God." Jews are being received into membership in some "community churches" now.

It seems that Judas, though dead, yet liveth.

We wonder why the apostles were not driven out of Judea along with others. Perhaps the authorities, having had evidence of divine intervention in their behalf when they were miraculously released from prison, hesitated to pursue the apostles further.

Verse 2.—Courage was required to give public and honorable burial to their first martyr, but the disciples were not cowards. They did not flee from death, but because the Lord desired them to scatter. They could preach to more attentive ears elsewhere. Jerusalem had been given its opportunity, so they turned to other regions.

True reforms always progress on the wing. When even a worthy cause entrenches itself, it never gains adherents. Truth makes progress by carrying the war into the enemies' territory.

Verse 3.—Note the quiet introduction of the apostle Paul. Uninspired writers would have stopped to give an extended biography of one so prominent. There is not the slightest trace of hero worship in an inspired writing. The only hero of the apostles was their Lord.

It is almost nauseous at times to listen to the eulogies of preachers, church officers, society officials and missionaries, good and devoted though they are. Our praises should be given to Him whom angels adore. Any true servant of Jesus would gladly yield all space given to his own praise to adoration of Christ.

BRANDS PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING

(Verses 4-8.)

Verse 4.—The Lord had commanded the apostles to "go into all the world" and preach. They had tarried in Jerusalem till driven out by persecution. It is a question whether they were as aggressive as Jesus desired. Some think they were Spirit-guided in remaining in the Holy City so long; others think the persecution was divinely appointed to compel them to carry out the Great Commission.

"The Word" which they preached, everywhere the same, was that Jesus is

LESSON TEXT

1 And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison.

4 They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word. 5 And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ. 6 And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. 7 For from many of those that had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was much joy in that city.

the Christ, and that salvation is in no other name.

How sad that so many conflicting fads, cults and philosophies to-day brand themselves as "the word." Some, claiming to preach "the word," deny everything essential to the deity of Jesus. But any teaching slighting Jesus' deity, atonement and resurrection is a false gospel.

Verse 5.—Philip's success in Samaria was remarkable. The reader has not forgotten the enmity between the Jew and Samaritan. Nothing but the gospel of Christ could have reconciled them.

It is also the only thing that can reconcile hostile groups now. All other treaties, compromises and "gentlemen's agreements" will last only till it is advantageous to one of the parties to break the compact.

The readiness of the Samaritans to accept the gospel may be understood when we recall Jesus' teaching there at Jacob's well. On that visit "many believed on him" because of what He did. They willingly listened to further news concerning Him. Their enmity to the Jews made them more ready to accept Him whom Jews had rejected.

THE FIRE OF THE GOSPEL PURIFYING

(Verses 9-13.)

Verse 12.—The careful reader will not overlook the statement that "men and women" were baptized. The gospel plan made no provision for church membership or baptism of children not yet having reached the age of responsibility. The gospel is for *sinners*, hence those not sinners are otherwise provided for by God.

This contest of the disciples with sorcery is interesting. For years Simon had

held the superstitious Samaritans in his power by sleight of hand and pretended communication with the unseen. He possessed skill and ability. Having faith in no god, he profited from the credulity of the ignorant. To him all religion was superstition. Attracted to the new teaching, at first by curiosity, he was convinced by the strength of the testimony, and became a disciple. His conversion was doubtless due to the miracles Philip wrought. He himself had been deceiving the people by "spiritualist cabinet," "table tipping" and "ouija board." Familiar with the tricks of the occult, he knew that Philip actually did what he had been pretending to do. When Philip attributed the power to Jesus, who had risen from the dead, Simon believed.

No good reason exists for doubting the genuineness of his faith. It was imperfect, but he was only a beginner. All faith is imperfect at first. It is a thing that grows. It may be adulterated by some unworthy motive at first, but purified by further knowledge. Simon set a commendable example in one respect. When convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus, he obeyed as far as his knowledge went. Some wait till they understand everything, or all objections have been removed, and that means they never obey.

AN APOSTOLIC PREROGATIVE EMPLOYED

(Verses 14-17.)

There has been much theological speculation as to why the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria. Those favoring some form of episcopacy or official supervision of churches, are eager to see in this an episcopal visit, to grant certain official authority to the Samaritans. The most

9 But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who beforetime in the city used sorcery, and amazed the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. 11 And they gave heed to him, because that of long time he had amazed them with his sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 And Simon also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed.

14 Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 who, when they were come down, prayed for

serious objection to this theory is that there is not a particle of evidence to support it.

It is a pure creation of the "historical imagination." The apostles did not interfere in any manner in the organization of the church there. They did "lay hands" on certain brethren who were thus empowered to work miracles. They also preached the gospel in Samaritan villages. There is no evidence that their trip was even to investigate the preaching being done by others.

They knew Philip was inspired and would preach the same message as they did. But, not being an apostle, he evidently lacked the authority to confer the miraculous gifts he possessed on any others. Peter and John went to Samaria to confer this gift.

Miracles challenged the attention of the people. It was desirable that a large number of preachers should have this power, to facilitate the spread of the gospel. But, so far as known, none but apostles could bestow that gift. This makes clear the purpose of the visit to Samaria. It is usually easy to understand the Bible when we permit the simple record to speak for itself.

A SURPRISING CONVERSION

(Verses 18-24.)

Verses 18, 19.—Simon's cupidity remained with him. Seeing some of the people whom he had formerly deceived actually performing miracles, he saw an opportunity to become rich if he possessed that gift, and offered liberal payment therefor.

Simon was not the last to be tempted to make gain through special religious authority or talent. It is common now to hear religious work described in commercial terms. We even hear of "thousand-dollar preachers," "three-thousand-dollar preachers." Some ministers refer to

themselves in these terms. To what have we come? Simon was a gentleman in comparison with those who to-day would commercialize the gospel. His opportunities to understand the gospel were limited. We have no such excuse. Nothing grates more harshly on the ears of a true minister than to hear a Dun or Bradstreet rating placed on himself. Neither the ability nor religious usefulness of a preacher can be judged by the size of his salary. Many of God's greatest and noblest have served for a mere pittance in obscure places, but their reward hereafter will be great. They will be accorded positions more honorable than those given to many who were much more prominent in this life.

One fine trait Simon had. When his error was pointed out, he immediately repented, like the Simon did who rebuked him.

His prayer for pardon must be considered sincere, and we hope it was granted. It would be a real treat to meet him in heaven and hear him praise God for His grace in forgiveness.

One already a Christian obtains forgiveness on different terms from the alien. On Pentecost Peter told sinners to "repent and be baptized" for forgiveness. In this instance, a baptized believer was commanded to "repent and pray God." Repentance and prayer are always terms of forgiveness. Baptism is to introduce into Christ, whereby sonship rights are conferred, thus enabling the transgressing Christian to be his own priest, receiving forgiveness direct from God. The erring Christian repents, prays God and makes what restitution is possible.

AN EPOCHAL CONVERSION

(Verses 25-40.)

Verse 26.—That was a peculiar interruption to Philip's successful ministry in

them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: 16 for as yet it was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. 23 For I see that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. 24 And Simon answered and said, Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.

the populous city, when the angel ordered him to go to the country. Few such calls are loud enough to be heard to-day.

Many country preachers receive a "call" to the city, but when a city preacher goes to the country, we conclude his sanity needs investigation.

The only information given the preacher was that he should start for a certain road, sixty to seventy-five miles to the south.

"He arose and went." How much that single sentence reveals about this great preacher. It is the spirit of every true preacher.

Verse 27.—No miracle was performed to produce faith in this man, because he was already a believer in the Old Testament, and Philip could preach Christ to him from the prophecies. He was a Jew whose financial ability and wisdom had elevated him to a chief cabinet position with the Ethiopian queen, Candace. This appears to have been the dynastic name, not that of an individual.

Several Ethiopian queens ruled under that title during that era.

Many of their treasures have been recovered, and recent archeological research has opened up a new set of tombs that may yield valuable material.

The long drive in a chariot from Ethiopia, a journey of perhaps fifteen hundred miles, is sufficient evidence of the devotion of the treasurer to the Jewish faith. One such journey in a lifetime was about all that one so far away could hope to achieve.

Verse 29.—The Spirit's order to join himself to the chariot made some sort of introduction necessary. As he came within hearing distance he overheard the eunuch reading a passage very familiar to him, which suggested the logical and courteous approach. "Do you understand what the prophet refers to?" was not discourteous,

but an expression of interest in the reader. The answer will go far in helping him to determine whether the reader is a Christian or Jew. The passage is found in Isaiah 53. No Jewish rabbi could then, nor can he yet, interpret that passage. It is the finest single prophecy of the Old Testament from which to preach Christ.

If the reader could understand it, it would mean that he was a Christian, and Philip must look further for his subject for evangelism. If he could not, he was a Jew, and Philip might begin with that very passage to preach Jesus. His question, therefore, was carefully asked. The negative reply suggested to Philip the logical course for his sermon. Verse 35 states that he, "beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus." It is not difficult to imagine the development of the sermon. He would direct the attention of the eunuch to the description of the Messiah, as outlined by Isaiah. The abuse heaped on Him, His suffering, the injustice of the trial, incidents connected with it, the manner of His death, history of the burial and resurrection, are all presented almost as vividly as by an eyewitness.

After portraying the prophetic picture of the Messiah, he would give a historical sketch of Jesus of Nazareth, showing how perfectly the prophecy foretold concerning Him.

The record states that he "preached Jesus." That always included preaching the terms of forgiveness as presented in the New Testament. After convincing the eunuch that Jesus was the Christ, Philip would unfold to him the gospel plan of salvation.

Verses 36-39.—Just at the right point in their journey they "came unto a certain water." Some have misunderstood the word "desert" in verse 26. As used

25 They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

26 But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza: the same is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship; 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this,

in the first century it was a term applied to any uninhabited region, no matter what made it such. It might be a dry region, rocky or swampy. Any territory with very scant inhabitants was "desert." It is therefore no contradiction for Luke to speak of water in a desert.

The eunuch's request for baptism raises an interesting question. How did he know anything about this ordinance? The narrative makes it clear that all he knew about Christianity he had just learned from Philip. It follows, therefore, that Philip must have preached baptism to him. It is also a legitimate conclusion that no one can preach a full gospel and omit what an inspired man included. No one, then, can preach a whole gospel and not preach baptism. Those who do this are guilty of insulting the Holy Spirit, who prompted Philip in his message to the eunuch.

To New Testament preachers baptism was not a matter of little importance. They both preached and practiced it. It is impossible to be true to Jesus Christ and disparage, or neglect, one of His commands. This case of conversion is a thorn in the flesh to those who insist that "Spirit baptism" is the all-important thing.

Valuable light is also thrown on the so-called "mode" of baptism in this instance. The chariot was stopped when the water was reached. Both the candidate for baptism and the administrator "went down into the water," and after the baptism both "came up out of the water." Such a procedure would have been worse than useless if anything but an immersion had been the form.

Both men were away from home, with no convenient place for change of clothing. It would have been folly to go into the water to sprinkle a few drops, or pour a little on his head, for that could have

been done more conveniently out of the water.

As a matter of fact, the only baptism known in the New Testament is the immersion of a penitent believer in water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Sprinkling and pouring are both centuries too late to have apostolic authority or precedent behind them.

The symbolism of baptism also reveals the form of administration. Rom. 6: 3-5: "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Col. 2: 12: "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead." These two references are so plain that no one is excusable for misunderstanding them, if he really desires to know what the Scriptures teach on this subject. Two most important things are symbolized by baptism. First, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The ordinance would be meaningless if He did not rise. It was commanded because the Lord desired that this most important thing in connection with His earthly ministry might never be forgotten. Those who change the form nullify a part of the testimony on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. It was His intention that every believer who might be baptized into Him should, by that very act, add his testimony to his faith in the resurrection. Second, the ordinance also symbolizes the death of the life of sin

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb,
So he openeth not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away:
His generation who shall declare?
For his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other? 35 And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scrip-

in the believer, and its burial and the resurrection of a new creature in Christ. Each one yielding obedience to Christ in baptism advertises to the world the fact of his laying aside forever the old life and the putting on the new life. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5: 17).

What a shame that the Church of Rome ever departed from the original apostolic practice in baptism. How unfortunate that certain Protestant bodies have followed in Rome's steps in this matter. Our study of the New Testament cases of conversion reveals two prominent facts. First, every command was literally obeyed by inspired men in both preaching and practice. Second, that they did not postpone obedience. As soon as His will was known, it was done.

Another observation must be made on this incident. Previous lessons have developed that conviction of sin was the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised Him for this purpose. John 16: 8: "When he [the Comforter, or Holy Spirit] is come, he will convict the world in respect of sin."

We have learned that He invariably did this by the preaching of those who already believed, thus working to convert sinners through those who were Christians. It being the office work (in part) of the Holy Spirit to bring men to a conviction of sin, let us study this case to ascertain the method He employed, for it is reasonable to suppose that He works according to law.

When the preacher was visited by the angel in Samaria, the sinner was still in Jerusalem, worshiping according to the Jew's religion. The sincerity and ability of the eunuch were such that the Spirit evidently was unwilling that he should return to a heathen land still adhering to an obsolete faith. He therefore planned for a meeting of sinner and preacher. To effect that meeting, the preacher, who was much farther from the

selected place on the Gaza road than the sinner, must have started from Samaria while the eunuch was still worshiping in the temple at Jerusalem. He must have been able to time the movements of both to so arrange. In addition to that, He must arrange for their meeting at exactly the moment when the eunuch would be reading from that prophecy in Isaiah, that the proper Scripture text may be ready for immediate use. What a wonderful illustration of divine providence this is! The knowledge by the Holy Spirit of even the little details of our lives and movements is a cause for amazement.

It may be assumed that whenever an audience is assembled for worship, the sinners present have had their steps providentially guided to that place, that the same opportunity may be given them that was presented to the eunuch.

Then, when the message is delivered, acceptance or rejection depends on the sinner. The Spirit has done His part when conviction of sin is wrought, and it may be successfully argued that He always succeeds in doing this with every honest-hearted hearer.

But action must be taken by the sinner for himself. God will not compel any to serve Him. He does desire that every one shall have the opportunity to obey, and has commanded us to carry his message of love to every creature for this purpose.

This interest shown in our salvation by the different personalities of the Godhead is one of the highest compliments ever passed on our race. It shows that our every movement and act is carefully noted. Jesus said that even the hairs of our heads are numbered. That is literally true. All the laws of nature bear evidence to this fact. Such knowledge and interest are, in the language of the Psalmist, "too wonderful for us."

How careful we should be in view of this fact. Some day we shall face God

ture, preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

for judgment, our deeds being recorded there for our justification or condemnation. We should look forward to that meeting with joy, or apprehension, according as we use the providences of God in this life.

It would seem that none of us could ever live carelessly after realizing God's fathomless love, as revealed in both His providences and His plans for our salvation through Christ.

Verse 39.—His task accomplished with the treasurer, Philip was next transferred to Azotas, a city some miles north of the scene of the baptism of the eunuch. We wish more was known of the subsequent history of this officer of Candace. No

reliable records of his work are extant. There is a tradition (which is not very hard to believe founded on fact) that when he returned to Ethiopia he preached the gospel there, established a church and led many to Christ. The Abyssinian church traces its beginning to his work, according to some of its writers. It is safe to suppose that a man for whose conversion the Spirit should plan so carefully would render a good account of his opportunity to proclaim the gospel to others. His position and ability would conspire to give him an influence accorded but few.

May his example in immediate obedience stir many to "go and do likewise."

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Unlike most modern Christians, those of apostolic times sought to bring men of all faiths into the true faith. From Jerusalem they were providentially scattered so as to spread the gospel everywhere. (Vs. 1-3.)

2. Everywhere they preached the same message—Jesus is the Christ, and there is salvation in none other. This one message, backed by the supreme authority of the divine Christ, brought Jew and Samaritan together in the same fold. (Vs. 4-8.)

3. The New Testament church baptized "sinners." There was no "infant membership." Simon the sorcerer, though

imperfect in understanding, at least made a start in the right direction and in the right way. (Vs. 9-13.)

4. Peter and John were sent to Samaritan Christians, not as ecclesiastical lords, but to bestow miraculous gifts. When Simon the sorcerer saw his blunder, he made amends through repentance and prayer, as an erring Christian should.

5. When Philip was ordered to the country, instead of the city, he cheerfully went. The eunuch was converted without miracle. Philip preached Christ, beginning from Old Testament. In preaching Christ he included baptism, and the eunuch was immersed. (Vs. 25-40.)

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense was persecution a testimony to the faithfulness of the early disciples? 2. What divine purpose may have been accomplished by the persecution of Jerusalem Christians? 3. What is meant by "preaching the word"? 4. What success attended preaching the gospel in Samaria? 5. Tell of conversion of Simon the magician. 6. Was his conversion genuine? 7. What sin was there in his offer to buy miraculous power? 8. Why were Peter and John sent to Sama-

ria? 9. How does a non-Christian obtain forgiveness? A Christian? 10. Tell story of conversion of eunuch. 11. What would be included in Philip's message when he "preached Jesus" to the eunuch? 12. What lessons concerning baptism does this incident furnish? 13. What symbolic meaning has baptism? 14. Show how the Spirit of God planned for the conversion of the eunuch. 15. What do we know of the subsequent history of the eunuch?

LESSON TEN

A RELENTLESS PERSECUTOR CONVERTED

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 9: 1-30

Memory Text.—“And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God.”—Acts 9: 20.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. The Arrestor Arrested.</p> <p>2. A Penitent Persecutor Mercifully Visited.</p> | <p>3. The New Recruit Begins Recruiting.</p> <p>4. Paul's First Preaching in the City of Jerusalem.</p> |
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COMMENTS

(The student should compare Acts 9: 1-30 with Acts 22: 3-21; 26: 1-23. The discussion following has been gathered from all these accounts.)

THE ARRESTER ARRESTED

(Chapter 9: 1-9.)

Verse 1.—Luke here returns in his narrative to Saul, introduced in connection with the death of Stephen.

How graphically the words “yet breathing threatening and slaughter” describe the mad hate and merciless persecution of this zealot. Saul, with letters of authority in his pocket, rode forth to complete the extermination of Christians.

Verse 2.—In a large measure, he had been instrumental in banishing disciples from Jerusalem, and when he heard of their activity in Damascus, he decided at once to carry out his program there as at Jerusalem. These letters were addressed to the synagogue rulers, who had no authority in civil law in Damascus. But the Jews were influential there, and a request from them to Aretas, the governor, to send certain of their own nation to Jerusalem for religious trial, would doubtless be granted.

Rulers in every age have been awed by religious bigots, who stand as a unit if they have considerable numbers. It is well that religious folk exercise their power, but it should be most guardedly done. It is so easy to mistake one's prejudice for true zeal, and opinion for proven truth.

Verse 3.—This was a wonderful miracle. It is said by travelers that the sun

shines so brightly in but few places as on the sandy plain near Damascus. Yet this light exceeded the brilliancy of the sun “by far.”

Verses 4-9.—The Roman soldiers accompanying Saul were terror-stricken. The entire company was prostrated to the ground by the overpowering brilliance of the light.

What emotions would this phenomenon awaken in the Hebrew scholar! Instantly he would recall that a miraculous light signified the presence of a heavenly messenger. It was a divinely lighted cloud that guided his forefathers in their wilderness wanderings. It was a fire that lighted, but did not burn the bush, that challenged Moses' attention when God called him to lead His chosen people out of bondage. It was a miraculous light shining on the ark of the covenant that enabled the consulting priest to interpret God's will concerning any undertaking. Thus, a miraculous light meant that God was present in a special manner.

Revealed by the glory of this wonderful light, a form appeared before Saul and addressed him in Hebrew, saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The language of the speaker clears up what appears to be a contradiction in the two accounts as given in Acts 9: 7 and 22: 9. In one it is expressly stated that Saul's attendants heard the voice. In the other it is declared that they saw the light, but heard not the voice. Saul's companions were doubtless Roman soldiers, familiar with Latin and Greek, but who could not understand Hebrew. They heard the

LESSON TEXT

1 But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2 and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: 4 and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: 6 but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7 And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man. 8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing; and they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink.

sound of the speaker's voice (9: 7), but, not understanding the language, did not hear in the sense of understanding what was said.

This is a common use of the word "hear" to-day. If one's hearing is slightly blunt, he is likely to say, "I beg your pardon, I did not hear you," on being addressed in a tone too low to distinguish the words.

By the use of a little common sense, and granting just ordinary honesty to the writers, every so-called contradiction in the New Testament can be as easily harmonized as this. It is certain that those who discover "hopeless contradictions" in the New Testament are looking for them, and, of course, find what they look for. We can always see what we are determined to discover. Encouragement for the commission of every crime can be found in the Bible even, by those anxiously seeking such authority.

A correct understanding of the conversion of Saul demands a knowledge of his religious state before he became a Christian.

The authentic records of his life (gathered from New Testament writings) tell us that he was a Jew, born into a family so devout in that faith that, though living in the Gentile city of Tarsus, where Greek was a language of commerce and conversation, they spoke the Hebrew tongue in their home. That is probably the significance of his calling himself a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" in Phil. 3: 5. He was a member of the Pharisee sect, the most zealous and bigoted of the Jewish parties. His education was completed in Jerusalem, in the college of Gamaliel, a noted teacher of his day.

He was elected to membership in the Sanhedrin while yet a young man, a most

unusual honor. He was absolutely honest, but narrow and prejudiced.

All he knew of Christianity had been learned from its enemies and traducers. He regarded Jesus as a pitiable impostor who had merited death because of his impersonation of the Messiah. He entertained no doubt that Jesus' body was moldering away in some unknown tomb, to which He had been carried by His friends. About all he had in common with Christians at the time of his conversion was a belief in God and faith in the Old Testament as God's revelation to the Jews.

A careful study of what happened in the process of his conversion, with the purpose of learning what was required of him in becoming a Christian, is both interesting and profitable.

His reply to the challenge of the heavenly messenger was, "Who art thou, Lord?" The word "Lord" was used at that time to denote only those to whom powers of deity were ascribed. Saul knew the One he had seen in the vision was a heavenly visitor, but who? An angel? That would be his first impression.

His amazement at the reply can be imagined. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." One moment before that he had not the slightest doubt that Jesus was dead and His body hidden somewhere.

He knew that a heavenly visitor would speak only the truth.

The shock of these words of Jesus was greater to his religion than the light had been to his eyes. Jesus was immediately revealed to him as one desiring the salvation of even his most merciless persecutor. He also discovered Him identifying Himself with His humblest disciples, even as He had said while on earth: "In-

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. 11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth; 12 and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight. 13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem: 14 and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name. 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel: 16 for I will

asmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." He had appeared on Damascus' plain to defend His followers and summon their leading enemy to a place of leadership with them. Small wonder that so often in later years he marveled at the mercy, wisdom, favor and ways of God, breaking into pœans of praise and rapture whenever the thought came to his mind afresh.

Saul's next question, "What wilt thou have me to do, Lord?" reveals his absolute sincerity and boldness, qualities that have made him an ideal for two millenniums.

His fearlessness was due to his consciousness of having lived always in "good conscience." Many years later he said to the Sanhedrin, of which he had been a member, "I have lived in all good conscience till this day." A conscientious man may be mistaken, he may even be bigoted, but he need never be ashamed of his motives. And he is much more certain of being led to see the truth than is a so-called open-minded man who has no real convictions in matters of religion or morals. This latter man can never do the right, because his heart is wrong. The conscientious man will likely be led to see his error and then will immediately change.

Jesus answered the second question only indirectly. Instead, He told Saul why He had appeared to him, then commanded him to go immediately into Damascus, where it should be told him what he must do.

It is commonly believed, and many evangelists so teach, that Jesus appeared to Saul to convert him. If so, He must be a respecter of persons. This can not be, for the whole spirit of His teaching denies it. His own words will better inform us concerning the object of His personal appearance "For to this end have I appeared to thee, to appoint thee a

minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me."

This language is unmistakable. There is not a hint that the appearance was to convert Saul, but, on the contrary, it is explicitly told him to go into Damascus, where another would tell him what to do to become a Christian. Jesus called him to become an apostle to the Gentiles. An essential qualification of an apostle was that he must have seen the Lord after His resurrection, that he might be a personal witness of that vitally important fact.

Consult Acts 1: 22, where Peter states his understanding of the matter. Saul, not having been a disciple while Jesus was on earth, and evidently not having seen Him in the flesh, could be qualified for the apostleship only by such a miracle as happened on the plain near Damascus. Paul himself places this construction on the appearance of Jesus. In 1 Cor. 9: 1 he says: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" He appeals to this vision (and the frequent subsequent appearances of Jesus) as unanswerable proof of his right to be called an apostle.

It thus becomes clear that the miracle, as such, was no part of his conversion. That, as we shall see, was brought about by the same method employed in every other instance, the preaching of the gospel by one already a Christian, and obedience on the part of the one converted to the same commands of Jesus.

It is vitally important that the purpose of every miracle stands forth clearly.

show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake. 17 And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. 18 And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened.

They were, of necessity, unusual occurrences, and had unusual objects, always. A careful study of the setting will reveal the immediate purpose of every miracle without much difficulty. The use made of it by an inspired person should always reveal its import.

Saul must have been disappointed when Jesus told him to go into Damascus to learn what to do. He was impatient to acknowledge Jesus at once before the world, and begin whatever mission might be assigned him. But his spirit of humility and loyalty to the one who had so honored him as to appear to him as "unto one born out of due time"—a spirit not equaled by any one else of whom we have a record—led him to follow his guide into Damascus to be taught the Lord's will.

A PENITENT PERSECUTOR MERCIFULLY VISITED

(Verses 10-19.)

The next step in the conversion of Saul was the preparation of the preacher who was to have the signal honor of baptizing this noted sinner.

Verse 10.—This is the only instance in which Ananias figured, so far as Biblical records go. In Acts 22: 12 Paul mentions him, as he tells the Jerusalem mob about his conversion, stating that he had a good reputation among all the Jews in Damascus.

When his name was called, Ananias immediately stood at attention, replying: "Here am I, Lord." His attitude would lead us to expect instant and unhesitating obedience to any command.

Verse 11.—But when told to go to the house of Judas and inquire for Saul, he seemed to think the Lord had made a mistake.

He was not the last preacher of that sort. Some to-day appear to think the Lord made a mistake in certain of His commandments and ordinances, or else that he is indifferent about obedience to them. They are very willing to state their own opinions as to what the Lord

will or will not do, in certain instances where His will has not been fully obeyed. They have no hesitancy in offering substitutes for simple commands of Christ, assuring their hearers that the Lord will accept any honest service or form of obedience or worship. It is surprising to see how easily they persuade themselves that they have priestly power or authority, and that the Lord will act as they suggest rather than disappoint their deluded followers. Like Ananias, they proceed to give the Lord instruction. How utterly silly, or worse, such pretentious men must appear to Christ and the angels. It is highly important that we understand that when Jesus commands it is ours to obey.

If we encourage any to trust in "a good conscience" instead of obedience, we are blind leaders of the blind, and all concerned shall fall into the ditch of God's condemnation.

Would it not be interesting to know how those disciples in Damascus had learned about Saul's purpose in coming to their city? They must have had some "underground" method of sending warnings, as persecuted people in every age have done. Some "secret disciple" must have been in the Sanhedrin. John tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was such a one. Did he inform Jerusalem disciples of the secret order for arrest of Damascan Christians?

Verse 15.—Ananias would be reassured by such a statement. His fears should have been quieted by the knowledge that Saul was praying. Praying men are not often dangerous men.

In the meantime, three days passed during which period Saul neither ate nor drank. Anxiety to learn what he must do to receive forgiveness weighed so heavily upon him that hunger and thirst fled. He spent the days fasting, praying, waiting for the minister commissioned to instruct him in the way of the Lord.

This is a fitting place to pause and ask what change has taken place in Saul up to the present. We met him as a dis-

And he was certain days with the disciples that were at Damascus. 20 And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God. 21 And all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them that called on this name? and he had come hither for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests. 22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.

believer. He is now a believer. It is more accurate to say that he knew Him in whom he believed. His fasting and prayer evidence sincere repentance on his part. His faith in God and his zeal and conscientiousness have not changed.

When one has thus repented, what is necessary, if anything, to obtain remission of sins? There is much teaching that one is saved by "faith only." Strange doctrine, for here is Saul, not only believing, but truly penitent, yet not forgiven. If the teachers referred to above speak the truth, the plan of salvation has changed. But no information to that effect has come from Heaven.

Men may reason that faith and repentance are sufficient, but our theology is correct only when it harmonizes with *all* God has spoken on a subject.

Verse 17.—"What lack I yet?" was no doubt the question in Saul's mind when Ananias approached. Two objects of the preacher's visit are mentioned before he answers that question. He had been sent to restore sight to the eyes blinded by the intensity of the sun's rays, and prepare the sinner for miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16 informs us that Ananias then said: "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." This was the only thing Saul was commanded to do.

It is common to hear baptism scoffed at as having no place in conversion, but language could not make it clearer that it is connected with forgiveness, than Ananias' speech to Saul makes it.

It thus harmonizes with Peter's teaching on Pentecost, when he said: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." He also uses strong language in stating the place of baptism in 1 Pet. 3:21: "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of

a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

If it is necessary for Saul, it is necessary for us. The law of forgiveness is the same for all. Surely none who studies this lesson will ever say hereafter that baptism is of no importance.

It seems strange that Saul should have been chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles. His zeal for the Jews' religion would have marked him as entirely unfit for such a task to the man of earthly wisdom. But we forget that human nature has some strange contradictions. It has been affirmed that every miser is a potential spendthrift; every courageous man a potential coward; a scrupulously honest man a potential thief. This may or may not be true. This is left for the psychologist to discuss. If the theory be correct, then the strongest hater may become the strongest lover. Saul despised Gentiles, until he learned that Jesus desired their salvation. His devotion to the newly discovered Messiah induced him to undertake whatever Jesus wanted done. He loved Gentiles as intensely as he had formerly hated them.

It may be, also, that he was called to this special field of ministry because of his logical mind, which fitted him so well for overthrowing the false philosophies of the Gentile world.

But, over and above all these, he was a man on whom the Lord could count absolutely at all times. He would never compromise with heathenism, nor permit Christianity to be adulterated with effete Judaism. He would yield life itself rather than consent to the slightest alteration of the gospel terms of salvation.

He even ventured to pronounce conditional curses on angels when he wrote: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." He then immediately repeats the curse, for emphasis (Gal. 1:8, 9).

Jesus knew the danger that Christianity would be contaminated by being

23 And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him: 24 but their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him: 25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

mixed with heathen cults, and He therefore chose an uncompromising champion of the faith to carry it into those regions.

The rapid degeneracy of the church in the era immediately following the first century illustrated the danger imminent from the beginning. After having had the gospel presented in its purity in the beginning by inspired men, and overseeing the reduction of its doctrines to book form, the Lord left its propagation to men, that their faithfulness might be tested. It is sad to observe many false to that trust.

THE NEW RECRUIT BEGINS RECRUITING

(Verses 19-25.)

Verses 19, 20.—This preaching the faith he had set himself to destroy, immediately after his conversion, attested the sincerity of his conversion. Of course he would be successful.

Verse 21.—The amazement of the people is not to be wondered at. His conduct was little short of miraculous. Scorning Jewish opposition, which soon became deadly in character, he preached with power and success.

Verses 23-25.—The persecutor soon tasted his own medicine. He must have felt that his experience was divine justice.

It is highly probable that he fled to Arabia immediately upon his escape from Damascus enemies, where he must have spent three years. Nothing is said of his activities there, but we know he could not have been inactive. No matter where Paul was, he would preach Jesus as the only Saviour of the world.

He could profitably use three years in Arabia, a land of isolation, for the restudy of Old Testament prophecies and the recasting of his theology, fortifying himself against attacks of Sanhedrinists and arming himself with the true interpretation of inspired prophecy proving Jesus to be the Messiah. God always demands that every man shall do what he can for himself, hence he probably gave Paul the supreme satisfaction of dis-

covering for himself what the prophets really said about the Messiah.

PAUL'S FIRST PREACHING AT JERUSALEM

(Verses 26-30.)

Verse 26.—The distrust of the Jerusalem disciples was natural. They feared Saul was feigning discipleship to learn who were in their ranks, intending to prosecute to the death all whom he might discover.

Verse 27.—Barnabas did a great service to Christianity when he persuaded the disciples of Paul's sincerity. He did so by reciting Paul's experiences at Damascus, and the hearts of the Jerusalem brethren were touched by the suffering of the persecutor.

One of the finest of Christian virtues is that of forgiveness.

Verse 28.—Gal. 1: 18-21 tells of this Jerusalem visit. Gal. 2: 6 states that his interview with other pillars of the Jerusalem church added nothing to his gospel. They all taught the same, for all had the same teacher.

Verses 29, 30.—What a reunion there must have been at Tarsus. How many questions rise in our minds. Did he convert many of his old friends? Were his parents living, and, if so, did they believe? Was he successful in establishing a church? No definite statement concerning these matters is anywhere found, but we know his labor in Tarsus had a large measure of success, for later, when the Antioch church needs the ministry of a man of unusually high order, Barnabas goes to Tarsus and persuades Paul to go with him to the Syrian city and help establish the cause there. We shall learn what a great church they built up there.

It was persecution that drove Paul to Tarsus. This leads us again to note how God's plans are wrought out through wicked men sometimes. It was a strain upon his pride to go back to his boyhood friends and confess to having been mistaken for so long. The gospel demands sacrifices of all who accept it. And all who are true to it will suffer persecution,

26 And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem, 29 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord: and he spake and disputed against the Grecian Jews; but they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

even now. It is a doubtful compliment to a preacher's boldness and faithfulness when all men speak well of him. Because of the heroism required to live a faithful Christian life, many are unwilling to make the attempt, lacking the courage necessary. But to him who does thus live, there is "laid up for him the crown of life."

At the end of his earthly career, while awaiting death in the Roman prison, Paul

looked back over his life with satisfaction and composure. He had given up all that men hold dear to win Christ, had succeeded, and eagerly anticipated "departing and being with Christ," that he might forever be in His presense. Happy is the man who so lives that when he beholds his days swiftly rushing on to the end he is assured that for him his "departure" will be an entrance into eternal joy. Oh, the glorious hope of heaven!

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Luke here tells of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. It is evident that he also is describing a miracle. The miracle was to qualify Saul as an apostle, and was not for the purpose of converting him. A careful study of the narrative shows that the steps he took in conversion were the same as required in all other cases. (Vs. 1-9.)

2. Ananias was disposed to cavil with the Lord because the divine command went contrary to some of his opinions. Men have been known to do the same thing since. Though fully believing and thoroughly repentant with the background of a special miracle behind him, Saul had to be baptized before receiving the promise of forgiveness. This unvarying divine order has never been nullified. (Vs. 10-19.)

3. Note these facts: Saul was a Jew, highly educated, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, trained to be a leader in the Jewish faith, and a fearless, conscientious persecutor of Christians be-

cause he regarded them as heretics. Though fiercely partisan, he was a devoutly religious, praying man. He listened to Stephen's sermon, witnessed his martyrdom, and doubtless heard others preach the gospel. He believed on the Lord Jesus, he repented of his sins, he confessed his faith, he thought he had done everything necessary to make him a Christian, but he lacked one thing. (Vs. 10-19.)

4. Saul amazed the people by preaching Christ with as much zeal as he had used in preaching Judaism. The persecutor became persecuted. He probably spent three isolated years in Arabia in profound study. (Vs. 19-25.)

5. When Saul finally went to Jerusalem to preach Christ the Christians there were suspicious of him, but Barnabas straightened matters out. Being persecuted in Jerusalem, he, as a Christian, went back to his old home town which he had left as a partisan Judaizer. (Vs. 26-30.)

QUESTIONS

1. What was Saul's mission to Damascus? 2. Tell what happened on the Damascan plain. 3. What was the purpose of Jesus' appearance to Saul? 4. What did Jesus personally tell Saul to do? 5. What did Ananias tell him to do? 6. What did Saul do immediately after his conver-

sion? 7. How do you account for Saul's being chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles? 8. Where did he go from Damascus? How did he (probably) spend the time while there? 9. Tell of his trip to Jerusalem. 10. Should a preacher so live that everybody speaks well of him?

LESSON ELEVEN

FURTHER ACTIVITIES OF PETER

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 9:31—10:33

Memory Text.—“So the church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied.”—Acts 9:31.

LESSON PLAN

1. Peter Evangelizing and Healing.
2. “The Dead Are Raised.”
3. A Wonderful Answer to the Prayer of a Remarkable Man.
4. A Jew Puzzled by a Vision.
5. The Puzzle Solved by the Holy Spirit.
6. Preacher and Audience Getting Acquainted.

COMMENTS

Coincident with Saul’s conversion, persecution appears to have lost its virulence. Without doubt, he was the moving spirit in advocating violence to exterminate Christianity.

Its principal foe having become its champion, the church entered upon a period of peace, which time was spent in training converts in the fine art of Christian living and growth in grace and knowledge of the truth.

PETER EVANGELIZING AND HEALING

(Chapter 9: 31-35)

Verse 31.—The word “edified” means that the church was “buildd up” in divine graces. As a result, the character of Christians was so changed that many were led to accept Christ, being won by the godly living of His followers. There is one argument that skeptics have never successfully met—the argument of a life lived in imitation of Christ. When the whole church measures up to its opportunities and responsibilities morally, it will win all who are savable.

Verse 32.—Luke next devotes some space to the labors of Peter. We are glad of this. It would have been a distinct loss to know nothing more about the one to whom the keys were given and by whom they were used so effectually on Pentecost.

While he gives in detail the work of Paul more fully than that of any other apostle, yet he does not overlook the others.

Lydda, the scene of the healing of Æneas, was a town about a dozen miles southeast of Joppa.

Verse 33.—The very affliction of Æneas, having been paralyzed for eight years, would make him a well-known character in that small town. He was, therefore, a wisely chosen individual to become the object-lesson of the power of Christ, as shown through His apostle.

Since miracles were always performed to produce faith in Christ, the wise selection of location and individual to be healed was of much importance.

It was not miraculous that one should recover the use of a paralyzed member of the body, but it was miraculous that one bedridden for eight years should be healed immediately and remain well. News of this wonderful case of recovery would spread like wildfire. The effect was a very general conversion of the people of that locality. “All that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon” is to be understood, of course, as hyperbole.

“THE DEAD ARE RAISED”

(Verses 36-43.)

The incident narrated in the above paragraph has been richly suggestive to ministers and teachers for centuries. The name “Dorcas,” bestowed because it was descriptive, makes it certain that she was a woman of grace and beauty. It means “gazelle.” She was both beautiful and good.

What a power, in a community, is a woman with these two things in her

LESSON TEXT

9: 31 So the church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied.

32 And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all parts, he came down also to the saints that dwelt at Lydda. 33 And there he found a certain man named Æneas, who had kept his bed eight years; for he was palsied. 34 And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise, and make thy bed. And straightway he arose. 35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. 37 And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick, and died: and when they had washed her, they laid her in

favor. A beautiful woman of negative virtue is the worst curse with which any community can be afflicted. On the other hand, a woman like Dorcas is the highest gift God bestows on people.

Beautiful, good, industrious, charitable. What an inspiration for an artist to paint her portrait. These traits should be more frequently found in a holy partnership.

No wonder the whole city felt broken up when she died. How lovingly would the widows caress the cold hands that had sewed useful garments for them, and compare specimens of her handiwork with each other.

No man of wealth was ever able to erect a shaft over his tomb that was comparable to the monument built by Tabitha—the love and esteem of her neighbors.

How sad that any gifted person should fail to leave such a monument. How perverted the tastes and ideals of such people, when they prefer to build up huge fortunes, live in palaces, surround themselves with material luxuries and servants, all of which can give them no pleasure unless it be a pleasure to stir up resentment and envy in others, to living as Dorcas lived.

It is not strange that "Dorcas societies" have sprung up the whole world round. A name like hers is worth infinitely more than a thousand names of self-promoters and pseudo "benefactors." Dorcas should have been a deaconess in the Joppa church; perhaps she was one.

We wonder why the disciples at Joppa sent for Peter when Dorcas died. Was it merely that he might conduct the funeral services, her friends feeling that the death of such a one merited an oration from an apostle? Was he a personal friend of the family, and they desired inspired words of comfort? Or did they

entertain a hope that through him she might be restored to them?

It seems that Peter entered the death chamber without assurance from the Lord that prayer for her resurrection would be answered by granting the petition.

All were sent out while he prayed. He intended asking for her return. But if in the wisdom of God this should be impossible, he would not have the people doubly disappointed and grieved. Should God refuse his request, it would not disturb the faith of Peter, for he knows that God always answers the prayers of His followers when offered aright. He would ask for what he desired, then close with "Not my will, but thine, be done." This was Jesus' instructions on prayer.

Sincerely uttered, these words guarantee God's hearing prayer. We ask for what we think we need. But our lack of foresight, or personal desires, may lead us to ask for what it were better for us we should not receive. Then at the close we say, "Father, if it be better that what we seek should be withheld, and even the thing we most dread or fear should be better for us, then in Thy providence bestow just what is best for us and Thy cause."

This is the only true spirit of prayer, and the only one that is promised an answer.

Understanding this perfectly, Peter intended praying for the life of Dorcas. After the prayer he spoke, "Tabitha, arise."

With what anxiety he must have watched the effect of his command. The thrill of joy when she opened her eyes was second only to that experienced when he first saw his beloved Lord on that resurrection morning. Lifting her up, the company outside were bidden quickly to come in and greet her. Again, the re-

an upper chamber. 38 And as Lydda was nigh unto Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men unto him, entreating him, Delay not to come on unto us. 39 And Peter arose and went with them. And when he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand, and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa: and many believed on the Lord. 43 And it came to pass, that he abode many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

sult of the miracle was that "many believed on the Lord." Peter's joy in seeing conversions as a result of the miracle was greater than in his power to work miracles, or than the satisfaction of restoring Tabitha to her friends even. So, to-day, the supreme joy of a true follower of Jesus is in seeing men and women turning to the Lord.

A WONDERFUL ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF A REMARKABLE MAN

(Chapter 10: 1-8.)

We now come to a study of one of the most interesting and profitable cases of conversion recorded in the New Testament. The record is here, doubtless, because of its epoch-making character. The Holy Spirit selected this as one which He desired Luke to record because of its value as an example, and also for its religious significance.

Let us first notice the character of the man. Cornelius was an Italian, doubtless, a Gentile at any rate, and a captain in the Roman army, serving in that detachment stationed at Cæsarea, the capital of the province of Judea. A permanent barracks would be maintained here, of course.

Of intense religious convictions, he was "devout," a term merely signifying that he was deeply religious, without in itself enlightening us concerning what his faith was. Heathen who are sincere and devoted are "devout."

He also "feared God with all his house." That tells us he was at least a proselyte to the Jewish faith. The true God was worshiped only by Jews. His character was such as to influence his family and servants, who, together, constituted his "house," as that word included all who dwelt under one roof, regardless of personal relationship.

The genuineness of the religious pro-

fessions of the man who leads his family to worship God can not be successfully questioned.

Those living under the same roof with him learn exactly what he is. If there is hypocrisy or weakness anywhere, it is certain to be revealed in the home sooner or later. The finest testimony a man can have is to be regarded as a devout Christian by his family.

He was also liberal, being an almsgiver on a large scale. This is another reliable test of true worth. He was sympathetic, moved by others' necessities, glad to extend relief.

Lastly, he was a man of prayerful habits. Regular hours for exercising that phase of religious life were observed. How rare to find a professional soldier with such a character.

In Cornelius' case we have a fine illustration of a man rising above his environment. Weak men are the creatures of environment. Strong, courageous men *make environment*. They may not be able to control everything about them, but they can control what is within them, and that will soon be reflected on the external conditions surrounding them. The world needs more men who can create an atmosphere of righteousness, even though their duties keep them in places where such influences are rare. This is the way in which the leaven of Christ is to work in the lump of humanity.

Let the student pause a moment here to ask himself whether he ever knew a better man, morally, than Cornelius. His character was so lovable, his motives so pure, that it would seem as if God would expect no more of him than to continue in the same state and conduct, accepting him as one of His children just as he was. Many churches to-day would open their doors to him and receive him into full fellowship on a character test alone.

It is not uncommon to find preachers willing to admit people into the fellow-

10: 1 Now there was a certain man in Cæsarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. 4 And he, fastening his eyes upon him and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter: 6 he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side. 7 And when the angel that spake unto him was departed, he called two of his household-servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8 and having rehearsed all things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 Now on the morrow, as they were on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour: 10 and he became hungry, and desired to eat: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance; 11 and he beholdeth the heaven opened,

ship on the basis of a "character test" if their congregation "would stand for it." But if character alone is to be accepted as the ground for membership in a church, pious Buddhists, Christian Scientists, Mormons, and others must also be admitted. It is a rule of logic that a proposition that proves too much proves nothing.

Before deciding to open the doors of fellowship on this basis, we should study this case to learn what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in connection therewith. If Cornelius was received into the church at Cæsarea just as he was, then we also should receive those who can pass the character test. If anything in addition was demanded of him, we, if true to the Scripture, should demand the same of those like him who seek membership in the church. Let us follow the process of his conversion with care, for his is a model case.

The natural question, "What did Cornelius lack?" will be answered in the next lesson.

"The ninth hour of the day" (3 P. M.) was one of Cornelius' regular prayer periods. While thus engaged, an angel appeared, reminding him that his prayers had been heard, and that his alms-giving had "gone up for a memorial before God."

It is comforting to know that no good thing we do escapes the eye of our God. What was the burden of his prayer is not told in so many words, but we may learn that from a study of the incident. He was assured that his prayer was answered, and then he was told what to do, evidently in fulfillment of his part in the answering of his prayer. He, therefore, must have been petitioning God to let him know what he should do to be saved, for that was what the angel told him, im-

mediately after giving the information that his prayer had been heard.

Note the title Cornelius used in addressing the angel. It was "Lord." This was not a title of nobility, or formal address, but was limited to those to whom the powers of deity were ascribed.

