

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, October 1st, 1876.—Stephen's Defence.—Acts vii. 1-19.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 1-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Rom ix. 5.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xiii. 14-41. Tuesday, Genesis xi. 30-32; xii. Wednesday, Genesis xvii. 1-10. Thursday, Genesis i. Friday, Exodus i. Saturday, Galatians iii. Sunday, Rom. ix.

ANALYSIS.—I. Question. Vs. 1. II. Appeal to Abraham. Vs. 2-8. III. Appeal to Joseph. Vs. 9-19.

EXPOSITION.—Stephen was charged before the highest national tribunal with blasphemy (vi. 13, 14), and asked by the president of that tribunal to make answer to the charge (vs. 1.) A defence of himself he was expected to make; but a mere defence he neither made nor undertook. The real matter at issue was not this alleged matter. Rather this was it—whether the party of the Sanhedrim or the party of Jesus Christ were the true people of God, and were authorized to speak and act in God's name. And even this question was hardly to be argued. Stephen was to charge home upon the guilty their guilt, and in the name of truth, and the God of truth, thunder the condemnation incurred by that guilt. The form of God's arraignment and condemning message spoken from his throne in heaven through Stephen to his accusers and judges was just that which fitted them and lent to it extremest power. Stephen assumes, what his and others' words and works had already sufficiently shown, that Jesus was the Christ, and hence that Christ's cause was identical with all that had been of God in their national history; and how this Sanhedrim, being the most guilty of all, should meet the worst doom of all.

Abraham. Verse 2-8. Stephen goes back to him as the father and founder of the nation, to show that as God's servant he represented Christ and condemned the anti-Christian party; that he was not the father, but the judge of Christ's enemies. Abraham was called not on account of his blood, his family, his conformity to outward rites. He was of a heathen family, obliged to leave his kin, accepted of God only for his faith and its fit expression, rejected of men for the same reason, and receiving circumcision, not in order to make him God's servant, but because he was God's servant. Hence they who trusted to blood, to circumcision, to national position, stood not with Abraham, but against him and with his enemies and persecutors, with heathen and heretics. See this developed by Paul in Gal. iii.

Verse 2.—Men, brethren, and fathers. The word "men" has here the force of our adjective honored, and qualifies both of the nouns following. Brethren and fathers need not be understood as referring the latter to the Sanhedrim, and the former to the other hearers, but as in xxii. 1, designating his Jewish hearers both as his fellow-countrymen, and also many of them as his superiors either in age or civil position, or both. God of glory appeared. God was wont to appear in the glory of flame or radiance, and hence the expression. Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia means "between rivers," and was the country between the Euphrates and Tigris. Charan. Called in Gen. xii. 4, Haran. See for the history of the call of Abraham, Gen. xi. 27-32; xii. 1-5.

Verse 3.—Into the land which. More exactly, "into whatever land," thus bringing out the fact of Abraham's ignorance of his future, and hence his greater faith in obeying. Heb. xi. 8.

Verse 4.—The land of the Chaldeans. From "Ur of the Chaldees." Gen. xi. 31. The old kingdom of Chaldee lay hundreds of miles to the south of Haran, near the mouth of the Euphrates. When his father was dead. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Haran (Gen. xii. 4); Terah was two hundred and five years old at his death. Gen. xi. 32. Hence, in Gen. xi. 26, the age of Terah at Nahor's, not Abraham's, birth is probably intended; and the name of Abraham, though the younger, is first given because of his prominence

as the elect one. Comp. Gen. v. 32 and ix. 24.

Verse 5.—None inheritance. For his ownership and permanent occupancy as his home.

Verse 6.—Strange land. Egypt. Four hundred years. In round numbers. From the last call to the exodus was a period of four hundred and thirty years, according to Gal. iii. 17. In Ex. xii. 40, we read: "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years."

Verse 7.—Will I judge. This judging was not the mere declaration of the sentence, but also its execution. This verse, with the preceding, shows that Abraham, like Christ, was to suffer, by God's permission, from man's wickedness, but that God would avenge his elect in due time and measure.

Verse 8.—The covenant of circumcision. Of which circumcision was the sign or token. The covenant, or gracious promise, respected the national existence and destiny, and so the circumcision had a national meaning. It was for all males who belonged to the nation. Indirectly it had a religious import, because this nation was elected especially from religious considerations. Baptism, unlike circumcision, has its immediate and whole value as a religious rite. It signifies that those receiving it presumably belong to that nation or family in which membership is constituted solely by faith, never and in no part by natural birth.

Joseph Verses 9-19.—The divine purpose is carried out through human agency. On the one side was godly character and the consequent favor of God, on the other was ungodliness, and envy, and malice toward the godly. Joseph was the type of Christ. Malicious envy sold him to destroy him, and so save the destroyer. The malice accomplished its purpose seemingly, but really in its victory achieved its utter defeat. Joseph became the honored of God and man, himself saved and the Saviour of others, even of his destroyers. This is made to appear conspicuously by asserting that not till Joseph was forgotten, was the full cruelty and bitterness of bondage felt. At first Egypt was their safe retreat, their haven from the storm, and somewhat so was it while Joseph's name was in remembrance.

Verse 9.—The patriarchs. The ten conspirators—types of Stephen's hearers.

Verse 10.—Over Egypt and all his [that is, Pharaoh's] house. Pharaoh was in a sense Egypt, and Egypt Pharaoh. Joseph was "prime minister."

Verses 11-13.—Note here the extreme brevity and compression.

Verse 13.—Honor came to Joseph's virtual murderers through him.

Verses 14, 15.—So also, even to their father Jacob, and the whole nation as such. Threescore and fifteen. Stephen quoted from the Septuagint version, which makes seventy-five, while our Hebrew text says seventy. See Gen. xlv. 27; Ex. i. 5; Deut. x. 22.

Verse 16.—See Gen. xxxiii. 19; xxiii; whence it appears that two persons, but the chief person is here mentioned as representing both.

QUESTIONS.—What was the last New Testament lesson upon? Who was chief among them? Who have accused him? Where is he brought? Has he as yet said anything in defence?

Vs. 1. What office in the council did the high-priest hold? To what "things" does his question refer?

Vs. 2. Where had the glory of God been seen? Where, in Mesopotamia, was Abraham first called?

Vs. 4. Who was Abraham's father? How old was he when he died?

Verse 6. Were the Israelites "four hundred years" in Egypt? How long had Abraham been in Canaan when Isaac was born?

Vs. 8. Is there a single passage of Scripture to prove that baptism, under the new dispensation, takes the place of circumcision under the old? Of what was circumcision simply a sign? What was the attitude of early Christians to it?

Vss. 9-11. What truth is Stephen careful to pick up in his historic argument? Why?

Vs. 14. Where was Jacob buried? Where was Joseph buried? Who, like Stephen, was accustomed to make an historic argument in defence of Christianity? Acts xiii. 17-23.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, October 8th, 1876.—Stephen's Defence.—Acts vii. 35-50.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

The way o' the wind.

"Why does the East Wind always complain?—Because he is married to the rain."

"Why is the North Wind's breath so strong?—He has wrestled with icebergs fierce and strong."

"Why is the South Wind's step so light?—Out of a sleeping land it comes in flight."

"Why is the West Wind's touch so soft?—Out of a sunset cloud he came."

Lying under a summer tree, This is what Zephyr sang to me.

Zephyr, with flattering words and low, Tells but half of the truth I know.

Four great boys in an ancient hall, They grew up thinking their will was all.

Sweet Mother Nature, the dearest dame— I fear her softness is much to blame—

Lovely and quiet, year out year in, Her soft white blankets she sits to spin;

Rose-hued curtains, and carpets green, Broidered cushions of satin sheen.

Her guests are bidden, her house is fair— Four wild rovers have entrance there.

Never's an hour so still and sweet But may be broken by trampling feet.

But when from the ruin they turn away, Oh, who so gentle and blithe as they!

They rock the cradles in tall tree-tops, They run wi' h the tripping water-drops;

Daintily courting, they sigh and pine Round the flower-ladies so pure and fine.

Well they love pleasure, but mischief best— Too swift and subtle and strong for rest.

Up and down in the world they go, And mock us with every voice we know.

They pipe to the dreamers at even-song; They inourn to the watchers all night long.

Then down the chimney they shout and roar, Shriek at the lattice and shake the door.

The old man, sighing, repeateth still, "The will o' the wind is boyhood's will."

The boy with wondering, silent lips, Thinks of the sea and the walled ships;

And each in his dim heart longs to find Out his world the way o' the wind.