Cornelius knew the one speaking to him was a personality from heaven, but, not knowing any name for him, used the common term, meaning "a divine one."

The careful reader will not overlook the fact that it was habitual for those who followed Jesus to thus address Him. Those who deny or question the virgin birth should be able to draw a significant conclusion from this fact.

Joppa, to which Cornelius was instructed to send messengers, was some forty or fifty miles south on the Mediterranean coast. Another characteristic of the captain, reminding us of Paul, was that of instant obedience to the Lord. As a soldier, he had been trained to such response to a command from a superior.

What regeneration and transformation of both individuals and society would follow if this were the motto of all who pretend to obey Jesus to-day.

Verse 7.—Cornelius' concern to learn what the Lord desired him to do was revealed in his ordering a trusted soldier to accompany the servants sent to Joppa. That would insure the safety of the messengers and expedite their journey. As a soldier, he would come and go under orders limiting his time and movements, and would be obliged to report to Cornelius at a certain hour. God's key-men are always those who can be depended on to act when, and as, ordered.

While the servants and soldier are on their way to Joppa let us transfer ourselves there in advance and see what is transpiring in that interesting seaport.

and a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth: 12 wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts and creeping things of the earth and birds of the heaven. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean. 15 And a voice came unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. 16 And this was done thrice: and straightway the vessel was received up into heaven.

17 Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, 18 and called and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, were lodging there. 19 And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men

A JEW PUZZLED BY A VISION

(Verses 9-16.)

Verse 9.—Simon (Peter) is being entertained by another Simon (the tanner), and they are waiting for the announcement of the noonday meal. Peter had regular prayer hours. One such was at noon.

Verses 11-16.—We do not wonder that this vision perplexed Peter. His strong attachment for the Jewish law made him refuse to eat animals pronounced unclean by that law, even when ordered to do so by a heavenly visitor. (Peter was not quite like Paul in this respect, whose obedience was unhesitatingly rendered, regardless of the command.)

Though he was an inspired man, the Spirit had not yet led him into the work of evangelizing Gentiles. What he had preached thus far was under the guidance of the Spirit, but the fact that the gospel was for Gentiles on the same terms as Jews had not been impressed on his understanding. The illumination of the minds of inspired men was evidently progressive.

Peter's perplexity was all the greater when he saw that sheet, in which not one clean animal could be found, lifted up into heaven, and heard a voice declaring that God had cleansed it. What could it all mean?

THE PUZZLE SOLVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

(Verses 17-23a.)

Verse 17.—How opportune was the arrival of Cornelius' messengers just as the sheet disappeared into heaven! The Spirit, under whose direction this entire incident transpired, was timing the movements of these men as carefully as He did those of Philip and the eunuch.

Verse 19.—It was at this juncture that the Spirit personally commanded Peter to go down, speak to the men and go with

them without hesitancy, assuring him with the words, "I have sent them."

Peter did not then know they were Gentiles. But upon learning whence they came, the meaning of the vision flashed on him with perfect clearness. While he had said in his Pentecost sermon, "The promise is to . . . all that are afar off," unquestionably referring to Gentiles as being included in the gospel plan, it appears that he had not realized the import of his words until this moment. The unclean contents of the sheet symbolized Gentiles, as Peter had hitherto looked on them.

God's receiving them into heaven rebuked him for his narrow Jewish prejudice. To a loyal Jew, who was accustomed to look upon Gentiles as outcasts from God's favor, it was a revolutionary thought that they and Jews should be saved on the same terms.

Racial prejudice is deeply rooted in almost every heart. The Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Germans, even the Negroes in their native land, deem themselves superior to all other races.

As a matter of fact, we are all of one origin, and are all alike under the skin. The motives, vices and virtues, and spiritual possibilities, are much the same in all. The differences observed are due to education and environment largely.

The humility and evident sincerity of Cornelius made a most favorable impression on Peter.

The man chosen to become the first Gentile Christian was wisely selected by the Spirit. Likewise, the man selected to do the preaching was well chosen. His action in visiting a Gentile and declaring that God's terms of acceptance through Christ were the same for all nations, was itself an illustration of the power of the gospel to draw all men into a common brotherhood. Those knowing him would recognize that his conduct in so doing was little short of miraculous, and could

seek thee. 20 But arise, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting: for I have sent them. 21 And Peter went down to the men, and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? 22 And they said, Cornelius a centurion, a righteous man and one that feareth God, and well reported of by all the nation of the Jews, was warned of God by a holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words from thee. 23 So he called them in and lodged them.

And on the morrow he arose and went forth with them, and certain of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the morrow they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his kinsmen and his near friends. 25 And when it came to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and findeth many come together: 28 and he said unto them, Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join himself or come

be accounted for only by some direct divine intervention.

PREACHER AND AUDIENCE GETTING ACQUAINTED

(Verses 23b-33.)

Verse 23.—Peter knew that the apostles at Jerusalem were as little inclined to receive Gentiles as himself, so those six Joppa brethren were taken, that he might have witnesses as to what he did. The Jerusalem brethren would accuse him of treachery to his race, and he proposed not to run the risk of being misrepresented in the matter.

He did not know at that time just what he might be called on to do, but, whatever it was, he desired reliable witnesses to help explain his conduct. He only knew that it was God's will that he go to Cornelius and await Spirit guidance for his conduct when there.

Verse 24.—What an audience Peter had. Cornelius, knowing about what time to expect the soldier, had gathered all in whom he felt a special interest, to hear the wonderful message God was to send by an inspired preacher. With what eager expectancy they must have watched the passing moments. What a quickening of the pulses when the lookout reported the company in sight.

Verse 25.—Cornelius' falling on his face revealed both his ignorance of the true worship and his reverence for things divine. He was accustomed to saluting and being saluted, as a representative of the Roman Empire; now, here was a representative of God, who had sent His angel to him, and as such he felt such reverence was due.

Verse 26.—Peter's rebuke was kindly. But he evidently forgot that he was the Pope! Cornelius to-day could enter the presence of the pretender who claims to

occupy Peter's seat, only on all fours. This single action of Peter is sufficient to give the lie to all Papal pretensions.

Verse 28, seq.—Had Peter not been born again, he never could have made the speech here recorded. In the vision of the sheet God had shown him that no man was unclean. No amount of persuasion could have induced him to enter Cornelius' house before that housetop experience. But once God's will became known, he preaches to the Gentiles because God loves them. He himself, in his action here, was a fine example of the transforming power of the gospel.

His success was due to his earnestness. He had an intense desire to see lost Gentiles saved. Such a desire always produces results. With every modern invention at hand for disseminating information, we take an awful responsibility of being lost ourselves when we trifle with our task, as most of us do. There is no excuse for our remissness.

Verse 33.—The sinner's state of heart has much to do with his acceptance or rejection of the gospel. Paul preached the same gospel to Agrippa that he did to the jailor, and with as much skill. The different results merely reflected the moral difference of the two men. When Cornelius said, "We are all here to hear the things commanded thee of God," Peter must have said to himself, "Man, what a chance!" If preachers now could have such audiences as Peter had that day, they would always have conversions. The trouble with the world to-day is that so few really want to know what God has said.

Too few have learned what obedience really is. Some Christians seem to think one can pay his debt to God by being honest with man and obeying the laws of morality. But God has commands that

unto one of another nation; and yet unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean: 29 wherefore also I came without gainsaying, when I was sent for. I ask therefore with what intent ye sent for me. 30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago, until this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, 31 and saith, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call unto thee Simon, who is surnamed Peter; he lodgeth in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea side. 33 Forthwith therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord.

are tests of obedience, and when we know what they are, if we hesitate or refuse to obey, we can not see the kingdom of God. This age needs some bold, vigorous preaching of the old-fashioned type that tells sinners plainly, both those without and within the church, that to refuse obedience to God's commands or ordinances means the loss of the soul. We simply

can not be saved and do as we please about obeying Jesus Christ in all His teachings.

This world is a testing-place where souls are being trained for service with God. It is a serious thing to know His will, and blessed is he who places himself in the attitude of Cornelius toward learning and doing His will.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. When Saul, the chief persecutor, became a Christian, the church began to build and have peace everywhere. In these verses Luke reverts to the activities of that other apostle, Peter, who healed Æneas, giving all the credit and honor to Jesus Christ. (Vs. 31-35.)

2. At Joppa, the beautifully benevolent Dorcas died, and the disciples sent for Peter who restored her. As a result many believed. Peter rejoiced more because of the conversion than because of ability to work miracles. (Vs. 36-43.)

3. Cornelius, a Roman captain of devoutly benevolent and religious life, doubtless a convert to the Jewish faith, lived in Cæsarea. He had a vision to

the effect that he was to send to Joppa for Peter. (Chap. 10: 1-8.)

4. Peter, the apostle, while in Joppa, had a vision which puzzled him greatly, but which was the companion to the vision of Cornelius. (Vs. 9-16.)

5. The miracle in this case was not designed to convert Cornelius, but to convince Peter who, as a Jew, did not believe in admitting Gentiles into the church of Jesus Christ. (Vs. 17-23.)

6. Cornelius, through ignorance, bowed himself at Peter's feet to worship him, but Peter would have no such demonstration, declaring himself to be but a man, even as was Cornelius. This sets aside Peter's primacy. (Vs. 23-33.)

QUESTIONS

1. What effect did Saul's conversion have on the persecution of the church? 2. Tell of the healing of Æneas. Why was this a strategic case for healing? 3. Tell of the raising of Dorcas. What kind of woman was she? 4. Do you think Peter knew she would rise before his prayer? Why? 5. Why did the disciples send for Peter when Dorcas died? 6. Narrate the vision of Cornelius. Who was he? 7. What can you say of his character? Was he a saved man before his obedience to Jesus Christ? 8. If obedience to ordinances was necessary for

him, what do you think is required of us to-day? 9. Why was a soldier sent along with his servants to Joppa? 10. Have you ever known a better man, morally, than Cornelius? Do you believe morality alone will save one? 11. Tell of Peter's vision at Joppa. What lesson did it teach Peter? 12. Why did Peter take six Joppa brethren with him to Cæsarea? 13. Trace the Spirit's work in bringing sinner and preacher together. 14. Analyze Cornelius' religious state when he was visited by the angel. 15. What kind of preaching is needed to-day?

LESSON TWELVE

CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS AND PETER'S REPORT

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 10: 34—11: 18

Memory Text.—"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."
—Acts 10: 34.

LESSON PLAN

1. God Respects Character, Not Persons.
2. Witnesses to the Resurrection.
3. Amazed Group of Jewish Christians.
4. Peter Explains, but Refuses to Apologize.

COMMENTS

The last lesson closed with the household of Cornelius assembled to hear what message Peter had been authorized by the Holy Spirit to deliver to them. We can imagine the eagerness with which they waited for the answer to Cornelius' question concerning what the Lord desired him to do. The angel had refused to give the message of God to Cornelius himself, further than to assure him that the Lord had heard his prayers and noted with approval his alms. But Peter was to speak unto him words whereby he and his house should be saved. We also are vitally interested in what Peter may have to say to this Gentile, for we belong in his class.

GOD RESPECTS CHARACTER, NOT PERSONS

(Chapter 10: 34-38.)

Verse 34.—What a reassuring word Peter brought at the very beginning of his address. His language made it clear that the idea that "God was no respecter of persons" was as new to him as to them. "I perceive," he said. It was a new perception. Our last lesson showed how the "perception" was driven into his hardened Jewish mind, the miracle of the housetop vision being the hammer.

How glad we should be for this truth. Earth has, of necessity, certain distinctions as to classes. Not all are born with equal endowments, nor with equal opportunities.

God understands this, and will distrib-

ute responsibility according to these endowments and environments. But He refuses to recognize the artificial distinctions we insist upon so determinedly, such as color, culture, race, wealth and office. The ruler is as directly responsible to God as the ruled. The rich must be as good morally, and as hard working, as the poor. The only quality God recognizes, and that on which His whole classification is based, is goodness.

But Peter referred especially in that expression to the law providing for remission of sins. God has no favorites in that respect. All who are saved must be saved on the same terms. What makes a Jew a Christian makes a Gentile a Christian.

What the Lord commands the white man to do he also commands the yellow man to do. Male and female must be obedient to the same laws of pardon. In this day of religious confusion, it is hard to believe this fact, but it is a fact, nevertheless.

Verse 35.—The terms of acceptance are to fear him and work righteousness. "Fear" does not mean exactly that we are to stand in terror of God, unless our lives are evil. In that case it is to our credit to fear in the ordinary sense of the word.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 31). It means that we must exercise every precaution concerning evil, familiarize ourselves with His law of righteousness, and fear to do wrong, knowing that all

LESSON TEXT

10: 34 And Peter opened his mouth, and said,

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him. 36 The word which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) —37 that saying ye yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 even Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree. 40 Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, 41 not to

such conduct will surely be punished. And since God must mete out that punishment, we should fear Him in that sense.

“And worketh righteousness” includes obedience to God’s every command. We can not of ourselves know what right is under all circumstances. This must be revealed to us by the Lord, and Jesus came to give us a full revelation on this subject. Having the teachings of Him and His inspired men, we know what righteousness is—that it consists in keeping all His commandments. It is infidelity to claim righteousness and repudiate or neglect any of the commandments of Christ or the apostles.

Verse 36.—Peter here declares that God sent His word of peace to Israel through Jesus. The “Israel” thus reconciled to God was to be held responsible for carrying the same message of “peace” to the Gentiles. For centuries God had been preparing the Jews for the reception of the new revelation which we know as Christianity. Many of that nation did accept it and lost their Jewish identity as a result. When a Jew became a Christian he entered the fellowship of Gentiles, intermarried with them, was ostracized by his own race, and, of course, his Jewish blood was soon lost to Judaism. Jews of to-day are descended from the hostile official classes of Jesus’ time, largely, and the traditions of centuries make it difficult for them to break with their ancestral faith.

That many Jews have embraced Christianity during the centuries is evident, however, for there are not more Jews now living in the whole world than there were in Christ’s own day, perhaps, and this despite the fact that they almost uniformly have large families.

How aptly is the gospel styled a “gospel of peace.” It is God’s plan for restoring peace between Himself and sinful men; also for establishing and maintaining peace between men themselves. It should not be forgotten that the only abiding peace begins with a reconciliation with God. One not at peace with God can not be at peace, ideally, with his fellow-men. We waste much time these days trying to find a substitute for righteousness as a condition of peace. The angel announcing the birth of Jesus proclaimed “peace among men in whom he is well pleased,” and was not foolish enough to declare that it might be found among any others. It is doubtful if Jesus desires peace among the unrighteous.

He intends giving the world an object-lesson on the results of hate, perfidy, greed and selfishness by permitting all who practice such things to perish in their sins and because of their sins. We shall pin our faith to “gentlemen’s agreements,” leagues of nations and concordats in vain. These will last till it is to the personal interest of one or both of the parties to break the terms, then they will become “scraps of paper.” The fruit of Christianity can not grow on the vine of national ambition.

No man can be truly peaceable who is not first a Christian. How strange that Christian statesmen, and even ministers of the gospel, should deceive themselves into thinking that Christian fruit may be borne on unchristian vines. The world will be transformed just as fast as individual men are transformed, and not one hour faster.

Verse 37.—John’s preaching was not the gospel, but a preparation for it, the gospel itself being preached “after the baptism which John preached.” Galilee

all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid the water,

was the region where Jesus began His preaching.

Verse 38.—Jesus preached effectively because He “went about doing good” and “healing all that were oppressed of the devil.”

Notice that a distinction is made between the two forms of service. The latter refers to His healing bodies; the former, to His spiritual ministrations.

It is good to heal bodies, but it is better to cure sin-sick souls. A soul can be healthy only when it has Jesus’ ideals and perspective of life. That alone enables one to distribute properly the emphasis placed on things temporal and eternal.

WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION (Verses 39-43.)

Verse 39.—Peter hastened over the earthly ministry of Jesus because the general facts concerning Him were quite well known at that time, and he desired to dwell on the most powerful evidence for his deity that could be produced, the fact of His resurrection.

Verse 41.—Their eating and drinking with Him after His resurrection was to make it clear that they could not have been mistaken in their identity of Him. Such intimate relationships would render imposture impossible. The student should appreciate the simplicity of the testimony of the disciples concerning the resurrection of Jesus. It was merely the identification of a person with whom they had been most intimately associated for three years, and from whom they had been separated for only three days. Forty days in His company would make any claim that another had impersonated Him and deceived the disciples very absurd. Nothing is more easily demonstrated than the identity of our best friend after a three-day separation.

Verse 42.—It was the resurrected Christ who commanded the apostles to

preach that He was to be judge of living and dead. After that great miracle of resurrection, they would believe everything He said. The same is true of all who to-day really believe He arose. When any are found questioning the miracles, or any other gospel statement about Him, if honest enough to tell the truth, they would confess to skepticism about His resurrection.

Verse 43.—His judgment will be tempered with mercy, or He would not have authorized them to preach a possible forgiveness of sins. It is not possible for us to realize the depth of such love, sin-stained as we are. It broke His heart, literally, when on Calvary He was bearing the weight of our sins.

One who so loved a sinful race may be trusted to mete out justice with divine comprehension and compassion.

It must not be forgotten, however, that his very love will compel Him to condemn the disobedient. God has no place anywhere in His universe for a disobedient soul, save in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels, and into which they were cast because of disobedience. In nature, everywhere, we see object-lessons of the effects of disobedience. A plant or animal, man or child that disobeys any of the laws of health pays a penalty in disease. Monstrosities result when some of nature’s laws are interfered with. In such a way God would impress on thoughtful men the terrible consequences of neglect or disobedience with reference to His laws. A perfect life is possible when every law of God is perfectly kept. In God’s presence nothing but perfection could hope to abide. Hence the removal from Him of “every one that loveth and maketh a lie.” Wickedness in heaven would overthrow heaven. It would not be heaven. But God desires all whom He has made in His image to be with Him, therefore the plan for forgiveness as perfected through Christ. But, once in His

that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

11: 1 Now the apostles and the brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4 But Peter began, and expounded the matter unto them in order, saying, 5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend-

presence, He will not expose us to moral infection by permitting blasphemous and rebellious lovers of evil to remain in our company. What blessed immunities heaven will have.

AN AMAZED GROUP OF JEWISH CHRISTIANS

(Verses 44-48.)

Peter was no doubt surprised at the interruption of his sermon.

The phenomenon of Gentiles, speaking in tongues, as the apostles did on Pentecost, also amazed the six Joppa brethren who had accompanied Peter. Well it might. It was such a manifestation of Spirit power and control as had been rarely seen.

The question arises, Why this miracle? This can be answered by studying it in its setting here. Miracles were never performed to create wonder and astonishment, nor merely for humanitarian reasons. The evidential element was always dominant.

In this instance, where the house of Cornelius spake in tongues, God had no new revelation to make, but He had a message for the six Joppa brethren whom Peter had taken along expressly that he might have witnesses to the things that transpired in the Gentile's house. Their surprise when they saw and heard Gentiles speaking as the apostles had done on Pentecost may be imagined.

For the first time they had undeniable evidence that God was willing to own Gentiles who were righteous. Immediately their whole conception of God's attitude toward the race was revolutionized. They had been taught that God cared for Jews only, that Gentiles were all scum of the earth in His sight. This scene revealed God as a lover of those whom they despised. If He felt this interest, was there not an obligation laid on Christians to teach and baptize Gentiles also?

Race pride and prejudice are among

the most persistent and blighting characteristics of humanity. "We are the people" is the almost universal feeling. If any be found free from this damning curse, he will be one who has caught Jesus' spirit.

Too few of His followers even are free from guilt in the matter of race pride. Christians who may be very exemplary in their private life speak sneeringly of "Chink," "Dago" and "Sheeny."

These are all "made in the image of God," and to slander or belittle them is to blaspheme God. We can not love the Creator and despise His creature.

This problem of racial differences, capabilities, rights, "spheres of influence," is one of the most serious and disturbing faced by the Christian world today. The world has become one great neighborhood because of modern inventions. Distance has been annihilated. Barriers have been torn down. All men dwell together in a single community. Hitherto the assignment of each race to its proper position of influence and territorial location has been attempted by force, and war has been the method of using this force.

To-day so-called Christian nations are dominant in world affairs. The initiative in solving this most perplexing and threatening problem has been providentially thrust on them.

These governments are passing through God's crucible, being tested to see whether they will rise to a plane of brotherly interest, compassion, justice, unselfishness, such as Jesus taught and lived. If so, they have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." If they fail, the whole race seems doomed to extinction, perishing under the very weight of its material civilization of which it is so proud. If men's prejudices and passions run riot, and modern instruments and inventions of destruction be employed against enemies, a few short years will witness the death of the last

ing, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even unto me: 6 upon which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the heaven. 7 And I heard also a voice saying unto me, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. 8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth. 9 But a voice answered the second time out of heaven, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. 10 And this was done thrice: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11 And behold, forthwith three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Cæsarea unto me. 21 And the Spirit bade me go with them, making no distinction. And these six brethren also accompanied me; and we

man of knowledge and genius. Our very education and resourcefulness will prove our destruction. What a menace our materialistic ideals and progress have become. Now is the time for Christianity to turn the currents of human thinking out of the Satan-made channels of hate, suspicion, bitterness, prejudice, dishonesty and selfishness into the great stream of universal brotherhood as conceived by Jesus Christ. Failure at this critical moment will be fatal to Christianity, and a period blacker than the Dark Ages will be ushered in. This simple religion which Peter preached to Cornelius is the only power that can save us from a deluge of blood and suffering, the like of which the world has not known.

We must not, we dare not, fail to use the opportunity now before us to see that His teaching on brotherhood becomes the basis of all international and inter-racial negotiations and agreements.

Verse 48.—Who were baptized? Cornelius and his house. Were there infants in it? If so, they are not mentioned, nor considered in this connection. The Spirit “fell on all them that heard the word.” Those thus baptized in the Spirit “spake in tongues.” Cornelius had assembled them “to hear all things” that Peter had been commanded to teach. It is very evident from these expressions that no children under the years of accountability were among those baptized.

PETER EXPLAINS, BUT REFUSES TO APOLOGIZE (Chapter 11: 1-18.)

Peter's challenge (v. 47) to the six brethren from Joppa, asking whether any of them dare now refuse baptismal privileges to Gentiles, was unanswered. Of course they could say nothing against it. The purpose of the miracle thus becomes clear.

It was to convince the six Jewish Christians that Gentiles were entitled to

the gospel as well as Jews. It taught them the same lesson that Peter's house-top vision at Joppa had taught him.

We have now studied this case of conversion sufficiently to note the process by which it was brought about, and the relation of the Holy Spirit baptism to it.

As to the process, it was identical with the preceding cases. The gospel was preached, so that “belief cometh of hearing” (Rom. 10: 17), and “hearing by the word of Christ;” sinners, repenting, were baptized into Christ. We know they repented, for in Acts 11: 18 it is said, referring especially to this instance, “Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.”

Their conversion was complete when they had submitted to the Lord in baptism.

Will those who pride themselves on their morality, and rely upon that to save them, give attention to this case for a moment? Are you better than Cornelius? Do you do as much in a religious and charitable way as he did? It is safe to say you are not his superior morally. But he was not saved when Peter entered his home. Acts 11: 14 tells us that Peter was sent to speak words whereby he might be saved. This may startle, but it is the testimony of God's truth. Cornelius was not saved till he had obeyed Christ in baptism. Nowhere in the Bible is there a promise that morality alone will save any one. Our salvation depends on our being in covenant relationship with Christ, and that is entered by faith, repentance and baptism into His name.

As Peter expected, when he returned to Jerusalem, he was summoned to give an account of his going into a Gentile's house, and eating with them. This by Jews who had become Christians.

It seems that it was almost impossible for the followers of Moses to realize that when a law was “fulfilled” it was obsolete.

entered into the man's house: 13 and he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14 who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. 17 If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God? 18 And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.

It must have been a solemn gathering. (Those Jerusalem Christians had evidently not learned that Peter was a pope, and therefore infallible, and not to be reprov'd for anything.)

The student will note that Peter gave a full account, being careful to mention both miracles in connection with the incident, calling on the Joppa brethren for confirmation of his narrative. He was patient in explaining his conduct, for a few days before he had been under the same delusion as they.

His closing exclamation, "Who was I, that I could withstand God!" shows that the miracles were no part of the process of conversion, but God's plan for enlightening both Peter and the brethren accompanying him as to God's willingness to receive Gentiles.

This is a proper place to study the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In verse 16 Peter identifies what occurred at the home of Cornelius with what happened to the Jerusalem disciples on Pentecost, both miracles being the same, and states they were in fulfillment of Jesus' promise to "baptize in the Holy Spirit." This is perfectly plain.

It will not be overlooked that in both cases those baptized spake in tongues—a miraculous gift. We are justified then in believing that Holy Spirit baptism was always for the purpose of conferring miraculous gifts. It was no part of the process of conversion, for in one instance it was the preachers who received it, and in the other it was the audience. Nor was it to prepare the Gentiles for baptism, for this is the only instance where it was conferred on those not Christians. But, as already stated, in each case it was a miracle, designed for a peculiar purpose.

That Holy Spirit baptism was *not* the baptism which Jesus commanded the disciples to preach is evident from the following facts. First, Jesus was to do the

baptizing in the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 3: 11; Acts 1: 5; 11: 16.) Second, nowhere is there a hint that the apostles ever preached anything about it. Third, when administered, it came as a distinct surprise. No one was expecting it, nor were they commanded to do anything to receive it.

From this Scriptural induction we are justified in believing that it was an outpouring of power personally administered by Jesus (Acts 2: 33), always attended by miraculous phenomena, and as a manifestation of divine approval was limited to the apostolic age. Since that time no authenticated instance of miracle has occurred.

It is unfortunate that some good people misunderstand the plain facts set forth above, and claim a baptism of the Spirit for themselves. We have a perfect right to ask them to prove such a favor by speaking in tongues. They confuse the indwelling of the Spirit, as promised to every Christian, with the baptism. The Spirit takes up His abode in the heart of the Christian as an abiding guest, a comforter and advocate. In this way He helps our infirmities, strengthens us mightily and doubtless performs a thousand ministrations for us in ways of which we know nothing. He helps in overcoming temptation. His presence in our hearts is one of the Lord's methods of making a way of escape from every temptation. And He enables no one today to perform miracles.

The church, like every divine institution of which we know, and every order of creation, began in miracle and is continued by law. In its beginning everything must have been created by miracle. Whether the order of oak-trees began with an acorn or an oak, we can not say, but for either to exist without the other would be a miracle, and in the beginning one of them was without the other. But, once begun, nature's law perpetuates the

order, each seed bringing forth after its kind.

By means of the law of conversion, souls are born into the kingdom of God, and they are cultured by the law of spiritual growth. But in the beginning of the kingdom miracles abounded—suf-

ficient to thoroughly demonstrate God's presence in it.

They then ceased, and we carry it on by following the laws of regeneration laid down in the New Testament. In this we "are laborers together with God."

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Continuing the study of the conversion of Cornelius, it is evident that the revealed fact that "God is no respecter of persons" was new to both Peter and his audience. Through Christ the terms of salvation became universal in application. (10: 34, 35.)

2. The introduction of the gospel plan produces friction among those who refuse to understand it, but by the fair-minded it is seen to contain the only conceivable basis of peace among men. (Vs. 36-38.)

3. Peter's discourse placed prime emphasis upon the resurrection and the fact that it was abundantly witnessed. He thus set forth in unqualified fashion the deity of our Lord. (Vs. 39-43.)

4. Everybody present was astounded at the miracle of Gentiles speaking in tongues. As remarked in the previous lesson, this miracle was to convince Peter and his Jewish friends that Gentiles were

embraced by the terms of the gospel. The miracle was intended to tear down all middle walls and partitions of prejudice and race hatred. Has the world been clear-eyed enough to see this? (Vs. 44-48).

5. Cornelius' household was baptized, but none but adults could answer the description given. The essential steps of Cornelius' conversion were the same as the essential steps in all conversions under the gospel of Christ. The miracle had a special design that in no way disturbed the universal plan and its terms. (11: 1-8.)

6. The plain facts set forth here and elsewhere show that miracles have had no place in the divine plan since the days of the apostles. The church began in miracle, but is continued by obedience to the law of Christ and by growth in His love and grace. (Vs. 1-18.)

QUESTIONS

1. How does the law of salvation for the Jew differ from that for the Gentile? 2. What does it mean to "fear God"? 3. What did Peter mean by "working righteousness"? 4. How is the gospel a "gospel of peace"? 5. How can a God of love punish disobedient sinners? 6. Discuss the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." 7. What was the purpose of that baptism at Pentecost? At the house of Cornelius? 8. Are people baptized

with the Spirit to-day? Why? 9. What responsibility rests upon Christians with respect to race prejudice? 10. Should a sinner receive water baptism before he has received the baptism of the Spirit? 11. Will morality alone save one? Did you ever know a better man than Cornelius? 12. In what respect is the church like nature, in its relationship to miracle and law? 13. In carrying on the Lord's work now, what takes the place of miracles?

LESSON THIRTEEN

CONTINUED GROWTH OF CHURCH AND
PERSECUTION BY HEROD

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 11: 19—12: 24

Memory Text.—“The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”
—Acts 11: 26.

LESSON PLAN

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| 1. Antioch Situation Investigated. | 4. James Martyred, Peter Delivered. |
| 2. A New Preacher and a New Prophet at Antioch. | 5. A Prayer-meeting Interrupted by Prayers Being Answered. |
| 3. The Church Must Be Missionary. | 6. Herod's Humiliating Death. |

COMMENTS

ANTIOCH SITUATION INVESTIGATED.

(Chapter 11: 19-24.)

At this point Luke resumes his narrative of the labors of those driven out of Judea by persecution. Satanic opposition again furthers the success of the gospel. Will the world ever learn that forcible suppression acts as a hotbed for the propagation of any teaching? If so, it will depend upon the force inhering in truth itself to overthrow error. Censorship is almost always a questionable procedure.

Verse 19.—Tyre and Sidon were the prominent cities of Phœnicia, and, true to Jesus' prophecy in Matt. 11: 21, 22, soon had influential churches of Christians. Cyprus was the largest island in the eastern Mediterranean, the old home of Barnabas, of whose labors there we shall soon learn. Antioch was in Syria, near the sea, and a very important city commercially. All the above places were evangelized by “scattered disciples.” These brave Christians fled to save their lives, there being no sufficient reason for martyrdom, but would not renounce their faith in Christ.

There are many opportunities to-day for disciples isolated from their brethren to establish churches, beginning perhaps with a prayer-meeting or Bible school in their own homes, and observance of the Lord's Supper. Wherever such an opportunity is found it is a duty

to use it. A large number of strong churches had their beginning in this manner. Any one has a perfect right to establish a church of the New Testament order anywhere, unless it unquestionably would infringe on the territory of other New Testament churches.

The churches referred to in this verse were founded by Palestinian Jewish Christians, doubtless, for they “preach to Jews only.” They were filled with the current Jewish prejudice.

They had not heard of Peter's vision and the event at Cæsarea.

Verse 20.—Among the refugees were some from localities outside Palestine, whose contact with Gentiles had made them more tolerant.

Cyrene was on the north coast of Africa, west of Egypt.

Verse 21.—The large number of Greeks who accepted the gospel attested the approval of the Lord upon their venture. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that their conversion was proof of his apostleship to them. Here scattered disciples proved their right to preach by the results obtained. The “fruit argument” is one impossible to answer. That alone is sufficient authority for any one's preaching, if he be personally faithful.

Verses 22-24.—It is not quite clear whether the Jerusalem brethren sent Barnabas to investigate the situation and report to them, or whether they sent him to assist and encourage the Antioch church in its missionary activity among

LESSON TEXT

11: 19 They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phœnicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord. 22 And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas as far as Antioch: 23 who, when he was come, and had seen the grace of God, was glad; and he exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the

Greeks. If his visit followed Peter's report, as contained in the eleventh chapter, it is more than probable that the latter alternative prompted them.

In any event, he approved what he found there.

What a preacher he must have been! His name means "son of consolation," bestowed upon him, doubtless, because of his power in exhortation and comforting troubled souls. What would we not give to have a sample of his sermons.

What an epitaph for his monument the twenty-fourth verse would make.

Who would not be happier to have such an inscription truthfully written on the slab erected to his memory, than to leave a fortune of millions? If we knew where his body is buried, we would feel tempted to erect a memorial and write that verse on it.

He was the type God calls great. God's measure of greatness is not an intellectual yardstick, not a dollar sign, not a unit of earthly fame or achievement. It is a spiritual thermometer of goodness only. The best man morally is God's greatest man.

We shall doubtless be surprised when we read the Roll of Honor on heaven's record tablet. We may find the names of those whom we have so highly honored as religious leaders far down in the list, if at all, and read at the top thousands of whom we never heard. What a host of kingdom builders have lived and died unknown outside a very limited circle! There is comfort for us all in the knowledge that God does not regard our deeds from the same standpoint that men do.

A NEW PREACHER AND A NEW PROPHET AT ANTIOCH

(Verses 25, 26.)

Verse 25.—This journey was made because the work begun by the Judean

refugees had expanded with such rapidity that additional teaching and pastoral care became a necessity. Barnabas, the man who first vouched for Paul at Jerusalem (Acts 9: 27), went personally to Tarsus seeking Paul. It was a merited compliment to the young man to be thus sought out. It is a distinct honor to be thought of in connection with a different or growing work.

One can not but wonder whether Paul had so built up the cause in Tarsus that his fame reached Antioch, or whether Barnabas was providentially guided to seek his services for the Syrian city.

Verse 26.—The Antioch church had grown in grace and the knowledge of the truth, under the ministry of the good men serving it, until the Christlikeness of its members led to their being named for the head of the church—"Christians." They had been called "disciples" from the earliest days of Jesus' personal ministry.

The word "disciple" means "pupil" or "learner." It was a fitting term to apply to those who had progressed to a certain degree of knowledge and obedience to the Lord. But when the life lived by His followers had become so much like that of the Master Himself, it was proper that a name suggestive of their advancement be used in referring to them. "Christian" means more than "disciple," though in a sense they are synonymous.

We can not be dogmatic, perhaps, as to whether the name was first used by enemies, in derision, or by divine authority, but it is quite certain that it is sanctioned by inspiration in 1 Pet. 4: 16. Because of this, and its acknowledged fitness as a designation for Christ's followers, it has always seemed to the writer to have been divinely authorized. Some Greek scholars insist that the form of the verb "were called"

Lord: 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. 25 And he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that even for a whole year they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people; and that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

27 Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius. 29 And the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judæa: 30 which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

12: 1 Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And those were the days of unleavened

necessarily implies that it was done by divine direction. Others question that. It is certain, however, that the Jews would not have called them Christians, for the name "Christ" meant "Messiah," and they would not associate a name sacred to them with a people whom they despised and persecuted. Nor is there any evidence that the name was given by Gentiles. On the whole, the probability is that they called themselves by that name when they felt worthy to so use it. It is undoubtedly the one preferable to all others for Christ's followers to use to-day. Every disciple of Jesus is proud to wear it, and it is the only one all will consent to bear. The church is the bride of Christ, and should honor Him by wearing His name, rather than that of some man or system of government or doctrine or ordinance. It will be a long step toward unity when all Christians will be satisfied with that name only, and refuse to answer to any other, for unity in name will hasten unity in other matters. Paul in 1 Cor. 3: 3-8 brands the use of human names in a sectarian sense as sinful. In Eph. 5: 14, 15 he states that the whole family in heaven and earth is named for Christ, so there will be only "Christians" in heaven. It is a pity that we are so partisan here that we are unwilling to use exclusively the divine name.

THE CHURCH MUST BE MISSIONARY

(Verses 27-30.)

It may be worth while to call attention to the fact that this holy name was bestowed on the Antioch brethren about the time they decided to send out two of their best preachers on a missionary tour. So far as known, this was the

first concerted action in behalf of the missionary cause. Earlier labors had been independent and individual. This was congregational.

The church decided to be responsible for preaching the gospel in the regions beyond, and selected their ablest and most consecrated preachers for the task. It was when the missionary spirit and zeal seized the church that it was found worthy to bear its Founder's name. It was then "about its Father's business," and was imitating Jesus as well as obeying His command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

No anti-missionary, or o-missionary, church has a right to call itself "Christian." A Christian will be doing what Christ commands, and one of His commands is to go into all the world with His gospel.

The growth of the Antioch church was phenomenal under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. The careful reader will not overlook the character of their preaching. "They taught much people." Teaching the Word of truth constituted a large part of the work of ministering in an apostolic church, and should have a much larger place than it usually has to-day.

Strong, intelligent churches, loyal to the Lord in all things, can only be built up by teaching. The church of the next generation will emphasize the importance of this work more or it will fail. Error can be uprooted only by teaching truth in its place, and the religious world is full of entrenched error. Immediate results may not be so noticeable where teaching is relied on mainly as the means of church growth, but permanent and healthy growth never comes in any other way.

bread. 4 And when he had taken him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarters of soldiers to guard him; intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people. 5 Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him. 6 And when Herod was about to bring him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and guards before the door kept the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the cell: and he smote Peter on the side and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And he did so. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9 And he went out, and followed; and he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. 10 And when they were past the first and the second guard, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth into the city; which opened to them of its own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and straightway the angel departed from him. 11

Verse 28.—Agabus, introduced here as a Jerusalem prophet, will be met later in a similar role. His reputation was well established, for the disciples had such unquestioning faith in the accuracy of his predictions that they immediately began gathering funds for famine relief even before the famine came. This proves both his inspiration and his reputation as a true prophet.

The incident gives a beautiful insight into the benevolent and charitable activities of a church ministered to by inspired men. One mark of an apostolic church is generosity.

The poor we have always with us. It is always famine time for some of God's children somewhere. We have almost daily opportunity to test the truth of Jesus' epigram, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Giving to the poor and for the support of Christ's kingdom is the only way we can lay up treasures of money in heaven. The amount we give here determines the amount of our credit balance on the books of the recording angel.

Not the literal sum, perhaps, but the gift as expressed in terms of sacrifice. What we give we have eternally. What we keep here we lose forever. God's bookkeeping is not like ours. It may not be amiss at this point to direct attention to a fatal mistake some people make about their giving. They keep their property till death, then give it by will, imagining they will receive credit for that amount in heaven. That can not be. What I keep and use for myself here I can not give after I die. Such giving may be entirely a good thing to do, under certain circumstances, but it is not giving, because I used it as long as I could.

It is a peculiar conception of property

rights that permits one to dictate by will what shall be done with what he leaves, perhaps hedging it about by certain conditions that will work hardships on coming generations, or prevent progress. For the hand of a dead man to control wealth a thousand years after he has gone is a most absurd situation indeed. Suppose I will a farm, richly underlaid with coal, to a benevolent work, stipulating that the coal shall never be mined, under penalty of the farm reverting to my heirs. Future generations may suffer with cold, but my foolish restriction will prevent mining the coal. We need a few statesmen big enough to show us the iniquity of some of our established business and legal procedures.

For the benefit of some who teach today that a prophet was merely "one who spake for God," and did not possess forecasting ability, we call attention to the fact that New Testament prophets, as well as Old, *did* possess the powers of seers. The man who merely preaches righteousness, and has no inspired insight into the future, is no prophet.

Verse 30.—This visit of Barnabas and Paul is doubtless the same as referred to in chap. 24:17, and again in Gal. 2:1, *seq.*

In the latter passage Paul states that he "went up by revelation," though this fact is not mentioned in the preceding places.

To read the statements in Acts we would imagine that his going was entirely on his own initiative. This is mentioned for emphasis.

JAMES MARTYRED, PETER DELIVERED

(Chapter 12:1-10.)

This was Herod Agrippa I. His reign was popular at Rome, and he was re-

And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a truth, that the Lord hath sent forth his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. 12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together and were praying. 13 And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid came to answer, named Rhoda. 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for joy, but ran in, and told that Peter stood before the gate. 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she confidently affirmed that it was even so. And they said, It is his angel. 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened, they saw him, and were amazed. 17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him forth out of the prison. And he said, Tell these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went to another place. 18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir

warded by having his territory enlarged till at last he ruled over all Palestine, with Perea in addition.

He desired to please the Jews, and, noting the growing breach between their leaders and the Christians, he shrewdly undertook to add to his popularity by drastic persecution of the latter.

It is unnecessary to say that he had no excuse whatever for so doing, for Christians were taught to be law-abiding people, caring not whether Rome ruled or Jews regained their independence.

Verse 2.—This was a case of plain murder. James was the brother of John, the beloved apostle. It will be remembered he enlisted his mother to solicit a promise from Jesus for a chief cabinet position in His kingdom. When asked if he could drink Jesus' cup and be baptized with His baptism, he answered confidently in the affirmative. He thought it would be a cup of joy and a baptism of honor and glory. Jesus' sad reply, "You shall indeed drink my cup and be baptized with my baptism," was prophetic of the event Luke has just told us here. As he was led to the block he must have recalled that conversation with Jesus. If a place of special honor is reserved in heaven for martyred saints, it is legitimate to suppose that one of the highest was given this first martyr among the apostles.

We are surprised that Luke tells the whole story of the execution of James in two short verses. It is not natural to deal thus briefly with such events as the unjust killing of one in exalted station. An ordinary historian could not have resisted the temptation to extend the story, at least sufficiently to give the charge against the accused and state his defense. This is mentioned to again call attention to the indirect evidence in favor of the inspiration of the New Tes-

tament writers. Uninspired writers would have written differently.

Verse 3.—The execution of James was a "feeler" to ascertain what effect it might have on Herod's popularity with the Jews. If they disapproved, no more would be ordered. If they approved, he would "proceed with caution" to include others in his list of murders, being careful not to raise too vigorous a protest from sympathizers with Christians, lest the report be borne to Rome that he was not administering justice in his province.

His experiment proved that he had guessed right, so Peter was apprehended.

Verse 4.—Herod's care in guarding Peter is interesting. A "quaternion" consisted of sixteen soldiers, detailed as a special guard, four being on watch for three hours, twelve being at rest, when a change would be made, four new ones going on, and the relieved detail having nine hours of rest. This was precisely the same arrangement made by Pilate when the Jews asked for a guard for the tomb of Jesus. Why this precaution on Herod's part?

He had not forgotten that Peter had been delivered from prison a little while before (Acts 6:17-23), without the knowledge of jailor or guards, and he proposed to take no chances in this instance.

Men are slow to learn that it is impossible for them to contend against God. Enough had already happened in Jerusalem to convince the most skeptical that God was with the disciples, but stiff-necked, religious bigots are about the hardest to convince of their blunders in both doctrine and conduct. The Sanhedrin would not have listened if God had sent Gabriel himself into their presence to plead for justice when Jesus was on trial. Religious stubbornness. What a sin.

among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the guards, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea, and tarried there.

20 Now he was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: and they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was fed from the king's country. 21 And upon a set day Herod arrayed himself in royal apparel, and sat on the throne, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people shouted, saying, The voice of a god, and not of a man. 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

What would be Peter's emotions when jailed for execution at the very feast during which Jesus was crucified? He was not expecting release, and escape was out of the question. The few days in prison would give memory a chance to parade before him his own perfidy and denial at that trial of Jesus, and overwhelming sorrow would flood his soul. But now he does not deny. He does not shrink from torture or death. Simon has truly become "Peter"—"rock." The Lord knew the material in Peter's soul, and knew he would triumph over weakness at last. It is not stumbling, nor even falling, that marks one for contempt. Many great and noble souls have done that. It is the man who makes no effort to atone for mistakes that is contemptible. Peter sinned, but he could gloriously repent. This made him great.

Verse 9.—He had resigned himself to death this time, as is evident from what Luke tells us in this story. Peter thought his delivery merely a vision.

A PRAYER-MEETING INTERRUPTED BY PRAYERS BEING ANSWERED

(Verses 11-19.)

Verse 12.—There is a tradition that this was the house of Mary, sister of Barnabas, mother of Mark, the place where the last Supper was eaten.

Verse 15.—The incredulity of the praying company is not hard to understand. They knew that delivery of Peter was, humanly, impossible. Some have expressed wonder at their unbelief in being told that their prayers had been answered. But there is no evidence that they were praying for Peter's release. They seem to have abandoned all hope of that. It is likely that, remembering Peter's previous denial when facing danger, they were praying that this time his courage fail not. Peter was calmly await-

ing the sword, and had he been brought out for death, this time he would not have denied.

The prayers of the devout company of friends availed much for him.

How comforting to know the angels of God are about his people. If our eyes could be opened to see the heavenly hosts hovering over us to "do service" for us (Heb. 1:14), how the fact would strengthen. "The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear him." Jesus said the angels of young believers always behold the face of the Father. The fleshly body we now have cuts us off from the spiritual world, but that is the real abiding world nevertheless. We are learning to live by faith here. When that lesson is learned, we may live by sight. We are now in a disciplinary school. We may not know all about the purpose of such a training, but we know it is for the best. Blessed the man who learns to live by faith. God loves him. The angels minister to him. Men admire him. Succeeding generations will call him blessed. Heaven will crown him at last.

We may infer that the disciples believed that each believer had a special angel detailed to watch over him. I like to believe that is true. Who can tell the mighty service such beings render, through the directions of the Holy Spirit, promised to every Christian?

Verse 17.—This James was not the apostle, of course, but the one who wrote the Epistle of James, the brother of Jesus.

Verse 19.—A sad fate for the innocent soldiers, but it is ever so. All connected with injustice and unrighteousness in any way, whether personally guilty or not, must suffer because of it. That should cause us all to hate sin with all our being.

HEROD'S HUMILIATING DEATH.

(Verses 20-24.)

Diplomacy is not new. The influential Blastus was first "approached," and he made the overtures to Herod. Tyre and Sidon depended on Herod's territory for food, hence the eagerness of their inhabitants for "peace" with Herod. Hunger has signed many treaties. Herod was a great orator. He outdid himself on that occasion, and the fawning beggars for crumbs from his table cried out, "The voice of a God." Like

the Kaiser, he was stricken when his pride reached its height. Josephus also describes the awful death of this king, giving additional details ("Antiq." XIX., VIII. 2).

What a lesson for human vanity. Using his ability to profit personally, both in wealth and honor, instead of for the service of his fellows, Herod blindly followed his conceited course. A shameful abuse of God-bestowed gifts.

His fate should warn every gifted man to use his gifts so that he can joyfully face God in judgment.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Luke here resumes his story of those scattered by persecution. Tyre and Sidon, Cyprus, Antioch and other places, were evangelized by them. Many of the strongest churches were begun this way. The same may be said of the success of modern Christianity. (11: 19-24.)

2. When the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch the church was strengthened, as is always true under the ministry of a great and good man. Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch. Two great men! In those days the church sent out its ablest and best to preach the gospel. (Vs. 25, 26.)

3. The church of Jesus Christ is necessarily missionary. Antioch sent out two of her best men about the time she adopted the name "Christian." The missionary spirit made her worthy of such a name. The Antioch church grew as its missionary zeal grew. The light that shines farthest is brightest at home. (Vs. 25, 26.)

4. About this time a faithful prophet named Agabus foretold a famine, and immediately the Antioch brethren determined to send relief to the brethren in

Judea. True Christianity not only makes men missionary, but also makes them benevolent and unselfish. (Vs. 27, 28.)

5. It is to be noted that Old and New Testament prophets were not only great teachers of the wisdom of the past and present, but were also inspired seers with ability to accurately foretell events in the future. (V. 27.)

6. Herod Agrippa killed James and sought to kill Peter to please those Jews who hated the growing church. This horrible move was a political "feeler." What will a vain, selfish man not do to make himself "solid"? Peter was miraculously delivered and went to the home of the mother of John Mark. The enemies of Jesus Christ are slow to see the hand of God in the persistent triumph of truth. (12: 1-10.)

7. Even Peter's friends were astounded at his delivery. There are some situations that cause the profoundest faith to give up and say, "Thy will be done." But Peter escaped and Herod met a horribly tragic death at the hand of God. His power, cruelty and shrewdness were not enough to save him. (Vs. 11-24.)

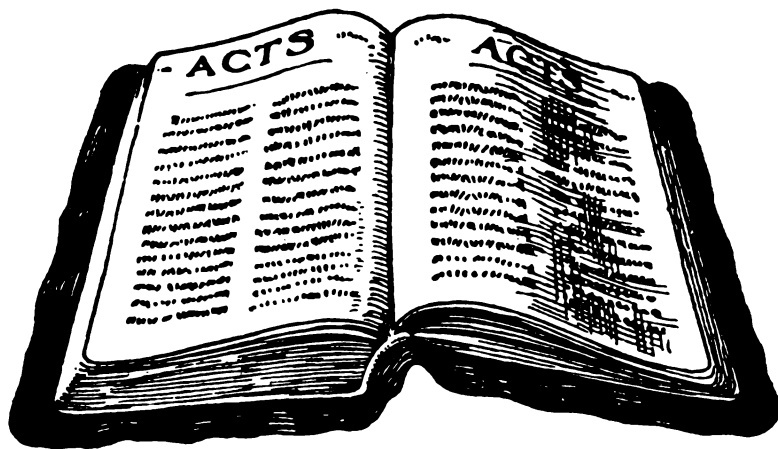
QUESTIONS

1. What was the effect of persecution in spreading the gospel? 2. What is the duty of a disciple to-day who is deprived of the privilege of worship in a New Testament church? 3. Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch? 4. What made him a great man? 5. What results attended the joint labors of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch? 6. Tell of the visit of Agabus and its results. 7. What new

name was given the disciples at Antioch? Why bestowed? 8. Why should that name be used by Christians to-day? 9. What obligation is laid on Christians to give? 10. What do you think of making gifts by will? 11. Tell of the death of James. 12. Narrate the imprisonment and release of Peter. 13. How do angels serve us? 14. Tell of Herod's death, and give the moral of his life.

STUDIES IN ACTS

PART TWO



CHAPTERS 12: 25—28: 31

By
W. R. Walker

STUDIES IN ACTS

PART TWO

Embracing Acts 12: 25—28: 31

For Adult and Young People's Classes

By W. R. WALKER

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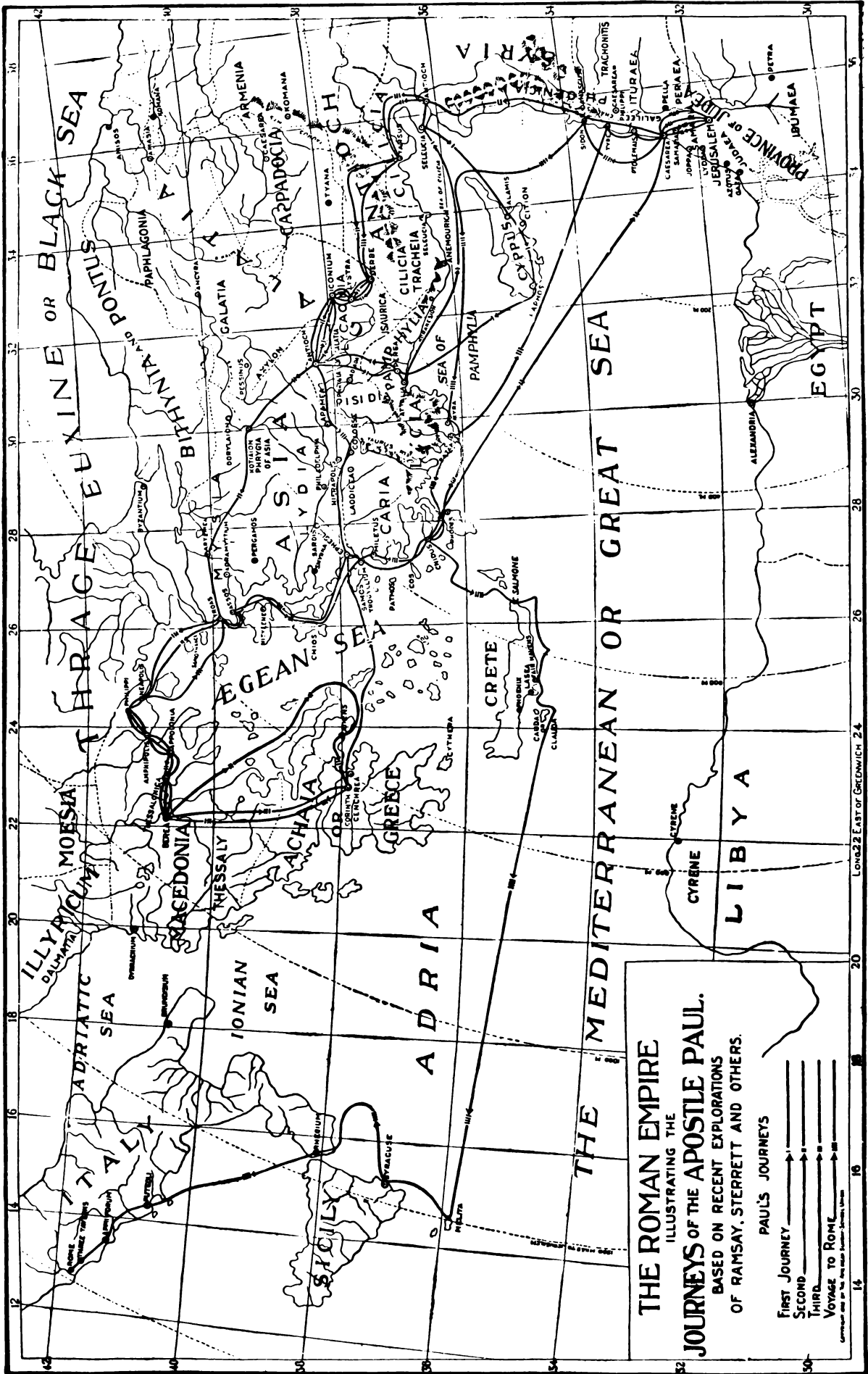
A WORD ABOUT THESE LESSONS

Again we call your attention to the importance of making the “Lesson Condensed” and the “Questions” of each lesson the basis of your classwork in order to get through within your time limit.

Each member of the class should carefully study the entire lesson at home and come prepared to contribute to the general interest in this important and fascinating study.

Probably no book in the New Testament has been so greatly neglected as the Book of Acts, and yet it contains all the necessary instruction to enable us to carry on the church of Christ according to apostolic principles and practice.

EDITOR.



This Map, for Wall of Schoolroom, Lithographed on Muslin, size 36x58 inches. Sent by mail for \$2.00

STUDIES IN ACTS

By W. R. WALKER

PART II. CHAPTERS 12:25—28:31

LESSON FOURTEEN

FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR OF PAUL (WITH BARNABAS)

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 12:25—13:49

Memory Text.—“And the word of the Lord was spread abroad throughout all the region.”—Acts 13:49.

LESSON PLAN

1. A New Missionary “Volunteer.”
2. An “Ordination” of Missionaries.
3. Power of God Stronger than Sorcery.
4. Another Antioch Entered.
5. Skillful Introduction of the Christ.
6. Jesus’ Death according to Prophecy.
7. Jesus’ Resurrection according to Prophecy.
8. Remission through Jesus Christ.
9. A City Stirred.

COMMENTS

A NEW MISSIONARY “VOLUNTEER”

(Chapter 12:25.)

The “ministration” of Barnabas and Paul was the distribution of relief sent by the Antioch church to Jerusalem Christians, as narrated in Acts 11:27-30. This was a gracious act on the part of the Gentile church at Antioch, serving to soften Jewish prejudice toward Gentile Christians, thus aiding in preventing a split in the ranks of the church at the beginning.

A more reliable testimony that the Gentiles had really accepted Jesus’ teaching could not have been given. One of Christianity’s best arguments for its being divine is found in what it leads men to do.

Mark was one of the evangelists, and the one who wrote the Gospel bearing his name. He was a nephew of Barnabas. See Acts 12:12.

AN “ORDINATION” OF MISSIONARIES

(Chapter 13:1-3.)

Verse 1.—The Antioch here mentioned is in Syria, the place where Christians received that name, and should be carefully distinguished from another city of the same name in Pisidia. It was a city commercially important, with a lesser fame as an intellectual center, located about fifteen miles inland from Seleucia, its seaport. In a suburb about five miles out was the Grove of Daphne, famous for its licentious orgies. It is remarkable that a church springing up in such an environment should lead all others in spiritual insight and missionary zeal. This was due to the number and character of their religious leaders, several of whom are named.

Symeon received his name “Niger” from his dark complexion, probably, that being the meaning of the word.

LESSON TEXT

12: 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark.

13: 1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John as their attendant. 6 And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus; 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of

Lucius of Cyrene, a city of northern Africa, has been identified by some with Luke, but there is no historical basis of it.

Manaen was foster-brother of Herod Antipas, being reared in the same house with him, perhaps nourished at the same breast.

Christian influence in Herod's home is also indicated in the reference to Joanna, wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward who was one of the women "who ministered to Jesus with her substance" (Luke 8: 3.)

The interest shown by Herod Agrippa, when permitted to hear Paul (Acts 26), is not to be wondered at.

These men were called "prophets and teachers." They had received special endowment from the Holy Spirit, imparting prophetic gifts, and used their natural and acquired ability to edify and train the church. What a blessing to a church is such a company of teachers. The most serious lack in churches to-day is that of trained leadership. The lamentable dearth of true preachers makes it imperative that the church provide opportunity for such training or lose her position. More of our consecrated young people must be given Christian education that will equip them for local leadership.

The office of "teacher" is magnified in the New Testament far above the palce assigned it in churches to-day. We are on the eve of a revival of Scriptural emphasis on this honored position.

The church of to-morrow will be one where teaching is stressed above organization, equipment, or, perhaps, even preaching. The teaching preacher will be in demand.

Verse 2.—Leads us to believe that teaching is called "ministering to the Lord." Of course it is. It is fulfilling Christ's great commission to go and "teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things" He has commanded.

We "minister to the Lord" when we obey any of His commandments, and when teaching others His will, that they may continue His work in the world, the farthest-reaching work conceivable is being done.

It is significant that the first definite missionary enterprise, on the part of a congregation as a whole, grew out of a season of prayer and fasting. When an entire congregation prays, it is damaging to any spirit of complacent indifference it may harbor. It is certain to arouse dissatisfaction with its mere routine activities and stimulate to larger and more sacrificial undertakings. It always creates discontent with present attainment.

Prayer is a disturbing thing in a church.

Verse 3.—A formal ordination or setting apart of these men was fitting. The hand of blessing and approval by the church was laid on their heads, and they were probably guaranteed against want by assurance of support by the church. A service like that would make a deep impression, especially on the young people. It is a solemn, but blessed, moment when any church lays hands on one of its members, sending him forth to the work of extending the kingdom of Christ. The Holy Spirit calls as insistently to-day as then for workers to enter new or needy fields.

understanding. The same called unto him Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith. 9 But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him, 10 and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

13 Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. 14 But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and they went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. 15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16 And Paul stood up, and beckoning with the hand said,

Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, hearken: 17 The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high

Who of the young people studying this lesson will respond to the call?

POWER OF GOD STRONGER THAN SORCERY

(Verses 4-13.)

Verse 4.—It was the distinct mission of the Holy Spirit to superintend the preaching of the gospel throughout the world. Jesus promised the Spirit's guidance to the apostles for that purpose, and we here have an illustration of the fulfillment of that promise.

Barnabas, perhaps because of his age or priority of service, seems to have been the leader of the three when they start. He was a truly great man. We shall hear more of him. It is only the good who are really great.

Seleucia was a seaport, fifteen miles from Antioch. Cyprus was an island, a little more than a hundred miles to the south and west of Seleucia. Somewhere on this island Barnabas was born. (Acts 4: 36.) It was natural that he should desire to carry the gospel to his own people first. Paul had already preached in his home city, Tarsus. (Acts 11: 25.)

Verse 5.—Salamis was a town on the eastern shore of Cyprus. The missionaries, being Jews, would be welcomed to the synagogue, for strangers of that nation were always accorded an opportunity to speak in their worship. If Jews accepted the gospel, Gentiles could be reached all the easier. If they rejected it, that fact would advertise for the preachers, and insure a more favorable hearing from certain types of Gentiles.

Verse 6.—Paphos was the seat of gov-

ernment, at the western extremity of the island. The sorcerer encountered there reminds of Simon of Samaria. (Acts 8: 9-24.) "Bar" is the Hebrew for "son." "Jesus" does not refer to Christ, of course. It is the same as "Joshua," a common name among Jews. He was called "the son of Jesus" to distinguish him from some other Elymas. By tricks, he had gained the confidence of Sergius Paulus, the ruler of the island, whose official title was "proconsul." Certain facts cited by Sir Wm. Ramsay are interesting in connection with this man's name. The chief officer of Antioch in Pisidia a little later was a member of the family of Caristianii, whose wife's name was "Sergia Paulla." The governor of Galatia, visiting him at that time, was named "Sergius Paulus." We may surmise from these facts that a relationship existed between these rulers of different provinces of the Roman Empire, and that the family was one of some standing.

Archeological research has furnished many things strengthening to faith.

Verses 8-12.—Elymas' motives for opposing Barnabas and Paul were jealousy, inspired by love of domination over the proconsul, and covetousness. He was keen enough to perceive that if the ruler listened to the apostles, his own ascendancy was gone. Paul accepted the challenge of the sorcerer, and they met in the governor's presence. The scene was fit to be dramatized. The withering speech of Paul struck terror to the heart of the imposter, and his humiliating exit, led by the hand, should have wrought for his conversion. The incident convinced Sergius Paulus that the

arm led he them forth out of it. 18 And for about the time of forty years as a nursing-father bare he them in the wilderness. 19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. 20 and after these things he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 And afterward they asked for a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for the space of forty years. 22 And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; to whom also he bare witness and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who shall do all my will. 23 Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus; 24 when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not he. But behold, there cometh one after me the shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to unloose. 26 Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us is the word of this salvation sent

preachers were messengers of God. This is another illustration of the place and purpose of miracle. Inspired writers frequently mention that faith was planted by seeing the miracle, its purpose being to accomplish that rather than merely heal.

Verse 13.—No reason is assigned for Mark's desertion at Perga, but in Paul's judgment it was an unworthy one, as we shall learn in a later lesson.

The town was on the south shore of the peninsula of Asia Minor, about 250 miles west of Tarsus.

ANOTHER ANTIOCH ENTERED

(Verses 14-16a.)

From this time, Saul, hereafter called "Paul" (a diminutive name meaning "little"), bestowed, possibly, because of his small stature, becomes the leader of the missionary group, and we read "Paul and Barnabas" instead of "Barnabas and Saul."

Reasons for Saul's being called to become the apostle to the Gentiles now begin to become apparent. His leadership qualities manifest themselves on this trip on virgin heathen soil.

His ability and spiritual equipment for work among Gentiles are revealed in many ways and places. Barnabas found a greater than himself when he went to Tarsus to seek Paul as a "helper."

It is frequently thus. Barnabas was great enough to yield pre-eminence to Paul, rejoicing that another could do more than he could himself. It is a mark of real greatness to so act. Not all ministers possess the supreme virtue for preachers—humility—in a degree large enough to enable them to gracefully take second place. How one acts under such circumstances is a fine test of his character.

Apparently, no time was spent in Perga. They were Spirit-guided on this journey, and we may infer that more fruitful fields awaited them in the interior. It is always the part of wisdom to consider the prospects for making converts. A field yielding 100 per cent. increase is worth twice as much as one yielding 50 per cent.

It may be pertinent to remark here that the most fruitful field on which the church can concentrate in evangelism is the Bible school. Eighty-five per cent. of all its conversions come from this source.

This proves that it should receive more attention than is usually given it. Houses of worship should be built with the needs of the Bible school in mind. Teachers should be trained for its classrooms. Money should be spent in recruiting for its ranks.

Every available help for teaching the word of God should be provided. Wide-awake, growing, evangelistic churches are stressing this department now as never before, and in this fact do we find our hope for kingdom success.

Verses 14, 15.—The beginning at Antioch in Pisidia was made in the synagogue, as usual. The "ruler" who had charge of the worship that Sabbath invited the strangers (Paul and Barnabas) to make comments after the Scripture of the day had been read. This was also customary. It was Paul who accepted the invitation.

A SKILLFUL INTRODUCTION OF JESUS AS CHRIST

(Verses 16b-25.)

This very full report of Paul's sermon to the Jews of Antioch interests us because it is probably much the same as he usually delivered under similar circum-

forth. 27 For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. 28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet asked they of Pilate that he should be slain. 29 And when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead: 31 and he was seen for many days of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses unto the people. 32 And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, 33 that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. 34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. 35 Because he saith also in another psalm, Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption. 36 For David, after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37 but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. 38

stances. It gives us an idea of his method of approach to his own people.

Verse 17.—This reference to the providential choice of Israel by God was prudent. It was not a new fact to them, but it was well calculated to win their appreciative attention to what he had to say. His interpretation of the reason for this choice will be new to them, so he must prepare them for that part of his message.

The providential choice by Jehovah was not limited to their first selection for His favor, but was manifested also in delivering them from Egyptian bondage with a "high arm." The expression meant that the arm of their deliverance reached down from heaven, a miraculous intervention on their behalf.

Verse 18.—A tender figure, that of God's being a "nursing-father" during the period of their rebellious wanderings in the wilderness.

It defends even His punishments, they being prompted by love.

He disciplined them both for their own good, and with future generations in mind. Just discipline is not inconsistent with either love or providential guidance. It sounds strange to hear some, who profess to believe and love Jesus, rail at the God of the Old Testament, when Jesus approved all God did, as there recorded.

There are too many who refuse correction on God's part, as a spoiled child of luxury rebels against any attempt to curb his so-called "liberty."

Verses 19, 20.—Reference to the period of judges was to affirm the continuation of providential care. Just what "seven" nations he had in mind we can not say. He, perhaps, used the number in a symbolic sense, meaning that the conquest was complete, seven

being one of the perfect numbers of the Jews.

Verse 23.—Here his theme is stated, that Jesus was the promised "Saviour." The Antiochan Jews had heard of Jesus, if at all, only from enemies, hence Paul must develop his subject by proving his proposition.

Verses 24, 25.—First proof, "John the Baptist so proclaimed him."

The fame of this great prophet had penetrated to Antioch, and his testimony would have much weight. John denied being the Christ, but stated that he was His forerunner. That would prove that the Christ was to immediately follow John. Of those who then lived, who merited such a title?

JESUS' DEATH ACCORDING TO PROPHECY

(Verses 26-29.)

Paul's voice must have been tender in this part of his appeal.

He must tell them that their national leaders fulfilled prophecy by not listening to it, words of indictment which he immediately proceeded to prove. Some men prove the truth of Scripture by doing evil. The leaders in opposition to Jesus read in their synagogues the very Scripture prophesying their rejection of their Christ, but their eyes were blinded to the fact because they had pictured their Messiah as they wanted Him, not as He was foretold. They were very human in that. Many imitators of them still live.

JESUS' RESURRECTION ACCORDING TO PROPHECY

(Verses 30-37.)

Verse 30.—This confident assertion would demand instant and lively atten-

Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: 39 and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets:

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;

For I work a work in your days,

A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you.

42 And as they went out, they besought that these words might be spoken to them the next sabbath. 43 Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 And the next sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of

tion. The worshipers would lean forward in their seats. They had heard this rumor, but here was a man who claimed to have first-hand information. In proof he cited the testimony of living witnesses, the kind of testimony given first place in the courts always.

It seems strange that he did not refer to his own wonderful experience near Damascus, but it was probably due to his being unknown to his auditors, and his word would add nothing to what he had already stated, so he continued his appeal to the Old Testament.

Verse 33.—The reference to the second Psalm meant that He (Jesus) was “begotten” from the dead. He was “the firstborn of all creation” in that sense at least. His resurrection differed from that of Samuel, who immediately went back to the grave after visiting Saul. His body saw corruption. But Jesus rose with the glorified body and ascended to heaven. His body is incorruptible.

Verse 34.—The “holy and sure blessings of David” referred to the blessing to the race through Jesus, David’s Son.

Verses 35-37.—Paul makes the same argument on this quotation from the Psalm that Peter did on Pentecost. (Lesson III.)

REMISSION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

(Verses 38-41.)

Verses 38, 39.—The vital fact in connection with Jesus’ resurrection was that it opened up the way for forgiveness of sin. Those who lived under the law of Moses were condemned by it, since none of them kept it perfectly. Now the goodness of God appears in that He offers the forgiveness and salvation which could not be obtained under the law. If the resurrection of Jesus were a mere historical fact, it would have no more interest than any other

unusual incident. But as it is the most convincing evidence of His deity, and consequent authority in religion, it is the most important event for us since creation itself. Paul staked everything on it. (1 Cor. 15:12 *seq.*) The “advanced thinkers” who pretend that they can dispense with the resurrection and all other miracles, and still be true “followers” of Jesus, are sawing off the limb between themselves and the tree. Their “faith” is that of the infidel.

A CITY STIRRED

(Verses 42-49.)

Verse 42.—Paul evidently did not extend an invitation for confession of faith the first day. He went just far enough to guarantee his theme being the subject of much conversation during the week.

We may well believe that those present made a new study of the Messianic prophecies at once.

Verse 43.—Devout men would prefer investigation of a proposition of such tremendous import, to eating, so it is not strange that they crowded about Paul and Barnabas and went to their lodging-place for further teaching. The invitation to preach again the next Sabbath shows that a great majority heard with approval.

Verse 44.—Just what was to be expected. Among Jews the one absorbing topic of conversation that week would be the synagogue sermon of the preceding Sabbath.

Verse 45.—Again, opposition started with the official class.

Their motive in stirring up persecution was not that a conviction that the apostles were teaching false doctrine, nor that it was immoral, nor that the men were wicked, but pure jealousy.

If any sin of deeper dye than jealousy

God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying,

I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles,

That thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth.

48 And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spread abroad throughout all the region.

has escaped from hell, it has not been discovered yet. No sin more deadly, none more inexcusable, none more detestable, but none more common.

It has caused more murders than has covetousness. Yet we regard it a minor "fault." We tolerate it in those of exalted station, both politically and religiously, to our shame and to their disgrace.

It takes a really great soul to rise entirely above it.

The "blasphemy" of Paul's opposers was not what we call profanity, but consisted in their skeptical and defamatory remarks about Jesus as Christ. To call in question His deity is blasphemy.

Verse 46.—Paul and Barnabas respected the right of the Jews to conduct their worship without interference on their part, after opposition was raised, and left the synagogue, going to Gentiles.

We shall learn that Paul's custom was almost invariably to begin with Jews, then turn to Gentiles. The Jews were better prepared to receive Christ, from a religious and moral standpoint, than Gentiles, hence it was wise to offer them the gospel first.

The devout Jews who followed Paul and Barnabas constituted the nucleus of the church at Antioch, but soon Gentiles were added in large numbers. The gospel of Christ is the only thing that can ever enable Jews and Gentiles to live together without strife.

"Judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life" is a peculiar expression. It does not mean that they regarded themselves as unworthy. On the contrary, they thought themselves to be the only ones who were worthy. Paul meant that by their rejection of Jesus, whom he had offered to them as their Saviour, they had revealed their unwillingness to be taught by the Scripture they professed to revere, and by this unreason-

able rejection had branded themselves as rebellious, hence under the condemnation that rebellion always brought. They passed judgment on themselves by disobedience.

Verse 47.—This quotation from Isa. 49:6, showing that God desired the salvation of the Gentiles through Jewish agencies, should have made an appeal to their pride. God had favored the Jew by giving him the honor and responsibility of saving Gentiles. Jewish prejudice, however, was so deep-seated that it made every Jew unwilling to do anything for Gentiles or concede possible salvation to them.

Verse 48.—"As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." This sounds as if they were passive in the matter of salvation and that only those could believe who were "ordained" to faith. The word "ordain" means "to place in rank or order."

Those who believed were placed in order or rank with reference to salvation. This was accomplished by yielding obedience to the gospel commands. All who hear, believe, repent and are baptized are "ordained" to eternal life. Those who refuse to do these things are not so "ordained," hence are lost. Any one who obeys God through Christ is placed in God's saved ranks or order.

Luke probably means that God has ordained to save the honest and sincere who try to do His will, and that all such, when the evidence for the gospel is given them, will believe it.

Verse 49.—The gospel radiated from Antioch through all that region.

The success attendant on their labors there enables us to understand why the Holy Spirit led them to that city, as a beginning-place for Asia Minor's redemption. When men are willing to be led by the Spirit of God as revealed in the Word, the salvable portion of our race will soon be won.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Antioch in Syria was the seat of the great church of Gentile Christians that had sent relief to the distressed brethren at Jerusalem, thus softening Jewish prejudice against Gentile Christians. (11: 27-30.)

2. The New Testament magnifies the office of "teacher." This fact is to-day being stressed, and the teaching function of the early church may again be restored. In apostolic days teaching was emphasized more than organization, equipment or even preaching. (Vs. 1-3.)

3. Barnabas and Saul, set apart and sent out as missionaries by the Antioch church, took John Mark and went from place to place preaching the gospel. Saul's name, for some reason, was changed to Paul and he preached fearlessly and with power, converting the proconsul. John Mark quit them at Perga. (Vs. 4-13.)

4. From here on Paul's authority in all elements of leadership is apparent, and Barnabas yields precedence. This shows Barnabas to have been a great man. The Holy Spirit had charge and guided them to fruitful fields of evangelism. Our most fruitful field to-day is

the Bible school. (Vs. 14-16a.)

5. Entering Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas sought the synagogue as usual, and Paul preached a sermon. He made a wise and tactful approach in addressing these Jews. Paul led up to his main theme, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. (Vs. 16b-25.)

6. Paul showed his Jewish hearers that Jesus' death and resurrection were according to the prophecies of their own prophets, and set forth the pre-eminence of the Christ. (Vs. 26-37.)

7. Continuing, Paul preached remission of sin through Christ, who had risen from the dead, instead of through the law of Moses. Paul based everything upon the deity and resurrection of the Christ. (Vs. 38-41.)

8. Ending his sermon where it would provoke discussion and investigation, Paul let the leaven work. Multitudes were interested and jealousy was aroused. Jealousy is one of the rankest of sins. It subverts, perverts and paralyzes all that's good that it touches. In spite of this the gospel grew in Antioch and radiated from there through the surrounding region. (Vs. 42-49.)

QUESTIONS

1. Why had Barnabas and Saul been sent to Jerusalem by the church at Antioch? 2. Upon their return to Antioch where were they sent again? (V. 2.) 3. What importance is attached to "teachers in the New Testament"? 4. State a probable reason for their going to Cyprus at the beginning of their journey. 5. Give an account of their labors in that island. 6. Tell of the incident in which Elymas figured. 7.

Who left them at Perga and returned to Jerusalem? (V. 13.) 8. Narrate events of the first Sabbath in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. 9. Why is the Bible school the most fruitful source of evangelistic gain? 10. Give some of the principal points in Paul's synagogue sermon. (Vs. 16-41.) 11. What results followed the sermon? 12. Explain the passage: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (V. 48.)

LESSON FIFTEEN

FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR COMPLETED

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 13:50—14:28

Memory Text.—“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly.”—Acts 6:7.

LESSON PLAN

1. Women Used as Tools of Persecutors.
2. Success in Iconium.
3. Lame Man Healed.
4. Continued Travel and Persecution.

COMMENTS

WOMEN USED AS TOOLS OF PERSECUTORS

(Chapter 13:50-52.)

The notable success of Paul and Barnabas, as narrated in the preceding lesson, was not without its effect on the hard-hearted Jews. They plot a persecution scheme requiring the assistance of “honorable women” to bring it to a success.

It is difficult to conjecture just what was done by those women that resulted in the banishment of the apostles for a time.

One thing is certain. They were not “honorable” except in title.

Official position, places of trust, titular distinction and family relationship do not guarantee individual honor on the part of those thus honored. Too often those filling seats of distinction are base in heart. These women must have been of this type.

There is nothing to which such natures will not stoop.

Whatever they did was designed to neutralize the influence of the preachers. This persecution being initiated by those eminent in city affairs, of course, the unknown non-resident preachers had no hope of proving their innocence of the charge. The best thing to do was to leave for the interior, and hope for a more favorable reception there.

They literally fulfilled Jesus’ order to his disciples to “shake the dust from

their feet,” a most expressive and impressive symbolic action.

If one could shake off the bad influences and impressions of a wicked city as easily as he can the dust from his feet, it would be a blessed thing. One should try to do this. To be able to carry away nothing but good from places visited is a talent to be coveted.

Notwithstanding their being driven out of Antioch, they left with joy in their hearts, for some had become obedient to the faith, and a nucleus of what was certain to become a strong church was left behind. If good results follow our persecutions, we can with Paul thank God for afflictions.

SUCCESS IN ICONIUM

(Chapter 14:1-7.)

Verse 1.—Leaving Antioch, Paul and Barnabas traveled southeast to Iconium, a Greek city with a decided bias toward the Roman government. For centuries it was a city of commercial and political importance. Later, it lost both population and prestige.

Its present name is Konieh, practically the same as that borne when the apostles visited it. During the late war it figured in some campaigns, as a center of operations.

Once more the synagogue served as the place for the beginning of the church. The missionaries were welcomed in its worship, invited to speak, which they did with much success.

LESSON TEXT

13: 50 But the Jews urged on the devout women of honorable estate, and the chief men of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out of their borders. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

14: 1 And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. 2 But the Jews that were disobedient stirred up the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil affected against the brethren. 3 Long time therefore they tarried there speaking boldly in the Lord, who bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their

A detailed history of their experiences at Iconium would doubtless duplicate that in Antioch.

When as many Jews as possible had been won to Christ, the apostles turned to the Gentiles. Honest-minded people of Greek and Roman blood were more easily persuaded concerning Christ than were many Jews. The readiness of Greeks to accept the Messiahship of Jesus, as contrasted with the unwillingness of Jews to do so, was rather remarkable. It can be explained, in part, by the fact that wherever Jews had gone, they carried their Scriptures with them, and the people among whom they lived became familiar with their hopes and with the teachings of their prophets. In this manner God had providentially prepared Gentiles, who permitted Jews to trade in their midst, for the advent of His Son Jesus.

The apostles had an easier task in interpreting the prophetic utterances concerning Christ to Gentiles, who would not share the hope of world dominion with the Jews, than the Jews with false national ambition and pride. The nations that had been most hospitable to Jews in that century were rewarded by being made the recipients of the gospel. To them belongs the honor of transmitting it to future generations. They gave a welcome to the despised Jew, and, in turn, received God's greatest blessing as a reward. What a lesson in hospitality for us.

Verse 2.—The "disobedient" Jews were not only disobedient to the gospel, but also to the law of Moses, which they thought they revered so highly. These stirred up the Gentiles, because it was a Gentile community, and they could not persecute the apostles without Gentile consent and co-operation. What charge was laid against Paul and Barnabas is

not told us, but it was a slander of some sort.

Verse 3.—The missionaries remained in the city, faithfully proclaiming their gospel, till driven out by fierce persecution.

During this time they were faithfully preaching, their message being confirmed by miracles.

It is worth remembering that in all their labors, no miracles were wrought when they preached to Jews. The Old Testament prophecies provided them the material necessary to prove that Jesus was the Christ. Jews accepted certain prophecies as Messianic, and such passages would be taken by Paul as a base for his sermon, showing how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies and met all prophetic conditions.

But, in preaching to Gentiles, a different method was employed.

They knew little or nothing of the Old Testament Scriptures, therefore it would be useless to make an argument from that source.

The only method conceivable to us whereby God might attest His approval of the message of His divinely chosen missionaries was to bestow upon them power to work miracles. These were not mere wonders or sleight-of-hand performances, but always had a beneficent motive behind them, thus showing to ignorant Gentiles the real character of God. This would cause Him to stand out in marked contrast with their own deities, who were merely perverted ideals of physical or intellectual power. They were usually worse than the average men, lying, intrigue, licentiousness and murder being characteristic of their natures.

Miracles of healing, and revelations of divine wisdom, would immediately teach the Gentiles that God was essentially

hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when there was made an onset both of the Gentiles and of the Jews with their rulers, to treat them shamefully and to stone them, 6 they became aware of it, and fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the region round about: 7 and there they preached the gospel.

8 And at Lystra there sat a certain man, impotent in his feet, a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. 9 The same heard Paul speaking: who, fastening his eyes upon him, and seeing that he had faith to be made whole, 10 said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped up and walked. 11 And when the multitude saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because

different from the gods they had been worshipping.

It is wholesome for us to remember the purpose of miracles, even in this day. It is not unusual for good Christians to say: "If we just had the faith of the apostles, we could work miracles of healing as well as they did." Why does not some one demonstrate that fact?

Such statements reveal a defective knowledge of the purpose of miracles. Genuine miracles were always used as evidence of God's approval of the one through whom the miracle was wrought. When God gives us a new revelation we may look for miraculous attestation of that fact. Modern followers of "inner consciousness," and claimants to "Spirit guidance," must excuse us for skepticism concerning their "new light," until they provide proof like that of the apostles. It is common for such, knowing the impossibility of providing proof of divine approval, to deny the historicity of apostolic miracles, hoping thereby to deceive the unwary.

Verse 7.—Lystra and Derbe were farther east. The apostles fled to these cities when persecution became too severe at Iconium.

In 2 Tim. 3:11 Paul refers to his experiences in these cities as among the most distressing of all he endured.

How strange that any should care to persecute the bearers of such a message as the gospel of Christ. Its most distinguishing feature is its promise of the forgiveness of sin, and who can find fault with it there? It demands a righteous life of its adherents, and who would object to that? It imposes loyalty to the Government under which one lives, and who should be disturbed by that? The above questions reveal the true source of persecution suffered by Christians. Only those loving sin and its rewards object to the church. No good

man will ever be found opposing either Christianity or its objectives. But, since its teachings make him uncomfortable, the wicked man always has, and always will, oppose the church.

LAME MAN HEALED AND RESULTS THEREOF

(Verses 8-18.)

Verses 8-10.—This case of a man with congenital deformity of the feet, rendering him unable to walk, healed at a word from Paul, was of special interest to Dr. Luke. No more convincing miracle could be employed.

The statement that "he had faith to be made whole" may be misunderstood. Some teach that the healings of Jesus and His apostles were limited to those who had faith of an unusual degree.

But both Jesus and the apostles healed where no faith at all, on the part of the one healed, is mentioned. Their power to cure disease, or to remedy malformed bones or joints, was not dependent on the faith of the one helped. But it was necessary that great care should be exercised in choosing the beneficiary of healing power. Some sick, if healed, would make poor witnesses for Christ. "Faith to be made whole" means that the individual was honest, of good reputation, one who would not capitalize his good fortune by exhibiting himself as a side-show attraction, but would use it rather as a text for preaching Jesus as the Christ, God's Son.

An unworthy person would not be made better by being healed, but would so advertise what had been done for him as to bring reproach on the gospel.

Verses 11 seq.—The action of the heathen multitude is not to be wondered at. They interpreted the healing as evidence of special favor toward the Lycaonians on the part of the gods, hence their use of the native speech in-

he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Jupiter whose temple was before the city brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the multitudes. 14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude, crying out 15 and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and bring you good tidings, that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: 16 who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven

stead of the current Greek—deference to the national gods. A temple of Jupiter was at the city gate, and his image there made the people familiar with his traditional appearance. Mercury was his interpreter. It is interesting and illuminating to know that Barnabas was identified with Jupiter, and Paul with Mercury. Statues of Jupiter (the Greek Zeus) represented him as a majestic god of heroic size, noble face and brow indicative of great intelligence. Barnabas must have looked something like this, so we can form some idea of his appearance. Mercury was pictured as lithe, alert, athletic. His being Jupiter's interpreter reveals the fact that Paul was the chief speaker, thus accounting for his taking precedence over Barnabas. This side-light helps us picture Paul in our imagination.

The sacrifices proposed were those accorded the gods whom they were supposed to be. The preservation of sacrifice among heathen people in all ages is evidence that God originally commanded man to thus worship Him. It has been perverted in various degrees and manners, but no one can explain its universality on other ground than that here suggested.

Verse 14.—Rending their garments showed the deep horror of the missionaries that worship should be accorded them. Less worthy representatives of Jesus would have been flattered. Some self-styled servants of Jesus to-day parade themselves so ostentatiously, either in dress or ceremonial, that it is impossible to see Jesus through them.

Verse 15.—Paul's argument from God's providences, as a means of revealing his personality, only increased their determination to worship one with such reasoning powers. It was evidently a new thought to them. The argument from design, though new, impressed them as unanswerable. Let us briefly develop it. Nature is good to her creatures when

they obey her laws. She provides the soil with its fertility; the seed with its life properties; rain and sunshine with seasonal return. Doubtless every portion of earth will prove to be a valuable storehouse, when once the peculiar kind of riches of each section shall have been discovered. Mountains have deposits of ore, bare hills may grow the finest fruits, valleys produce corn and wheat, pastures abound on slopes too steep for cultivation, and forbidding regions have amazing wealth in gas, oil and coal. The more one studies the earth's structure and resources, the more he appreciates the fact that it was prepared with such a creature as man in mind.

The teaching of Genesis as to man's supreme place in God's economy is confirmed by every law and property of nature. In the light of this, how sad that man should try to thwart God or bring reproach on himself. How pitiable that he should join forces with the demons of hell in opposing God and good. Of course all such attempts will prove impotent, but they will result in the certain damnation of the disobedient soul found on that side.

CONTINUED TRAVEL, PERSECUTION AND SUCCESS

(Verses 19-28.)

Verse 19.—It seems that almost the entire city might have become obedient to the gospel had the persecutors not come from Iconium to stir up the people. What an awful responsibility the unbelieving Jew of that day assumed in keeping people from Christ. The unbeliever to-day, whether in pulpit or outside the church, has an equal responsibility.

Millions now are as ready to hear and believe the truth as were those Lystrans. Whole nations still sit in darkness waiting for gospel light. We who have it must send it forth.

Thomas Kalane, a native African, educated in Wilberforce University, became

rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the multitudes from doing sacrifice unto them.

19 But there came Jews thither from Antioch and Iconium: and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But as the disciples stood around about him, he rose up, and entered into the city: and on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22 confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they

a Christian only under the teaching of W. H. Book, of Columbus, Ind., and went back to his own country three years ago. He has led almost fifteen hundred souls into a knowledge of the truth, and bids fair to duplicate the wonderful work done by Congo missionaries at Bolenge. Other fields are as white unto harvest as Africa. "Let your light so shine."

By the time the persecutors had followed Paul to Lystra, he would appreciate the truth of Jesus' saying: "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." They are on his trail as mercilessly as he hounded Christians to Damascus. They may have been sincere. Paul was. It is more likely that they were simply stubborn. Many folk mistake stubbornness, when in their own lives, for conscientiousness.

The fact that Paul was chosen as the one to be stoned proves that he was more damaging to Jewish officialdom than was Barnabas. He was the chief speaker and his logic was more convincing than Barnabas' "consolation." He may have been more favorably inclined toward the Gentiles also, for we shall learn presently that Barnabas was led aside by Jewish influences working in the church, whereas Paul withstood them.

Stoning being the penalty for blasphemy, it was doubtless on that charge that Paul was convicted. By false testimony, the Jews could easily persuade the Gentiles that he had committed a capital crime according to their law, and incite a mob to help in the execution.

Strange that folk who desired to do sacrifice to him a few days before were so easily persuaded to assist in killing him.

How fickle is humanity. A mob deifies one moment, anathematizes the next. No "justice" is so certain to be injustice as mob judgment. Our tolerance of mob lynchings in this country is a

disgrace to our citizenship. We may boast a splendid material civilization, but while mobs go unpunished we are only partially civilized at heart. No matter how great the provocation, if we yield to the mob spirit, we are not worthy of citizen rights.

Privileges of citizenship can be bestowed safely only on those who are willing to live according to law, and the mob always violates the law. It decides a case on the presentation of one side of the testimony, and that almost always insures injustice. If it be lawful to "take the law into one's own hands" in one instance, it is lawful in all other instances, and so lawful government must break down.

An interesting suggestion, in connection with Paul's stoning, may be pardoned. Lystra was the home of Timothy (Acts 16:1).

On Paul's second trip to Lystra, Timothy was a disciple of high standing and influence. His grandmother was the first convert to Christ in the family (2 Tim. 1:5). His mother also taught him the way of the Lord (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). These facts make it almost certain that Timothy was one of the converts of this first trip.

One may hazard the guess that Paul was taken to Timothy's home to have his wounds dressed, when he revived from the stoning. There would be the beginning of that friendship which ripened into the strongest Paul enjoyed on earth. Of all his companions none could take the place of Timothy (Phil. 2:19-22). If our guess be correct, a good lesson may be drawn. It pays to care for a good and great man in his need. While we are making a contribution to his physical comfort or health, he will make a spiritual investment in us that will yield rich returns.

Verse 20.—Paul's powers of physical recuperation must have been marvelous.

commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed. 24 And they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; 26 and thence they sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. 27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all things that God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And they tarried no little time with the disciples.

He could not have been the weakling he is sometimes pictured, or he could not have recovered sufficiently by the next day to travel to Derbe, a city some miles east of Lystra.

Verse 21.—Derbe proved to be a fruitful field, "many disciples" being made in a short stay. As soon as quiet was restored in Lystra they returned to that city to complete the organization of the church and strengthen the disciples, continuing thence to Iconium and Antioch, where similar organizations were perfected.

It is worthy of notice that all churches were organized after the same pattern. If the contention of some who maintain that the Lord had no definite plan for the organization of His followers is true, why should inspired men have followed a uniform plan of organization? Elders (plural) in every church. Each congregation independent of all others except in the matter of unity in Christ.

There would be many questions asked the apostles by the infant churches as they were on the return trip.

Details of selection of officers, their qualifications, instruction concerning public worship, baptizing converts, all would be new matter to these Gentile recruits. These were beginning-days, and vitally important both to them and succeeding generations.

Beginning-days are full of joy in any true church, even though full of anxiety. Friendships formed at such times are the strongest earth ever knows. What a love "charter members" of a church have for each other. It is worth the privations, hours of trial, hard work, and uncertainties incident to congregation founding just to have such fellowship.

Verse 22.—It is still true that we enter the kingdom of God with much tribulation. We do not suffer persecution of the same sort to-day, but a refined type of it will pursue all who are devoted to Christ.

Verse 23.—What confidence those

early Christians had in the power of prayer. The Lord will care for His own who thus trust Him.

Verse 27.—Can you picture the gathering of the Antioch (Syria) church on the first Lord's Day after the return of the missionaries?

Every member would be notified of Paul and Barnabas being in the city, with a report to make, and a crowded house would be assured.

How glad their brethren would be to hear their voices again.

How eagerly they would ask what success had attended their ministry among the Gentiles. What had been their experiences?

They would ask details of Paul's stoning, but he would hasten over that incident to tell of Timothy's conversion. They would want to have an "exhortation" from Barnabas. Many eyes overflowed with joy on that day.

Verse 28.—Their tarrying was for a twofold purpose, to recuperate wasted physical strength and direct the activities of the Antioch church again for a time. They were also preparing for another tour similar to the one just completed. Were they gathering funds for expenses? Perhaps. At any rate, they soon departed on a more extensive campaign.

We know nothing of the financial condition of the Antioch church, but we do know that with such men in its membership it was a rich church. Money may aid, but it may also hinder true spiritual riches. Any congregation with godly people in its membership is rich before God. God himself is enriched by such people, for Paul speaks in Eph. 1:18 of the "riches of his inheritance in the saints." It seems almost too good to be true that God can value so highly our worth, but it is clearly revealed that such is the case. The high estimate placed upon man in the implied partnership with God, through Christ, is a wonderful tribute.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Even honorable and devout women joined in the opposition to Paul as the gospel spread in influence, and Paul and Barnabas had to leave the city. When women of ability become bitterly partisan, their antagonism is merciless. (Vs. 50-52.)

2. Leaving Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas moved rapidly from place to place, being persecuted. They preached in synagogues, made friends and enemies, created discussion of the truth, and were driven on to the next place. Their courage and faith knew no bounds. (14: 1-7.)

3. Note the fact that miracles wrought by the apostles were used as evidence of God's approval of the person working the miracle. That they should have been persecuted for preaching a gospel of love and kindness is hard to understand. (Vs. 1-7.)