—CARL SPENCER, in Harper's Magazine.

"I should keep him."

I was very much struck with an answer I received the other day from a little boy who was visiting me. He had been playing a long while and was very tired. One of his playmates, I am sorry to say, was not a very good boy; he did not mind his mother, and sometimes uttered words I do not wish even to hear from children's lips; but he was a generous, merry kind of a boy for all that, and was quite a favorite.

"I am afraid, Charlie," I said, "that Willie Ray is naughty; he is a very troublesome child. Now if you were his mother, what would you do with him?"

"I should keep him!" answered Charlie, looking up in my face, fearlessly.

"Would keep a naughty boy, Charlie? Does he deserve his mother's kindness?"

"Yes, I should keep him!" said Charlie again shutting his lips firmly together, as if that was all he had to say.

"But, Charlie," I persisted, "do you think a naughty boy like Willie Ray ought to be kept by a good kind mother? He is disobedient and unruly in every way."

"Now, auntie," replied the little boy—"now, auntie, do you think he could be good if his mother did not keep him? and try to make him better?"

Here was his answer. How many mothers act upon little Charlie's resolute reply, "I should keep him?" "He is my boy; God gave him to me. He may be undutiful and disobedient sometimes; but I shall keep him—work with him and for him, pray with him and for him, still hoping and never quite despairing."

Yes, children, the mother is the last to give up her child; through evil report and good report, in times of sickness and sorrow and trial, and even in crime, she will shield, she will love him, and pray for him, and keep him always in her heart.

And does not the blessed Saviour show the same patience and love to us all, his children for whom he died? Does he not wait "yet this year," that they may bring forth fruit? He intercedes for us, sends blessings and mercies and trials all to bring us back to him. He will not let us go until we prove wholly recreant. Let us pray that as Charlie said, "He will keep us," and at last receive us into his heavenly habitations.

"Take no Thought for the Morrow."

"One little boy," says Mr. Knapp, an American missionary in Spain, "sells wax matches, called cerillas, in the street. If he does not dispose of a certain number of boxes a day, his parents will not give him anything to eat when he comes home at night. One after-

noon he was very hungry, having had to suffer for deficit the day before. While thinking what to do, Jesus came into his little mind, and so he got down by his basket, there in the busy plaza, and asked him 'to help to sell four boxes of wax matches, so that he might have his dinner.' When he arose, a gentleman stepped out and bought just four boxes, and the little match-vender ran home joyfully with his eight farthings, his heart brimming full. We asked him why he did not stop to sell more. 'Oh,' said he, 'I had not enough for to-day, and Jesus will take care of to-morrow.'"

Guess who I am.

I was born in a queer place, children; in a house that was all windows. There were a great many others in this house, but I only made the acquaintance of my nearest kin.

My father's name was Scarlet, and my mother's name Violetta, and they called me Purple. I had the dearest little sister whose name was Pinky.

I was not happy or contented in those days. Our home I thought neither nice or pleasant. It was too crowded, and the sun shone down too bright and warm. But in spite of my discontent, I grew to be a fine large—ah! I nearly told you who I am then—the admiration of numbers of finely dressed ladies and gentlemen who came to look at us, and always took some of our companions away with them. How I used to wish they would take me too! Somewhere, anywhere, away from the crowded spot where I was born.

One day the man who tended us came by, accompanied by a lady and a little girl, who said as soon as she saw me: "Oh mamma, see what a pretty purple one is here! Buy this, mamma, please do!"

"Why, Annie dear, do you like that better than this lovely pink one?" said the mother looking at Pinky with her fine large eyes that I fancied were just the color of mine.

"Oh, yes, mamma! But can't you buy both—the pink for you, and the purple for me?"

"If it will make my little daughter happy, I will," said the kind lady.

"It will, indeed, make me very happy, you dear, good mamma."

Sister and I were then taken out of the crowded bed, away from our parents and friends, who clung to us as they could, and I saw the tears streaming down their cheeks as we were borne away. Although in my discontent I had so often wished it, I did not dream the parting would be so painful. Indeed, it almost broke my heart-strings. My tender-hearted sister clung even more tenaciously than I to our old home, and when we were finally cruelly separated, we drooped our heads sadly and refused to be comforted.