4. That the heathen populace of Lystra called Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury, throws some light on the possible appearance of the two men. Instead of being flattered by this adulation, the apostles rent their garments in protest

and preached Christ the more earnestly. (Vs. 8-18.)

5. Unscrupulous persecutors followed the apostles to Lystra from previous places, and Paul was stoned nigh unto death. Not being moved by these things, the apostles continued their tour of missionary evangelism, preaching, confirming disciples and appointing elders in the churches. From Derbe they returned to Antioch in Syria, whence they started, having covered Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and then back home.

6. That Paul was chosen to be stoned proves that his preaching was the chief menace to Judaism. No "justice" is so unjust as mob judgment. Lystra was the home of Timothy. On this occasion probably began the friendship of Paul with Timothy.

7. Paul could have been no weakling even in body. He was a giant in spirit, in intellect, in courage, in faith. Those beginning-days were fraught with conquest and with trials that made Christians all the more a brotherhood.

QUESTIONS

1. Who were instrumental in driving Paul and Barnabas from Antioch in Pisidia? (13: 50.) 2. What was the significance of this shaking the dust from their feet? (V. 51.) 3. What was their success in Iconium? (14: 1-3.) 4. Why did they leave there? (Vs. 4-7.) 5. Trace on the map their journey to Lystra and Derbe. 6. Why did the apostles confine their miracles to their ministry to

Gentiles? 7. What means were employed to convince Jews of Jesus' Messiahship? 8. Why are miracles not performed now? 9. Tell of the healing of the lame man at Lystra. (Vs. 8-10.) 10. What extraordinary thing happened to Paul at Lystra? (Vs. 11-13, 19.) 11. Describe the return trip with its labors. (Vs. 21-26.) 12. Tell of their further work at Antioch in Syria.

The language of St. Paul (15: 36), when he speaks of revisiting "the brethren in every city where they had before preached the word of the Lord," indicates that he felt that a good foundation had been laid in the different places where they had ministered. It seems from this that the course adopted by the apostle was to tarry in some center of population, and continue his preaching till a sufficient number of converts had been gained to carry on the work after he left them, and till some of these were so far instructed as to be able to take oversight of the infant churches.—*Cambridge Bible*.

LESSON SIXTEEN

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 15:1-35

Memory Text.—"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas."—Acts 15: 22.

LESSON PLAN

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|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Occasion of the Conference. 2. Traces of Phariseeism in the Church. 3. Peter Speaks. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. James Closes the Discussion. 5. The Decree. 6. The Decree Delivered. |
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COMMENTS

Luke next narrates for Theophilus an account of a conference held in Jerusalem, precipitated by certain believers of the sect of the Pharisees, who taught that obedience to Christ was in vain unless the law of Moses was also observed by the Gentiles.

This discussion was of vital importance, since it settled the mooted question of the Christian's liberty in Christ. The decision was effective in preventing a threatened split in the church at the very beginning of its success among the Gentiles.

THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERENCE

(Chapter 15:1-4.)

Verse 1.—The occasion of this controversy was a meddlesome visit to Antioch of certain Jerusalem believers. Being from the Holy City, the place where the church was established, they arrogantly presumed to speak with authority. They felt that their membership in the mother church would outweigh the influence of any Antiochan teachers. The purpose of their doctrine—that Gentiles must be circumcised and keep certain ordinances of the law of Moses—was doubtless to bring the whole Gentile portion of the church, rapidly growing and threatening to outnumber the Jewish element, into subjection to the Jewish minority.

This is characteristic of Jews in all ages. Jewish cupidity or covetousness

is not a stronger national trait than love of pre-eminence and authority. And when this authority is obtained it is invariably used to the distinct advantage of the Jew.

Their action clearly reveals that they were only adventurous converts to Christianity. Attracted to it in the beginning by its success, they now feel that sufficient progress has been made for them to seize the reins of power. They had never fully understood the universality of Jesus, nor had they perceived the true relationship between the law and the gospel.

It is so often true that those causing trouble in the church are the imperfectly taught. The importance of correct teaching can not be overestimated. Happy and fortunate the church making every effort to train its members for the responsible duty of teaching. The two causes of the irresponsible teaching of those Jewish Christians—ignorance and desire for authority—are a most fruitful cause of division among Christ's followers to-day.

Verse 2.—It is significant that Paul and Barnabas, two inspired men, were not influenced by the false brethren. They had been preaching successfully to Gentiles, holding that the law of Moses had been entirely done away, and that the only commandments binding on either Jew or Gentile are those of Christ. While Paul and Barnabas produced the better arguments, yet the mere fact that

LESSON TEXT

1 And certain men came down from Judæa and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 They therefore, being brought on their way by the church, passed through both Phœnicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they

the visitors came from the mother church gave them a tremendous advantage. As we shall learn later, these deceivers boldly affirmed that all the inspired men in Jerusalem taught as they did at Antioch. In this they expressly lied. It is easy for some, in the heat of argument, to falsify. Most men with a false doctrine to defend acquire a Jesuitical conscience.

What was the controversy about? The disturbers insisted that all Gentiles be circumcised, coming under the covenant made with Abraham. Two passages they would quote as final: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee." Though Paul's and Barnabas' answer is not given in this connection, we find it in Paul's letter to the Galatians, where he refutes the same arguments of Judaizers in Galatia. The substance of what he says in that letter is that those who obey Christ, the real "seed" or heir of Abraham, become joint-heirs with Christ through faith, and that it is those who live by faith in Christ who have the promise of eternal life. He shows that even Abraham was not saved by his faith.

In the company sent to Jerusalem were Paul and Barnabas, and, it is safe to assume, some who believed the false teachers, that both parties to the controversy might be represented there. The disturbers themselves evidently did not go along! They could quote James and others in their absence, but not in their presence.

It is frequently wise to put boasters to the test. When a man boasts that he knows where liquor can be purchased, send his name to the grand jury, and note the change in his confidence. The Antioch church set us a good example. When in doubt about the teaching of inspired men, let them speak for themselves.

Verse 3.—En route, they visited churches and taught the people. Phœnicia was the name of that country lying along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Samaria lay north of Judea. The thoroughness with which evangelistic work had gone forward is evidenced by the existence of so many churches in the region traversed. No specific mention of preaching in Phœnicia exists, but the fruits of gospel ministry are abundant, therefore somebody preached. The particular Gentiles of whose conversion Paul and Barnabas spoke were the people of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

Their visit to Jerusalem must have stirred the entire church there. What a reception they would give Paul. He had returned to the place whence he had set out on his last trip of persecution, bearing evidences of victory for the gospel in far-off lands.

The mere announcement that he was in the city, and would tell the story of his experiences in heathen territory, would insure a large attendance at the service in which he spoke. It is a rare joy to us to-day to listen to the experiences of our returned missionaries.

The humility of those missionaries was beautiful.

God was credited with the results. "Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase," is always the spirit of the true preacher. The man who advertises his own greatness or accomplishments in the kingdom has much to learn of the spirit of Jesus.

TRACES OF PHARISEEISM IN THE CHURCH

(Verses 5, 6.)

All of the inspired men in the Jerusalem church were of one mind and teaching on the subject of the relation of the law of Moses to the gospel. There were uninspired members of the

caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders, and they rehearsed all things that God had done with them. 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed saying, It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.

6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them,

Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness; giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; 9 and he made

church, men who had been Pharisees in the Jewish faith, having an exaggerated conception of the value of the ceremonial, and whose loyalty to God was measured by outward forms of worship or blameless keeping of traditions, who, retaining these Pharisaic ideals, were the agitators causing the differences of opinion in the fellowship. Their Pharisaic intolerance was threatening the peace of the congregation and the possibility of a division was imminent. It is profitable to notice how the situation was handled and division averted.

It was not accomplished by each side incriminating the other, nor by compromise of truth, but by holding a friendly conference where the arguments of each were presented in a brotherly spirit. Many misunderstandings which ripen into open rupture might be thus removed. If both parties are willing to submit to the same standard, the teaching of inspired men, there should be no situations arising impossible of adjustment. If either party challenges the authority to which appeal is made, of course, there is small hope of a workable agreement. It would seem, however, that every one professing to be Christian should be willing to listen to specific teaching of the New Testament, and, if that be done, there is no necessity of a split in the church on any question.

The wisdom and toleration of the inspired leaders in inviting the false teachers into the conference is to be commended. They might have arbitrarily exercised their apostolic authority and refused to hear the opposition. Their conciliatory plan proved its superiority, for, after the conference, all held the same views, and a decree was sent out in which there was unanimity of doctrine and conduct.

It is frequently taught that there was disagreement among the apostles themselves on this subject. The reader is requested to study the incident for him-

self and see whether there is just ground for that view. There is not a hint that the apostles and elders ever had any difference of conviction on this matter, nor, in fact, on any other doctrine affecting the teaching or welfare of the church. It is true that both Peter and Barnabas later acted inconsistently, as we shall learn farther on, but Paul blamed them for their weakness in yielding to Pharisaic prejudice and influence, not for teaching a different doctrine. The promise of Jesus that the apostles should be "guided into all truth" was fulfilled, and they all, everywhere, taught the same things. Inspiration, however, did not affect their conduct, so they may not always have acted in harmony with their own teaching.

It is expressly stated in this narrative that the dissenters were "Pharisees who believed." Those who would minimize the inspiration of the apostles, or magnify their own "Spirit-guided inner-consciousness" conception of the truth, are the only ones who hold that there was disagreement among the inspired teachers. It is clear that such a theory must be read into the history, and its purpose—to discredit the authority of the written Word—is equally clear.

PETER SPEAKS

(Verses 7-11.)

The "questioning" in the discussion was evidently spirited, but conducted in Christian love. When all the men who had been associated with Jesus, and had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, agreed, those who had been unsettled in their minds soon yielded to the judgment of the Holy Spirit as expressed through those leaders.

Peter opened the argument in behalf of liberty for the Gentile brethren. The incident referred to by Peter, in which God chose him as the mouthpiece through whom "the Gentiles should hear

no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.

12 And all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them. 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying,

Brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

the word of the gospel," was the conversion of Cornelius and his household. It will be remembered how the Holy Spirit fell on those Gentiles, to convince the Jewish Christians who accompanied Peter from Joppa that Gentiles were worthy of salvation.

Now Peter uses the miraculous gift of the Spirit as an argument in connection with circumcision. If God would receive them without circumcision, as their baptism in the Spirit proved, it were folly for the Jewish Christians to insist on Gentile obedience to Mosaic law. He also referred to the law as a "yoke" which none was able to bear. This agrees with Paul's argument in Galatians, where he teaches that all who lived under the law were condemned by it. Modern "scholars" of the "destructive criticism" type have labored hard to create a difference between Paul and Peter, but they have failed in their attempt. As stated above, Paul did rebuke Peter for his inconsistent conduct (Gal. 2: 11-21), but not for his teaching. Not one instance of disagreement in doctrine can be found in the New Testament. Peter's doctrine of salvation in the eleventh verse of our lesson is identical with Paul's in Romans and Galatians.

JAMES CLOSES THE DISCUSSION

(Verses 12-21.)

Verse 12.—Barnabas and Paul corroborated the testimony of Peter that God had received Gentiles on the same terms as Jews. They detailed their wonderful experiences on their missionary tour of Cyprus and Asia Minor. Such cases as the conversion of Sergius Paulus would make a profound impression on the brethren.

Verse 13.—The next speaker to the subject was James. This was doubtless the James who was called the brother

of Jesus, a younger son of Joseph and Mary. At the death of Jesus, he, together with his other brothers, was a disbeliever. John 7: 1-5 shows that the sons of Joseph and Mary were not believers when Jesus started for Jerusalem for the last Passover, at which time He was crucified.

After His resurrection He told Mary, to whom He first appeared, to go and tell them that He was to ascend to His Father (John 20: 17).

The fact that His brethren became disciples and leaders in the church is a strong argument for the credibility of the testimony on which His deity rests. Nothing but His resurrection could ever have convinced them of His Messiahship.

James reminded the brethren that what Peter and Paul had narrated as experiences of their ministry was the fulfillment of prophecy, therefore just what they should have expected.

Verse 14.—The "Gentiles" mentioned by James were Cornelius and his house, who became "a people for his name" when they took the name "Christian."

Verse 16.—"The tabernacle of David" which had fallen was the dynasty of David, restored when Jesus, David's greater son, was enthroned in the heavens, evidence of whose enthronement was given on Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Spirit and the resultant founding of the church, the visible phase of Christ's kingdom on earth.

Since the kingdom of Jesus was to be universal, Gentiles might be admitted on the same terms as Jews, and James therefore advised against "troubling them" with circumcision or other Mosaic ordinances. However, because the Gentiles had so recently left idolatrous practices and were in great danger of relapsing into the excesses of their former religious life, he counseled, send-

- 16 After these things I will return,
And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen;
And I will build again the ruins thereof,
And I will set it up:
17 That the residue of men may seek after the Lord,
And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,
18 Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.
19 Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God; 20 but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every sabbath.

ing them specific and definite recommendations to guard them against such perils.

THE DECREE

(Verses 22-29.)

The speeches of the inspired men won the entire church over to their view, so that all joined unanimously in the decree.

The spirit of the decree should be noticed. If differed widely from decrees sent out by Rome to-day, and from certain ecclesiastical bodies claiming divine authority. That the apostles had authority is proven by Jesus' commission as recorded in Matt. 28: 18-20; Matt. 10: 40; John 20: 22, 23. That they were Spirit-guided in reaching this decision is proven by verse 28. All such authority was limited to the apostles, and those who exercise it now are usurpers.

The letter was diplomatic. It referred with restraint to the teachers who had gone out from Jerusalem, representing themselves as teaching the same things the Jerusalem church taught.

It affirmed the unity of the brethren in their position after the council of the apostles and elders. It revealed their interest in the Gentile churches by sending special messengers, Judas and Silas, here mentioned for the first time, whose standing in the Jerusalem church was unquestioned, to carry the decree, thus making it impossible for the false brethren to charge Paul and Barnabas with having altered or forged the document.

Verse 24.—The Judaizing teaching was serious in its consequences, for it would "subvert the souls" of those who accepted it.

This means that Jesus is a jealous Lord. He demands the right to be exclusively worshiped. One can not be a Christian and follow an obsolete system

like that of Moses. If that be true, what shall we say of those who pretend to be Christian and follow Joseph Smith in Mormonism, Mrs. E. G. White in Seventh-day Adventism, Mrs. Eddy in Christian Science, or Pastor Russell in Millennial Dawnism?

The prohibitions of this decree are not without difficulty.

The command to abstain from things sacrificed to idols can be understood, for so doing would easily lead the new converts back into idol-worship. In 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul treats this subject at length, taking the ground that if one is fully enlightened on the matter, he might eat meat first offered to an idol, and not sin. But the danger was that another, not so well taught, might see the Christian thus eating, and conclude he was worshiping the idol. Therefore, his advice is to "eat no meat" if it cause any to stumble, or sin by lapsing back into idolatry. There was evidently so much danger in this practice that the apostles and elders in this conference thought the only safe course was to advise against its being done at all, in churches where apostles were not present to advise in the matter.

The command to obtain from fornication is not hard to understand. Gentiles were noted for their lewdness at that time. When converted to Christ they might misconstrue the "liberty which was theirs in Christ" as license to indulge in all sorts of excesses, just as many foreigners landing on our shores misconstrue the liberty of our country as license to be lawless, an alarming percent. of all crime being committed by these classes. Fornication is always a sin, and it was perhaps the greatest temptation met by the average Christian of the first century.

It is not so easy to understand why "blood and things strangled" were for-

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 and they wrote thus by them, The apostles and the elders, brethren, unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting: 24 Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no commandment; 25 it seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit,

bidden. The law of Moses prohibited such food, but now that the law has been abolished, why bind this particular portion of it on Gentiles? One can only guess at the answer. Since drinking blood was a solemn manner of solemnizing covenants, it is possible that the Gentiles would understand this part of the decree to constitute an order not to make blood covenants with heathen neighbors.

So far as the author knows, the reason for forbidding the eating of things strangled is unknown. It is difficult to believe it was included in the list of prohibitions merely because it was a part of the law of Moses. But what the real object was can not be determined at this late date. There was doubtless a special reason for it then, and those to whom the letter was sent would know why.

THE DECREE DELIVERED

(Verses 30-35.)

We can imagine the eagerness with which the Antioch church waited for the return of those sent to Jerusalem. It would not be difficult to get the entire church together to hear their report. The "multitude" assembled listened to the "epistle," and "rejoiced for the consolation" or exhortation. It was complimentary to the church that it received instruction so gladly.

Nothing is more encouraging to-day than to find a congregation anxious to come together for a series of meetings to hear the teaching of inspired men, as contained in the Bible. There is good reason to believe that a revival of interest in Bible study is upon us. No themes will attract an audience so continuously as Bible themes, if they be handled by one familiar with Bible teaching on them. There is a growing number who love to meet in Bible school, prayer-meeting and regular worship

periods for instruction in the word.

Verse 32.—Judas and Silas were called "prophets," which means that special spiritual insight was theirs. They were inspired. It would be a rare treat for the Antioch brethren to hear such men from the mother church. That congregation was surely blessed in the large number of great preachers who ministered unto it. Great preachers are almost certain to leave great churches behind them—not always a multitude in numbers, but a church mighty in good deeds and loyalty to the revealed Word. A real, true preacher will train every congregation to which he ministers in genuine Christian doctrine and life.

Verse 33.—The success of the attempt to prevent a rupture in the church is proven by the statement that "they were dismissed in peace from the brethren" to go back to Jerusalem. The effort of inspired leaders was effective.

The divided church to-day could be united in a short time if all who profess to love and honor Jesus Christ were to listen to the "divine decrees" of His word. All men who spoke by the Holy Spirit spoke the same thing in every matter of doctrine and life. It is easy to learn what they taught. The difficulty is to induce people to cease substituting their own theories. Those acknowledging its authority are willing to listen when it speaks. Those desiring to usurp authority for themselves object to having the Bible revered. The man speaking slightly of the word of God, with reference to its inspiration or authority or sufficiency, should be granted no place as preacher or teacher in our churches to-day.

Verse 35.—Scriptural warrant for a multiple ministry is here found. Paul, Barnabas and "many others" devoted their time and talents to building up a great church there. It may be that the church of the future will have a more

and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Fare ye well.

30 So they, when they were dismissed, came down to Antioch; and having gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the consolation. 32 And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. 33 And after they had spent some time there, they were dismissed in peace from the brethren unto those that had sent them forth. 35 But Paul and Barnabas tarried in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

diversified ministry than is common at present. A group of men with differing, but supplementary, talents could unitedly

build up a marvelous church almost anywhere. They did it in the days of the apostles and it can be done now.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Certain disciples who had been Pharisees taught that obedience to Christ was vain without obedience to the law of Moses, and a conference of Christians was held in Jerusalem to decide the matter. (Vs. 1-4.)

2. This conflict between Judaizers and Gentile Christians, sooner or later, was inevitable and the Antioch brethren sent Paul and Barnabas, their best representatives. The discussion in this instance was over the Jewish rite of circumcision. (Vs. 1-4.)

3. The inspired men of the Jerusalem church were of one mind on the relation of the law of Moses to the gospel of Christ. The Pharisee believers caused the trouble, but the whole matter was settled in a brotherly conference. (Vs. 5, 6.)

4. Peter did much toward bringing about the understanding that settled the question by referring to his wonderful experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the conversion of Cornelius. (Vs. 7-11.)

5. Barnabas and Paul corroborated

Peter's testimony at the conference, and then James closed the discussion. This James was doubtless the "brother of Jesus," who wrote the Epistle of James, and who was the minister of the Jerusalem church. That Jesus' own brethren were members of the Jerusalem congregation is evidence of his divinity. (Vs. 12-21.)

6. The unanimous decision of the council at Jerusalem was to the effect that Jews and Gentiles were on the same basis in Christ. Jewish Christians were to remember this, and certain brethren were sent back with Paul and Barnabas to explain at Antioch that Gentile Christians were to do the same. This meant the modification of certain ceremonial practices of both. (Vs. 22-29.)

7. When these brethren reached Antioch and read the decree of the inspired men in Jerusalem everything was happily and peaceably adjusted. A similar course would settle matters now. All that is needed is willingness to heed the plain teachings of the inspired Word and cease substituting our own notions.

QUESTIONS

1. Who precipitated the discussion leading to the Jerusalem conference? (15:1.) 2. What special danger to the peace of the church threatened as a result of this dispute? 3. What argument would be used by those who favored making circumcision binding upon Gentiles? 4. For what purpose did the church at Antioch send men to Jerusalem? 5. Was there any dispute among the apostles and elders on this question? 6. What difference remained after the

conference? 7. State the arguments of Peter and James. (Vs. 7-21.) 8. Discuss the decree, giving reasons for each of its provisions. (Vs. 23-29.) 9. How would Bible study affect the divided church to-day, if conducted with the desire of learning just what is taught? 10. What is the advantage to a church of a regular Bible-study period? 11. What seems to be taught here concerning the advantage of having more than one minister serving a congregation?

LESSON SEVENTEEN

FIRST STAGE OF PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 15:36—16:15

Memory Text.—"There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."—Acts 15:9.

LESSON PLAN

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|---|---|
| <p>1. Why Two Companies.
2. Timothy Joins Paul.</p> | <p>3. The Troas Vision.
4. Lydia Converted.</p> |
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COMMENTS

We closed the last lesson with Paul and Barnabas ministering to the Antioch church. Just how long they continued in that capacity is uncertain, but sufficiently long to leave the church in healthy condition, with a renewal of the missionary spirit.

WHY TWO COMPANIES WENT OUT INSTEAD OF ONE

(Verses 36-41.)

Verse 36.—It is Paul who proposes the tour of inspection through the region where they had established churches in Asia Minor.

The restless zeal of one who is filled with the missionary passion passes the comprehension of one not thus imbued. Such fiery enthusiasm for bearing the gospel story to heathen souls impresses the disinterested as mere fanaticism. It is the "fanatic" that has always done the world a real service. Not that every fanatic has so done, but few who have rendered a service of worth have escaped the charge of being "fanatics."

How Paul's heart yearned for those young disciples who had been left to combat the subtle influences of heathenism. He must know "how they fare." Can they keep the lamp of Christ burning in the awful black damp of paganism?

Barnabas agreed to the proposal, and expressed a desire to repeat the first trip, even to taking his nephew Mark along.

To this Paul objected. On the earlier journey Mark had deserted them at Perga, just at the point where they were ready to penetrate the unknown interior, wholly given up to idolatry. What motive led him to turn back is not stated, but in Paul's judgment it was an unworthy one. Himself endowed with a courage, zeal and devotion of a most unusual type, Paul could not tolerate the company of one in whose loyalty he had little confidence. Because Mark failed them once, Paul reasoned that he might do so again. Barnabas, either for reasons of blood relationship or because he had evidence of a change in Mark, argued for his admittance to the party. He saw qualities in Mark of real worth. Paul had no patience with a quitter. To him the ministry was not a reform school. They doubtless had some heated controversy on the subject. It was regrettable that men so full of the Holy Spirit should disagree so hotly. It is ever a tragedy for good friends to fall out.

Let it not be overlooked that their difference was in their judgment of a man, not on a matter of doctrine, nor on the advisability of another missionary campaign. The Spirit had been given them to guide into a knowledge of the truth they were to teach, but not to control their personal conduct in any manner whatever. In ordinary affairs they were left with no more guidance or help from above than we have to-day.

15: 36 And after some days Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare. 37 And Barnabas was minded to take with them John¹ also, who was called Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed away unto Cyprus: 40 but Paul chose Silas, and went forth, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

It was in their work as teachers of Christianity that they were miraculously preserved from error.

It is quite possible that another reason entered into their parting company. In Gal. 3: 11 *seq.* Paul tells of Barnabas being carried away with a faction in the Antioch church which held that Jewish Christians should refuse to have social intercourse with the Gentile members thereof. Paul had personally withstood both Barnabas and Peter, who was led away by the same dissension, accusing them of inconsistency, if not cowardice.

Perhaps this incident occurred shortly prior to this second missionary tour. If so, it will help us to account for their separation. When men differ seriously on one matter it always opens up the way for other estrangements. These apostles, however, were too great as men to permit a personal dispute to mar their friendship permanently or lessen their regard for each other. To the end they remained fast friends, bound by such ties as only those who have shared mutual hardships can experience.

A truly great man will hold no grudge. He may differ with vehemence from one whose actions he disapproves, but when the debate is over, he will not forget that there are many things on which they agree, and a common interest in these things forbids permanent enmity. Any man who "holds spite" is too small to bother with.

Their misunderstanding had at least one advantage for the cause they both loved better than life. Two missionary tours were made instead of one. Occasionally differences between Christians on matters of policy or expediency result in a division of activities which extends the kingdom more rapidly than it would had no such difference arisen. In that event, if the parties keep their Christian regard for each other, separation may be a blessing in disguise.

Barnabas, with Mark, took the same route followed before, going to Cyprus, Barnabas' home. Paul chose Silas (sometimes written Sylvanus) and started northward into Asia Minor, traveling by land all the way. The journeys of both parties may be traced on the map.

Before passing from this incident, attention should be directed to Paul's message to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4: 11, in which he asks Timothy to bring Mark with him to Rome, that he might minister in his behalf at Rome. Paul says: "He is useful to me for ministering." This makes it clear that Mark redeemed himself in the eyes of Paul, a task not overly easy when dealing with a man so exacting and devoted as Paul. Barnabas knew better than Paul what sort of qualities Mark possessed. He had watched him grow to young manhood, and noted sterling honesty and versatility manifesting itself, and was determined that one failure should not prevent his doing the great work of which he was capable. We are profoundly grateful to Barnabas for "holding on" to Mark. Otherwise we should have seen him disappear from history, perhaps, without data on which to base a just estimate of his real character. In such an event, we should have had no "Gospel according to Mark," a book that is a model in condensed biography and graphic description.

Men of strong convictions, positive temperament and unswerving fidelity to the truth as they see it, are likely to be hasty in passing judgment on those less heroic or less dependable. Fickleness and uncertainty of mind, hesitation in allying one's self with a righteous cause, are almost unpardonable sins for such men. We need leadership of that type. But it is most fortunate that we have the patient, hopeful, trustful men of Barnabas' disposition also, or many promising young men would be lost to every righteous cause.

16: 1 And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra; and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek. 2 The same was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those parts: for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 And as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep which had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

TIMOTHY JOINS PAUL

(Chapter 16: 1-5.)

With what emotion would Paul look on the cities of Derbe and Lystra. As he entered the latter, he would probably go in through the gate at which he had been stoned. He would pause and thank God for having spared his life there and for the privilege of testifying, by means of persecution, of his honesty and loyalty.

We can surmise to what house he would go first, the home of Timothy, who in the meantime has grown into young manhood, and given evidence of unusual preaching ability. How Paul's heart would glow as he listened to this young convert, his own "child in the faith," preaching the blessed gospel of the Son of God. The winning of one such promising boy was worth all his sufferings when stoned. Immediately Paul planned for the training of Timothy to become his personal helper in the work of evangelism.

The influence of his mother and grandmother must not be overlooked (2 Tim. 1: 5). The number of men possessed of great religious passion, who credit their mothers with planting this impulse in them, is legion. This seems to be one of the spheres of woman's influence where her peculiar powers can be manifested to best advantage. Woman is naturally more religious than man. She will endure more, work harder, believe more implicitly, love more. The fact that his father is merely mentioned would indicate that, if a Christian at all, he was not especially active. The probability is that he was negative religiously.

Knowing that he and Timothy would encounter Jews who had become Christians that were still full of racial prejudice, Paul circumcised Timothy before starting out on their westward trip. He would want to take the young half-

Greek into synagogues with him, for he frequently found his best opening for beginning his evangelism in the synagogue.

On such occasions he desired to lose no time in discussing this obsolete practice with worshipers in the synagogue, therefore removed all cause for it by voluntarily yielding to their tenets.

This action was solely to prevent arguments which might alienate possible converts to Christ. In no sense was it designed to encourage the continuation of the custom, nor impose it on any Gentile. It had absolutely no religious significance in Christianity, as it did in Mosaism, hence could be practiced or omitted as might be desired by each individual. It was not wrong to practice it, nor wrong to refuse. *Per se*, the act had no moral quality. But if it would open the way for a more favorable hearing of the gospel on the part of some Jews, both Paul and Timothy were willing to take the necessary step that such advantage might be gained. Had the Jews demanded it as a concession to their religious scruples, Paul would have refused to yield. That we know from his conduct in the case of Titus, another Greek who labored with him (Gal. 2: 3-5). Certain Jewish Christians demanded that Titus be circumcised, in recognition of the binding character of the law of Moses, but Paul positively refused. Had he yielded to their demands concerning Titus, the ordinances of the annulled law of Moses would have been bound on Gentiles, and the church would have become an adjunct to Judaism. Paul knew this.

From Paul's conduct in these two instances, we learn that it is sometimes right to perform a certain act under one set of circumstances, and wrong to do the same thing under different circumstances. The law of expediency must govern in such cases. We are free to do some things voluntarily, which, if

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7 and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not; 8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 And when he had seen the vision, straightway we sought to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel unto them.

done under duress, would be wrong, because those to whom we yielded would misinterpret our motive or be encouraged to continue dictatorial policies certain to destroy all liberty.

It was a proud day for Timothy's mother and a great day for the church at Lystra when the young preacher started off with Paul and Silas as a messenger of Jesus Christ. A congregation frequently grows stronger by sending forth its best workers to labor in other fields. Unsuspected talent comes to the front and unrevealed devotion takes up the waiting tasks.

The effect of the faithful ministry of these three ministers was evident from the beginning. "Churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." Their missionary work was first, last, always evangelistic. This is the only true test of successful work on mission fields. Where converts are being made the work is successful and pleasing to the Lord. Where souls are not won to Christ, He is not pleased, nor is successful work done, even though much educational, industrial or hospital work be carried on.

THE TROAS VISION

(Verses 6-10.)

Note on the map the course traveled by the three as they went in a north-westerly direction through Asia Minor. The missionaries evidently desired to preach in all the cities and villages through which they passed, but the Spirit directed them elsewhere. They were not permitted to turn to the right, to go into Bithynia, nor to the left into Asia (the province of which Ephesus was the leading city), nor to turn back. There was but one thing to do, go straight forward. While feeling keen disappointment in not being permitted to go to Ephesus on this trip, Paul was not rebellious. He knew that if guided elsewhere, it was for the larger good

that might result, so was content.

Later we shall see him providentially guided to that same city by the Spirit.

There are times when openings, to do work in certain centers, seem to have been providentially made, and other times when the way to such labor would seem providentially closed.

Verse 8.—The preachers must have experienced some emotion on reaching Troas, the Troy of Homer. They were not so far removed from that siege, in which the wooden horse figured, that they could have been indifferent to its tragic story.

On retiring that night they would be much perplexed. Having been urged forward, at last they have come to the sea and can walk no farther. What has the Lord for them now? Doubts vanished in the vision Paul experienced during the night. This (by vision) was one of the Spirit's methods of guiding them to the region where he desired them to labor. Immediately Paul prepared to go into Greece, thus carrying the gospel message for the first time to European soil. Macedonia was the northern part of Greece, as we know it to-day, in which such cities as Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea were located.

LYDIA CONVERTED

(Verses 11-15.)

The student will notice at this point in the narrative a change in the personal pronouns used by the writer. Thus far he has used the third person exclusively in his narrative. Now he abruptly changes to the first. This informs us that it was at Troas that Luke joined Paul and party. Perhaps they were hurried on through Asia Minor to meet him there. It is a tribute to his modesty that Luke says nothing about his conversion nor explains how he came to give up the practice of medicine in a settled way to become a member of this traveling group of ministers. We wish he had

11 Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace, and the day following to Neapolis; 12 and from thence to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony: and we were in this city tarrying certain days. 13 And on the sabbath day we went forth without the gate by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women that were come together.

said more about it. Did one of the preachers need the services of a physician at Troy, and call Luke to his aid? Did they preach there while waiting for a boat, and Luke accidentally hear them? No answer to these questions is possible.

It has always seemed to the writer of these notes that from the early period of missionary effort the Lord sanctioned the labors of the medical missionary. We know that Luke was a trained doctor, but nothing is said of his preaching ability. He possibly was more useful to Paul, who was sick at times, and the party as a whole, in his capacity as physician, than as preacher. There are few fields of service offering more opportunities for doing constructive work in the kingdom than the practice of medicine. A fine Christian doctor is an asset to any church and community. Our medical missionaries have opportunities to preach the gospel, which those not thus qualified could never meet. Homes which would be shut because of racial or religious prejudice open to the one who can minister in time of physical need. All differences disappear when the life of one beloved is hanging by a perilous thread. When a pagan, Mohammedan or Buddhist is sick unto death, he will gladly avail himself of the services of a scientifically trained Christian physician. Jesus' work as healer made many converts. Likewise His followers to-day may bring many souls to Him through the ministry of healing, an art successfully applied only in Christian lands.

When the travelers set sail from Troas, evidence of providential guidance was again granted, in that they made a quick journey to Samothrace. "By a straight course" means that the wind favored them, and they sailed directly to their destination, which was an island near Neapolis, a seaport for Philippi.

Verse 12.—Philippi was the most important city of the district in which it was situated, and a "colony," meaning that it had been settled by Romans from

Italy under order from the Government at Rome.

Greek people, however, predominated there. The official places were filled by Romans, but, being in Macedonia, Greek influences, culture and religion would largely prevail.

Verse 13.—Relatively few Jews were in Philippi, else there would have been a synagogue there. But an opening for the preachers was found at the river-side, where certain Jewish women resorted to worship and pray as best they could when denied synagogue privileges.

What a lesson for indifferent disciples of Christ to-day in the conduct of those godly women. Many modern Christians, when away from home, or living in a community where no church is found, either complacently fit into the religious *regime* of the church nearest them, regardless of its loyalty to the Scriptures or its practices in observing the ordinances, or else abandon all pretense of worship. What a different impression might be made in such instances if those who are satisfied to be Christians only would gather their neighbors into their own homes and there study the Word, observe the Lord's Supper, and teach the plan of salvation. Such a course would result in the speedy establishment of a new church. It is safe to state that more than 50 per cent. of the churches of Christ now in existence originated in this manner.

Luke says: "We spake to the women that were come together." All four—Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke—did the teaching. One wonders whether they had a service somewhat like our Bible schools of to-day. It is clear that they did the work a modern Bible school is organized to do.

Verses 14, 15.—Here is the record of another case of conversion. Let us study the instance, with the purpose of ascertaining what constituted the conversion and how it was brought about.

Lydia was several hundred miles away from home, with a consignment of the famous "purple" cloth (now called

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Turkish red), a product for which Thyatira was noted. This city, located in west-central Asia Minor, was also famous for its labor unions, the copper-smiths and dyers being especially well organized and controlling the industries in which they were engaged. Modern unions are nothing new under the sun.

This cloth merchant was more faithful to her religion than many of her race to-day, for she observed the Sabbath day, a practice which only the strictly orthodox maintain now. It costs too much to close a store on Saturday (the Sabbath), so the more progressive Jew does business on that day and closes on the Lord's Day, catering to the custom of Christian nations.

Not many particulars are given concerning Lydia's conversion, but sufficient to enable us to understand the case thoroughly. She was a devout Jewess, a believer in God, so the preachers would not find it necessary to teach concerning His personality. It would be necessary to teach her about Jesus, His personality and mission. She had never heard of Him, in all probability. Paul's "speaking" would be on that subject, of course. Luke remarks that "the Lord opened her heart" so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. Paul's preaching opened her understanding of Jesus' redemptive work in the world, and when she learned His demands she yielded to them. She believed in Him and did all that He commanded.

We have already learned that God opens sinners' hearts by preaching Christ to them. In this instance, the message was the Lord's, the plan of salvation was His, He sent the preachers to inform her of His will, so it could be said legitimately that "the Lord opened her heart." She co-operated with God by honestly listening, then obeying the gospel. Paul, in 2 Thess. 2: 14, tells the Thessalonians that He "called" them through His gospel. That is the only way God calls any one to His service. The sinner hears the word of Christ, accepts it as a divine message, obeys it,

whereupon his sins are forgiven and he is "called of God."

Rom. 10: 9-15 makes the order of procedure in the process of becoming a Christian very clear. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In order that people may hear, there must be a preacher.

When Lydia "attended to the things that were spoken by Paul" she was baptized. This action on her part was in obedience to what Jesus had commanded His disciples to preach and practice. If baptism was required in her case, and she was commended for attending to it at once, who dares say to-day it is of no special importance, that it is "only a form," or that it may be indefinitely postponed?

Not only Lydia, but her "household" also, obeyed the gospel. As in the case of Cornelius, this included all who dwelt in the same house with her, such as members of her family, servants and salespeople. Advocates of infant baptism have made much of this case in support of their doctrine. Let us look into the matter a little. To find authority for infant baptism, several assumptions are necessary, for certainly nothing is said about "infants."

First, it is assumed that Lydia was married, though the presumption would be that she was not. It was most rare in that day for a married woman to be away from home on business.

Second, it is assumed that she had children. No proof of that.

Third, it is assumed that if she had children, some of them were infants. It is not probable that she would have been so far away from home if she had "infants" to care for, because Jewish matrons of that day were not given to neglect of their homes.

Fourth, it is assumed that "if" she were married, "if" she had children, "if" some were infants, she had them with her, another improbability. The more reasonable guess (for that is the strongest word we can use for such "argument") is that she was an un-

married woman, only such being likely to be engaged in such business as she was conducting. She would have some salespeople assisting her. For convenience they would have temporary quarters where they lived and sold their goods, this being their "household." It was into this "household" that Paul and his party were constrained to enter,

making it their headquarters during their preaching there. Thus the church at Philippi, to which Paul wrote his tenderest letter, was established in the house of this woman of Thyatira.

It is more than probable that when she returned home she started another church, for in Revelation Jesus sends a message to the church in Thyatira.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Paul and Barnabas remained at Antioch for a time, then Paul became restless to revisit the churches they had established on their first missionary journey. The missionary spirit is always thus. Being unable to agree upon John Mark, they separated, Paul taking Silas and Barnabas taking Mark. Note that this difference was over a man and not over doctrine. (Vs. 36-41.)

2. Paul held no grudge against Mark nor did he permit the disagreement to interfere with his friendship with Barnabas. He was too big a man for that. He simply believed that Mark was not the right man for the trip. Afterward, Mark was reinstated in Paul's esteem. (Vs. 36-41.)

3. At Lystra, Paul met Timothy again, his own "child in the faith," and planned for the training of that splendid young man. Timothy's passion for religion came from his mother, as does that of most men. It was a proud day for the Lystra church when it sent Timothy into the ministry of the gospel. (16: 1-5.)

4. Guided by the Spirit, the missionaries, against their inclinations, went

on to Troas (the Troy of Homer), instead of stopping at Bithynia. That night in a vision Paul was summoned to Macedonia to introduce the gospel into Europe. (Vs. 6-10.)

5. In the eleventh verse of this sixteenth chapter, Luke suddenly changes the pronouns of his narrative from the third person to the first, indicating that he, Luke, joined the party at Troas. Possibly he was added because he was a physician, and because of the importance of medical missions. (Vs. 11-15.)

6. The conversion of Lydia occurred at a little prayer-meeting by the river. Many a church of Christ could be started with a similarly small number. Lydia was a Jewess, faithful to her religion. She doubtless had never heard of Jesus. Through Paul's preaching, the Lord opened her heart so that she did what he commanded. That Lydia's "household" was baptized does not support infant baptism. Households included servants and others abiding together. It is not known that Lydia was married. Infants can not come to Christ by faith and obedience and there is no mention made of infants.

QUESTIONS

1. Who proposed the second missionary tour? 2. What led Paul and Barnabas to separate? 3. With which apostle do you sympathize in this controversy? 4. Do such disputes ever work out to the furtherance of the gospel? 5. Who became Paul's companion? 6. Tell something of the young man who joined Paul at Lystra. 7. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy and refuse to circumcise Titus? 8. Why did they not preach in Asia Minor as they passed through? 9. Tell

of Paul's vision at Troas. (Vs. 9, 10.) 10. How do we know that Luke joined the party at Troas? (V. 11.) 11. What is the importance of medical missions to-day? 12. Tell the story of the conversion of Lydia. 13. How did the Lord "open her heart"? 14. What authority for infant baptism does this case of conversion contain? 15. What lesson concerning our duty in organizing churches can we learn from the example of Lydia?

LESSON EIGHTEEN

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR

—Continued

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 16:16-40

Memory Text.—“And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized.”—Acts 16:32, 33.

LESSON PLAN

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|---|--|
| 1. A Demonized Girl Healed. | Unique Experience. |
| 2. Gospel Opposed—“Business Reasons.” | 4. The Apostles Demand Roman Citizenship Rights. |
| 3. Prisoners in Jail at Philippi have a | |

COMMENTS

A DEMONIZED GIRL HEALED

(Chapter 16:16-18.)

The conversion of Lydia did not lead to the abandonment of the riverside as a place of prayer. It had been used for that purpose long enough to impart to it a holy association, and those likely to be reached with the gospel message would be found there in larger numbers than anywhere else.

There is much in sentiment. Certain places have a rich memory because of the sentiment of the heart that makes love possible. Our deepest religious experiences are usually associated with some place. Many early converts to Christ in that region would look back to the riverside at Philippi as one of the great experiences of life, because they had heard the great Paul there.

The case of the healing of the maid with a “spirit of divination” is interesting and profitable for study. The narrative assumes that she was possessed by a real personality, an intelligence under the power of Satan. In this day it is well to remember that the New Testament teaches the personality of the devil and his emissaries from the regions of the condemned. There is not a hint that the girl was suffering from dementia. Her affliction consisted in being under the domination of a personality

other than herself, as in the case of one hypnotized.

There is good reason to believe that during the first century, when Jesus and His apostles were here on earth personally, that unusual liberties were accorded Satan and his angels to manifest their power.

This afforded opportunity to attest the superiority of Jesus over denizens of the unseen world, as He demonstrated His power over disease, nature and death, in the material world. In no other manner could actual proof of His supremacy in the unseen world have been given. It is likely therefore that special privileges were given these adversaries of God and man, to exert themselves to the utmost while the age of miracle lasted, that we might have evidence from the spirit realm of Jesus' supremacy there—an additional proof of His deity. There is no good historical testimony that the phenomenon of demon possession has been observed in any other century.

This particular demon told the truth. It may seem strange that Paul would resent such advertising. But he knew the effect of association. If he acknowledged the truth of this testimony, the people would naturally accuse him of being in league with the demon. The demon doubtless chose to tell the truth in this instance expressly for the pur-

LESSON TEXT

16 And it came to pass, as we were going to the place of prayer, that a certain maid having a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. 17 The same following after Paul and us cried out, saying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim unto you the way of salvation. 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, being sore troubled, turned and said to the spirit, I charge thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold on Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers, 20 and

pose of embarrassing Paul and prejudicing the people against his message. The adage, "A man is known by the company he keeps," has always been used both for and against a person. One can not be too careful about his associates nor whose teaching he endorses. It is possible that evil people may teach much truth in order to gain acceptance for some error.

The simple method of exorcism and completeness of the cure were impressive. A mere order, issued in the name of Jesus Christ, was the only ceremony, and the girl was immediately freed from the control of the evil spirit.

GOSPEL OPPOSED FOR "BUSINESS REASONS"

(Verses 19-24.)

The masters of the maid became patriotic very suddenly when their means of gaining an easy living at the expense of the afflicted girl was lost. She probably had such power as is claimed by clairvoyants and spirit mediums. People have always been eager to learn the secrets of the future, and will pay money to any one who pretends to reveal it. Those masters had a lucrative business in the capacity of "managers" of the demon-possessed girl. Such persons are not noted for their patriotic or religious zeal, usually, but let something arise that interferes with their unholy methods of money-getting, and they sometimes become very pious and patriotic. In this particular instance they began to accuse Paul and Silas of being disloyal to Rome. The charge would have both a religious and political aspect. The teaching of the preachers, that Jesus was "King of kings, and Lord of lords," was perverted so as to make them guilty of sedition. The accusers would point out the abandonment

of idol temples by Christians, and prophesy the complete overthrow of Rome's national gods, thus endangering the authority of the state itself. It is easy to see how their charges would appeal to ignorant and prejudiced folk.

In our own time, we have seen similar conduct on the part of all wicked men against whose business restrictive, reform or prohibitive measures became necessary.

The saloon-keeper suddenly became zealous for the retention of "personal liberty" guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, felt a holy concern about the tax-payer whose burdens he so gladly bore, and pleaded for the privilege of paying extra license fees, when he saw the handwriting on the wall dooming his iniquitous business to extinction.

The dive-keeper becomes frantic in his fear for the safety of respectable women on the streets when his revenue-producing brothel is to be closed. His interest in virtuous women becomes pathetic.

Entrenched sin has always fought bitterly for its privileges, and wherever it has been overthrown, some leaders in the reform movements have been persecuted. This is a part of the price every true man must pay for his righteousness. Men of this heroic stamp are the sort God loves, and he will reward them hereafter.

Earth seldom does. Persecution, prison, death, marks the pathway of right's triumph over wrong in every age. How badly the world needs men willing to endure persecution, loss of property, failure in business, even death, that right may prevail.

This incident furnishes another instance of the fickleness of the multitude. The same people who witnessed the exorcism of the demon and marveled, soon joined the ranks of the persecutors. Paul and Silas were illegally whipped

when they had brought them unto the magistrates, they said, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21 and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans. 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent their garments off them, and commanded to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and

by the municipal judges, at the demand of the populace. We sometimes censure judges for not being responsive immediately to popular sentiment, but, on the whole, such procedure on the part of magistrates would not insure justice. In many cases, as in the instance being studied, injustice results from such yielding. Popular government is correct in principle, but it needs to safeguard itself to prevent defeating its own ends. If courts should be made immediately responsive to every popular demand, Sovietism is the ideal system of government.

Luke's mention of rods as the implements of chastisement is another of the marks of historical accuracy for which his Acts has become famed. The Romans used rods, whereas the Jews used whips of thongs.

The care exercised by the jailor in guarding his prisoners indicates that he feared his ability to hold them. If he permitted them to escape, his own life would be forfeited. Under the Government of Rome, a sheriff was responsible for the safekeeping of his prisoners. His bond for failure to do so was the death penalty. The unusual precaution taken by this jailor, placing the men in the inner compartment and confining their feet in stocks, was due to his knowledge of the miracle they had performed in casting out the demon. He felt it necessary to take no risk whatever with such men, seeing their power over unseen forces. He made escape humanly impossible for them.

If laws were passed defining a jailor's duty in protecting prisoners, with a stringent penalty for failure to perform that duty, and such laws scrupulously enforced, the disgrace of lynchings would soon pass from our fair land.

Non-enforcement of law is responsible for such lawlessness. In England there is rigid enforcement of law, with the result that crime is reduced to a minimum.

PRISONERS IN JAIL AT PHILIPPI HAVE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

(Verses 25-34.)

It would seem that everything connected with the imprisonment of Paul and Silas conspired to give them an audience providentially prepared to listen to the gospel story.

If the Lord's apostles must be imprisoned, He will see to it that they are furnished an opportunity to preach His gospel even in prison. "The prisoners were listening to them," Luke states. Of course they would be listening. Perhaps the only men to whom prison life was a new experience were the two preachers.

The others, seasoned criminals or petty violators, had seen much of the inside of prisons, but never had they seen or heard such men as shared the stocks and inner jail with them that night. "What sort of men can they be?" would be the inquiry of every occupant of the bastille.

Sleep would flee from Paul and Silas in their new environment. The disgrace, the uncertain events of the morrow, the possible effect on new converts of their arrest, all these and a thousand other disturbing thoughts would be rushing through their minds. In their desperation they turned to God, who never forsakes His true followers, even when they are disgraced in the eyes of men. Conscientious of no sin, knowing their persecution due to their faithful proclamation of the gospel, they were happy despite their misery and suffering. They could sing praises to God and thank Him for having been found worthy to suffer for His sake. What a blessed gospel it is that can turn such sorrow into joy. Suffering, sorrow, as a means of fitting for service, is one of the peculiarities of the religion of Christ.

Those persecuted because of faithful preaching the gospel have this compensation, always. Such treatment is an ac-

suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison-house were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened; and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 And he called for lights and sprang in, and, trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. 32 And they spake the word of the Lord

knowledge of the effectiveness of their labors. Some preachers are never criticized by any one, being pronounced a "very good fellow, loving, careful of giving offense." The Lord never called such men to preach His gospel. They lack heroism and true devotion. The world may not be worse for their living in it, but it is no better. Spineless negatives can not overcome the world.

The conduct of Paul and Silas would insure every prisoner being wide awake when the earthquake came, thus qualifying them to be competent witnesses to the fact that the phenomenon of the jail doors being opened and prisoners loosed was not due to an attempted delivery from the outside nor to an insurrection from within. Prisoners and jailor alike would thus be providentially prepared for hearing Paul's explanatory sermon.

If Christians to-day were as ready to use every opportunity to advantage as were the missionaries at Philippi, Christ's church would advance more rapidly. Prison cells, executioners' blocks and scaffolds have served as effective pulpits for faithful preachers. "Pilgrim's Progress" might never have been written had not the tinker of Elstow suffered in prison. Savonarola led more to reform by means of his martyrdom than even his eloquent and consecrated lips had been able to move.

The earthquake was clearly a miracle. No common shaking of the earth's crust could shake the foundations of the jail, and loose every bond, throw wide open the doors, and harm no one. This miracle was designed to direct the attention of those witnessing it to what the apostles would have to say afterward concerning Christ.

Verse 27.—The consternation of the jailor was natural. According to the code of honor then recognized, he was about to do the only thing that could vindicate him of the charge of carelessness, commit suicide. That would re-

lieve him of the suspicion of having conspired with the prisoners to effect their release.

Verse 28.—The reassuring word from Paul convinced him of the supernatural nature of the happening. He very logically connected Paul and Silas with the miracle, in some manner. His question, "What must I do to be saved?" leads us to suspect that he knew something of the preaching of these men. The suddenness of his asking the question can be explained only on this theory.

Perhaps in his rounds of duty in the city streets he had heard them for a few moments, listening merely out of curiosity, and been somewhat impressed with their doctrine. Some seed had fallen on good ground. They had talked about the forgiveness of sin. After all, that was what mattered. He knew himself a sinner, and believed these men could tell him God's plan for forgiveness.

Verse 31.—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house," together with Rom. 5:1, "Being therefore justified by faith," furnish the basis for the doctrine of justification by faith only. Those holding this view insist that forgiveness is immediate when faith comes. If these were the only passages bearing on the subjects, we might be justified in this conclusion. But there are other replies to the same identical question which must be considered. The true doctrine will make possible the harmonizing of all Scriptural teachings on the subject.

The student will remember that the Pentecostians (Acts 2) asked Peter the same question. The apostle gave this command: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins."

Paul asked the same question of Jesus on the Damascan plain (Acts 22:10). Jesus replied: "Arise and go into

unto him, with all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. 34 And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God.

35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. 36 And the jailor reported the words to Paul, saying, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore come forth, and go in peace. 37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men that are Romans, and have cast us into prison; and do they

Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do." The verses following narrate the conversation between Ananias and Saul, and the only thing commanded by Ananias is: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

This inductive study of all the passages answering the question, "What must I do to be saved?" reveals the fact that not every inquirer received the same instructions.

The reason is not difficult to discern. The Philippian jailor was a heathen, ignorant of the person and mission of Jesus.

In telling him what to do, Paul began with him where he then was in his religious experience, and told him the first thing to do was to believe on Jesus as the Christ.

Verse 32.—He next proceeded to "speak the word of the Lord unto him, and to all that were in his house." That is, he placed before his inquirer the arguments for Jesus' deity, giving reasons for the faith which he said was necessary to salvation, the discourse dealing with the evidences on which Christ's claims rested.

The apostles did not arbitrarily command faith without giving testimony to justify it. There are "many infallible proofs" of the deity of our Lord, and inspired men spent much time in citing them.

Verse 33.—Paul did not stop when he had argued for Jesus' deity. The jailor "took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, immediately."

The necessity of "immediate" obedience to all Jesus' commands is strongly suggested here. There is too much indifference with reference to obedience to Christ's ordinances to-day. It is not uncommon to defer baptism until a "convenient season."

Neither Scriptural teaching nor precedent justify that procedure. Delay begets contempt for the ordinance. The earliest possible moment is always the best time for obeying any command of inspiration.

The reason why Peter did not tell the Pentecostians to "believe" was because they already believed when they asked the question. It was their faith, induced by Peter's sermon, that led them to make the inquiry. If faith alone saves, Peter should have told them they were already saved, and could take their time to obey positive ordinances. Instead, he told them to "repent, and be baptized unto the remission of your sins." Surely they were not forgiven when they asked the question. To affirm they were makes Peter a trifler or brands him with being ignorant, a dilemma neither horn of which a devout Bible student will care to take.

In the case of Paul, when Ananias instructed him, he was not only a believer, but penitent. Ananias gave the answer which applied to one having made that much progress in his conversion by saying: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sin."

The study of all these cases reveals the Scriptural terms of salvation; viz., belief on Jesus as the Christ, repentance of sin, and baptism into Christ. One having done these things, publicly confessing his faith, has the assurance of Christ's own word that he is a child of God.

Before leaving this incident it may be well to remark that all in the house of the jailor were old enough to be intelligent auditors, for the record states that "they spake the word of the Lord unto all that were in his house," thus eliminating infants from this household.

To contend that there is Scriptural authority for the baptism of infants is to lay claim to something so utterly foundationless as to be foolish.

now cast us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and bring us out. 38 And the serjeants reported these words unto the magistrates: and they feared when they heard that they were Romans; 39 and they came and besought them; and when they had brought them out, they asked them to go away from the city. 40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

THE APOSTLES DEMAND ROMAN CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

(Verses 35-40.)

Verse 35.—When a report of the night's events reached the ears of magistrates who had ordered the public whipping of Paul and Silas, they discreetly decided to release the prisoners. For the apostles to have left the jail secretly would have subjected them to a possible misunderstanding. They had been treated as dangerous criminals. Their good name had been smirched. Should they depart without opportunity to publicly declare their innocence before a properly constituted court, the stigma might follow them elsewhere.

They therefore stood on their rights as Roman citizens and demanded a public vindication. The consternation of the magistrates who had so carelessly administered so-called justice that they had not even learned the citizenship of the accused may be imagined. Should their precipitate action be reported to Rome, they would be impeached at once. The life, liberty and property of a Roman citizen were jealously guarded by the Roman Government.

Abject apologies were made, and the court records would be expunged of all charges against them, that their innocence might be established, after which they were importuned to leave the city. They were not ordered to leave. They had a perfect right to remain, but to stay and insist on their rights might lead some outsiders to suspect Christianity as being antagonistic to the state, thus embarrassing its adherents and impeding its growth.

Discretion led them to heed the request.

Verse 40.—They remained long enough, however, to make certain that the newly made Christians should not misunderstand their departure.

They "comforted" the brethren by fully explaining the cause of their arrest, the action of the magistrates in releasing

them, and probably gave instructions to the church concerning its attitude toward the civil powers. The entire narrative shows how careful the early Christians were to obey the laws of the country where they lived. This is Christian duty to-day.

A large part of apostolic preaching was "comforting" those to whom they preached. This word means rather "exhortation," though the gospel has both aspects.

Exhortation, persuasion, encouragement, admonition. These are the meanings of this word "comfort." A fine quartet of duties for the preacher. How we love those who can comfort us. Who can comfort the child as well as the mother? Her power to do this awakens the first love in the heart of the child. She can comfort, because God has given her intuitive understanding of the child nature. The Christian who can comfort others must understand the need which demands comfort. To do this, one must have suffered himself as the one he would comfort. It is worth some suffering if, by the discipline of having passed through it, we are enabled to help others who suffer. The one most missed when summoned from earth is the "comforter" of the community.

It would be with deep emotion that Paul left Philippi. No other church treated him quite so well. Here he made real friends. Lydia and the unnamed jailor were both large-hearted and their spirit appears to have been imbibed by the entire church. Paul went to Thessalonica from Philippi, and in Phil. 4: 16 he thanks them for having sent "once and again" an offering to support him while in Thessalonica, where he was "laboring night and day" in the gospel.

Churches, as individuals, have a characteristic spirit. Every church of note or accomplishment has a certain quality or type of spirituality that distinguishes it from other churches. One is a missionary church, another a praying church, another a liberal church, another

a teaching church, another a loyal church. Perhaps in most instances the peculiar spirit of a congregation will be found to be that of its most influential members at the beginning of its life. Certain ideals became the inherited possessions of the church, handed down from one set of leaders to the next. This fact shows how vital to future success the character of a charter membership

may be. Many dead churches died because their first leadership was unworthy or inefficient and the reputation of the congregation suffered, thereby keeping worth-while folk from identifying themselves with it. It is always well to delay organizing a body of believers until proper leadership has been found or developed. There is absolutely no success possible without leadership.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. On what seems to have been a different occasion from the conversion of Lydia, the apostles met a maid who had a "spirit of divination," which means that she was somehow under the power of Satan. It is likely that special privileges were given these Satanic adversaries while the age of miracle lasted, that the supremacy of Jesus might be shown. (Vs. 16-18.)

2. The "managers" of this unfortunate girl were making money through her demoniac powers. No course of procedure is so hellish that some men will not adopt it if there is "money in it." We see this illustrated every day.

Organized evil always fights to perpetuate itself. In this case the fickle crowd was swept into line by it.

The apostles were unjustly thrown into prison, where the jailor was responsible for them under penalty of death. (Vs. 19-24.)

3. As prisoners, Paul and Silas were "different." Their songs and prayers attracted the other prisoners. An earthquake liberated them all. The jailor was about to kill himself when Paul stopped him. The apostles witnessed his confession of faith, baptized him and were

taken hospitably into the jailor's home. (Vs. 25-34.)

4. If Christians to-day were as ready to use all opportunities to advantage as were the apostles and early Christians, Christianity would sweep the world. The earthquake plainly was a miracle. Evidently the purpose of the miracle was to direct the attention of witnesses to what the apostles would have to say afterward. (Vs. 25-34.)

5. In answer to the jailor's question, "What must I do to be saved?" the only recorded answer of the apostles was that he should "believe on the Lord Jesus." But a close study of all conversions described in Acts shows that each inquirer must have received the same instructions, and was required to take the same steps as all the others. (Vs. 25-34.)

6. After the jailor had been baptized the same hour of the night, the magistrates tried to evade responsibility for the apostles' imprisonment, but Paul forced them into the open by asserting Roman citizenship. The apostles then went to Lydia's hospitable home. A great church grew up in Philippi. (Vs. 35-40.)

QUESTIONS

1. What was the "spirit of divination" that possessed the damsel here mentioned? (Acts 16:16-18.) 2. Why did Paul resent the publicity given by this incident? 3. Why were the girl's "masters" offended when she was healed? 4. How much influence has the love of money always had in making the progress of truth difficult? 5. On what technicality were Paul and Silas cast

into prison? (V. 20.) 6. Tell the story of what happened in the prison. 7. Why was the jailor about to kill himself? 8. Does the fact that Paul simply told the jailor to "believe" prove that belief was all that was necessary? 9. Why did Paul and Silas refuse to go when permission came from the magistrates privately? 10. Why was Paul particularly attached to Philippi?

LESSON NINETEEN

PAUL'S SECOND TOUR—Continued

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 17:1-34

Memory Text.—"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so."—Acts 17: 11.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. Experiences at Thessalonica.
2. The "Noble" Bereans.
3. Paul's "Resting and Sight-seeing"</p> | <p>at Athens.
4. A New Sermon from a New Text, but the Same Message.</p> |
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COMMENTS

Of course it was with heavy hearts that Paul and Silas left Philippi. They were leaving tried and true friends. The final meeting in Lydia's house, "comforting the brethren," was affecting. It would have been a real joy for Paul to have remained with this infant church that needed him so much, and loved him so, but for the sake of the brethren there it was better for him to leave. The persecution seems to have been directed against Paul personally, and, by going on, the way for the progress of the gospel would be opened up.

EXPERIENCES AT THESSALONICA

(Chapter 17: 1-8.)

Verse 1.—The two cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia lay between Philippi and Thessalonica, both being centers of some importance.

Had the Spirit not directed their steps through these towns, the apostles would doubtless have preached there for a time, at least. But the time had come to enter another field, Thessalonica.

This was an interesting city then. It has been in our thought again in modern times. We know it as Salonica, an important base of operations by the allies in the late world war, its location making it a desirable military asset.

This ancient city was originally called Therma, from certain hot springs found there, but later was named Thessalonica by Cassander, in honor of his wife, who

was a step-sister of Alexander the Great.

A large and safe harbor gave it commercial importance.

These facts will help us to appreciate its value as a center from which to carry on missionary operations.

Being a "free city" under Rome, with a large amount of municipal liberty, it was a refuge for many nationalities. Jews were there in sufficient numbers to have a synagogue.

Verse 2.—There Paul began his labors, his custom always being to offer the gospel first to the Jews. It seems that if a Jew could be won to Christianity at all, it was a comparatively simple task and soon accomplished. Resisting, he seldom, if ever, became obedient to the faith. Opinionated people are very likely to be wrong, but none are quite so sure they are right.

Three successive Sabbaths were used reasoning from the prophets, showing how Jesus fulfilled the predictions concerning the Messiah. Thessalonian Jews were afflicted with the same spiritual blindness that afflicted the leaders of their race in Judea. They desired a Messiah, but to meet their approval he must be a superman in material things. A spiritual leadership and such salvation as Paul offered they despised. The fact that spiritually minded Jews were easily converted to Jesus as Christ, and the materialistic sons of Jacob could not be persuaded, should not be overlooked. The attitude of the Jews in that

LESSON TEXT

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2 and Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them, and for three sabbath days reasoned with them from the scriptures, 3 opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, said he, I proclaim unto you, is the Christ. 4 And some of them were persuaded, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5 But the Jews, being moved with jealousy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the rabble, and gathering a crowd, set the city on an uproar; and assaulting the house of Jason, they sought to bring them forth to the people. 6 And when they found

century has proven to be prophetic of all races.

Verse 3.—Paul's argument at Thessalonica stressed the atonement. "It behooved the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead." His teaching would follow the line of Philip in talking with the Ethiopian eunuch.

Verse 4.—From the beginning, Gentiles in Thessalonica seem to have been more receptive than Jews. The special mention of the "chief women" is interesting. The church has always had an honored place for women, differing radically in this respect from Judaism.

Verse 5.—Persecution in Thessalonica followed the usual course.

It was the strategy of unbelieving Jews to try to create the impression that Christianity was a religion that caused revolution. They stirred up the people, then blamed Christians for the commotion. The Jews loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Rome (though at heart every true Jew was a traitor), but accused the Christians of having "another king, one Jesus." A mob can soon be raised in any city from among the vicious and irresponsible. This class, perhaps for the mere love of excitement, or in the hope of loot easily obtained during a riot, joined with the Jews in assaulting the house of Jason, who was host to the apostles.

Their attempt to "bring them forth to the people" means that they tried to have the city council, which convened in "the name of the people," to pass sentence on them. Failing in this, they next took Jason and the leading brethren before the "rulers," called "politarchs" in Greek.

Since this name for an official class was not found outside the New Testament in Greek writings, unfriendly critics, until recently, have made much

of Luke's "ignorance or inaccuracy" in using a term not used by any one else. But, as in so many similar instances, the archeologist has discovered proof of Luke's accuracy, and proven the ignorance of the critics, for in Thessalonica itself several inscriptions have been dugged up in which this word "politarch" is used in reference to city officials there.

Despite all these facts corroborative of the truthfulness of the New Testament, some who still call themselves scholars continue to repeat the libelous statements that the books are full of historical blunders. Not one such blunder has been proven against a single writer. This is all the more remarkable when it is borne in mind that other writers of that period are noted for their admixture of myth and legend with history. This striking difference in the character of the writings is too remarkable to be accidental.

Verse 6.—The charge that "these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also," suggests that this was a proverb coming from the regions where Christ had been preached. It was a tribute to the gospel as a regenerating power, though they falsely represented it as violently revolutionary. The fault-finding proverb told the truth, in a sense. Christianity will right everything that is wrong, and the lover of unrighteousness looks upon it as a turning-upside-down system.

Verses 7-9.—It would appear that the prosecution was unsuccessful in obtaining a conviction of the preachers, but were able to compel a bond for maintenance of the peace to be drawn up, which Jason signed. Of course the next step of the persecutors would be to start new trouble, charging Paul and Silas with being the aggressors. It is easy to

them not, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7 whom Jason hath received: and these all act contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8 And they troubled the multitude and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who when they were come thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed; also of the Greek women of honorable estate, and of men, not a few. 13 But when

direct suspicion to one who has been before the court once, even though he be proven innocent. There is a taint about it most difficult to remove.

THE "NOBLE" BEREANS

(Verses 10-14.)

Jason's property interests could be safeguarded only by the immediate departure of Paul and Silas, the chief objects of Jewish hatred. The brethren "sent away" these men by raising a traveling-expense fund, paying their way to Berea, a city in southwestern Macedonia. There, the missionaries followed their usual custom of beginning in the synagogue worship. The spirit of teachableness in Berea was exceptional. The members of that synagogue had a genuine reverence for the Scriptures, "examining" them daily to ascertain whether Jesus did really fulfill the Messianic prophecies or not.

This spirit of Bible study is highly commendable. If all Christian people to-day would make an unprejudiced study of the New Testament, actuated by the same motives that directed the investigations at Berea, the lost unity of the church might be restored in a decade. If they were willing to be guided by its teachings, no serious differences as to teaching or practice could persist.

Verse 12.—The Greek women here mentioned were no doubt more or less favorable to the Jewish faith when they first heard the gospel. The Berean church, from the beginning, was composed of a mixed racial membership. This effectually prevented it from becoming a narrow Judaistic institution.

The word "believed" in this verse indicates that only those who obeyed were included in its scope. Those merely intellectually hospitable to the gospel, or giving mental assent to the truthful-

ness of its claims, were not styled "believers." The term is always so used in the New Testament. He only was a believer who accepted Christ as his Saviour, and allied himself with His cause. In that day it meant persecution, loss of property, alienation of friends, to become a Christian. Lines were closely drawn between Christians and non-Christians.

Perhaps it would be good for the church in this day if the distinction between "believers" and "non-believers" was emphasized more. Much of the hostility to the church is due to the fact that certain unworthy folk profess to "believe."

Coveting the moral standing such relationship will give them, or the business or official advantage that will accrue, they ally themselves with the church, thus providing much ammunition for hostile critics. The millstones of spiritually dead professors of Christianity hanged about its neck would sink anything but a truly divine institution. One of the plans laid at a Satanic conference held at the "gates of Hades" with the purpose of breaking up the church was to load it with unregenerate members. Churches practicing infant baptism and "confirmation" of all who master a "catechism" are guilty of adding burdens to it which the "body of Christ" is unable to bear. The unholy competition for large churches and sectarian rivalry leads to a lowering of the standard of admission until the fence between the church and the world is invisible through the brush of worldliness on both sides.

Verse 13.—The hounds of persecution bayed on Paul's trail from Thessalonica to Berea. As he was tracked from city to city, how often he must have thought of his own methods when a persecutor. This recollection would help to keep him humble and soften his method of de-

the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was proclaimed of Paul at Berea also, they came thither likewise, stirring up and troubling the multitudes. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent forth Paul to go as far as to the sea: and Silas and Timothy abode there still. 15 But they that conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timothy that they should come to him with all speed, they departed.

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with them that met him. 18 And certain also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, What would this babbling say? others, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached Jesus and

fense. He met persecution in the same spirit as his Master, but it would have been impossible, humanly speaking, for one of his temperament to have done so had he himself not been an offender in the same manner. Thus his very sin became a source of training for him. How wonderfully God overrules events to our good.

PAUL "RESTING AND SIGHT-SEEING" AT ATHENS

(Verses 15-21.)

Verse 15.—Leaving Silas and Timothy to carry on the work at Berea, Paul started for Athens, accompanied by a personal escort provided by the Berean brethren. For some unknown reason he immediately sent them back to Berea with orders for Silas and Timothy to join him at Athens. If he planned an extensive evangelistic campaign in the Greek center of culture, something occurred to alter the plan, for he did not remain long there.

How his pulse would quicken as he entered the city, famed then as "the eye of Greece." How varied his emotions.

Its culture, learning and historical associations made it the city sought by every lover of learning and progress. Here philosophers met to exchange views. Eminent teachers came to lecture to eager pupils. Devotees of religions of every conceivable sort were to be found in the market-place and in rented auditoriums proclaiming their doctrines and practicing their rites.

Finding himself in this center of the cultural world, Paul unhesitatingly sought opportunity to present his gospel of redemption through the blood of Christ. While waiting for his two co-laborers, we may well imagine that sleep fled from his eyes.

He spoke later of "spells of sleeplessness" as a part of his experiences. The excitement incident to his adventure in presenting a system of religion so different from that which the people had heard before would prevent rest, and no doubt one of those "spells" of insomnia fastened on him at Athens.

Verse 16.—A few trips about the city changed his emotions.

Noticing the boldness with which idolatrous worship was flaunted in the face of every passer-by on the streets, he was "provoked." Athens had a quarter of a million people at that time, but there were more gods than men on the streets. Every possible shade of religion, and philosophy offered as a substitute for religion, were hospitably received by the inhabitants.

So famous for tolerance had the city become, that every man with a new or revamped theory of any sort sought Athens, where the body of its population was anxious "to tell or to hear some new thing."

It may be pertinent to remark here that Christ is absolutely intolerant in religion. Not one utterance of His can be cited indicating the slightest regard for any religion but His own. He demands unconditional surrender on the part of all who would become His disciples. His "yoke," a symbol of bondage, must be worn. He was not speaking of the adherents of other religions when He said: "He that is not against us is for us." That statement concerned another group of genuine disciples of whom the twelve had no knowledge. There is entirely too much toleration of false religions, cults and isms at present. Christ has nothing in common with Christian Science, Spiritism, New Thought and other vagaries.

Every one of the fads so clamorously insisting on attention to-day is inher-

the resurrection. 19 And they took hold of him, and brought him unto the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching is, which is spoken by thee? 20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.) 22 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, Ye men of Athens, in all things I perceive that ye are very religious. 23 For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, To

ently hostile to Christ. He is no compromiser.

It may be unfair to criticize at so great a distance, but certain reports from heathen fields lead us to wonder whether some missionaries are not compromising Christianity in their attempts to harmonize Christ's teachings with that of heathen philosophers. Christ made no truce, nor did he compare religion with any. Nor did an inspired apostle. Paul used truth held by certain schools of thought of his age, but gave them no reason to think he valued their religion because of what truth they had.

A recent religious convention made abject apology to China and Japan for referring to these countries as "heathen." In the name of high heaven, what are they if not heathen? Small wonder that some missionary labor seems unfruitful. Of course, a clear distinction must be drawn between toleration and persecution. No true Christian ever persecuted.

Toleration refers to one's mental attitude toward a belief; persecution refers to one's treatment of an individual. Heathen can be won by love, sympathy, kindness, only. One can love and not tolerate, but can not love and persecute. Paul's conduct in Athens perfectly illustrates the distinction between the two. He loved every man in Athens, regardless of his religion, so truly that he would have given life itself, if by that means he could have won him to Christ. But he was "provoked" by their false religion, and immediately attacked it at its centers of propagation—the market-place and the Areopagus. In the market-place he met Epicureans (followers of Epicurus), whose philosophy was that the chief end of life is pleasure, and Stoics, who held that he who has learned to endure is most happy. The two systems were the current forms of statement of the world-old conflicting ideas as to the superiority of indulgence or restraint.

Recent discoveries have shown that "market-place agitator" is a better rendering than "babbler," in verse 18.

Paul immediately proceeded to the heart of his gospel message, the resurrection of Jesus. To many listeners this constituted the setting forth of a "strange God." They could easily perceive the force of such a fact as an argument for the deity of the one thus raised. Those of Christ's followers who "can get along without the miracles and the resurrection" would have had no place in Paul's company. Nor should they be granted any place in Christian fellowship to-day. Regardless of what name they wear, they are not Christian. They can "get along" without any Christ when they get along without His resurrection and miracles.

Verse 19.—It is uncertain whether Paul was arrested on complaint of some who had heard his market-place teaching, or whether he was invited to state his doctrines before the Areopagites by one of their own number. The language makes either supposition possible.

Under the law of Athens the Areopagites had authority to suppress any teaching which they deemed harmful to the city. When a new doctrine was promulgated, its advocate was usually invited to present it before the Areopagites, members of the court which sat in judgment on many matters pertaining to the city's welfare. It was this court which condemned Socrates to death in 399 B. C. We may appreciate the feelings of Paul, familiar with the history and traditions of the place, as he went before this body to proclaim his beloved gospel.

A NEW SERMON FROM A NEW TEXT, BUT THE SAME MESSAGE

(Verses 22-34.)

This sermon has been criticized by many who assert that when Paul stood before the eminent body of teachers and

an Unknown God. What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you. 24 The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 and he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: 28 for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said,

For we are also his offspring.

29 Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. 30 The times of ignorance therefore God

jurists he tried to present Christ in a learned way, and failed to obtain results. They connect this experience with 1 Cor. 2: 1, 2, in which he says: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom." These critics say that his failure at Athens was a lesson, and that when he entered Corinth, the next stopping-place, humiliated by his lack of success when speaking "learnedly," he sought the ears of unlearned and ignorant folk, adapting his message to their level of thought.

This interpretation slanders Paul and denies his Spirit guidance. Jesus promised to reveal to Paul what he desired him to preach, and He kept His word.

The fact is that he did have notable success at Athens, considering the relatively short time spent there. "Certain men" clave to him (a strong expression of friendship and acceptance of doctrine), at least one of whom was a member of the Areopagus (V. 34).

Notable women (Damaris—V. 34) were also won. This certainly indicates success. If the question, "Why did he leave so soon?" be asked, no answer can be given, except that the Spirit had other work for him. Care should be exercised in criticizing inspired men, that we do not criticize the Spirit himself.

Masterly skill is shown in this sermon. His theme, one to which his hearers would be hostile, was tactfully reserved for statement at the end of his argument, following the same method used by Peter on Pentecost.

An inscription "to an unknown God" provided the starting-point for his discourse. Some one, evidently not satisfied with any god worshiped in Athens, reasoning back to a first cause, expressed his skepticism with reference to all known gods, and reverence for the unknown one, in that street inscription.

(An identical inscription has been found on the site of Pergamum.) His declaration that a living God dwelt not in humanly built temples (of which Athens had so many), would appeal to the intelligent group before him. Likewise his affirmation of the unity of the race, despite its great variety, in saying that "he made of one every nation of men." That statement is scientific today. They knew the unchangeableness of species even then.

Verse 26.—Affirming His providential interest by determining "the bounds of their habitation" would awaken interest.

What a cue for historians in this expression. The various nations of earth are where they are because a Divine Providence desired them to be there. We shall never have a complete and true history of our race till some devout Christian, with keen discernment to see the relationship of events to the kingdom of God, shall produce it. Here is an unoccupied field. What young man who studies this lesson will prepare himself for twenty years, then write it?

Verse 28.—It was tactful of Paul to quote a Greek poet. This fragment is found in the writings of Epimenides.

Verses 30, 31.—"He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent," is the real message of the sermon. This is the same truth that Jesus presented to Nicodemus. It was Paul's way of saying: "You learned judges of Athens, with all your culture, are not saved by that. You, the same as the most ignorant, must repent." The boldness of this Jewish stranger, and the reasonableness of his doctrine, would appeal to some men.

The necessity of repentance he based on the certainty of the coming judgment, itself proved to be a certainty by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: 31 inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, We will hear thee concerning this yet again. 33 Thus Paul went out from among them. 34 But certain men clave unto him, and believed: among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

This was always Paul's central doctrine. The resurrection proves Jesus' deity, guarantees His return to earth, assures a judgment in which justice, so long delayed, or perverted on earth, shall be meted out.

Verses 32-34.—That there was mocking rejection of Paul's teaching is not surprising. Satan had then, as he has to-day, a considerable number preferring his deception to the plain truth. This is astounding, but true.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Growing persecution seems to have been aimed at Paul personally, and he and Silas left Philippi for the safety of the brethren. Going to Thessalonica, they met with some response, but were driven out by leading Jews infuriated by jealousy. Jealousy has no conscience, knows no justice. (Vs. 1-5.)

2. The rulers before whom Paul's friends were dragged were politarchs. Unfriendly critics used to say that this term existed nowhere except in the New Testament, therefore Luke's record was not accurate. Archeologists have since dugged up abundant inscriptions using the term, but the critics are not acknowledging their error.

3. Going from Thessalonica to Berea, the apostles met with a different reception. The people listened and judged candidly by comparing what they heard with Scripture, . As a result many believed. Again the merciless persecutors came and Paul had to depart. (Vs. 9-14.)

4. Leaving Silas and Timothy, Paul went to Athens. He then sent for them to join him. While waiting he went around over the famous city of heathen culture. He talked with philosophers of various schools, and they, through curiosity, urged him to address them. He did not hesitate to proclaim the plain truth in the midst of these formidable surroundings. Note that Paul, like the Master, was never tolerant toward error. (Vs. 15-21.)

5. Certain critics have tried to discredit Paul by practically ridiculing his address at Athens. The truth is that he met with success at Athens. The sermon shows tact, mastery and Spirit guidance. (Vs. 22-28.)

6. Paul's statement that God commands universal repentance showed those learned Athenians that they could not be saved by their learning. Christ came to save from sin, and sin is not a matter of class. (Vs. 29-34.)

QUESTIONS

1. What was Paul's theme at Thessalonica? (V. 3.) 2. Tell what you know about Thessalonica. 3. What kind of leadership were all Jews expecting in the Messiah? 4. Tell of the persecution in Thessalonica. 5. How has archeology shown that unfriendly critics were wrong in their statements about the Greek word "politarch"? 6. Why did Paul and Silas leave Thessalonica? 7. Describe their experiences at Berea. (Vs. 10-14.) 8. What is the meaning of the word "believer" in the New Testa-

ment? 9. How did Paul spend his time in Athens while waiting for Silas and Timothy? (Vs. 16-20.) 10. What was the general religious conditions in Athens at that time? 11. What were the text and theme of Paul's sermon before the Areopagites? 12. Give a brief abstract of his sermon there. (Vs. 22-31.) 13. What criticism has been made of Paul's sermon? 14. What do you think of his success in Athens? 15. Does this lesson indicate that Christianity is a "tolerant religion"?

LESSON TWENTY

PAUL AT CORINTH AND EPHESUS

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 18:1—19:20

Memory Text.—“And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”—Acts 19:17b.

LESSON PLAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Helpers and New Labors. 2. A Prosecution Falls in a Corinthian Court. 3. Paul Returns to Antioch. 4. A Teacher Taught. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Imperfect Teaching Makes Imperfect Disciples. 6. A Three Months' Evangelistic Campaign. 7. Exorcists Themselves “Exorcised.” |
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COMMENTS

As the fruit of his sojourn in Macedonia, Paul left three churches—Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea.

Encouraged by this success, he proceeded to Corinth, on the west coast of the peninsula separating the Peloponnese from Attica, nine miles from Cenchrea, its seaport, with which it was connected by a wooden tramway over which small ships were moved, thus avoiding the voyage around the lower peninsula.

Corinth was famed for its commerce, architecture, art, but not for literary life or products. It was a center of Grecian games, with which athletic contests Paul's writings betray much familiarity. As is common in a sport center, sensual sins abounded.

Drunkenness, licentiousness, dishonesty, vanity, factiousness and speculative philosophy were characteristic of the city life.

Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, corresponding to the Roman Venus, had a temple in her honor here in which one thousand female devotees dwelt. These priestesses were simply women of loose morals under the wing of religion. The moral state of the city may be imagined from these facts concerning its religious teaching and influence.

Small wonder that Paul found it necessary to condemn sins of the flesh so

severely in his two letters to the Corinthian church.

Having just emerged from the slimy filth of idolatry, and still living in its miasmatic air, Corinthian believers were tempted almost beyond their strength to endure. Yet the transforming power of the gospel is shown in that Paul finds so much to praise in these same letters.

NEW HELPERS AND NEW LABORS

(Chapter 18:1-11.)

Verses 1-3.—Paul, penniless on reaching Corinth, obtained employment with Aquila and Priscilla, fellow-tentmakers. He was doubtless thankful then that his parents had followed the universal custom of the time in teaching him a trade.

The disturbance in Rome here mentioned, resulting in the expulsion of Jews, was probably due to Jewish persecution of Christians. The emperor, not bothering to inquire into the merits of the case, took the easiest means of quieting the situation by exiling all of Jewish blood from Rome. His action reminds us of the custom, prevailing in our cities, of sending vagrants or disturbers of the peace on to the next city, perhaps paying their fares. An easy, but cowardly, method of dealing with possible criminals.

It is not likely that Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul first met

LESSON TEXT

18: 1 After these things he departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome: and he came unto them; 3 and because he was of the same trade, he abode with them, and they wrought; for by their trade they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.

5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. 6 And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his raiment and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7 And he departed thence, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in

them. He taught them concerning Christ while working, and they became very able and influential laborers in the early church. They accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where they provided a meeting-place for the church in their home. Again and again are they referred to in the New Testament.

Verse 4.—In 1898 excavators in Corinth unearthed a lintel on which was written in Greek: "Synagogue of the Hebrews." It is more than possible that this is the inscription over the door of the very synagogue where Paul began his "reasoning." How thrilling to look on a stone with such a history.

Verse 5.—Paul had left Silas and Timothy at Berea, and had sent word from Athens for them to join him there. Timothy, at least, had done so, for Paul sent him to Thessalonica from Athens (1 Thess. 3: 1, 2). His campaign in Corinth was postponed till these two trusted colaborers arrived, when he began an eighteen months' siege of idolatry in this commercial center of six hundred thousand people.

Verses 6, 7.—The results of this long evangelistic effort are very briefly tabulated. Driven from the synagogue, Paul found quarters in the house of Titus "The Just." This tells much of the reputation of that man. Though not specifically stated, it is a good guess that he was a Christian. In some manuscripts his name is Tertius, a fact leading some to identify him with the Tertius who wrote Romans (Rom. 16: 22). The location of this meeting-place, adjacent to the synagogue, was strategic. Paul could advertise so that Jews would be certain to know what he was preaching about, and conduct work among Gentiles at the same time.

The location of a place of worship makes no small contribution to the success or failure of a church. Many congregations, for the pottage of a cheap location (such as a donated lot), sell their birthright to capture a community with the simple gospel of Christ. Business men with vision will pay almost any price for a site where they can display their merchandise. The church of God should use as much business sense.

Verse 8.—This verse again directs our attention to the practice of the primitive church in the matter of baptism. "Believers" were baptized. A true church will do the same to-day, baptizing only those properly prepared for the rite, but not neglecting to baptize those who are thus fitted. The conversion of Crispus was a notable victory for the gospel.

Verses 9-11.—The sustaining vision was in fulfillment of the promise Jesus made on the Damascus plain, when he assured Paul of repeated appearances (Acts 26: 16). Thus did Paul learn the complete will of Jesus. Paul's great boast was that he received his gospel at first hand from the Lord (Gal. 1: 12, 16; 2: 6).

How reassuring it was to Paul to know that he would be successful in a large way in Corinth. He lost some time from preaching, being compelled to work for his daily bread, but God used even his working-hours to the success of his ministry.

So is it always with one wholeheartedly devoted to the spread of the gospel of Christ. Wherever he is, whatever he is doing, a true Christian may use opportunities to lead those with whom he associates to his Lord. "Tent-making preachers" are frowned upon to-day. Some "professional" preachers

the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9 And the Lord said unto Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: 10 for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to harm thee: for I have much people in this city. 11 And he dwelt there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment-seat, 13 saying, This man persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of wicked villany, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15 but if they are questions about words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; I am not minded to be a judge of these matters. 16 And he drove them from the judgment-seat. 17 And they all laid hold on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things.

18 And Paul, having tarried after this yet many days, took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila: having shorn his head in Cenchreæ;

would refuse them permission to teach, or administer ordinances, but many such are "ministering" in a more fruitful way than their critics whose entire time is paid for by some church. The New Testament church had no classification into "clergy" and "laity." Some did devote all their time to preaching, and were supported by the brethren, but they welcomed the supplementary labor of those who could only give a portion of their time to the work. Priestly and clerical distinctions among disciples must cease. There must be no official aristocracy. It must be understood and accepted as a principle governing churchly activities, that any one who has the ability and consecration needful may preach, and he is not less honorable in the sight of God if he earns his own living. Nor should he be held in less esteem by man.

Paul's ministry of eighteen months in Corinth was unusual. The strategic location and fruitfulness of the field, however, justified him in laying a foundation deep and solid (cf. 1 Cor. 3: 10).

How much the quality and permanency of Christian work in a community depends upon the character of the labors of the first preacher in that field.

Able and consecrated ministers seldom fail in establishing churches that will have a permanent value and long history.

Some of these days we shall have the wisdom to place our best preachers (in the full meaning of that word) in mission fields and places where the cause of Christ needs them. Strong churches should be able to thrive on their stored-up strength for awhile occasionally, and release their preacher to help some weaker church or to plant a new congregation somewhere.

A PROSECUTION FAILS IN A CORINTHIAN COURT

(Verses 12-17.)

Verse 12.—The Gallio here mentioned was a brother of Seneca, the famous Roman moralist. He was a man of good character and a wise administrator. The discomfiture of the Jews who preferred charges against Paul, when Gallio dismissed the case without hearing a word of Paul's defense, may be imagined. The action of the proconsul proved that Christianity could not be convicted of being a religion of revolution, nor in any degree unpatriotic. This incident furnishes one illustration of his sense of justice and readiness in decision.

Verse 15.—To Gallio, a heathen, the definitions of "Messiah" and "kingdom of God" were of no interest. The hearing clearly revealed to him that the apostles were not in any manner disloyal to Rome, one of them, at least, being proud of his citizenship. The whole dispute centered on interpretations of "words and names" which concerned nobody but Jews, as he saw it, hence his impatient refusal to listen further.

Verse 17.—What part had Sosthenes in this trial? Who was he? Was he a friend of Paul, a Christian, a lawyer presenting Paul's side of the case? Did the Jews vent their spite on him when they were denied vengeance on Paul? This is the common view held by commentators. Another explanation, however, seems more probable.

He is spoken of as "the ruler of the synagogue," a designation not likely to be applied to one who had left that position to become a Christian. As ruler, it would devolve on him to lead in any prosecution the synagogue might order

for he had a vow. 19 And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. 20 And when they asked him to abide a longer time, he consented not; 21 but taking his leave of them, and saying, I will return again unto you if God will, he set sail from Ephesus.

22 And when he had landed at Cæsarea, he went up and saluted the church, and went down to Antioch. 23 And having spent some time there, he departed, and went through the region of Galatia, and Phrygia, in order, establishing all the disciples.

24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the scriptures. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John: 26 and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more accurately. 27 And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him: and when he was come,

undertaken. He probably was the accusing witness in the case. Why then was he beaten, the question naturally arises? The curious crowd had gathered to hear a suit, and witness the infliction of a penalty—a public whipping. Enough of the barbarous remains in many of us to guarantee a large crowd when one of our race is to be humiliated or punished. Gallio's dismissal of the case disappointed their hopes. Perhaps the petulant words of Gallio to Sosthenes led the crowd to believe that he would be blind to their attempt to teach the ruler of the synagogue a needed lesson. They therefore proceeded to give Sosthenes the stripes they had planned to have inflicted on Paul. Gallio winked at the humor of the situation, and Paul emerged from the hearing as a sort of hero. Such publicity would help to advertise his preaching, and result in good after all. Another illustration of God making the wrath of wicked men praise Him.

There is evidence that the beating also did Sosthenes good. He is doubtless the same man who afterward unites with Paul in writing 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1). Something converted him to Christ after this scene in which he was flogged. What was it? Was it the Christlike spirit of the apostles when unjustly accused? Did the hearing bring out information about Christ of which he had been ignorant? Or did the whipping help him to see himself as others saw him, and lead him to repentance? Many a bully has been changed into a considerate man, respecting others' rights, by a merited drubbing. Whatever it was that led him to Christ, we are glad to know that he and Paul afterward united in writing a letter to the church where they had once met as enemies.

PAUL RETURNS TO ANTIOCH

(Verses 18-23.)

The growth of the church at Corinth, during the eighteen months of labor there, had been so encouraging that Paul felt justified in leaving it to the care of others for a season while he returned to Antioch, the church under whose auspices he had gone forth, to report his success and learn how they fared at the home base. Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him as far as Ephesus. One can not help wondering whether their departure from Corinth was due to labor conditions, friendship for Paul and a desire to travel with him, or to divine leadership taking them to a new city for gospel ministering.

In taking the vow, Paul was following the custom of the law of Moses, not the gospel teaching of Christ. A later chapter will deal with the vow more fully, and discussion is deferred till then. During the continuance of the vow the hair was permitted to grow. At the expiration of the period for which the vow had been made, the hair was shorn—a sanitary proceeding among turban-wearing people.

Verse 21.—Paul did return to Ephesus for a wonderful ministry.

Verse 22.—Only a hasty greeting was given the church at Caesarea, the city where he was destined to spend two years in prison later.

Was Cornelius still there? Were the brethren meeting in his house? How many interesting questions rise in our minds as this historic city is mentioned.

Verse 23.—With this verse begins Luke's account of Paul's third missionary tour, continuing to 21:16. While his writing is chronological, Luke makes no effort to divide Paul's labors into

he helped them much that had believed through grace; 28 for he powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

19: 1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: 2 and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given. 3 And he said, Into what then were ye baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism. 4 And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. 5 And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7 And they were in all about twelve men.

periods or epochs, as we do so carefully to-day. He writes with one object only in view, the narration of such incidents and events in the life of the apostle as would impart information to Theophilus concerning the methods by which Paul did his work, and sketching in detail such cases as were typical, that he might have a model for evangelistic undertakings. Of course the same information is just as valuable to us as to Theophilus. It will be a great day for evangelism when the Book of Acts is made the basis of all study, both as the message to be delivered and method of propagation of the gospel. All evangelists will preach the same gospel, even in the matter of telling sinners what to do to be saved, and thus all lines of division will automatically disappear.

On this tour Paul again traveled through Galatia and Phrygia, provinces of Asia Minor, having arranged a schedule for his trip, as the expression "in order" indicates. His special task was "strengthening the disciples." There would be so many things to try their faith, so many temptations to revert to lives of sin, that persistent exhortation and encouragement were necessary. Even now, the major part of ministerial work consists in "strengthening the disciples." Pastoral oversight in restoring faith and in renewing zeal is most vital to church life.

A TEACHER TAUGHT

(Verses 24-28.)

Verse 24.—Apollos, here introduced, later wrought most effectually at Corinth, as we learn from 1 Corinthians. He is spoken of as a very eloquent preacher. Certain expressions in 1 Corinthians seem to indicate that he was rather vain of his ability (a not uncom-

mon fault in great orators), but he had admirable traits also. He was teachable, as his willingness to be instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, two humble tent-makers, proves.

The average university-trained man would scorn to sit at the feet of tradespeople for religious instruction. Many of them in this day, while pleading "tolerance" for their so-called scientific religion which they offer as a substitute for the revelation of the Bible, are most intolerant of views other than their own. It is not unknown for a professor of science or philosophy to proclaim himself as an authority in religion. Such a one is always boastful of his superior reasoning powers, the product of which he offers as a substitute for Bible revelation. It will be pitiable in the judgment to witness the humiliation suffered by that type, as, scorned by angels and humble men, they hear the sentence of condemnation from the Lord.