Ah! when the heart is bowed with sorrow one cannot believe that the sun is still shining somewhere, and its bright light will soon burst through and scatter the dark clouds that surround them. So we, in our first real sorrow, little thought what a beautiful home awaited us. Too miserable to know or care whither we went, we took no notice of anything until the carriage stopped before a lovely brown cottage, and I heard the lady say:

"Here, Sydney, take these, please, and put them in the prettiest spot you can find in the garden."

Then I knew that Sydney was the gardener, and was to have the care of us.

Where do you think he took us? To just the loveliest spot imaginable, all fresh and blooming with flowers, and shrubs, and trees, in whose tops birds were singing blithely. The air was fragrant with the breath of roses, heliotropes and mignonette, and from a field near by came the scent of clover-blossoms.

The little girl still claims me as hers, and always when selecting a bouquet, clips some of my purple blossoms. She visits us every day, often accompanied by her mother, who brings ammonia and water for us to drink; but we have what is even better than that—the dew of heaven, the rain, the sunlight, and the pure, fresh breezes. Thus we live; and we grow as beautiful and fragrant as possible, just on purpose to make others happy. Do you not think it is a beautiful life, children?

I have told you my little history. Can you guess who I am?—Northwestern Christian Advocate.

CORRESPONDENCE.

For the Christian Messenger.

Fancies and Realities.

A MISSIONARY'S EXPERIENCE, OR NOTES BY THE WAY, AND FROM THE FIELD.

From a child, at least as far back as memory serves, it was my wish to enter into mission work especially in the foreign field, this desire grew and deepened, and preparation was in part made, but the doctor's advice and the leading of Providence for a long time delayed active service. Till at last the command to go forward was given, but then the field was in a very different quarter of the globe. Instead of coral islands of waving palms as the ships moved on, the cry rang clear from many "eager lookers, 'ice ahead,' and the steady experienced captain felt no alarm, the fogs made sailing dangerous, but keen were the eyes and steady the hand that commanded the ship. He knew his track and that these things were not uncommon considering the latitude and season. God in his wisdom had drawn the plan of operation, and thus it was that the voyage and its surrounding scenery was so different.

At last the port was reached, there instead of childhood's pictured missionary scene, was the staunch old timbered wharf, and the busy din of civilization and industry. True many things appeared strange, contrasted with one's past surroundings, the buildings for instance being nearly all of wood, and instead of the flowers and fruits left on the other side, the fields were clothed with a dingy brown, the gardens were bare, and the trees were only just pushing forth their first buds to the bursting. Yet the similarity to home customs and scenes, the church steeples and solemn bell, at once took away the romantic charm of missionary enterprise. In fact ever since God had clearly revealed His will, as to my destiny and work, the early dream had vanished, and I knew it was my lot to labor among my own kindred and people, although in another land.

Great then was the pleasure to find the church and people prepared by a kind providence to receive the man who by faith had been led to obey and to go forth to a people unknown, with the full assurance that the place was ready for occupancy. This was encouraging and strengthening to one's faith. And as it became manifest that the word preached was received gladly, and that God by his Spirit was leading sinners to repentance, all regret that God's will and not mine was the ruling power, gave place to gratitude, for the grace and control that had been exercised towards me. Soon it became manifest that all was not sunshine, and that there was far more missionary enterprise, and call to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross, than the field at first sight promised. After twelve months of rest and comfort, the fine building must be vacated, and if the field is to be held it must be against fearful odds. Now came the tug of war, and heart searching, as to motive which had hitherto led. Feeling persuaded that God would not have me build on another man's foundation. And willed by setting me to work to gather another church and congregation, thus to show his own power and wisdom, and to get glory through the agency employed, my heart was willing and grace sufficient in the day of His power was given.

Now the past mysterious providences became plainer, the work that called me from my home was manifest, and as the prospect of success and blessing appeared in the new enterprise, the wounds received among friends lost their smart, and as one read upon the faces the marks of shame that they had ever been given, it seems as if the scar itself will soon be obliterated, and the prayer rises spontaneously, "Father forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them their trespasses." Sweeter still, God has called me to minister to Africa's sons, permitted me to lead some of them to Christ, and then to bury mine own children in the Gospel, beneath the waters of baptism. It was this missionary journey that called for this article, or that led me thus to head it. For last week a voice from across the water, cried Come over and help us.