Apollos stands in marked contrast to the arrogant, vanity-inflated "scientist" and "higher critic." An honest seeker after truth, he listened as the tent-making pair expounded the Scriptures. A true scientist accepts truth, no matter what its source. The self-labeled variety rejects everything not originating from his own closed circle of "investigators."

Aquila and Priscilla showed Apollos how the prophecies portrayed Jesus as the Christ, using the very passages which destructive critics to-day pronounce as being of legendary origin, or interpolations. To Apollos, they were the revealed truth of God.

Verse 25.—This shows that Apollos was in the same class as those Ephesian disciples whom Paul ordered rebaptized (Acts 19: 1 seq.).

Verses 27, 28.—His training in Alexandria, a center for rhetorical instruc-

8 And he entered into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for the space of two years; so that all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. 11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12 insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out. 13 But certain also of the strolling Jews, exorcists, took upon them to name over them that had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14 And there

tion, served him well in his public arguments with the Jews.

Such a recruit to the Corinthian church was valuable during the absence of Paul. He at once became a leader among the Christians. Corinth, the city in "Achaia" where he labored, as we learn from the Corinthian letter, was a battle-ground between Jews and Christians. Apollos left his impress on the church there for many years following.

IMPERFECT TEACHING MAKES IMPERFECT DISCIPLES

(Chapter 19: 1-7.)

Verses 1-5.—Luke obviously gives the details of this case of uninstructed disciples to inform Theophilus (and us) of the method of dealing with imperfectly taught disciples. They were instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly, and they immediately obeyed the teaching. It is a good model for us. There are many imperfectly taught disciples scattered throughout different religious denominations. Those who know the true teaching owe it to those who know it not. All honestly desiring to obey Christ's commands will gladly observe any ordinance of which they may have been ignorant before. Our duty to the "pious unimmersed" is here made clear. We should inform them of the Scriptural teaching on the subject of baptism. Their duty, in turn, is equally clear.

They will obey Christ in baptism as soon as they learn His will in the matter. If any persist in disobeying after having the truth presented, the responsibility is theirs. They should be given courteous and Christian attention, but no place for full fellowship can be found for them in a New Testament church, either at home or on the mission field.

Not all who had been baptized by John were rebaptized by Christ's followers. The apostles were not rebap-

tized. John's baptism was valid until after Jesus sent out the twelve to proclaim the gospel according to the terms of the great commission of Matt 28: 18-20. The nucleus of the church was made up of John's disciples. But it appears that some of his followers were more loyal to him than to Christ, and they persisted in preaching his message even after Jesus' resurrection, thus perpetuating an obsolete teaching. Rebaptism of the disciples of such partisans was necessary to insure their proper understanding of the relationship between Jesus' mission and that of John. It is most certainly our duty to baptize all conscientious believers who have not been instructed as to the place and form of baptism, but have submitted to a substitute through the influence of religious leaders.

Verse 6.—Here is another instance of baptism of the Holy Spirit, attended by the same phenomena witnessed on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius.

A THREE MONTHS' EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

(Verses 8-12.)

Verse 8.—Three months were spent in synagogue teaching, a period sufficient to separate the honest hearers from the prejudiced and dishonest, whereupon Paul leaves the hardened to their fate.

It is a question meriting consideration, perhaps debate, as to whether we spend more time attempting to reach hardened people than we should.

Verse 9.—Nothing more is known of Tyrannus than what is stated here. He may have been a Greek rhetorician or philosopher. Whoever he was, he was broad-minded enough to provide auditorium accommodations for Paul for two years. This, combined with the three months spent in the synagogue, make a total of twenty-seven months in Ephesus.

were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said unto them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? 16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and mastered both of them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 Many also of them that had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds. 19 And not a few of them that practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So mightily grew the word of the Lord, and prevailed.

In Acts 20: 31 Paul refers to his stay as three years, using the customary method of reckoning time, in which any portion of a period was counted as a complete unit.

Verse 10.—"Asia" is the name of a province in Asia Minor, in which Ephesus was located.

Verse 11.—Such healing as here mentioned was so rare that Luke calls them "special miracles."

EXORCISTS THEMSELVES "EXORCISED"

(Verses 13-20.)

Verses 13-18.—This is an entertaining account of Paul's encounter with certain "exorcists," the doctrinal ancestors of modern spiritualism.

They were "wandering Jews," making a living by pretending to exorcise demons, and were amazed to behold Paul actually doing what they feigned to do. Noticing the frequent use of the name "Jesus" by Paul, they decided that it was a magic formula, and decided to try its efficacy themselves. They were obviously superstitious.

The results, so graphically told by Luke, were amusing. Luke must have smiled as he wrote, as every reader does now.

It would be worth much to witness the discomfiture of such rascals.

Evil men can not imitate good men

successfully. They may counterfeit their words, mimic their conduct, but sooner or later their unholy motives will betray them. The selfish, materialistic agitators in the industrial and political world who quote some of Jesus' sayings so glibly are of this sort. They are interested in the poor and oppressed "for revenue only," and none have less use for the authority of Jesus than they. Of all hypocrites, these are most contemptible.

This is another instance of the madness of men working to the praise of God. The publicity attendant on the encounter gave Paul audiences which otherwise would have been impossible to assemble. The immediate result was a general reformation in the use of magical arts in Ephesus. Signs, incantations, omens, portents, dream-books and spiritualistic mediums were all at a discount.

Verses 19, 20.—Books to the value of several thousand dollars were publicly burned. Paul's sermon, delivered while this conflagration was on, would be interesting reading. It would be worth much to hear him to-day expose the satanic character of New Thought, Christian Science, Spiritism, and other isms and cults. Since he is not here to do it, the unpleasant duty devolves on Christ's faithful to defend the flock from the ravages of these "wolves in sheep's clothing."

LESSON CONDENSED

1. After planting churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, Paul went to Corinth, the seat of the corrupting worship of the goddess Aphrodite. Here he found Aquila and Priscilla who became Christians, and Paul's fast friends. Planting a church under the very eaves of a tremendous stronghold of heathen-

dom was no easy task, but Paul accomplished it. (Vs. 1-3.)

2. Paul and his collaborators conducted an eighteen months' siege in Corinth, this commercial center of six hundred thousand people. Note that the Corinthians "hearing believed, and were baptized." This is the order, expressed

or implied, everywhere. (Vs. 4-8.)

3. Note also that, though an apostle, Paul became a tentmaker again to meet the necessities of the situation, and adapted himself to whatever form of life was required. There was not a sign of professionalism in his conduct. He had a vision of humble work, and performed it with faithfulness and joy. (Vs. 9-11.)

4. The Jews sought to bring Paul before Gallio, and the fact that he would not heed them proves that from the first Christianity was not seditious, but Christians were law-abiding persons. The crowd, like most mobs, was in a humor to see somebody beaten, so the flogging designed for Paul fell upon one Sosthenes. (Vs. 12-17.)

5. With verse 23, Luke begins his account of Paul's third missionary journey. Apollos, known later as an eminent Christian and an eloquent preacher, is here introduced. Note the fact that Aquila and Priscilla taught him the way of the

Lord. He was not a university product, but became a powerful preacher of Christ and His gospel. (Vs. 18-26.)

6. Paul, in his travels, came across some imperfectly taught disciples at Ephesus, and straightened them out. All Christians who know the truth should follow a similar course. This clears up our duty to the "pious unimmersed." It seems that only such of John's disciples whose partisanship for John was greater than their loyalty to Christ, were rebaptized. (19: 1-7.)

7. Not meeting with a cordial hearing in the synagogue at Ephesus, Paul gathered the faithful in a school building, and taught them successfully for two years. (Vs. 8-12.)

8. Among others Paul came into contact with certain workers in "magical art," and utterly discomfited them. These exorcists were the doctrinal ancestors of modern spiritualism. Evil men can not successfully and continuously imitate good men. (Vs. 13-20.)

QUESTIONS

1. What places are the scene of Paul's labors in this lesson? 2. Tell what you know of Corinth, and conditions there in Paul's day. 3. How came Paul to meet Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth? (V. 2.) 4. Where did Paul preach when driven from the synagogue? 5. What is the importance of a good location for a church? 6. What should be the general qualifications of a minister for mission fields? 7. Narrate the story of Paul before Gallio. (Vs. 12-16.) 8. At what point in Luke's narrative does he begin

the account of Paul's third missionary tour? (V. 23.) 9. Tell something of Apollos as an example of an unschooled man becoming a success in the ministry. (Vs. 24-28.) 10. Tell of the rebaptism of the twelve disciples of John the Baptist. (19: 1-7.) 11. What is our duty to those who do not fully understand baptism and the program of Jesus Christ? 12. Tell what you know of Paul's encounter with the sons of Sceva. 13. Who are the modern successors of those spiritualistic frauds?

APOLLOS' TRAINING

The literary activity and philosophic pursuits of the Greek population of Alexandria were not without their effect on the more conservative Jews, and we find from many sources that the Jewish writings were studied with all the literary exactness which marked the Greek scholarship of the time, and the Jews, conscious of the antiquity of their own records and yet impressed with the philosophic character of their cultured fellow-citizens, bent themselves greatly to find analogies between the Mosaic writings and the teachings of the schools. In study like this Apollos had no doubt been fully trained.—*Cambridge Bible.*

LESSON TWENTY-ONE

PAUL'S LABORS AND TRAVELS CONTINUED

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 19:21—20:38

Memory Text.—“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—Acts 20:35.

LESSON PLAN

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| 1. A Roundabout Way to Rome Planned. | Rioters. A worthy executive. |
| 2. “Business” Again Suffers Because of the Gospel. | 5. Further Travel and Preaching. |
| 3. A First-century Riot. | 6. A Long Service at Troas. |
| 4. A First-century Official Quieting | 7. Traveling On. |
| | 8. Farewell Address to Ephesian Elders. |

COMMENTS

The last lesson closed with a brief statement of the remarkable growth of the cause in Ephesus. This incidental remark of Luke's enables us to fix with certainty the time of writing 1 Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 16:8, 9, Paul says: “I will tarry at Ephesus till Pentecost; for a great and effectual door is opened up to me, and there are many adversaries.” This describes such a condition as Luke depicts in this lesson. The converts made as a result of the demonized man's attack on the sons of Sceva, and the burning of books of magic, showed that an “effectual door” had opened. The riot reveals to us the activities of the “adversaries.” It is clear, therefore, that Paul wrote the Corinthian letters while in Ephesus during that stay of twenty-seven months, sending the first, at least, by the messengers here mentioned, Timothy and Erastus.

A ROUNDABOUT WAY TO ROME PLANNED

(Chapter 19:21 and 22.)

After the subsidence of the mob excitement, Paul purposed “in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem and Rome. “Spirit” should be capitalized because Luke refers to the Holy Spirit, not to Paul's own spirit. All his missionary movements were directed by the Holy Spirit, as we have learned (Lesson XVII).

We shall learn of determined opposition to his going to Jerusalem, on the part of friends and prophets, but he brushes aside their objections by saying it was the will of God that he go. From this we conclude that he was Spirit-guided in his decision to visit Jerusalem and Rome. But how different will be the circumstances of his going from what he planned.

Often God's plan for granting our desires differs from the plan we had formed for their realization. We may be compelled to go in chains to our destination, whereas we had thought to go in triumph. But what will it matter to us hereafter how we reached the scene of labor where God desired us to be? From the other side we can look back on our bitter disappointments and rejoice that we had to pass through them. If envy were possible in heaven, the most envied soul there would be the one who suffered most.

“BUSINESS” AGAIN SUFFERS BE- CAUSE OF THE GOSPEL

(Verses 23-27.)

Verse 23.—The word “way” is a suggestive term describing Christianity. It probably became current from the insistence of the disciples that there was but one way by which men could be saved.

LESSON TEXT

19: 21 Now after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. 22 And having sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

23 And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way. 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen; 25 whom he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this business we have our wealth. 26 And ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they are no gods, that are made with hands: 27 and not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account, and that she should even be deposed from her magnificence whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. 28 And when they heard this they were

Ephesus had one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple dedicated to Diana. It was a massive structure filled with paintings and statuary, such as has been seen nowhere else. Its central attraction was a rude image of a many-breasted female, the goddess of fecundity. The licentious rites by which this deity was worshiped made a moral stench that would pollute hell itself.

Verses 24-27.—The riot stirred up by Demetrius was a glowing tribute to Paul's preaching. The god-making silversmiths were not only losing trade, but the temple itself was being deserted. Beyond Ephesus, in "all Asia," his gospel was likewise destroying idolatry. A good illustration this of the intolerance of Christ's inspired preachers.

They would be criticized by many to-day. We hear of missionaries holding conferences with Buddhists and Confucianists, in which appreciative comparisons are made of each other's beliefs.

Had Paul followed that course, inviting the priests of Diana into a banquet, and then eulogized the "ethical teachings" of their religion (for it had its ethical features), this riot would not have occurred. It is a shame that emissaries of Christ should descend to the plane of compromising with false religions.

The secret of Demetrius' opposition is disclosed when he says their craft is in danger. That is the secret of much opposition to the church now. Had the church not opposed the saloon, but cared for its victims instead, the liquor forces would have supported and praised it. If the church did not protest against the injustice and iniquity of certain indus-

trial practices to-day, it might have the support (financial) of all the monsters of corporate greed. If it apologized for sabotage and violence on the part of labor, it would gain the applause of those of Bolshevist sympathies. But when the church refuses to recognize classes, and insists that all be amenable to the same moral and religious standards, it loses the support and enlists the hostility of selfish interests of every sort. Part of the glory of the church is in the enemies it makes.

It is also interesting to note how unrighteousness entrenches itself in some religious form. Demetrius was scandalized by the desertion of Diana's temples.

A FIRST-CENTURY RIOT

(Verses 28-34.)

Verse 28.—How like the conduct of mobs to-day. A fiery speech applied to the tinder of prejudice sets the passions aflame, and reason and restraint are both consumed. Mobs are always mad.

Frenzied acclamation of Diana's greatness would not make her great, nor insure veneration for her shrine, but the crowd seems to have held such a belief. People championing a cause inherently weak must always depend on passion for its propagation, not upon reason or persuasion.

Verse 29.—Gaius and Aristarchus, known to be companions of Paul, were probably seized by the people, and rushed to the theater for questioning about the apostle and his teachings. They were "men of Macedonia," the only information we have about Gaius. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, where he was being entertained by Gaius (Rom.

filled with wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 29 And the city was filled with the confusion: and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel. 30 And when Paul was minded to enter in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31 And certain also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent unto him and besought him not to adventure himself into the theatre. 32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was in confusion; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33 And they brought Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made a defence unto the people. 34 But when they perceived that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 35 And when the townclerk had quieted the multitude, he saith, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there who knoweth not that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be gainsaid, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rash. 37 For ye have brought hither these men, who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

16:23), and it is probable that he was the man of whom we read here. Those early Christians traveled much.

Of Aristarchus a little more is known. He appears to have been a permanent member of Paul's party after this. He preceded Paul to Troas, then accompanied him to Palestine, then to Rome, in which city Paul refers to him as "my fellow-prisoner" (Col. 4:10). Tradition says he was martyred at Rome.

Verses 30, 31.—In a sense, it is regrettable that Paul was prevented from going into that temple to preach. He would have forgotten his own safety, as he always did, and convinced some of those fanatical followers of Diana of the folly of idol-worship.

The Asiarchs were high officials of Rome, but just what their duties were is not well known. The generally accepted theory is that they presided over the games held in honor of the emperor.

Their friendliness toward Paul marked them as men of breadth of understanding, not bigoted devotees of Diana.

Verse 32.—The ignorance of the mob as to the cause of their gathering was characteristic. Mobs never know what they are doing, nor why they do it.

Many times humanity acts like one big mob. Some one starts a movement appealing to prejudice or passion, and in a short time thousands join in it. Elections are sometimes carried by that same spirit, and none know this better than professional politicians. At the last moment, an unsubstantiated report is circulated concerning the candidate whose defeat is desired, and before he has time to expose the slander, election day has passed.

All too frequently, electors with mob disposition are carried off their feet by

such unholy methods, and the conniving, less-worthy candidate is elected.

Verse 33.—Unbelieving Jews seized the opportunity to try to discredit Paul before this idolatrous crowd. Alexander was sent forward to explain that the Jews, as a nation, repudiated Paul's teaching. When they perceived his nationality, however, the mob refused to listen to a discussion of points of difference between what, to them, was merely sects of Jews, so the uproar started afresh with renewed frenzy.

A FIRST-CENTURY OFFICIAL QUIETING RIOTERS

(Verses 35-41.)

Verses 35-37.—That was a town clerk worthy of his office. His duties must have differed from those of a clerk in our cities, for he seems to have had some executive authority. His speech is a fine illustration of skillful handling of a delicate situation.

He feared for his official head if he permitted such a demonstration to result in violence, yet his address must, in some measure, quiet the frenzied multitude. He therefore began by paying a devout tribute to Diana. His reference to her having fallen from Jupiter alluded to a tradition to that effect. By some it is thought that the original image was a meteor, the rough outline of which bore some resemblance to the goddess as afterward fashioned. Ignorant and superstitious people might be easily convinced of her having been cast down by Jupiter, if this legend be correct.

The town clerk then calmed them by saying that if she had a heavenly origin, opposition by these Jews could not pre-

38 If therefore Demetrius, and the craftsmen that are with him, have a matter against any man, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls: let them accuse one another. 39 But if ye seek anything about other matters, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. 40 For indeed we are in danger to be accused concerning this day's riot, there being no cause for it: and as touching it we shall not be able to give account of this concourse. 41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

20: 1 And after the uproar ceased, Paul having sent for the disciples and exhorted them, took leave of them, and departed to go into Macedonia. 2 And when he had gone through those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece. 3 And when he had spent three months there, and a plot was laid against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia. 4 And there accompanied him as far as Asia, Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 But these had gone before, and were waiting for us at Troas. 6 And we sailed away from Philippi

vail against her worship. Good reasoning that.

It is good for Christians in this day to remember that "every plant not planted by God shall be rooted up." We sometimes fear for the safety of the ark as it passes over rough ground, but if we carry it as ordered, our fears are groundless. Everything that is of God will abide. This does not mean that we are under no obligation to defend the truth, nor contend for the faith. It does forbid our despairing. We must do our duty in defense of the gospel, then trust God to make our weak efforts strong.

Verse 38.—The closing words of the town clerk gave evidence to all that he understood the underlying reason for the opposition of Demetrius. He hinted boldly that the silversmith cared more for his profit than for the worship of the goddess.

Verse 40.—The possibility of being haled before a higher court at Rome to explain their conduct (Paul being a Roman citizen, and entitled to citizenship rights) would sober them. If they could give no sufficient reason for their action, the city would likely lose its special privileges and much of its liberty. The situation required sober thought.

Since they proved no criminal act or intent against Paul, he counseled them that the wisest thing to do would be to disperse. The success of the town clerk is a good example of oratorical skill. Aside from this incident, his history is unknown.

Many of the world's really great pass through life without their greatness being recognized by their contemporaries.

Not all receive either reward or recognition here. That is one reason why a general judgment is necessary.

FURTHER TRAVEL AND PREACHING

(Chapter 20: 1-6.)

Verse 1.—Either feeling that he had accomplished his mission in Ephesus, or else desirous of causing no further trouble for disciples there, by remaining as an object of attack by both Jews and pagans, Paul again went into Macedonia, visiting Thessalonica, Berea and other places.

Verse 2.—From Macedonia he went south into "Greece," the province in which Corinth was the chief city, and scene of his greatest labor.

The second letter to the Corinthians supplements Luke's account of this journey, revealing one object, at least, of Paul's visit; viz., to gather an offering for the poor brethren at Jerusalem. He also had great anxiety concerning the spiritual state of the Corinthian converts, living exposed to so much evil influence.

Still further, he desired to learn how his rebuke administered in 1 Corinthians had been received.

Verse 3.—The time here mentioned was spent in gathering the offering and exhorting the church to godliness. Having completed his mission there, he intended to go direct by boat to the port nearest Jerusalem (probably Joppa), but knowledge of a plot to waylay him led to his going around by land, taking a considerable company with him. The funds he was carrying were sufficiently large to tempt robbers, and his large escort was chosen to guard and safely deliver the money to those needing relief.

The men named in this verse were the representatives of the Macedonian churches, chosen to accompany Paul to

after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we tarried seven days.

7 And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight. 8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered together. 9 And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, borne down with deep sleep; and as Paul discoursed yet longer, being borne down by his sleep he fell down from the third story, and was taken up dead. 10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Make ye no ado; for his life is in him. 11 And when he was gone up, and had broken the bread, and eaten, and had talked with them a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. 12 And they brought the lad alive, and were not a little comforted.

13 But we, going before to the ship, set sail for Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, intending himself to go by land. 14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. 15 And sailing from thence, we came the following day over against Chios; and the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after we came to Miletus. 16 For Paul had determined to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend

Jerusalem and administer the gifts sent by the brethren (1 Cor. 16: 3).

Sopater was a relative of Paul (Rom. 16: 21). Aristarchus was the one seized by the Ephesian mob (Acts 19: 29). Of the others mentioned we know nothing more.

Verses 5, 6.—Luke here resumes the use of “we” in his narrative, so it is inferred that he joined Paul again at Philippi.

Five days was a longer time than usually spent in voyaging from Philippi to Troy, but it was probably due to unfavorable winds encountered.

A LONG SERVICE AT TROAS

(Verses 7-12.)

Verses 7.—It is a reasonable supposition that the party tarried at Troas seven days, expressly for the purpose of meeting with the disciples when they met in regular worship. This brief statement throws a flood of light on the worship of the early church.

It reveals the fact that it was the custom of the church to meet on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, or Sunday, as it is usually designated, not on the Jewish Sabbath, which was Saturday. It is also clear that the primary object of their worship was to remember Jesus in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, or communion. In 1 Cor. 11: 24, 25 Paul says that Jesus said in establishing this ordinance for his disciples: “This do” and “as often” . . . “in remembrance of me.” In that immediate connection he does not state just how frequently the Lord desired them to observe it. The apostles themselves would know, however, for He taught them.

Their custom, or practice, will enlighten us on this point. The preaching was not essential as a part of the worship, that being incidental to the meeting. But the Supper was essential, and since the church observed it on “the first day of the week,” for that reason Christians should observe the communion every Lord’s Day. It is not too often to remember Jesus in his redemptive work in saving us, nor, if properly observed, does it become common. The soul, praying much, never complains about prayer becoming common, nor does reading the Bible breed contempt because of our familiarity with it; so the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper adds to the spirituality of all who are careful to keep the feast in honor of Him.

If it be argued that the passage does not say they met *every* first day, it may be replied that it does say “The first day of the week.” How often does the first day of the week come?

Every week, of course. The full significance of the passage may be appreciated by a paraphrase. Suppose some student of American history in the future should find the following statement in a book, and that it was about all he had on that particular point: “On the fourth day of July, when the citizens of Columbus, O., were gathered together to celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the mayor made an address to them.” What justifiable conclusions might he draw from the passage? First, that it was the custom of the citizens of Columbus to celebrate the Fourth of July as often as it came; that is, annually. Second, that their principal reason for assembling

time in Asia; for he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them,

Ye yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, 19 serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; 20 how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23 save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24 But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. 26 Wherefore I testify unto

was to celebrate the event of signing the Declaration. Third, that while the mayor's speech might have been fitting and helped to properly observe the occasion, it was not the essential, but incidental, part of such celebration.

It will be conceded, doubtless, that all the above inferences are legitimately drawn from the brief statement paralleling the seventh verse of this chapter. It thus becomes clear that the short historical statement of Luke here has great value to the Biblical student who is trying to ascertain the practices of the New Testament church. Any church willing to follow the example of inspired men in this matter will be certain of being loyal to that example by observing the communion every Lord's Day.

Verses 8-12.—The fall of Eutychus to his death, and his restoration to life, is very simply told by Luke. His mention of the lights is probably due to his professional knowledge of the effect of lights shining for a long time, causing drowsiness to one sitting so their full beams would shine directly into his eyes. This, together with the long sermon, was too much for the endurance of a young man, possibly not so much interested in the sermon as others, and he fell asleep. The value of this miracle in Troas, as an argument for the cause which Paul preached, may be imagined.

TRAVELING ON

(Verses 13-16.)

Verses 13-15.—This account of the journey from Troy shows intimate knowledge of the geography of the Ægean Sea. Assos was on the southern, whereas Troas was on the northern, side of a peninsula.

The companions of Paul took a boat and sailed around the peninsula, while he walked across. This would permit him to remain a little longer with the brethren at Troy, and still join the party bound for Jerusalem. The other places mentioned are located on the southward part of his trip, among the Ægean Islands.

Verse 16.—Paul's eagerness to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost was not because he desired to observe that feast as a Jew, for Jewish laws and ordinances had been done away, as he teaches in Col. 2: 14.

But that was an occasion when people of his race would be in the Holy City by thousands, and he would have an opportunity to present his beloved gospel to them. Although informed by the Holy Spirit that bonds awaited him, he wavered not for an instant, but pressed on determinedly, knowing that it was Christ's will that he be there.

FAREWELL ADDRESS TO EPHESIAN ELDERS

(Verses 17-38.)

Verse 17.—For some reason the boat on which he had passage stopped for a time at Miletus, thirty miles from Ephesus. Not caring to risk being left by the boat's unexpected sailing, he did not go up to Ephesus to see the elders of the church, but sent for them to come down to where he was, that he might give a farewell message.

What a pathetic speech this is. With bursting heart, the apostle recounted his labors among them.

Verses 20, 21.—This passage gives a comprehensive outline of the duties of a true preacher—proclaiming the gospel

you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27 For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. 28 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departing, grievous wolves shall enter in among you not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified. 33 I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. 37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more. And they brought him on his way unto the ship.

publicly, and from house to house. Public ministry, supplemented by private instruction, is the ideal program for the minister. Being universal in its scope, the gospel had a uniform message and requirements, hence he preached the same to Jews and Greeks.

Verse 23.—The Lord sometimes prepares brave souls for hardships by warning them beforehand, that they may be fortified to stand when the time of trial comes. With Paul, these repeated warnings but steeled him to endure. He was reconciled to imprisonment, because forewarned that it was Christ's will, and he knew that His will was always best.

Verse 25.—Their hearts broke at those words. Partings known to be final for this life are always sad. They were sustained, though, by the hope of a reunion on the other side. What a comfort in the precious promises of the gospel.

His warning to these elders must have caused him deepest pain. Their duties were to "take heed to themselves and the flock, and feed it." The responsibility of a bishop (which, in the New Testament, is the same office as elder or presbyter) is great.

He must watch the teaching from the pulpit. The bishop is the Scripturally authorized censor of the minister's teaching.

Verses 29, 30.—Courage was required to say that "wolves" should arise from their own midst. He hoped the warning might prevent any of those present from making shipwreck of the faith.

It is historically true that from Ephesus some early heresies went forth. The decay of Christianity in Palestine was due to the fact that its leaders im-

mediately following the apostles began to speculate and teach their theories instead of the simple gospel. As a result, the church lost out in the very land of its birth. Just as Israel, after the flesh, lost Palestine because of idolatry, so spiritual Israel lost the same land through such idolatrous practices and heretical teachings as characterized the Roman church a little later. The Holy Land is to-day an unpromising field for missionary effort, because of the perversion of Christianity there.

It is a fearful responsibility to be a teacher of religion, and a fatal mistake to teach anything but that which the Lord has authorized to be taught. All the trouble in the church now is due to false teaching.

Verse 35.—Paul refers to his self-support while with them, and counsels the elders to avoid any charge of serving for filthy lucre's sake. This quotation from Jesus is not found elsewhere. We are much indebted to Luke for having recorded it. It is quoted as much as any other of Jesus' sayings, perhaps.

Verses 36-38.—A most affecting farewell. One would think such a scene would guarantee faithfulness in the administration of their trust on the part of all these men, at least.

Church officials ought to be the highest type of Christians.

Not that they have a higher standard of morality by which they will be judged, but because they are responsible for so much, and teach by example as well as precept. One has no right to be less than the people expect him to be if he holds a position that requires example as well as precept.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. It is evident that, while at Ephesus, Paul wrote the two Corinthian letters. After the exciting scene over the burning of the books of magic, Paul, led by the Spirit, made up his mind to visit Jerusalem and Rome. (19: 21, 22.)

2. Before Paul left Ephesus a great stir arose about his teachings, for they interfered with the sale of silver images of the goddess Diana. Demetrius, a silversmith, raised a hue and cry, and incited a mob that seized Paul's companions. (Vs. 23-27.)

3. The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world. That Paul's preaching created such an uproar under the eaves of an established idolatry is a tribute to him and his gospel. All the gospel needs is to be faithfully preached. (Vs. 28-34.)

4. After a Jew named Alexander failed to get a hearing, the town clerk quieted the mob and talked sense. He reasoned in a fashion that based the safety of their religion upon the question of its divine origin, and in other matters referred them to the courts. Many a mob could be quieted by the sane reasoning of one person who hap-

pens to have a clear head. (Vs. 35-41.)

5. Quitting Ephesus, Paul visited a number of places with Jerusalem as his objective. Luke, the writer, must have joined him again, as the plural pronoun is resumed in verse 5. He was the bearer of relief from the outlying churches to Jerusalem. (20: 1-6.)

6. Paul and his party tarried at Troas seven days, probably, to meet with the disciples there. This incident shows that thus early they were meeting on Sunday, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, and not on the Sabbath. (Vs. 7-12.)

7. Although informed by the Holy Spirit that bonds awaited him in Jerusalem, Paul hastened to be there by Pentecost, when the city would be thronged, and he could preach his beloved gospel to thousands. (Vs. 13-16.)

8. At Miletus, where the boat stopped temporarily, Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus, thirty miles away. He made to them a farewell speech, feeling sure that he would never see them more. He showed them his magnificent courage and consecration, and bade them good-by. (Vs. 17-38.)

QUESTIONS

1. If Paul was Spirit-led in his movements, why did the Spirit warn him concerning Jerusalem? 2. Who was Demetrius, and what connection had he with the Ephesian riot? (Vs. 24-27.) 3. Would Demetrius have opposed Paul if Paul had compromised his gospel? 4. How does the church to-day encounter opposition by its refusal to compromise? 5. What is known of Gaius and Aristarchus? (V. 29.) 6. Who were the "Asiarchs"? What were their duties? (V. 31.) 7. What did the Jews attempt through putting forward Alexander?

(V. 33.) 8. Tell of the part played by the town clerk in this riot. 9. Where did Paul go from Ephesus? 10. Tell of Paul's stop at Troas and his reason for waiting there seven days. (20: 6.) 11. What valuable information concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper does Acts 20: 7 furnish? 12. What was Paul's principal reason for going to Jerusalem? (V. 24.) 13. Tell of Paul's farewell interview with the Ephesian elders. 14. What obligations rest upon church officials as to their being an example to the flock?

LESSON TWENTY-TWO

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM AND HIS RECEPTION THERE

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 21:1—22:29

Memory Text.—“For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.”—Acts 22:15.

LESSON PLAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Week at Tyre. 2. A Few Days at Cæsarea. 3. Lodgings at Jerusalem Arranged for in Advance. 4. Paul Reports, and Receives Advice. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Paul the Center of a Mob. 6. A Surprised Chief of Police. 7. Paul Tells His Own Nation Why He Is a Christian. 8. A Multitude Maddened by One Word. |
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COMMENTS

A WEEK AT TYRE

(Chapter 21:1-6.)

At Miletus, following the affecting farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul's party sailed south to Cos, an inconsequential island, where they anchored for the night.

The chronology of Luke is so explicit, in this narrative of their journeyings upon leaving Philippi, that we can determine the phases of the moon during much of the trip. The first part of the voyage from Miletus would be in the dark of the moon, making it impossible for vessels to sail the open sea after nightfall.

Later, they head direct for Tyre, being out of sight of land for some time, a feat of navigation possible only when moon and stars were visible to guide their course. The entire time consumed in the journey from Philippi to Tyre was somewhat more than a month. When running on regular schedule, they made about a hundred miles per day.

They did not stop long at Rhodes, the island where the famous Colossus, another of the seven wonders of the ancient world, then lay in ruins. It was a giant statue of Helios, the sun, the national god of the Rhodians, and was

more than a hundred feet high when standing.

It fell in 244 B. C. during an earthquake, and no one ever cared to restore it.

Phœnicia was the country bordering on the eastern Mediterranean shore, Tyre and Sidon being its two most important cities.

Their course took them to the west of Cyprus, and they must have been within sight of Paphos, even if they did not stop there. What memories would be revived in Paul's mind as he looked on the scene of Sergius Paulus' conversion. He would have ample time, while passing this interesting city, to tell Luke and his companions about the unusual experiences of himself and Barnabas there, so Luke would have first-hand information for his account of that first missionary tour.

Much of the ship's cargo must have been destined for Tyre, because the unloading of it required seven days. This enabled the missionaries to spend a whole week with brethren there.

They would be refreshed in spirit to find a congregation of believers in that city, so famed for its wickedness.

Sometimes most faithful people are found in exceedingly evil environments. Their goodness isolates them from the

LESSON TEXT

21: 1 And when it came to pass that we were parted from them and had set sail, we came with a straight course unto Cos, and the next day unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: 2 and having found a ship crossing over unto Phœnicia, we went aboard, and set sail. 3 And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left hand, we sailed unto Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unlade her burden. 4 And having found the disciples, we tarried there seven days: and these said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not set foot in Jerusalem. 5 And when it came to pass that we had accomplished the days, we departed and went on our journey; and they all, with wives and children, brought us on our way till we were out of the city: and kneeling down on the beach, we prayed, and bade each other farewell; 6 and we went on board the ship, but they returned home again.

7 And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. 8 And on the morrow we departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we abode with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters, who prophesied. 10 And as we tarried there some days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11 And coming to us, and taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own feet and hands, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle,

evil surrounding them so completely that they become encysted in their social and religious life. God's method of saving the world is by placing good people in the midst of the wicked.

At times, the righteous will be terribly assaulted by the tempests of sin and temptation, but the Lord will wonderfully sustain those who loathe sin while living in its midst.

How interesting to learn that the Holy Spirit had informed the Tyrian brethren of Paul's coming imprisonment at Jerusalem. The information thus furnished was, doubtless, to prepare them, as well as Paul, for that trying ordeal of five years in prison. It would help them to preserve faith under circumstances that would strain it to the breaking point without such preparation. It was their great love for the apostle that prompted them to urge him not to go to Jerusalem, even though they knew it was God's will that he should. We can pardon their solicitation in his behalf. The leave-taking on the beach was as affecting as that at Miletus.

A FEW DAYS AT CÆSAREA

(Verses 7-14.)

The church at Ptolemais enjoyed one blessed day with Paul in their midst.

What would we not give to-day to have him with us to advise and help in solving our vexing problems? We frequently feel the responsibility we face is too much for us when we try to apply the principles of the gospel to our present-day situations.

But if we had an inspired man to direct, minutely, our every move, we should lose the discipline of self-dependence and responsibility. We should become mere helpless babes in judgment and morals, losing that valuable training resultant from the necessity of assuming responsibility. We are frequently perplexed, but we need never err seriously in any decisions we make as to right conduct. We have a guide. Let us follow it, and fear no danger.

At Cæsarea, the brethren had the fine fellowship of the Christian home of Philip and his four consecrated daughters. What a delightful time they must have had in recounting to each other their experiences in preaching. Philip would tell them, of course, about the conversion of the eunuch. Luke, of literary turn, would make his notes for future use.

Perhaps even then, he was gathering material for this very Book of Acts. If so, that most unusual case would impress him as worthy of permanent record.

The Holy Spirit seems to have been concerned that the disciples be prepared for Paul's imprisonment. Here Agabus, a prophet, comes down from Jerusalem to add his word of warning.

It is clear that the Spirit did not issue these warnings to deter Paul from going to Jerusalem. Had that been the purpose of the announcements, Paul would have heeded it and gone elsewhere, for we have seen hitherto how carefully he always followed where the Spirit led. The predictions, then, must have been

and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12 And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

15 And after these days we took up our baggage and went up to Jerusalem. 16 And there went with us also certain of the disciples from Cæsarea, bringing with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. 19 And when he had saluted them, he rehearsed one by one the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of them that have believed; and they are all zealous for the law: 21 and they have been informed concerning thee, that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. 22 What is it therefore? they will certainly hear that thou art come. 23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men that have a vow on them; 24 these take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges for them, that they may shave their heads: and all shall know that there is no truth

for the dual purpose of preparing Paul for his disappointments, and the disciples for their loss of Paul's continued, unfettered activity.

But when the brethren heard of it, their concern for Paul's welfare overcame their scruples in opposing the will of God, and Luke frankly confesses that they attempted to influence Paul to place a construction on the Spirit's warnings other than what the Spirit desired. They might have known better. A man who "consulted not flesh and blood" at the beginning would not listen to interested advice after all these years of hardships; years of sufferings in which he gloried. Their intercession moved him deeply, for he knew it rooted in their deep love for him, and he naturally would appreciate that. But, like the Lord on a previous occasion not dissimilar, "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."

LODGINGS AT JERUSALEM ARRANGED FOR IN ADVANCE.

(Verses 15, 16.)

The "baggage" they were carrying was the money collected in Europe. It is more than possible that the Mnason who went with them from Cæsarea was a convert of Paul and Barnabas on their trip across Cyprus when the island was first evangelized.

He evidently had a home in Jerusalem, and by his going along danger of loss of the money by robbers would be materially lessened, as they could enter his house, with much baggage, and attract no especial attention. Had they

been obliged to seek lodging after reaching the city, their baggage would have been noticed by hangers-on about the inns.

PAUL REPORTS, AND RECEIVES SOME ADVICE

(Verses 17-26.)

The James on whom Paul called was the brother of Jesus. He came into prominence in the Jerusalem church soon after the ascension. He is the one who dictated the note to the Gentiles concerning circumcision, as discussed in Lesson XVI.

He also wrote the Book of James. His leadership in the church was not due to his relationship to the Lord, but was entirely the result of his ability and character.

The meeting was very important, for all the elders of the city were present. Paul's heart would glow as he told these Jewish brethren, who could with such difficulty believe that Gentiles were in any sense worthy of salvation, of his success among the Greeks of Asia Minor and Macedonia and Achaia.

Such proof as he had with him, the large offering from Gentile Christians for the Jerusalem poor, could not be denied as evidence of genuine conversion on the part of those whom Paul had baptized. Even prejudice must yield to that kind of argument.

The incident next narrated deserves careful study.

At the request of James, Paul went into the temple and paid for the offerings required by the law of Moses, in

in the things whereof they have been informed concerning thee; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, keeping the law. 25 But as touching the Gentiles that have believed, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication. 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them.

27 And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and moreover he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place. 29 For they had before seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple. 30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they laid hold on Paul, and dragged him out of the temple: and straightway the doors were shut. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him, tidings came up to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 And forthwith he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down upon them: and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, left off beating Paul. 33 Then the chief captain came near, and laid hold on him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and inquired who he was, and what he had done.

order that the men who had made a vow might be duly released from its terms.

That law demanded that when the days of the fulfillment of a vow had come, certain sacrifices should be offered (Num. 6: 2-12).

During the continuance of the vow, they must let their hair grow as an evidence that they were under it. At its expiration, they shaved their heads, as evidence that they had been released from it. Four brethren, evidently poor, had made such a vow. Its time limit had been reached, and they desired release from its obligations, whatever they were. By going into the temple with them, and paying for their sacrifices, Paul would prove that he had been misrepresented by his enemies, who had reported that he spoke blasphemy against Moses, and advised the Jews to cease circumcising their children and refrain from all contact with the temple and wholly repudiate the law. It was true that he had withstood every effort of these Judaizers to bind the law of Moses on Gentile Christians. He had insisted that both Jew and Gentile were saved by faith in, and obedience to, Jesus the Christ, and by Him alone. But he had not interfered with the Mosaic law further than to show how it had failed as a means of salvation. If a Jew desired to offer a sacrifice, he had that privilege. It was not sinful, though it was no longer obligatory.

Therefore, when James requested him to take that part in releasing the brethren from their vow, he could do so without any inconsistency. His conduct, in this instance, shows that it is sometimes

right to do a certain thing, when voluntarily done, but would be wrong if done as a religious act demanded by an obsolete law, and in recognition of the binding character of that law.

He did it to conciliate his opposing brethren. But had these brethren demanded that he do this in obedience to the law, he would have positively refused to do so.

An actual occurrence in his conduct illustrates this fact. He circumcised Timothy (Acts 16: 3) when he decided to take him along on a preaching tour among Jews, so that the question of his being fit to mingle among them might not be raised. But when, later, some Jews demanded that he circumcise Titus, another Greek preacher in his party, he flatly refused, insisting that Titus' liberty be respected (Gal. 2: 3-5.)

The incident of offering sacrifices for these men with a vow comes under that same principle. It reveals the extent to which Paul would go in "becoming a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain Jews."

This is a principle which we should be careful to observe to-day. A parallel case might be found in the matter of feet-washing. Some good people believe the Lord meant that to be observed as an ordinance of the church. They have a perfect right to so practice it, and are not sinning thereby. But others who have studied the incident in all its bearings are convinced that it was merely an object-lesson, and not bound on the church as an ordinance. Each of these groups should tolerate the other and remain in the same fellowship. Neither should belittle or lose Christian regard

34 And some shouted one thing, some another, among the crowd: and when he could not know the certainty for the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the castle. 35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the crowd; 36 for the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, Away with him.

37 And as Paul was about to be brought into the castle, he saith unto the chief captain, May I say something unto thee? And he said, Dost thou know Greek? 38 Art thou not then the Egyptian, who before these days stirred up to sedition and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins? 39 But Paul said, I am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and I beseech thee, give me leave to speak unto the people. 40 And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with the hand unto the people; and when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew language, saying,

22: 1 Brethren and fathers, hear ye the defence which I now make unto you.

2 And when they heard that he spake unto them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet: and he saith.

3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day: 4 and I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into

for the other because of this difference of interpretation.

This incident shows how earnestly the early Christians tried to win the unbelieving Jews. They even continued to support the temple, hoping thereby to gain the ears of their brethren.

They doubtless hoped that some sort of understanding might be reached whereby the two groups, who worshiped the same God, could become one religious movement. But their attempt was vain.

Their failure should teach us the folly of going too far in yielding to the prejudices of otherwise good people.

They should be duly respected, but it is never safe to entrust people with the Judaizing spirit with religious authority. The man of prejudice is a poor leader, and a poorer official.

PAUL THE CENTER OF A MOB

(Verses 27-36.)

Verses 31-36.—This attack on Paul was due to misrepresentation by certain Asia Minor Jews who had caused him so much trouble on his first and second tours. They had come to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, and recognized Paul in the throng there. Frustrated in their plans to kill him in their own land, they now propose to glut their vengeance here, where their own race dominates. They have no hesitancy in lying to stir up a riot against Paul.

The conscience of a religious bigot is a peculiar moral specimen. These Jews would not have departed one iota from the letter of the law's forms, but would willingly lie and murder, that the law

which said "Thou shalt not bear false witness" and "Thou shalt not kill," might be supreme as religious authority. There are some Christians to-day, too conscientious to worship where a musical instrument is used, but who have no scruples against neglecting the Lord's table, in plain violation of a plain duty. They refuse to permit their children to go to a Bible school or a Christian Endeavor meeting, and never give them any real Biblical instruction at all, despite the injunction to "nurture their children in the admonition of the Lord."

"O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us."

Verses 28-30.—Paul's accusers lied about his teaching, and also about his bringing a Greek into the temple. The Roman Government permitted the Jews to guard the inner enclosures of their temple against the entrance of Gentiles. An outer area, called "The Court of the Gentiles," might be entered by any one. But the temple proper was sacred to Jews, and warnings were posted about the wall, notifying all Gentiles that death was the penalty for venturing within.

Such riots as this over Paul were of frequent occurrence.

Overzealous Jews would raise the cry that a Gentile was inside the forbidden area. That would immediately start a riot.

Verse 31.—To quiet such uprisings and protect innocent victims of Jewish hate or misinformation, the "chief captain" or "chiliarch" (a commander of one thousand soldiers, a colonel), who was in command of the police force stationed about the temple, had his headquarters

prisons both men and women. 5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and journeyed to Damascus to bring them also that were there unto Jerusalem in bonds to be punished. 6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and drew nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9 And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. 10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me I came into Damascus. 12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there, 13 came unto me, and standing by me said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And in that very hour I looked up on him. 14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. 15 For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name. 17 And it came to pass, that, when I had returned

at the northwest corner of the temple, and, by an underground passage, might bring his soldiers, who were really doing police duty, into the Court of the Gentiles on short notice and break up mob gatherings. Not knowing the cause of the confusion, and seeing Paul the object of attack, he naturally concluded that he was a dangerous character, and ordered him handcuffed. How true to form all mobs run. When asked what the man they were attacking had done, "some shouted one thing, some another." None knew what he had done, but because certain "respectable" Jews demanded his death, they were anxious to kill him. The castle to which the soldiers were taking Paul was the prison where the chiliarch had his headquarters.

Some confusion for a house of God! But even in churches to-day, supposedly ruled by the Spirit of Him who taught non-resistance, mob violence is sometimes found. Restraint of passion is one of the most difficult to heed of all of Jesus' demands.

A SURPRISED CHIEF OF POLICE

(Verses 37-40.)

Verses 37-39.—The surprise of the chiliarch at Paul's speaking Greek explains his bringing a large number of soldiers to help quell the riot. Luke states that he "took soldiers and centurions."

That means several hundred soldiers were ordered out. An ordinary temple outbreak would not need so many troops to restore quiet. It is very probable that he was expecting the apprehension of a certain Egyptian, perhaps the one

mentioned by Josephus (Antiq. XX, 8, 6), who led an insurrection among the Jews, taking them to the Mount of Olives, from which place he promised to destroy the walls of the city. He was attacked by Felix, four hundred of his followers slain and two hundred captured, but he himself escaped. The hope of capturing such prey as this man prompted the chiliarch to make a desperate attempt. His chagrin, when he learns that he has a Jew, may be imagined.

Verse 40.—A dramatic situation when Paul spoke from the steps of the prison, guarded by hundreds of soldiers, surrounded by other hundreds of his own nation, demanding his execution. A scene for the artist.

In his defense, Paul forgot his own safety and preached the same gospel he would have declared to them had they been in orderly and sympathetic meeting, expressly to hear of Jesus as Christ.

PAUL TELLS HIS OWN NATION WHY HE IS A CHRISTIAN

(Chapter 22: 1-21.)

Having already studied the historical part of this speech in Lesson X., we pause here merely to note a few lessons.

First, the value of a good reputation. Paul proudly refers to his standing among his nation's leaders before he became a Christian. No asset is worth more to us than a good reputation.

It can be earned and kept only by living a life above reproach.

It is better than wealth, ability, breeding, and increases in value with each year. Years of good character render slander and misrepresentation almost

to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, 18 and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning me. 19 And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: 20 and when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting, and keeping the garments of them that slew him. 21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles.

22 And they gave him audience unto this word; and they lifted up their voice, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. 23 And as they cried out, and threw off their garments, and cast dust into the air, 24 the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, bidding that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him. 25 And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26 And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain and told him, saying, What art thou about to do? for this man is a Roman. 27 And the chief captain came and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? And he said, Yea. 28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this citizenship. And Paul said, But I am a Roman born. 29 They then that were about to examine him straightway departed from him: and the chief captain also was afraid when he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

powerless, but years of unholy living increase their power a hundred-fold.

Second, the self-forgetfulness of Paul. No effort was made to obtain his liberty. He seized the opportunity to preach to those who, under other circumstances, would refuse to listen. Really great men lose themselves in a really great cause. They do not care so much what becomes of them, but they do care tremendously what becomes of their beloved cause. Paul cared what they did with his gospel, because their souls' salvation depended on it.

Third, that punishment for sins committed, even ignorantly, is certain. Paul had persecuted unmercifully, now he suffers the same treatment himself. Poetic justice.

A MULTITUDE MADDENED BY ONE WORD

(Verses 22-29.)

The despised word "Gentiles" was a red flag before these bulls of hate. They would listen to no one who talked about Gentile salvation.

The chiliarch felt chagrined that he had wasted so much time listening to a speech that gave him no information, so he ordered "the third degree" to be given Paul, and dispersed the crowd.

Paul's refusal to be whipped is an enlightening incident. When he "suffered as a Christian," he made no complaint. But when about to be scourged as a criminal, and no religious significance attaches to it, he stood on his Roman citizenship rights. When "per-

secuted for righteousness' sake" we are to "turn the other cheek." But when assaulted by enemies, thugs or bullies, it may become our duty to resist with force. Only by such resistance can government exist. Of course, all such resistance must be according to law, using the proper channels of administrative justice, mob punishment never being pardonable.

"It was an offense punishable with the severest penalties for a man to claim to be a Roman citizen, if he were not one. The peril of such an assertion, if it were not true, convinces the centurion at once, and though we are not told so expressly, we may feel sure that the operation of 'tying up' was stopped."

Roman citizenship might be bought (as in the case of this chiliarch), bestowed as reward for military success, or in recognition of a distinct service to the state. How Paul's father obtained it we are not informed, but the fact that he was a citizen indicates that Paul sprang from a family of social and political standing. The Roman citizen in that day had as many rights as we have under our Government. His life, liberty and freedom in business selection were carefully safeguarded. It was a possession worth having.

But of greater value is citizenship in the kingdom of God, bestowing rights and privileges beside which these earthly favors become insignificant.

Not only so, but citizenship in the kingdom of Christ is open to all who obediently bow to His authority and take delight in doing His will.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Passing on from place to place as Luke accurately describes the voyage, Paul and his party passed near or touched many points of his first missionary tour. Stopping at Tyre, Paul met brethren of the church there, with their families. These begged him not to go on to Jerusalem. (21: 1-6.)

2. How blessed we would feel to have Paul with us one day as he was with the brethren at Ptolemais. At Cæsarea he and his friends enjoyed the hospitable home of Philip and his daughters. Doubtless, Philip related the incident of the eunuch's conversion and Luke took notes. Friends kept warning Paul not to go to Jerusalem. It is evident that Paul did not consider these warnings as from the Spirit to him. (Vs. 7-14.)

3. Coming to Jerusalem, Paul and his companions were received by friends and the following day appeared before James and the elders of the church, telling of the work among Gentiles and the help sent by them to the needy. Knowing of the bitterness of Judaizers, Paul did all he could to placate them. (Vs. 17-26.)

4. Certain Jews from Asia refused to

be appeased and incited a riot against Paul. They could conscientiously murder, but could not conscientiously see some of their ceremonies neglected. The chief captain prevented violence against Paul. (Vs. 27-36.)

5. Not knowing that Paul was a Jew instead of a desperado, the officer expected great trouble. Finding out differently, he consented to Paul's addressing the crowd. Like most mobs, the crowd was shouting all sorts of things. (Vs. 37-40).

6. Paul seems to have forgotten his danger and taken advantage of the occasion to preach Christ to the crowd. A great man loses himself in a chance to present his cause. (22: 1-21.)

7. The Jewish mob saw red at the very mention of the Gentiles, and raved their hate. The chief captain was confused, but, when he found that Paul was a Roman citizen, feared results to himself for what he had permitted. Paul did not shrink from being scourged for Christ, but refused to be scourged as a criminal. He had acted honorably and refused to be branded with dishonor.

QUESTIONS

1. What special advantages did Luke have on this trip for obtaining material for the book which we are studying? 2. If the Holy Spirit desired Paul to go to Jerusalem, why did he warn him so often concerning his fate there? 3. What interesting family did Paul meet at Cæsarea? 4. Suggest a reason for Mnason accompanying the party to Jerusalem. 5. What was the "baggage" they carried? 6. What induced Paul to

go into the temple to offer sacrifice? 7. How could he consistently do this while preaching that the law of Moses had been abrogated? 8. Tell of the mob in the temple. 9. How was Paul rescued? 10. Tell of his speech in defense. 11. Why did Paul refuse to be whipped by the soldiers in this instance, but submit without protest at other times? 12. How were Roman citizenship rights obtained? 13. How did Paul show moral courage?

LESSON TWENTY-THREE

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN AND HIS
REMOVAL TO CAESAREA

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 22:30—23:25

Memory Text.—"I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day."—Acts 23:1.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. A Former Judge Appears before His Former Court.</p> <p>2. Jesus Redeems a Promise.</p> <p>3. A Murderous Plot and Its Result.</p> | <p>4. A Specimen of Official Communications.</p> <p>5. The Preliminary Hearing before Felix.</p> |
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COMMENTS

Our last lesson left Paul in jail, where he had been taken by the chief captain for examination.

A FORMER JUDGE APPEARS BEFORE HIS FORMER COURT

(Chapter 22:30—23:10.)

The chief captain summoned the Sanhedrin, or "council," as Luke ordinarily calls it, that he might have reliable testimony concerning the nature of the charge preferred against Paul.

Other prominent officials of the nation were also present.

Many who had formerly known Paul would welcome this opportunity to see and hear him.

It appears that the chief captain turned the examination of Paul over to the Sanhedrin, deeming that the easiest way to ascertain what crime the prisoner had committed.

Verse 1.—This opening statement of Paul is worthy of notice.

It is an unanswerable argument against the oft-repeated theory that what one does is not material, provided he is sincere.

While assisting in killing Stephen, he was as sincere as he was later in preaching the gospel, yet that did not make his persecution right. It is to a man's

credit always to be perfectly sincere.

Verses 2, 3.—The outbreak of the high priest was a flagrant violation of the laws of both Jews and Romans. When the presiding judge in a trial shows such unfairness, the accused has no hope of obtaining justice. Recognizing that fact, and relying on his Roman citizenship rights to protect him from mob violence, Paul flashes his epithet "whited wall" with the dual purpose of rebuking the judge to his face and calling the attention of the chief captain to the amazing injustice of the whole proceeding against him.

Verse 4.—The defense of the high priest by his henchmen was pitiable. How inconsistent to ask the accused to obey the law forbidding evil-speaking against a ruler, but permit the administrator of the law to go unrebuked.

Verse 5.—Paul's reply that he did not know he was the high priest must be understood as sarcasm. He knew the Sanhedrist court was presided over by the high priest, and may have had personal acquaintance with him. His statement merely expresses contempt for the man who held the position. It was equivalent to saying: "You can not make a high priest out of such contemptible material as that."

Verses 6-10.—How did Paul know that

LESSON TEXT

22: 30 But on the morrow, desiring to know the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

23: 1 And Paul, looking stedfastly on the council, said, Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day. 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: and sittest thou to judge me according to the law, and commandest me to

the court was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees? He had been a member of that very court a few years earlier, and, doubtless, several of the men who sat with him then were still members of it, for election was for life.

He knew their sectarian affiliations then, and perhaps knew personally others who had been elected since his conversion to Christ. He quickly decided on his strategy. His method of escaping his present peril was both tactful and shrewd. He reasoned that if he could start this court on one of their interminable arguments over the differences of their tenets concerning the resurrection and reality of spirits, they would forget him in their zeal to defend their own peculiar view, and that the chief captain would do exactly as he did—adjourn the court.

He perhaps also hoped the officer would release him at once, the lawful thing to do, since his accusers had been given opportunity to convict him, but had brought nothing forward against him justifying holding him in prison. The chief captain should have set him at liberty. But the chief captain himself was not free. He was bound by fear of the influence of these leading Jews. His tenure of office depended largely on his ability to please them as "chief of police." He therefore kept Paul for further investigation.

It must have given Paul much secret enjoyment to watch the acrimonious debate in the Sanhedrist court. Knowledge of similar discussions would rush to him. He knew enough of the workings of the Sanhedrin to be acquainted with a way of escape from his persecutors.

JESUS REDEEMS A PROMISE

(Verse 11.)

In Acts 26: 16 Paul states that Jesus promised repeated appearances. He never forgets his suffering disciples.

Seldom did he appear to a disciple, even in the apostolic age, and never does he do so now. But we have His promise that not a hair of our heads shall fall without His notice. It is worth every thing to have this comforting faith. Our Father may not find it consistent with his larger purposes to deliver us from trouble, injustice, imprisonment, or death, but he will take care of us (our real self), no matter what befall. Even in death, we are His.

This night vision prepared Paul for a tedious prison life. The Lord assured him that he must testify for Him at Rome as he had just done in Jerusalem—in bonds. This would relieve Paul of worry about speedy release. His attention would be directed to opportunities to preach the gospel while in prison, rather than to a lawyer's pleas for acquittal. This will help us to understand why, in more than one instance hereafter, when he has the privilege of making a defense, he preaches Christ instead of refuting the false charges against him. Just enough is said concerning his own case and the reason for his apprehension, to show courtesy to the rulers who permit him to speak, and he then immediately leads to some phase of the gospel. We shall find him doing this before Felix, Festus, Agrippa and others.

A MURDEROUS PLOT AGAINST PAUL, AND ITS RESULT

(Verses 12-25.)

Verse 12.—This curse by which the Jews bound themselves reveals the frenzied bitterness of their hate. Its intensity is difficult to realize.

What is so irreligious as religious bigotry?

It is strange, but true, that one's best and holiest impulses may be perverted and Satanic actions result from perversion.

be smitten contrary to the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? 5 And Paul said, I knew not, brethren, that he was high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people. 6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees: touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 9 And there arose a great clamor: and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' part stood up, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: and what if a spirit hath spoken to him, or an angel? 10 And when there arose a great dissension,

One's best roots in his worst, and his worst in his best.

Much vice is perverted good. How true that we need to be on guard constantly lest we fall into error that will damn while trying to defend truth.

The pretense that they desired Paul brought before the Sanhedrin for further investigation was an unqualified lie, and, as such, forbidden by the law of Moses, whom they pretended to reverence so deeply.

They had no compunction of conscience concerning that, however, for by it they hoped to remove from earth one whom they deemed an enemy of the law. They hesitated not to break the law themselves, to uphold it. They would commit the blackest sin in the law's catalog, that the law which would condemn them for that very act might stand. Their zeal for a system led them to have no regard for those for whose safety system itself had been provided. What consistency!

Verse 16.—Trust a boy on the street to find out what is going on in secret meetings. Every city has boys who might give valuable information to sleuths of the law, but were they to employ such a source of knowledge, the dignity of police might be compromised or their prestige lessened.

This is the first intimation that Paul had relatives in Jerusalem. An ordinary biographer, as enthusiastic about the man whose adventures he was narrating as was Luke, would have mentioned this sister and her family earlier in the narrative. But Luke omits all personalities not germane to his one purpose of tracing the rise and development of Christianity resulting from the labors of Paul. This departure from the ordinary method of writing biography is strong evidence of Luke's being guided by the Spirit of God. His own preference and tendency would have been to introduce

many personal touches, none of which are found.

This boy showed discretion. His uncle was informed first and counsel sought.

Paul's Roman citizenship would insure the chiliarch's giving attention to what the boy had to say. Over and over, this prized right of the apostle worked to his advantage. His being "free-born" was one of the providential preparations, made "from his mother's womb," for his labors as an apostle. The Roman emperor who conferred this favor on Paul's ancestor, whoever he may have been, unconsciously aided in carrying the gospel to Rome's remote bounds.

It is marvelous how God performs his work through both those who worship Him and those who deny Him. His providences overrule in every event to bring His purposes to pass. Those who cooperate in the spirit of obedience will receive the reward of the obedient; those who do so unintentionally or with unholy motives will receive a reward according to their intents also.

Verse 18.—No time was lost by the centurion to whom Paul appealed to take his nephew to the chiliarch. The tell-tale expression, "he took him by the hand," leads us to suggest that the nephew was quite young. He was abashed in the presence of the official, and, to reassure him, the chief captain kindly took his hand, and asked him in fatherly fashion what he had to communicate.

We like that policeman better for his humanity. What virtue is more to be prized than sympathy? The boy would tell all he knew when thus encouraged. We always seek a sympathetic soul in whom to confide. Others may be more learned, or have better judgment, but, when in trouble, we desire the solace which only those who can "suffer with" us, as the word "sympathy" means. Little touches, like the one just noted,

the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the castle.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

12 And when it was day, the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty that made this conspiracy. 14 And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore do ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you, as though ye would judge of his case more exactly: and we, before he comes near, are ready to slay him. 16 But Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, and he

reveal much of character. This chiliarch shows discretion, sympathy, regard for his official standing, and, perhaps, other worthy qualities. His one fault, as seen in this incident, was his fear of the Jews, offense to whom might result in loss of his official position.

Verse 23.—The chiliarch had a good reason for his unusual precaution in guarding the life of his prisoner. The law of Rome made him responsible for the safe-keeping of all prisoners, especially Roman citizens. His own life and honor depended on faithfulness to that trust. Fearing himself unable to keep Paul in the city and protect him without creating a riot, he wisely decided to send him to Cæsarea, away from the atmosphere of hate and persecution.

To do this with safety, in the event that Paul's enemies should obtain warning of his purpose to remove the prisoner, he ordered the large escort of 470 men, variously armed, fully prepared for any demonstration against the company.

If the "more than forty men" who had bound themselves under the curse, together with the friends each could muster, should attempt to take Paul by force, it will be seen that this large bodyguard was none too many. Starting at the "third hour of the night" (9 P. M.), twenty or thirty miles could be covered by daylight, thus removing Paul sufficiently far from the danger zone as to render later attack improbable.

A SPECIMEN OF OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Verses 26-30.)

This is a most interesting letter. It gives us a sample of official communications of the first century A. D. Luke, while with Paul in Cæsarea, would have abundant opportunity to obtain an exact

copy of the document, as it would be on the court records there, accessible to those interested in either prosecution or defense.

At least, we learn the name of the chief captain—Claudius Lysias.

Nothing is known of him more than is stated here. He may have "annexed" the appellation "Claudius" as a compliment to the emperor, such liberties with names being common then, as now.

It is almost possible to trace the line of Presidents of the United States in its "Garfields," "Grovers," "Teddys" and "Woodrows."

Felix was procurator of the Roman province of Judea, having been appointed by Claudius, then emperor. Facts concerning this man will be given in the next lesson.

The form of address, "Most Excellent," we retain in our communications addressed to a Governor, or President of the United States, "His Excellency."

Lysias' letter is a good illustration of shrewd admixture of truth and falsehood. He states facts, but places them in such order that a false understanding of them would result. It is an excellent illustration of the work of a self-pleader.

The letter would lead Felix to conclude that Lysias rescued Paul because he was a Roman citizen, it being studiously worded to leave that impression. The governor would naturally believe he had a chiliarch at Jerusalem who was very watchful of citizenship rights. Yet we have already seen how Lysias had ordered Paul beaten, unlawfully, to extort a confession of crime, having taken no pains to ascertain his citizenship until after this order had been issued. He doubtless hoped this letter would insure silence on Paul's part concerning the whipping order.

Paul probably filed no protest to the accuracy of the statement, for there is

came and entered into the castle and told Paul. 17 And Paul called unto him one of the centurions, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain; for he hath something to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and saith, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and asked me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say to thee. 19 And the chief captain took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, What is it that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask thee to bring down Paul to-morrow unto the council, as though thou wouldest inquire somewhat more exactly concerning him. 21 Do not thou therefore yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, who have bound themselves under a curse, neither to eat nor to drink till they have slain him: and now are they ready, looking for the promise from

no hint of Lysias being censured by either Paul or Felix. Skillful pleading of his case before accusation possibly saved his reputation and humiliation.

Lysias' precaution to prevent lynching can not be too highly commended. Respect for law was one of the elements of strength in Roman government. Our own high regard for the sanctity of law is a heritage from ancient Rome, to a certain extent. When the state took from individuals the right (or duty, as held by many) to avenge insult or injury, it did much to establish order in society. Nothing is more dangerous, both to human rights and stable government, than the practice of permitting vengeance to be taken by the "nearest of kin." The feuds in our own mountain regions have interfered with justice and retarded the progress of the people living there more than has sterility of soil or isolation. Their insistence on avenging their own insults has been the greatest barrier between themselves and outsiders.

Human experience has demonstrated the wisdom as well as righteousness of the Biblical teaching that "vengeance belongs to the Lord." The highest degree of self-control is required to resist the temptation to avenge such gross crimes as murder and violation of women, but it is far better from every consideration that the punishment of every criminal be left to properly constituted courts. Revenge should never be a motive in visitation of a penalty. Preservation of the sanctity of the law, and of the rights of the people within the law, should be the determining factors always. It is folly for men to try to take revenge. God alone is able to impose penalties adequate for sin. We can not see sin as it is. We are all more or less under its domination, contaminated by it, and, by virtue of that fact, incapable of properly evaluating its hein-

ousness and merited punishment. Sin looms so much larger as we see it in others. Our prejudices, likes and dislikes, all enter into our decisions as to what penalties should be meted out. It is therefore necessary that we permit unprejudiced courts, acting under proper legal procedure, to administer punishment for all crime, and that we leave to God himself the work of requiting us for our sufferings and losses.

That means, of course, that we must wait till the hereafter for the application of such justice. But it is best that it is so.

How consoling to know that some day every wrong will be righted, every right deed rewarded.

A day of judgment, as revealed in the New Testament, is a moral necessity in the constitution of the universe. The man who denies the reality of heaven or hell has absolutely no rational explanation of the permitted injustice of this present world on the part of God. "He is longsuffering," desiring the salvation of all men, is the Scriptural reason for the postponement of penalties. But if repentance never comes then punishment hereafter is a moral necessity, or else God becomes a party to injustice—an unthinkable situation. This age needs more emphasis on the fact of future rewards and punishments. Many pulpits never mention hell unless to avow a disbelief in it, or slightly joke about it. It is certain that some souls in the day of judgment will successfully accuse some preachers with having dealt falsely with them while on earth. What an awful accusation to be laid at the feet of men who have pretended to guide their fellows in the way of life eternal. Lysias' letter also betrays the fact that he felt himself unfitted to decide a question of religion as raised by the Jews. He was a heathen and had not troubled to inform himself concerning the religion

thee. 22 So the chief captain let the young man go, charging him, Tell no man that thou hast signified these things to me. 23 And he called unto him two of the centurions, and said, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go as far as Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night: 24 and he bade them provide beasts, that they might set Paul thereon, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. 25 And he wrote a letter after this form:

26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, greeting. 27 This man was seized by the Jews, and was about to be slain of them, when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And desiring to know the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him down unto their council: 29 whom I found to be accused about questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30 And when it was shown to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to thee forthwith, charging his accusers also to speak against him before thee.

31 So the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul and brought him by night to

of the people he was appointed to rule.

That is one evidence of his unfitness to rule. No man can be a successful administrator of justice to any people, unless he is in some measure, at least, familiar with their religious beliefs and practices. The deepest springs of life are religious.

From them flow most of the thinking and doings of any people.

Perhaps to a larger extent than we realize, our conduct is regulated by our deepest religious convictions. Above the law of the land, our views of religion determine what we are.

A further word concerning mobs and lynchings may be well. It is affirmed that no other nation professing the civilization we have attained, has so large a per cent. of illegal executions and punishments. This is an awful reproach. It may be due largely to our youth as a nation. In pioneer days, personal or group administration of justice was a necessity, because the arm of the law was not sufficiently long to reach remote regions.

Vigilance committees and organizations were necessary.

But with the growing population, establishment of courts and increased educational opportunities, these self-appointed agencies become unnecessary, and, if continued, constitute a menace to individual rights and encourage injustice. They were expedients for a condition of life long since passed. But whatever the source of the mob and lynching practice, the stability of our Government now demands their abolition. If sheriffs and police officials were under as strict rules concerning the guarding of prisoners to-day as were the jailors of ancient Rome, we should have less mob violence and lawlessness.

THE PRELIMINARY HEARING BEFORE FELIX

(Verses 31-35.)

The night journey of Paul and his companions must have been a forced march. The eagerness of Lysias to get Paul out of reach of the men pledged to assassinate him is shown in the fact that he covered about thirty miles before daylight, more than a third of the entire distance to Cæsarea. That was a severe march for the footmen.

From Antipatris the cavalry alone escort Paul. This act of giving cavalry troops and permitting Paul to ride, was a courtesy accorded to a Roman citizen. It was well for Paul to have a good standing in his empire. It is always an asset to a man to stand well with the Government of which he is a part.

The first inquiry by Felix brought out the fact that Paul had kept his citizenship rights in the province of his birth—Cilicia.

He must have made a favorable impression on Felix, for he was permitted to remain in Herod's palace. Of course he was guarded as a prisoner, but since he was in the palace in which the procurator lived, it is likely that he was separated from the vicious criminals, it being scarcely conceivable that they would be kept in the royal palace. Thus far in his experiences while under arrest Paul has reason to be grateful for his Roman citizenship.

As a closing paragraph of this lesson, let us call attention to the marvelous providence guiding Paul's movements through these days. In the vision (Acts 23: 11) Jesus had told him that he must see Rome. Previously it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should bear witness in Rome. Now we

Antipatris. 32 But on the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 and they, when they came to Cæsarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34 And when he had read it, he asked of what province he was; and when he understood that he was of Cilicia, 35 I will hear thee fully, said he, when thine accusers also are come: and he commanded him to be kept in Herod's palace.

can begin to see how this prediction is being fulfilled. But how different God's method of bringing the gospel to the Cæsars from what we should have guessed.

Human wisdom would have arranged for the preacher to be sent to Cæsar with a large delegation of notables, a

formal presentation, but God revealed His utter indifference to the artificial class distinctions we have permitted to arise.

In the sight of God and His great apostle, the conversion of a Greek or African slave was as distinct a triumph as the conversion of Constantine.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The chief captain who arrested Paul was in some doubt about the case and called the Sanhedrin. The opening statement of Paul's defense shows that being sincere does not necessarily mean being right. The outbreak of Ananias was contrary to both Jewish and Roman law. Prejudice is a lawless, unreasoning trait. (Acts 22: 30—23: 2.)

2. Paul clashed with the high priest and showed his contempt for the whole farcical procedure. He tactfully precipitated a discussion between the Pharisees and Sadducees of the court, and the chief captain ordered him to be taken into the castle. (Vs. 3-10.)

3. A vision prepared Paul for bonds in Rome as in Jerusalem. Forty Jerusalem Jews banded themselves together with a vow to kill him. Nothing is more irreligious than religious bigotry. These bigots would have succeeded but for Paul's nephew. (Vs. 11-25.)

4. Paul's escape, brought about by the young man, was the occasion of an interesting letter from the chief captain, whose name we here learn to be Claudius

Lysias. The letter reveals Lysias to have been an astute politician, mainly looking out for himself, but he prevented mob violence, which was to his credit. As a public officer, Lysias' ignorance of the religion of his citizens was inexcusable. (Vs. 26-30.)

5. The strong guard appointed to protect Paul moved rapidly out and away from Jerusalem. Seventy horsemen escorted him all the way to Cæsarea, the footmen turning back at Antipatris. Paul as a man measured up to his Roman citizenship in Felix's estimation. A high-minded Christian man will bear inspection anywhere. (Vs. 31-35.)

6. Paul's movements were providentially guided. Merely human wisdom would have sent him to Cæsar in pomp and with servile conformity to court etiquette. But God sent Paul to Cæsar in bonds, and when he arrived he made no greater effort to convert the emperor than he had made to convert the jailor at Philippi. He was sincere and in earnest in both cases, and he preached the same gospel to both. (Vs. 31-35.)

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the chief captain summon the Sanhedrin? 2. Was Paul doing right when he, living "before God in all good conscience," was persecuting Christians? 3. Is conscience a safe guide in religion or anything else? 4. Was Paul speaking the truth literally when he said he did not know that Ananias was the high priest? 5. Tell how Paul shrewdly side-tracked the inquiry about himself. 6. What would Pharisees and Sadducees de-

bate about? 7. Tell of the plot against Paul and how it was discovered. 8. Narrate the effort of the chief captain to prevent a lynching. 9. Discuss the duty of officials to-day who are entrusted with the guarding of accused persons and the giving of protection against mobs. 10. What is the effect of lynchings—on those who perform them and on society in general? 11. Describe the letter of Lysias to Felix?

LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

PAUL IN PRISON AT CAESAREA

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 24: 1—25: 12

Memory Text.—"Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always."—Acts 24: 16.

LESSON PLAN

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| <p>1. A Hasty Hearing on an Unsound Indictment.</p> <p>2. Paul Pleads His Own Case with Skill.</p> <p>3. Postponement of the Trial.</p> | <p>4. Felix Hears for "Personal" Reasons.</p> <p>5. Festus Visits the Holy City.</p> <p>6. Festus Hears the Case, and Gets into Trouble.</p> |
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COMMENTS

A HASTY HEARING ON AN UNSOUND INDICTMENT

(Chapter 24: 1-9.)

Verse 1.—It appears that no time was lost by the Jews in Jerusalem in preparing for the trial of Paul at Cæsarea. The expedition with which the case was handled speaks well for the courts of that day. There was no long delay, during which schemes to abort justice might be hatched. Justice, however, was more difficult to obtain than now. This proves that the best methods of court procedure are of less consequence than the right kind of judges.

This high priest, Ananias, is the same man who ordered Paul smitten in the hearing before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23: 2).

He was a Sadducee, and, like his spiritual descendant, the modern destructive critic, he cared little for facts or justice, just so his own position as religious leader and dictator might be secure. The Sadducee, disbelieving in the resurrection, held the opportunist's view of life, as does the modern skeptical critic, that the end justifies the means. This particular rationalist came to a humiliating end, being deposed from office and later assassinated by Jewish patriots. The rationalist and skeptic are certain to fail in morals at some point.

Tertullus was a hired lawyer, em-

ployed to give skillful form and statement of the incidents leading to Paul's arrest.

He was evidently a suave, shrewd, hypocritical lawyer, being just the type required to handle a case without a shadow of justice on his side. This estimate of Tertullus is based on the speech he made to Felix. There was a modicum of truth in the complimentary opening, "Seeing that by thee we enjoy much peace," for Felix had cleared the region of certain robber bands that had infested it for a long time, thus rendering travel and commercial operations safe.

The form of his indictment deserves notice. Roman law required that, before one could be held on a criminal charge, a formal affidavit defining the crime, naming place and date of commission, should be duly filed. Examine this vague, indefinite statement, in the light of the law. Paul is called "a pestilent fellow." Nothing specific in that. "A mover of insurrection among the Jews throughout the world" was a rather broad affirmation to be made in court. "A ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes" was not a crime under Roman law. Tertullus must have counted on the influence of the high priest, his own reputation and the social or political standing of his witnesses, to obtain a verdict.

"Nazarenes" was a derisive name alluding to Jesus' birthplace, Nazareth,

LESSON TEXT

24: 1 And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with certain elders, and with an orator, one Tertullus; and they informed the governor against Paul. 2 And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying,

Seeing that by thee we enjoy much peace, and that by thy providence evils are corrected for this nation, 3 we accept it in all ways and in all places, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 But, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I entreat thee to hear us of thy clemency a few words. 5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 6 who moreover assayed to profane the temple: on whom also we laid hold: 8 from whom thou wilt be

a town with bad reputation. It was used by enemies with the purpose of belittling Jesus and His followers, but never accepted by the disciples as was the name "Christian."

What will be the feelings of the blasphemer who invented that epithet when he stands before Jesus to be judged at the last day?

In charging Paul with trying to profane the temple, Tertullus deliberately lied.

His turning the case over to Felix for examination of the witnesses and the accused, assuming by both manner and method that the case was so one-sided that it was unnecessary to go into detail, was shrewd, but Felix saw through his scheme. He may have smiled at the legal cunning, but he was not so easily influenced as Tertullus thought.

PAUL PLEADS HIS OWN CASE WITH SKILL

(Verses 10-21.)

As usual, Paul's defence is both skillful and frank. He had nothing to conceal.

Verse 11.—The charge of profaning the temple was refuted by the statement that less than two weeks ago, he went into the temple to worship, as he could prove. Men do not worship and blaspheme at the same time. If he honored it enough to worship there, it was absurd to accuse him of profaning the temple.

Verse 12.—There is here wholesale denial of stirring up dissension in either synagogue or temple.

Verse 14.—His next line of defense was to plead guilty to worshipping according to the way which these Jews termed a sect. This peculiar name for Christianity is again used.

The Greek word for sect means party, division, heresy. It conveys the same meaning as does the word "denomination" to-day.

Paul made it clear that, while accused of being a schismatic, he believed the sacred books of the Jews, and if any separation existed between them, it was because they, not he, had departed from the prophets and law. Their inspired writings had foretold of this Jesus, and when he came, his system superseded that of Moses.

He could therefore be consistent in preaching that Moses was no longer an authority, for his laws had been fulfilled, and were therefore obsolete. Yet since Moses' system was designed to prepare the nation for Christ when He came, only those who accepted Him as the Messiah really honored Moses.

Paul asserted that the cardinal doctrine, bringing hope to the fathers, was that of the resurrection. This was a direct challenge to Ananias the Sadducee.

Verse 16.—It was because of his faith in the resurrection that he tried to keep his conscience void of offense.

There is no fact quite so effectual in restraining those inclined to evil as an assurance of the resurrection both of the just and unjust. No significant factor in the moral decay so generally lamented to-day is the fact that this teaching has been so largely minimized or scorned on the part of many religious leaders.

Verse 17.—Reference to his bringing alms to his people was made to explain why he was in the city. His reason was benevolent. Had he been unfriendly to his people, as the accusations of the Jewish leaders would indicate, he would not have carried large donations to them.

Verses 18, 19.—This statement effectually answers the count in the in-

able, by examining him thyself, to take knowledge of all these things whereof we accuse him. 9 And the Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that these things were so.

10 And when the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, Paul answered,

Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I cheerfully make my defence: 11 seeing that thou canst take knowledge that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem: 12 and neither in the temple did they find me disputing with any man or stirring up a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city. 13 Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me. 14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets; 15 having hope

dictment that he had profaned the temple. He purified himself according to the law. That proved respect for the house of God and its ordinances. Felix could easily perceive the force of such logic.

He made it clear that the real disturbing factors in the situation were Asia Minor Jews, who had hounded him through all that region and continued their unprovoked attacks in Jerusalem.

This charge of Paul would make it necessary to bring these outside Jews to the trial for testimony concerning his misconduct, but they were not present, nor could their attendance be compelled.

He thus tacitly serves notice that he will not permit the trial to proceed further. The case, therefore, should have been dismissed by Felix at once. The prosecution had its chance, but had failed to make a case. By all laws of justice, the accused then had a right to his freedom.

Verse 21.—Paul's motive in repeating the statement made before the Sanhedrin that led Ananias to order him smitten in the mouth can be easily seen. It was either to give Ananias another opportunity to display his temper (which would be a point in Paul's favor) or to incite interest on the part of Felix in the subject of the resurrection. Felix would say: "What objection can Jews, or anybody, offer to a doctrine like that?"

POSTPONEMENT OF THE TRIAL

(Verses 22, 23.)

Felix's familiarity with the nature of Christianity enabled him to see through the duplicity of the Jews who, pretending loyalty to Rome, desired Paul condemned as a traitor to Cæsar, whereas their real motive was to have him silenced as a preacher of Christ. The procurator, however, was obliged to grant a hearing in the presence of Lysias, who, if the plea of Tertullus was

correct, would be the chief prosecuting witness against Paul.

The order of Felix that Paul's friends should have free access to him was not entirely due to his desire to show the prisoner a favor and treat him with the consideration due a Roman citizen. Paul had mentioned bringing alms to his nation. If he could secure money for this purpose, he could also find funds sufficient to bribe a procurator, and Felix planned it so that Paul should have every opportunity to obtain more "alms" to be used in securing his freedom. A reasonable bribe would have set Paul at liberty at any time.

FELIX HEARS PAUL FOR "PERSONAL" REASONS

(Verses 24-27.)

What prompted Felix and Drusilla to ask Paul to speak concerning the faith that is in Christ? Perhaps the dominant motive was to give him opportunity to give a bribe. It may also be that they had a genuine interest in hearing what this new faith was from the lips of the one best able to tell it. Their interest would be purely academic, of course, for neither of them was in any good sense religious.

A brief biography of these two will help us to understand them. Felix had been a household slave in the court of Agrippina, the mother of Claudius, then emperor of Rome. He was liberated by this emperor and entrusted with the government of Judea, where, according to Tacitus, he ruled with all the passions of a slave.

He had much ability, but his training in a corrupt court made him a grafter of the most depraved pattern. His rule became so disgraceful that the emperor was compelled to banish him to Gaul (now France), where he died in disgrace and poverty.

Drusilla was a Herod, the daughter of

toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust. 16 Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always. 17 Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings: 18 amidst which they found me purified in the temple, with no crowd, nor yet with tumult: but there were certain Jews from Asia—19 who ought to have been here before thee, and to make accusation, if they had aught against me. 20 Or else let these men themselves say what wrong-doing they found when I stood before the council, 21 except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day.

22 But Felix, having more exact knowledge concerning the Way, deferred them, saying, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will determine your matter. 23 And he gave

that Herod who put to death the apostle James, and carried on the first political persecution of the church. She had been the wife of Aziz, king of Emessa, before meeting Felix while on a visit to Rome. Her striking beauty led the licentious Felix to negotiate, through a sorcerer named Simon, for her to abandon her husband and become his wife. Since Felix could offer honor and luxuries which the king of the insignificant territory of Emessa could not afford, she willingly exchanged husbands. Love of finery and official position caused almost every Herod to sell virtue and honor to obtain them. When we remember that the Herods were descendants of Esau, it helps us to understand their weaknesses. The posterity of Esau was still selling birthrights of honor for pitiable messes of pottage.

Blood is not everything, but those who begin life handicapped by bad breeding are entitled to great honor if they overcome their inborn tendencies to sin, and become really good. Perhaps we have too little patience with those who must row against the currents of heredity. The character of the two who made up Paul's audience that day in the Cæsarea court will enable us to see the drift of his sermon. We are sorry that only the outline has come down to us.

Luke calls his sermon "reasoning." Speaking to those who did not accept the authority of Jesus, Paul could only appeal to their reason in asking acceptance of his moral teaching.

Every division of his theme would be a direct challenge to the conduct of the guilty pair sitting before him in royal state.

It took a bold preacher to argue for "righteousness" before the man who held his liberty in his power, and was ready to grant it any moment for a bribe. Paul would not obtain his free-

dom by such a method, preferring to remain a prisoner rather than resort to unlawful methods of release. His conduct in this instance is good for the follower of Christ to keep in mind. We are tempted at times to use questionable methods to secure what we know to be a right result. But the Jesuitical doctrine that the end justifies the means has no encouragement in the Scriptures.

The second division of his discourse, "self-control," might have been construed as insulting by Drusilla. How could he discuss that theme and say nothing about rising above the baser passions to which both had yielded in order to live together?

She doubtless thought him coarse and brutal to thus boldly speak to a titled "lady."

It is common for those in high position to disregard or override the standards of conduct set up for the government of people generally. They seem to feel entitled to be a law unto themselves. Law violations by those entrusted with law enforcement, or by "leading citizens," tends to the breakdown of law. There is no reason why a police judge or police officer should not obey parking rules as well as others.

Scrupulous attention to the impartial enforcement of law will do much to break up lawlessness.

The last part of the sermon was too much for the wicked Felix.

When Paul reasoned of "judgment to come," he was "terrified."

This is the most commendable thing we know of this man. So long as one can be "terrified" at the thought of his misdeeds, there is hope. What a different end there would have been to his life had he listened to Paul's exhortation that day. He might have retained his procuratorship and died in honor, and have been certain of a reward here-

order to the centurion that he should be kept in charge, and should have indulgence; and not to forbid any of his friends to minister unto him.

24 But after certain days, Felix came with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ Jesus. 25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified, and answered, Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me. 26 He hoped withal that money would be given him of Paul: wherefore also he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. 27 But when two years were fulfilled, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to gain favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul in bonds.

25: 1 Festus therefore, having come into the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Cæsarea. 2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against

after. But he was too cowardly to obey.

He preferred the pleasures of sin for a season to eternal bliss earned as the reward of righteousness.

Drusilla seems not to have been moved at all. Her heart was hardened beyond hope of repentance. Her influence over Felix helped to steel him also against the persuasion of Paul. What a power for good or evil is a beautiful and gifted woman. What an awful sentence must be meted out to such as Drusilla at the judgment, about which Paul spoke.

Can you imagine the scene when these same persons meet at the last great day? When they stand before Jesus and He asks Felix and Drusilla why they did not accept His gospel, what can they say? Not what countless millions of heathen people can say, "I never heard of you." The greatest preacher of any age pleaded with them, forgetting his bonds, in the abandon of his appeal to them to follow his Christ. Felix was persuaded of the reasonableness of the invitation, but he postponed obedience till a "convenient season." That season never comes. It is obedience "to-morrow," and consequent disobedience "to-day." It is never "convenient" to do right. Satan will always attend to that. He deceives us into thinking there will be a more convenient time, but there never will. It is right that it should be so, too. If all obstacles to obedience were removed, obedience would not be much of a test.

Jesus did not wait for a "convenient season" to die. He died when the "fulness of time" had come. It could scarcely have been "convenient" for him to leave the Father's abode and come to earth that we might be saved, but he came nevertheless. It is a positive insult to our Lord to wait till a "convenient season" to obey him.

The frequent communications Felix

held with Paul, to give opportunity for bribery, must have been almost unendurable to the apostle. Discretion would prevent his telling Felix that he knew what his real motive was in the interviews, but it was a real test of his self-control that he did not. One can believe that he hoped against hope that at last he might win this ruler. He most certainly did not cease to try.

Paul would be both glad and sad when Festus succeeded Felix. Glad to have his case presented before another who might administer justice. Sad to witness the humiliation and disgrace of Felix when he was deprived of office and banished. It is always hard to fail in our earnest attempts to win souls for Christ.

The downfall of any man is awful, but when a man of great ability, especially one entrusted with responsibility, falls, it is the worst tragedy the world knows.

FESTUS VISITS THE HOLY CITY

(Chapter 25: 1-5.)

Verse 1.—Porcius Festus was a better man than Felix in his personal life, being willing to hear Paul's case at once, but he lacked the information concerning the religion of the Jews necessary to pass on the case on its merits.

His trip to Jerusalem was to conciliate the people whom he was to rule. The legal capital was Cæsarea, but Jerusalem was the holy city to the Jews, and the place where the Sanhedrin met for adjudicating its affairs, so a ruler could not afford to be indifferent to Jewish prejudices nor ignorant of the state of affairs at the ancient capital.

Verse 2.—The Sanhedrin had not forgotten Paul in two years' time.

How long hate lives in wicked hearts, especially in the hearts of the bigoted.

Paul; and they besought him, 3 asking a favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem; laying a plot to kill him on the way. 4 Howbeit Festus answered, that Paul was kept in charge at Cæsarea, and that he himself was about to depart thither shortly. 5 Let them therefore, saith he, that are of power among you go down with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him.

6 And when he had tarried among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and on the morrow he sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded Paul to be brought. 7 And when he was come, the Jews that had come down from Jerusalem stood round about him, bringing against him many and grievous charges which they could not prove, 8 while Paul said in his defence, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the

Festus was besought to send Paul up to their court for trial on the ground that his was a religious offense, and they were empowered by Cæsar to judge such cases themselves.

FESTUS HEARS THE CASE, AND GETS INTO TROUBLE.

(Verses 6-12.)

Verse 6.—Eight or ten days would be sufficient time to familiarize himself with political and religious conditions at Jerusalem.

Every ruler in Palestine soon learned that the chief problems of government there were religious, and naturally desired to so regulate his official acts as to placate the leading men of the Jewish nation. Therefore, on return to Cæsarea, Festus held a hasty hearing of Paul's case and offered to send him to Jerusalem for trial. It was here that Paul's citizenship rights stood him in good stead. Assassination would have been certain had he been sent to Jerusalem. His patience was exhausted at last, and he frankly told Festus that he knew his rights, and demanded to be heard at Cæsar's court. This privilege of being heard by Cæsar himself, as the supreme court, was a priceless one for those who might be denied justice in lower tribunals. It guaranteed a fair trial and virtually insured a just verdict. One who made this appeal could go to Rome at Government expense, under a guard, guaranteeing safe escort there.

His rather peeved expression, "Thou hast appealed," can be understood when we see how the appeal would affect his standing with Cæsar.

Paul, in turn, was displeased because Festus lacked courage to release him. "I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest," was a courageous rebuke. He further did not hesitate to accuse

Festus of malfeasance in office for not dismissing the case against him. He felt he had a right to justice at Cæsar's court in Judea.

God's providence is again evident. The time for the fulfillment of the promise that he "should testify at Rome" is nearing.

How eagerly Paul would look forward to meeting the disciples there. He must have questioned how they would receive him. Would they shun him? Would they doubt his innocence of crime? Would they espouse his cause and use what influence they had to obtain his freedom? His conflicting emotions may be imagined.

The persecution of the Jews was a compliment to Paul.

Had his labors been unsuccessful, they would have ignored him.

It is true to-day that men who oppose official trickery, either in state or church affairs, will suffer persecution. If they criticize church officials, editorial policies, missionary secretaries, etc., no matter how merited the criticism, they will be persecuted.

It is still true that a man of whom all men speak well has failed to do his full duty. It requires courage to oppose wrong that is entrenched, but it must be done, or evil would soon be supreme everywhere. The cause of Christ needs men who have honesty, courage and vision to see what is wrong. The preacher who finds nothing to rebuke (except Jews where none live) is either too blind to be a leader or too timid to ornament his position as a herald of righteousness. Brave men of sane leadership are needed now, as always. Officialism has crept into some church circles, destructive criticism is brazenly denying every vital truth of the Bible and materialistic worldliness has pre-empted many choice pews. "The fight is on." It probably always will be on.

temple, nor against Cæsar, have I sinned at all. 9 But Festus, desiring to gain favor with the Jews, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? 10 But Paul said, I am standing before Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou also very well knowest. 11 If then I am a wrong-doer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if none of those things is true whereof these accuse me, no man can give me up unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar. 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Thou hast appealed unto Cæsar: unto Cæsar shalt thou go.

Our battles for righteousness now are not perilous physically, but only

brave souls will faithfully "carry on," for there must be much anguish of heart.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The Jerusalem Jews who were against Paul quickly prepared to accuse him at the trial in Cæsarea. They brought false charges. Ananias, the Sadducee high priest, was the chief instigator. His religion, like that of his destructive critic successors, did not deter him from hatred and injustice. Tertullus, the hired orator, was a shrewd falsifier. (24: 1-9.)

2. In Paul's defense of himself he was straightforward. He proved himself to be a devout worshiper in the temple and also acknowledged his faith in the resurrection to find aught against him honestly. Integrity sometimes loses in the battle with duplicity, but the defeat is temporary. (Vs. 10-21.)

3. Felix knew enough about Christianity to see that Paul was correctly presenting his case while his accusers were practicing treachery. But Felix could not separate the idea of money power from the case. The materialistic mind has never understood Christian motives. (Vs. 22, 23.)

4. Felix and Drusilla were a strange pair to sit in judgment over Paul. But Paul was the real judge and Felix had

at least enough conscience to be "terrified" at Paul's words about judgment and righteousness. Drusilla was too indifferent to be touched in the least. Indifference is the devil's surest anæsthetic. (Vs. 24-27.)

5. To please Paul's Jewish enemies, Felix left him in bonds until Portius Festus became procurator. Festus was a better man and unprejudiced. He failed to further the Jews' conspiracy to kill Paul. The utter mercilessness and lack of conscience that characterize religious misunderstandings and prejudice are hard to understand. (25: 1-5.)

6. The grandeur of Paul's character grows with each feature of his progressive trial. It was dangerous for a ruler over the Jews to make a mistake in his religious attitudes and decisions. Paul and Festus were both displeased—Paul, because Festus lacked courage to release him, Festus because of the reflection upon his own ability when Paul appealed to Cæsar. If leaders and men of power in religious affairs were to put Christ forward and themselves in the background, the world would go forward by leaps and bounds. (Vs. 6-12.)

QUESTIONS

1. What teaching of Paul explains the hostility of Ananias, the high priest? 2. Describe Tertullus and his speech. (Vs. 1-8.) 3. What was the probable origin of the term "Nazarenes"? (V. 5.) 4. How did Paul refute the charge of profaning the temple? (Vs. 11-13.) 5. Who were Felix and Drusilla? 6. Why did Felix keep Paul in bonds for so long? (V. 27.) 7. In what respect was Paul's sermon before Felix and Drusilla especially applicable to them? 8. When did

Felix's "convenient season" come? (V. 25.) 9. Who was Festus and what sort of man was he? 10. Why did he ask Paul to go to Jerusalem for trial? (V. 9.) 11. Why did Paul refuse to go? 12. Why was the privilege of appeal to Rome a priceless right to Roman citizens? 13. What was the real secret of Jewish opposition to Paul? 14. Describe some existing forms of officialdom confronting Christians to-day. 15. What would send the Christian world forward to-day?

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

PAUL AT CAESAREA—Concluded

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 25: 13—26: 32

Memory Text.—“At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me.”—Acts 26: 13.

LESSON PLAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Royal Visit Relieves an Embarrassed Ruler. 2. An Audience of Notables Assembled to Hear Paul. 3. A Happy, Tactful Introduction. 4. Paul Gives His Religious Genealogy. 5. Pharisaic Doctrine Expounded. 6. Paul Lays Another Plank in the Bridge on Which He Would Cross the | <p style="text-align: center;">Chasm to Agrippa's Heart.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Paul Reaches the Climax of His Own Life's Story. 8. Paul Preaches and Gets Mobbed for It. 9. An Ill-timed Interruption and a Personal Appeal. 10. A Heart-broken Preacher Sees His Audience Leave. |
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COMMENTS

A ROYAL VISIT RELIEVES AN EMBARRASSED RULER

(Chapter 25: 13-22.)

Verse 13.—The visit of Herod Agrippa and his sister Bernice was a formal one of congratulation to the newly appointed procurator of Judea.

Both visitors were anxious to be on friendly terms with Festus. They had known Felix, his wife, Drusilla, being their sister.

Their own political future depended on maintaining cordial relations with their neighbor in authority. Besides, it is more than possible that Bernice had a special personal interest in meeting the new official who had been advanced to the post where her licentious sister, Drusilla, had found social and political opportunity, as wife of the procurator. Bernice was at that time living in intimate relations with Agrippa, her own brother. Her first husband had been her uncle, Herod of Chalcis. After the incident of this lesson, she abandoned Agrippa for Ptolemy of Sicily, for a time, but returned to Agrippa later. Her shamelessness made her famous (infamous) even in that day of loose ideals of morality.

Nor was Agrippa any better. In faith he was a devout Jew, but never permitted his religion to interfere with his life.

The Herods were Idumæans, descendants of Esau, but had become proselytes to the Jewish faith. This Herod was really devoted to the Jewish cause, but in the rebellion culminating in the downfall of Jerusalem and Jewish rule in Palestine, he boldly advised against such folly and espoused the cause of Rome, hoping thereby to lessen the humiliation of the Jews.

Verse 14, seq.—Festus sets forth the facts in this address, as may be learned from a comparison with Luke's record just preceding, colored slightly to his personal advantage. The friendly visit of Agrippa provided Festus an opportunity to ascertain the exact nature of the charges against Paul. His own ideas of religion he revealed in the use of the term "superstition," that being the literal meaning of his word "religion" in verse 19.

The gap between his religion and that of Agrippa was so wide that it is no wonder he could not understand the accusations of the Jews against Paul.

Festus was not the last official igno-

LESSON TEXT

25: 13 Now when certain days were passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Cæsarea, and saluted Festus. 14 And as they tarried there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; 15 about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, asking for sentence against him. 16 To whom I answered, that it is not the custom of the Romans to give up any man, before that the accused have the accusers face to face, and have had opportunity to make his defence concerning the matter laid against him. 17 When therefore they were come together here, I made no delay, but on the next day sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded the man to be brought. 18 Concerning whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge of such evil things as I supposed; 19 but had certain questions against him of their own religion, and of one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20 And I, being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be

rant of the true faith. Men who rule are usually professors of religion, but frequently their knowledge is only theoretical.

No man ever administered government successfully over any people unless he quite thoroughly understood their faith.

Every institution, social, educational, political, roots in religious ideals; and the man ignorant of these roots of conduct and laws can not deal satisfactorily with such questions as will constantly arise in connection with the administration of an executive position.

Agrippa was doubtless sincere as he expressed a desire to hear Paul. He knew much about this great preacher, and was familiar with current Jewish versions of the character and teachings of Jesus.

Despite his infamous immorality, he had a genuine theoretical interest in religion. Here, then, is his opportunity to learn some things he wants to know from an authority on the subject.

AN AUDIENCE OF NOTABLES ASSEMBLED TO HEAR PAUL

(Verses 23-27.)

Verse 23.—What an audience Paul faced that day. As he entered the chamber where royalty, courtiers and chiliarchs sat in state, and he realized that he was the one to whom they were looking for entertainment and information, how his heart must have quickened.

He must have remembered that Ananias, who baptized him at Damascus, had told him that he would be permitted to speak to kings and suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 9: 15). When this prediction was made, Paul probably pic-

tured a great throng in a popular assembly, gathered to hear what Jesus would have them to do, kings sitting beside servants, at Jesus' feet. He himself had accepted the divine call so unhesitatingly that he would naturally think of others as willing to make the same sacrifices. Now, here in Festus' court the prediction of Ananias is fulfilled, but how different the situation from what he had expected. Instead of being a popular preacher to a large church, attended by royalty, he is under indictment, held a prisoner for Cæsar's hearing, and brought in before rulers and officials, but one of whom seemingly has any real interest in his message.

In this pompous speech, introducing the speaker of the occasion, Festus seems to take credit to himself for "determining to send him to Cæsar." Of course he decided to send his prisoner to Cæsar. He had no option in the matter.

If he could have escaped that rather embarrassing duty, he would have done so gladly. Through his own blundering and cowardly hesitancy to set an innocent man at liberty, he found himself under the necessity of sending the prisoner to Cæsar and nothing to say in the commitment papers except that the man had been accused by certain Jews, but of what they accused, he did not know. Can you appreciate his humiliating position? Cæsar would likely say, "What sort of man have I governing in Cæsarea? He is either too ignorant to know the nature of the alleged crime, or too negligent of duty to ascertain it." Not a very flattering decision concerning a new official, but a necessary one. The poor ignoramus, who has had no time to study religion, would have been deeply humiliated to own his lack of informa-

judged of these matters. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be kept for the decision of the emperor, I commanded him to be kept till I should send him to Cæsar. 22 And Agrippa said unto Festus, I also could wish to hear the man myself. To-morrow, saith he, thou shalt hear him.

23 So on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and they were entered into the place of hearing with the chief captains and the principal men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus saith, King Agrippa, and all men who are here present with us, ye behold this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews made suit to me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death: and as he himself appealed to the emperor I determined to send him. 26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, king Agrippa, that,

tion had he not been too conceited to realize his limitations. One can imagine the amused looks on the faces of his guests as they exchanged knowing glances at each other.

It was not only "unreasonable" (v. 27) to send a prisoner to Cæsar without specifying the charges against him, but it was full freighted with unpleasant political possibilities. Cæsar would very likely send him a resignation with a dotted line marked "Sign here." So it must have been with relief that Festus turned the investigation over to Agrippa.

A HAPPY, TACTFUL INTRODUCTION

(Chapter 26: 1-3.)

Agrippa showed none of the stage-play effort to impress the assembly that Festus exhibited. He quietly addressed Paul, telling him to proceed in his own way. Again we note the mention of Paul's characteristic gesture (cf. Acts 13: 16; 21: 40).

Paul was sincere in his introduction. He was glad to state his case to a man who could understand the point at issue.

Agrippa's training in the Jews' religion made him such a man.

Any opportunity to preach the gospel made Paul "happy," but he was especially so when permitted to speak to the ruler of an important province of the Roman Empire. In saying "I am happy to make my defense before *thee*," he probably cast a deprecatory glance in the direction of Festus.

This is a wonderful sermon. If Paul ever felt special need of the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit when speaking of Christ, it was when he faced Agrippa. The two men had had much in common, as the progress of the discourse will show, and he was determined to win the king, if possible. The differ-

ent paragraphs of the sermon are all attempts to bridge the chasm between them. The conciliatory and truthful introduction above is the beginning of the attempt.

PAUL GIVES HIS RELIGIOUS GENEALOGY

(Verses 4, 5.)

His early life, parentage, schooling, official life in Jerusalem, were all matters of record among the Jews, and Agrippa was familiar, in part at least, with those facts, being himself a member of the sect of Pharisees, to which Paul belonged. That much they had in common. The more lines in which their lives had run parallel, the better their chances of standing together again, so Paul mentions other things they held in common.

Things held in common are always valuable to one who would win another to Christ. If we belong to the same lodge, political party, have mutual relatives or friends, we feel a little nearer each other. Paul was never ashamed of having been a Pharisee, for it was the best sect of the Jews.

PHARISAIC DOCTRINE EXPOUNDED

(Verses 6-8.)

It is illuminating to learn from this section of the sermon that the Pharisees insisted that the promise to the fathers included the resurrection of the dead. The Old Testament has but little to say about this. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, were perhaps better Old Testament scholars than the Pharisees, and could possibly out-argue them on that point.

The argument from the silence of the Old Testament on the resurrection, made much of by rationalists of all time, must

after examination had, I may have somewhat to write. 27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not withal to signify the charges against him.

26: 1 And Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand, and made his defence:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before thee this day touching all the things whereof I am accused by the Jews: 3 especially because thou art expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. 4 My manner of life then from my youth up, which was from the beginning among mine own nation and at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; 5 having knowledge of me from the first, if they be willing to testify, that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers;

have been somewhat difficult to meet. Jesus silenced the Sadducees by quoting the words, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," words spoken by the Lord centuries after the death of the patriarchs, as proof of the resurrection, stating that God was not the God of dead men, but of living ones. But it is doubtful whether Pharisees had ever thought of making use of that argument. Paul's reference to "the hope of the fathers," however, proves that belief in a resurrection was an essential part of the Pharisaic creed. He and Agrippa had common ground there.

Another word on Paul's statement that he was "accused of the hope of the resurrection by the Jews" may be permitted.

That was true, but it was because he connected the resurrection with Jesus personally. He taught that if Jesus had not risen, there was no hope of a resurrection. Not even Sadducees would have persecuted him for holding the abstract belief in a general resurrection. But it was intolerable to both Sadducee and Pharisee that he should affirm that the Galilean carpenter had already arisen, and that through His power alone would the dead rise.

This was an accusation that the Jews had put to death the Son of the very God they worshiped. His basing all hope of the resurrection on the fact of Jesus' resurrection embittered them to the point where they were ready to murder him.

PAUL LAYS ANOTHER PLANK IN THE BRIDGE ON WHICH HE WOULD CROSS THE CHASM TO AGRIPPA'S HEART.

(Verses 9-11.)

This part of his sermon deals with Paul's career as a persecutor. Why does

he mention that? Because Agrippa's family had also been persecutors of the same faith. Paul's expression, "I thought with myself," is peculiar. It would seem to indicate that his determination to persecute was the result of taking the selfish view. All "thinking with self" is self-centered and all thinking of that kind is wrong. It is only when we center our thinking in Christ that we think correctly and reach right conclusions. This Paul did when he died, and Christ lived in him.

The world will be an ideal place to live when our thinking and planning for life start with Jesus as the center of consideration. Occupations will be chosen from that viewpoint.

Pleasures likewise will be fashioned with the thought of pleasing Him. What a revolution in our sports and games, if that center of thinking were used. The first objective in any undertaking is to "be well pleasing unto him." Impractical? So the world thinks, but it is "thinking with itself." There would be more real fun and joy in the world in a day if such considerations obtained than in a year as it is now.

As Paul recited his activities in persecuting Christians, he must have been impressed with the poetic justice then being meted out to him. He was then in the same position as the disciples whom he had been instrumental in arresting and convicting on testimony which he afterward learned was false. The best evidence we have that he may possibly have been a member of the Sanhedrin is the statement here that he gave his vote against the Christians. That privilege of voting was ordinarily exercised only by one who was a member of that body. He spared not himself in telling of his bitter persecutions. The curiosity of Agrippa concerning what had induced Paul to change his

7 unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! 8 Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead? 9 I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them. 11 And punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities. 12 Whereupon as I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that

life so radically would be stimulated by this tactful placing of himself in a bad light as a Jew.

We can imagine the restraint under which Agrippa labored while waiting for Paul to reach the part of his story dealing with his conversion.

Paul is a good illustration of that type of man who can be either very good or very bad, but can not be a cipher. Somehow we admire that sort more than we do the man whose life is colorless morally, neither good nor bad, just neutral. Every one who is really good has potential wickedness well under control in his life.

Paul never conquered so completely that he vanquished all evil within him. "I labor to keep my body in subjection" and "When I would do good evil is present with me" are two expressions revealing the continual fight raging in his inner nature. The glorious thing about him was that he fought, whereas so many give up in weak submission to evil tendencies and temptations. If any reader finds strong temptations within himself, let him thank God for them. Their very presence proves that he is worth something. Satan desires him, as he did Peter, "to sift as wheat," because he knows the worth of such a man.

Some are so negative in nature that it is a wonder that Satan makes any attempt to enlist them in his service. No one can be worth much to either God or man who has not fought successfully to subdue his own nature. All of life is a battle—just "one battle after another."

PAUL REACHES THE CLIMAX OF HIS OWN LIFE'S STORY

(Verses 12-18.)

This account of Paul's conversion, so far as the facts in it are concerned, has already been considered in Lesson X.,

but one expression here merits attention.

In Acts 9:7, Luke says: "The men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no man." In Acts 22:9, Paul says: "They that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." An apparent contradiction. But in this speech before Agrippa (26:14) he informed his audience that Jesus spake to him in the Hebrew language. The attendants on that Damascan trip were doubtless Roman soldiers who would not understand the Hebrew tongue. They would "hear the voice," but not hear in the sense of understanding what was said.

We use the word "hear" in the same senses to-day.

This is a fair illustration of the ease with which all the so-called contradictions may be removed if we grant that the witnesses who wrote the New Testament were even ordinarily honest men and used words as they were currently employed. Those who find contradictions do so because they are looking for them, and, of course, they find what they look for. A critic can find fault with the rainbow, but most of us will continue to admire it just the same. It does not prove that all nature is awry when we see two clouds in the heavens traveling in opposite directions. Nature is not lying in one cloud, nor in both. There are two different air currents, that is all, but it is the same nature driving both, and there is no contradiction, yet two people telling of the direction of the wind might differ in their statements, and both tell the truth. We need just a little common sense in dealing with Bible statements, that is all.

Paul answers another question that would be in Agrippa's mind, in verse 17, where he says: "Jesus sent him to the Gentiles." The king, knowing the prejudice of Pharisees, would wonder

journeyed with me. 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad. 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 16 But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; 17 delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, 18 to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me. 19 Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 but declared both to them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judæa, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. 21 For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple, and assayed to kill me. 22 Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; 23 how that the Christ must suffer, and how that

why Paul did not confine his ministry to the Jews. When told that Jesus had ordered Paul to preach to Gentiles, he could not help admiring the apostle for his ready obedience.

PAUL PREACHES AND GETS MOBBED FOR IT

(Verses 19-23.)

Agrippa, being a Pharisee, believed that angels appeared to men on many occasions, so it was not difficult for him to believe that Paul told the truth in narrating his vision on the way to Damascus. Paul's life would be sufficient evidence of the honesty and sincerity of his motives. When here he says, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," Agrippa would approve of his conduct.

Though disobedient himself, the king would like Paul better for his obedience. A dishonest person regards an honest one highly. A liar respects a truth-teller.

Paul informed his hearers that he began preaching immediately at Damascus. What joy there must have been among the poor, persecuted disciples in that city when they learned that he who had started on his journey expressly to deliver them to death was now tarrying in their city, preaching the very Christ they served. Heaven will have no deeper joy than was theirs on hearing this able man confound the disbelieving Jews.

Paul's grasp of the gospel was complete from the beginning. That could not have been possible without the appearance of the Lord and the special illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is so different from

the Judaism of Paul's day that nothing but a miracle could give one instant appreciation of the relationship between the two. From the first, Paul preached that "repentance and good works" were the objectives of the gospel.

In verse 22, help from God is acknowledged in that he was permitted that day to "stand before small and great," testifying as had Moses and the prophets concerning Christ. We can see no place where God miraculously interfered, to bring the audience he then addressed before him. His entire experience in prison was much the same as others have had. Were we to suffer so unjustly we might find it difficult to say that God was with us. But to Paul, whatever happened was providential. It is always so for every one as willing to be led of God as Paul was. There is not the slightest doubt that God still leads him who is willing to unselfishly go where God wants him to go, and do what God wants him to do. He may lead where faith will be sorely tried, but if the one tested remains true, he will see, sooner or later, how God was wondrously leading all the while.

AN ILL-TIMED INTERRUPTION AND A PERSONAL APPEAL

(Verses 24-29.)

Festus had advertised his ignorance at the beginning of the hearing, but he headlined it in his interruption of Paul at this point. The poor fool thought that because *he* could not understand the drift of Paul's sermon, no one else could. We are all likely to reason thus. There is no light to the blind, no music to the deaf. The African on the equator refuses to believe that ice exists. What he

he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles.

24 And as he thus made his defence, Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning is turning thee mad. 25 But Paul saith, I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness. 26 For the king knoweth of these things, unto whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28 And Agrippa said unto Paul, With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds.

30 And the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31 and when they had withdrawn, they spake one to another, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32 And Agrippa said unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

can not understand to him does not exist.

The skepticism of the proud scientist and philosopher of to-day is on a par with the silly reasoning of Festus. He branded Paul's story and enthusiasm as the ravings of a mad man. His critics of the present time are not quite so complimentary, but equally wrong. Their theories and hallucinations are too absurd to demand even a passing notice. The man who opposes Christianity as Paul preached it merely publishes to the world his own imbecility.

It is possible that Festus tried to make an impression on Bernice by his profound (?) observation. If so, he doubtless succeeded—in impressing her with his ignorance.

We have missed much by Paul's not being permitted to finish the line of argument he was about to introduce for the Christhood of Jesus as drawn from prophecy. Agrippa believed the prophets, and Paul desired to explain certain dark sayings from that source which the rabbis were unable to interpret.

The apostle minced no words in accusing Festus of inexcusable ignorance concerning the events which he had just been narrating. They were "not done in a corner." Nor in a spiritualistic medium's cabinet. The miracles of Jesus and the apostles were very different from sleight-of-hand performances.

Agrippa must have given evidence of an interest that almost swept Paul off his feet. Something he saw working in the heart of his royal listener induced him to make a direct and personal appeal. The old version that says Agrippa said, "Almost persuadest thou me to be a Christian," is not correct as a translation, but it no doubt expresses the true state of the king's mind. Our text

makes him seem to say: "Do you think that you can win me with one sermon?" He was tremendously moved, but resisted the Spirit.

Agrippa will remember that day when, with trembling step, he approaches the throne of this Jesus for judgment, and beholds Paul standing there. He will wish he had been altogether persuaded then. How bitter will be his remorse. Yet not more so than that of those who to-day neglect and resist when almost persuaded.

A HEART-BROKEN PREACHER SEES HIS AUDIENCE LEAVE

(Verses 30-32.)

None save those who have also made appeals with the whole heart to lead some one to Christ, and failed in the attempt, can sympathize with Paul as his auditors left. The disappointment is almost unbearable, but every true minister and personal worker has experienced it. There is some consolation for us in the knowledge that even an inspired apostle could not always succeed in winning those to whom he spoke.

How lonely Paul was as he was led back to his prison cell. At times such as that he needed the assurance of Jesus again that He would be with him always. And He is always with all who try earnestly to do His will.

"Paul was acquitted on all hands, and Festus may rightly be deemed guilty because he had driven an innocent man to appeal to a higher court, from fear that he would be delivered into the power of his enemies. But God was using human means for bringing the apostle to Rome, and so fulfilling his servant's great desire."

LESSON CONDENSED

1. Herod Agrippa, great-grandson of Herod the Great, was king over certain territories. He was of Jewish faith, but did not let his religion interfere with his schemes. Festus was a Roman procurator and could not quite understand Paul's case. Agrippa agreed to hear Paul, and Festus was more than glad to have him do so, as he was afraid to send Paul to Cæsar and afraid not to send him. (Vs. 23-27.)

2. Paul had an audience of political notables. Agrippa simply asked him what he had to say. Paul and Agrippa were both Pharisees. They both believed in the resurrection of the dead. Paul was tactful as well as truthful in his address. The thing that made the Jews want to murder him was his predicating his belief in the resurrection on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (26: 1-8.)

3. With Paul everything centered in Jesus Christ. This will be a great world when we all can learn this lesson. Again, this address shows Paul to have been either for or against. He was no cipher, no milksop. What he believed, he believed with might and main. (Vs. 9-11.)

4. Paul related to Agrippa the experience that is described in Lesson X. The seeming discrepancy at one point is really not a discrepancy. The Roman soldiers with Paul at the time of his conversion heard the sound of the voice, but did not understand the words. (Vs. 12-18.)

5. Agrippa, being a Pharisee, had no difficulty in accepting Paul's account of the vision. We note how clearly Paul grasped the terms of the gospel from the very beginning. He not only grasped them but held to them. (Vs. 19-23.)

6. Festus revealed his own stupidity and ignorance by accusing Paul of madness. Self-conceit looks with pity upon others while being unable to see its own emptiness. There is much so-called scholarship to-day of the Festus type. (Vs. 24-29.)

7. Agrippa was deeply moved, but stopped short of surrender to Christ. It was a dramatic moment, a tragic moment. Many a soul has stopped at the very threshold and turned back. Even an inspired apostle could not always succeed in his appeals. (Vs. 30-32.)

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Herod Agrippa? 2. Why did not Festus understand Paul's case? 3. What belief was held in common by Agrippa and Paul? 4. Why were the Jews so bitter against Paul? 5. In whom and in what did all Paul's thinking center? 6. What kind of man was Paul when it came to positiveness and

clearness of position? 7. How did Festus reveal his stupidity? 8. What effect did Paul's discourse have upon Agrippa? 9. What reasons would you surmise explaining Agrippa's failure to fully accept the gospel? 10. If an inspired apostle sometimes failed to convince, how should we feel and act in similar circumstances?

LESSON TWENTY-SIX

VOYAGE TO ROME AND RECEPTION THERE

Scope of the Lesson—Acts 27 and 28

Memory Text.—"I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me."—Acts 27: 25.

LESSON PLAN

1. The Prayer to Visit Rome about to Be Answered.
2. Paul Gives Advice to No Effect.
3. A Ship, Straining in Its Joints, Is "Bandaged."
4. Paul Predicts Again, This Time by Inspiration.
5. The Sailors Forget the Traditions of the Sea.
6. A Fourteen-day Fast Broken.
7. A Perilous Landing Safely Made.
8. A Criminal Escaped, or a God?
9. Publius' Father-in-law Healed.
10. Rome at Last.
11. Paul Meets Some Jews in Conference.
12. He Makes a Set Speech to His People.
13. An Abrupt Close for a Book.

COMMENTS

At last, after three years of unjust retention in jail, the great apostle, accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus, begins the journey to Rome.

THE PRAYER TO VISIT ROME ABOUT TO BE ANSWERED

(Chapter 27: 1-8.)

From this passage, it is impossible to determine whether Aristarchus was a voluntary companion, traveling along with the apostle to share his ill fortune, or whether he was himself a prisoner. In Col. 4: 10, Paul mentions him as a "fellow-prisoner." He is also named in Philemon 24. Both these letters were written from the Roman prison, so it seems probable that Aristarchus was also going to Rome to be heard by Cæsar.

The ship which carried the prisoners was engaged in coast trade. In that day few boats sailed on long voyages. Travelers going very far were compelled to change vessels frequently. No regular schedules for a trip to Rome were carried out.

We like that captain, Julius, for his consideration of Paul at Sidon, permitting him to go ashore to "refresh

himself," probably giving a sea-sick man a brief respite.

A direct course to their destination would have taken them to the north of Cyprus, but on account of the stormy weather at the beginning of winter, when the trip was made, they sailed to the south or protected ("lee") side of the island. The "longest way was safest."

Myra was the principal port of Lycia, a province at the southwestern extremity of Asia Minor. The Alexandrian ship, to which they transferred there, was loaded with wheat. They proceeded thence out of direct line also, to obtain the shelter afforded by Crete, sailing south of that island, though it was much nearer to leave it to the south. Fair Havens was a small harbor, protected from north and northwest winds, but not commodious for wintering.

PAUL GIVES ADVICE TO NO EFFECT

(Verses 9-13.)

The fast mentioned here was the Day of Atonement, which was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 23: 26, 27), a time usually falling

LESSON TEXT

27: 1 And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan band. 2 And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail unto the places on the coast of Asia, we put to sea, Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. 3 And the next day we touched at Sidon: and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go unto his friends and refresh himself. 4 And putting to sea from thence, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy; and he put us therein. 7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and were come with difficulty over against Salmone, the wind not further suffering us, we sailed under the lee of Crete, over against Salmone; 8 and with difficulty coasting along it we came unto a certain place called Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

9 And when much time was spent, and the voyage was now dangerous, because the Fast was now already gone by, Paul admonished them, 10 and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that the

within the time of our month of October.

Paul's natural leadership is again illustrated in this incident. He took it on himself to advise against sailing. Please note that, in predicting loss of life, the Lord had not given him a revelation to that effect. He evidently spoke out of his own experience as a Mediterranean sailor and judge of weather probabilities, not by inspiration. His judgment concerning the loss of the ship proved to be correct.

We may learn a good lesson from the centurion's experience. Expert advice is not always as good as it claims to be.

The companions of Paul would reason that he wanted to delay passage to Rome as long as possible, thus postponing expected conviction and punishment. Later the centurion probably wished he had listened to Paul instead of the experts in navigation.

Phœnix, about thirty-five miles from Fair Havens, had a much larger and safer harbor. The advice of the majority, to try to reach that place and tie up for the winter, was merely the dictation of sound reasoning. The change of wind, promising a day or two of good weather, seemed the propitious time for sailing, so they heaved anchor. They had reason to believe they would reach Phœnix in not more than a day.

A SHIP, STRAINING IN ITS JOINTS, IS "BANDAGED"

(Verses 14-20.)

The sudden descent of the Euraquilo ("northeaster") made it unsafe to remain near the shore, hence their "giving way" to the wind.

Luke tells us that at Cauda they "undergirded" the ship.

It would have amused the sailors to read this verse, for he uses the medical term "bandaged" to describe what they did. This is one of the many unintentional internal evidences of Luke's authorship. Cables were wound around the vessel, acting as hoops on a barrel.

The Syrtis which they so much feared was a quicksand bank near Africa. To strike that would mean certain destruction for all.

The "freight" thrown overboard was not the wheat, but some other unnamed commodities. The valuable food cargo would not be sacrificed till the destruction of the ship seemed certain.

The "tackling" consisted of extra spars and cordage.

PAUL PREDICTS AGAIN, THIS TIME BY INSPIRATION

(Verses 21-26.)

Paul may be excused for saying: "I told you so." It is natural. But he now comes forward with another prediction, and this time assures them that it is from heaven.

The student will not overlook how Paul used this opportunity to introduce his God. There are many occasions when we might do likewise if we were always alert to see and use them.

"God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee" is a somewhat ambiguous expression. It may mean that he had prayed for the lives of his companions, and that his prayer had been heard, like Elijah's prayer for drouth and rain. In that event, his prediction

voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives. 11 But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul. 12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to put to sea from thence, if by any means they could reach Phœnix, and winter there; which is a haven of Crete, looking north-east and south-east. 13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close in shore. 14 But after no long time there beat down from it a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo: 15 and when the ship was caught, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and were driven. 16 And running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were able, with difficulty, to secure the boat: 17 and when they had hoisted it up, they used helps, under-girding the ship; and, fearing lest they should be cast upon the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and so were driven. 18 And as we labored exceedingly with the storm, the next day they began to throw the freight overboard; 19 and the third day they cast out with their own hands the tackling of the ship. 20 And when neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was now taken away. 21 And when they had been long without food, then Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have set sail from Crete, and have gotten this injury and loss. 22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For there

of the loss of life would have been a reality had it not been for his prayer. It may be another illustration of the effectual prayer of a righteous man.

But it may mean that his prayer was for the conversion of those on shipboard, and that God assured him of success in that.

This would be like Paul, certainly.

He specifically refers to a "certain island" to give definite evidence of his revelation. His company would believe in his inspiration when he could predict a shipwreck on such an unlikely island as Malta, one lying far out of their course.

THE SAILORS FORGET THE TRADITIONS OF THE SEA

(Verses 27-32.)

Two weeks of helpless drifting in a terrible storm! What an experience. It would furnish material for a novel.

It seems scarcely possible that a vessel of the size then in use could have weathered such a storm. Without divine protection it would almost certainly have been lost. Can we see a reason for their especial protection? The apostle and his helpers were on board, and there was yet much work for Paul to do.

There were also 276 people from various countries who might constitute the nuclei of several churches. Therefore the Lord cares for them as a nursing mother. He permitted them to suffer harrowing experiences, for that was the best way of rooting their faith in him as a God who is also a Father.

Luke was impressed with the ability

of the professional seamen to "surmise" so correctly that they were near land. Such knowledge to a landsman seems almost uncanny.

The attempt to abandon the ship on the part of the sailors was most cowardly. The traditions of the sea require them to stick to their posts till the last passenger is safe. They must have been very much ashamed of themselves afterward, especially if they became Christians. A true Christian will not be a coward.

The soldiers used a heroic method to prevent the sailors' escape. By cutting loose the small boat in which the deserters were planning flight, they severed all hope of being saved, except in the ship itself. Such help as sailors only could give would be needed later. The provision for life-saving boats even then is interesting to note.

A FOURTEEN-DAY FAST BROKEN

(Verses 33-38.)

Shipwreck now being certain, Paul knew that if they were cast into the sea in a weakened condition, the result of a two weeks' fast, they would surely perish. He therefore again became the leader, advising them to eat, and set the example himself, after he had given thanks. The effect on his action on both crew and passengers was immediate. How one man can change the temper of a crowd. The magnetism of Paul was irresistible. His speech may have been seasoned with a fitting story, for they were all "of good cheer." Dormant appetites were aroused when they saw

stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, 24 saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Cæsar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee. 25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me. 26 But we must be cast upon a certain island.

27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven to and fro in the sea of Adria, about midnight the sailors surmised that they were drawing near to some country: 28 and they sounded, and found twenty fathoms; and after a little space, they sounded again, and found fifteen fathoms. 29 And fearing lest haply we should be cast ashore on rocky ground, they let go four anchors from the stern, and wished for the day. 30 And as the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship, and had lowered the boat into the sea, under color as though they would lay out anchors from the foreship, 31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. 33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take some food, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye wait and continue fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I beseech you to take some food: for this is for your safety: for there shall not a hair perish from the head of any of you. 35 And when he had said this, and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he brake it, and began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and themselves also took food. 37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. 39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they perceived a certain bay with a beach, and they

him eating calmly, first having given thanks—an example fitting always.

The fine art of being brave is one of the most valuable acquisitions of any life. And it may be acquired. Why should not the soul of faith be brave? One living in personal fellowship with his Lord knows that, come what may, no harm can happen to him. There is an enemy that can destroy his body, he may cause it to suffer almost beyond endurance, but when it can resist disease no longer, he leaves it and joins his Lord whom he has been serving. The Christian is the only one who can be really brave.

A Stoic may harden his feelings and make no complaint, but he is not happy in his affliction. He doggedly restrains expression of his real state. But, impossible as it seems, many Christians have learned to be happy even in affliction. James admonishes thus.

“Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into divers temptations.” Paul “rejoiced in afflictions.” Peter was not ashamed to “suffer as a Christian.” Some of earth’s greatest characters have been continuous sufferers. One of the finest contributions on the Lord’s Supper ever added to our literature came from the pen of a man who had been bedridden for more than thirty years, suffering agony almost continuously, but his book breathes not a hint of the fact, save that it is beautifully softened and tender.

While none of us covets pain and heartache, yet there is a discipline in

them that draws the believer into a close fellowship with Christ which compensates for the loss of health.

Paul yearned for “the fellowship of his sufferings.” Souls that have endured are able to strengthen others.

Most reluctantly would the wheat be thrown overboard. It was even more valuable then than now. But the less water the ship drew, the farther it would be driven upon the beach by the power of wind and wave, thus rendering escape more certain and easy.

A PERILOUS LANDING SAFELY MADE

(Verses 39-44.)

Perhaps the anchors were “cast off” (*i. e.*, the ropes holding them were cut) because they were imbedded in the mud at the bottom and could not be raised without loss of time.

They “loosed the bands of the rudders” because they had been hoisted and tied to prevent their fouling the anchors, dropped from the stern. Drawings of ships of that time show two paddle-rudders at the stern. These rudders would be needed in keeping the prow of the boat toward the shore, so they loosed the ropes that had held them out of the water, that they might be used again.

How graphic this whole narrative. It would be a fine example of descriptive work for a class in language.

The “meeting of two seas” was caused by a receding wave meeting an

took counsel whether they could drive the ship upon it. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosing the bands of the rudders; and hoisting up the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. 41 But lighting upon a place where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the foreship struck and remained unmovable, but the stern began to break up by the violence of the waves. 42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43 But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stayed them from their purpose; and commanded that they who could swim should cast themselves overboard, and get first to the land; 44 and the rest, some on planks, and some on other things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safe to the land.

28: 1 And when we were escaped, then we knew that the island was called Melita. 2 And the barbarians showed us no common kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us all, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out by reason of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous creature hanging from his hand, they said one to another, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped from the sea, yet Justice hath not suffered to live. 5 Howbeit he shook off the creature into the fire, and took

advancing one of about the same power, and the bow of the boat, with hoisted foresail pulling on it, would settle into the mud and stick. Side waves would break the vessel in two, and that made immediate abandonment imperative.

The apparently heartless proposal of the soldiers to kill all the prisoners must be viewed in the light of the military law under which they were serving. If they permitted a single prisoner to escape, their own lives would be forfeited. Their problem was to decide which life was more valuable, that of a prisoner, or their own, and they decided as most men would now.

Very fortunate for the other prisoners that they were in the company of Paul. His popularity with the centurion saved all their lives. He must have been a model prisoner. It is always profitable to be obedient to the rules of the society where we may be. This is a good illustration of the power and influence of a good man. Mere goodness is always and everywhere the best protection one can have. Friends, arms, courts, and shrewd diplomacy, may all fail one, but goodness of years' standing and proven genuineness will never fail.

The forty-fourth verse reminds the author of a sermon by T. DeWitt Talmage based on this text. The noted preacher used this passage to teach the lesson that all would eventually get to heaven regardless of what church they belonged to. He had some riding into safety on a Baptist plank, others on a Methodist spar, still others on a Congregational piece of wreckage, "but all got safely to land." His argument was that it is absolutely immaterial what

church one trusted in to take him to heaven. It seems passing strange that a man of his intellectual powers should have made such an application of this bit of history. Of course, it is about as good a passage of Scripture as he could have found to teach the doctrine he wanted to proclaim. But the reader will readily see how fanciful and absurd is such an interpretation.

It is just such use of the Bible that leads some to skepticism.

Mr. Talmage overlooked the fact that no one is saved by belonging to a denomination, but by belonging to Christ. It is a handicap to truth, rather than a help, to be in a denomination.

His figure was suggestive of one thing which he evidently did not realize, or he would have been slow to use it. If the planks, spars and broken pieces of the ship represent the denominations, then the whole church is a shipwrecked institution, and Jesus made a false prophecy when he said: "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." One would scarcely care to trust his salvation to a mess of wreckage. But this is as good an apology for denominationalism as can be made. We may be thankful that to-day but few men attempt to apologize for it. It must be abandoned for the simple church which Jesus established through his apostles, for on no other basis can men be brought to stand together permanently. Denominationalism has done its best to wreck the church without having such object as its aim. May God hasten the day when all Christ's followers shall be content with the church as Jesus established it under the ministry of inspired men.

no harm. 6 But they expected that he would have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but when they were long in expectation and beheld nothing amiss come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius; who received us, and entertained us three days courteously. 8 And it was so, that the father of Publius lay sick of fever and dysentery: unto whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laying his hands on him healed him. 9 And when this was done, the rest also that had diseases in the island came, and were cured: 10 who also honored us with many honors; and when we sailed, they put on board such things as we needed.

11 And after three months we set sail in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered in the island, whose sign was The Twin Brothers. 12 And touching at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. 13 And from thence we made a circuit, and arrived at Rhegium: and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli; 14 where we found brethren, and were entreated to tarry with them seven days: and so we came to Rome. 15 And from thence the brethren, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and The Three Taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

16 And when we entered into Rome, Paul was suffered to abide by himself with the soldier that guarded him.

17 And it came to pass, that after three days he called together those that were the chief of

A CRIMINAL ESCAPED, OR A GOD?

(Chapter 28: 1-6.)

Verse 1.—This island is called Malta at present, and it lies south of Sicily.

Verse 2.—The term "barbarian" implies no lack of civilization. It was used by Greeks and Romans to describe those speaking any language other than their own.

Verses 3, 4.—The superstition of the natives who thought Paul an escaped murderer was not strange. It is like some foolish notions that persist to-day. A San Francisco earthquake or Titanic horror are visitations of divine justice. But Jesus taught differently.

The miracle afforded an opportunity to demonstrate God's favor to Paul, and prepared the hearts of the islanders for his gospel message. The incident was providential for that reason.

The healing of Publius' father-in-law and others was for the same reason. These miracles opened the way for the preaching of Christ.

PUBLIUS' FATHER-IN-LAW HEALED

(Verses 7-10.)

Luke's description of the disease of Publius' father-in-law suggests typhoid. If so, instantaneous healing would be a most wonderful miracle indeed.

The entire's ship's company were well treated because of Paul's presence among them. One good man frequently saves many bad ones. Sodom would have been saved for ten righteous souls.

Even wicked people will not live among their own kind exclusively.

Scoffers want to live near churches. From their talk we might expect them to found a colony where none but unbelievers might dwell. But do you know of any of them sacrificing their property to get out of Christian communities? They are no more anxious than others to live without gospel influences about them.

ROME AT LAST!

(Verses 11-16.)

Verse 11.—The "twin brothers" were Castor and Pollux, sons of Jupiter, "guardian saints" of sailors, carved images of whom were on the prow of the boat.

Verses 12, 13.—Syracuse was the principal city of Sicily. Rhegium (now Reggio) is at the southern end of Italy. From Reggio to Puteoli they made 180 miles in a day, showing the effect of favorable winds.

Verse 14.—Churches had evidently been planted in several places in Italy. The consideration of the centurion who permitted Paul to remain a week at Puteoli makes it more than probable that he had become a Christian, and used all the liberty he had to assist in spreading the gospel message. Christian soldiers can do much.

It would be interesting to know how the brethren at Rome knew of Paul's presence at Puteoli. Some Christian probably carried the news to Rome the moment he came to Puteoli. He had written the church at Rome that he desired to visit them "to impart some spiritual gift," and they would anxiously await his coming.

the Jews: and when they were come together, he said unto them, I, brethren, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers, yet was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans: 18 who, when they had examined me, desired to set me at liberty, because there was no cause of death in me. 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had aught whereof to accuse my nation. 20 For this cause therefore did I entreat you to see and to speak with me: for because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters from Judæa concerning thee, nor did any of the brethren come hither and report or speak any harm of thee. 22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against.

23 And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number; to whom he expounded the matter, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 And when they agreed not among themselves, thy departed after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, 26 saying,

Verse 15.—Apparently two delegations set out from Rome to meet Paul and escort him on the last part of his journey. They traveled on the Appian Way, the "National Pike" of Italy. The first party met him forty-three miles from the city, the second ten miles nearer.

Though a prisoner, Paul entered Rome like a conqueror, hailed as a special messenger from God. The path of every true preacher is a triumphant road. Certain small souls may joke about the ministry, but men of large caliber delight to honor those who have unselfishly devoted their lives to the sacred calling.

A real preacher has a power and influence that angels might envy.

Verse 16.—The report of Julius the centurion, and Festus' commitment papers, doubtless induced Cæsar to give Paul such large liberty while waiting his turn for trial. Courts then, as now, must have been congested.

PAUL MEETS SOME JEWS IN CONFERENCE

(Verses 17-22.)

Paul tactfully sought an audience with influential Jews at once. It is surprising that Judean enemies had sent no word in advance to stir up enmity at Rome. Perhaps they feared to press complaints which they knew Cæsar would throw out of court.

Paul's speech was conciliatory and shrewdly framed. It led to "the hope of Israel," that they might ask him to speak further on that subject. He identified himself with the nation's deepest hope. Having no reliable information concerning Christianity, they

naturally desired to hear of it from its greatest advocate.

HE MAKES A SET SPEECH TO HIS PEOPLE

(Verses 23-28.)

That was a great meeting, when, for a whole day, Paul explained the symbolism, ordinances, sacrifices, priesthood and prophecies of the law of Moses as preparatory to Jesus as Christ.

We know what portion of the Jews believed. Those who were spiritual and honest of heart. Those rejecting were the materialists, who prided themselves upon being practical men—the same as many of those rejecting Him to-day.

Paul used the same quotation from Isaiah that Jesus used when rebuking the Jewish leaders for not listening to Him.

AN ABRUPT CLOSE FOR A BOOK

(Verses 30, 31.)

It seems strange that Luke closed his book without stating the outcome of Paul's trial. It is probable that Luke finished his writing just before Paul's trial. From other sources we know somewhat of the activities of Paul while there. He wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians during those days. In those books he speaks of his gospel winning some of the Prætorian Guard, even certain of Cæsar's household accepting the faith (Phil. 1: 12-14; 4: 22).

He would preach to every soldier detailed to guard him.

Epaphras and Aristarchus were his fellow-prisoners and Mark was again

Go thou unto this people, and say,
By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand;
And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive:

27 For this people's heart is waxed gross,
And their ears are dull of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed;
Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart,
And should turn again,
And I should heal them.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear.

30 And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him.

with him (Col. 4:10). Luke remained by his side (Col. 4:14).

Busy and fruitful years. Not what Paul would have chosen had he been given the privilege of electing the conditions under which he went to Rome, but perhaps as a prisoner he reached more people than he could have done as a free man. If so, he would rejoice even "in afflictions." This is one reason why we may also rejoice in tribulations. They may be the means of our winning men to Christ.

God's ways are wonderful; many of them past finding out; but all of them are right, and blessed is the one who walks in them with Him.

Not much reliable information as to the subsequent movements of Paul exists, but it is very certain that he was

released by Cæsar. Tradition has it that he was granted his desire to go to Spain, after which he itinerated over the scenes of many of his former labors. He was again apprehended and imprisoned at Rome, during which time he wrote the pastoral Epistles, and soon thereafter suffered martyrdom.

It was a glorious life that Paul lived, glorious because of its hardships, trials, severity, persecutions and ceaseless toil.

He has inspired more people to heroism than all the kings and rulers of earth combined. It was worth all his suffering to be able to thus influence for good so many thousands, and he will find heaven filled with those who want to see and talk with him.

If it were right, we could envy Paul. Instead, let us emulate him.

LESSON CONDENSED

1. The last stage of Paul's career, so far as Luke's narrative is concerned, is ushered in when this trip to Rome is begun. On the way, Paul's knowledge of sea-faring conditions caused him to counsel delay, but the ship-owner paid no heed. (25:1-13.)

2. A typical storm burst upon them. After much cargo and even ship tackling had been thrown overboard, Paul related a vision of good cheer wherein God had made it clear to him that he must appear before Cæsar. After some trouble with would-be deserters, Paul persuaded the crew to take food. His superiority as a man and a leader of men was clearly manifest. (Vs. 14-38.)

3. After casting the wheat overboard as a last resort, the 276 people on board suffered shipwreck, and escaped the best

way they could. The soldiers had wanted to kill all prisoners. Fortunate that Paul was along. He saved their lives. Would it not be fortunate if our modern ship of state had a Paul on board? (Vs. 39-44.)

4. On the island of Melita, where they got ashore, the natives thought Paul was a god. After healing many of the sick on the island they set sail again. Paul's presence was always a blessing to the rest. So always is the presence of a good man. (28:1-10.)

5. Somehow the news of Paul's coming reached the brethren of the church in Rome, and brethren went to meet him and his friends. Paul, though a prisoner, entered Rome like a conqueror—a spiritual conqueror. Calling some of the chief Jews together, he explained the situation

to them and they wanted to hear about the cause of Christ. (Vs. 11-22.)

6. Paul carefully explained the processes of the law and the prophet's leading up to the coming of Christ. He talked to them all day. Some believed and some disbelieved. (Vs. 23-28.)

7. Luke breaks off his narrative here without telling us the results of the trip

to Rome or the outcome of Paul's trial before Cæsar. From other sources we learn that while in Rome he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. He never ceased to preach Christ, prisoner or not, and his heroic soul never ceased to glory in his hardships. This same spirit in all Christians must be restored. (Vs. 30 31.)

QUESTIONS

1. By what means of travel did Paul start for Rome? (Vs. 1, 2.) 2. Why did the vessel go by a circuitous route? 3. What advice did Paul give at Fair Havens, and why was it not heeded? (Vs. 9-11.) 4. What was the "Euraquilo"? 5. What use did Paul make of his opportunities to preach on the journey? 6. Describe the shipwreck and tell what you think of Talmage's sermon on the incident. 7. In what respect were "all on board given to Paul"? (V. 24.) 8. Of what cowardly act were the sailors guilty? 9. Why should a Christian al-

ways be brave? 10. Why did the soldiers propose to kill the prisoners? 11. What incident at Malta caused the natives to regard Paul as a god? 12. How were the wrecked passengers treated by the "barbarians," and why were they called "barbarians"? 13. How did the brethren receive Paul at Rome? 14. How long was Paul's trial delayed, and how did he spend the time? 15. What success had he in reaching his own people in Rome? 16. What books did Paul write during this imprisonment? 17. What do you know about his release?

