

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, June 11th, 1876.—The Apostles before the Council.—Acts v. 27-42.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 29-32.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"If God be for us, who can be against us." Romans viii. 31.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Numbers xxiii. 16-23. Tuesday, Isaiah xli. 10-16. Wednesday, Psalm lxxvi. Thursday, Matthew xvi. 13-20. Friday, Hebrews xi. 32-40. Saturday, Matthew xxii. 15-22. Sunday, Romans viii. 31-39.

ANALYSIS.—I. The apostles before the council. Vs. 26-28. II. The answer of Peter. Vs. 29-32. III. "Counsel to slay." Vs. 33. IV. Prudent advice of Gamaliel. Vs. 34-40. V. Apostles "beaten." Vs. 40-42.

GAMALIEL.—A Pharisee and celebrated doctor of the law. From Acts xxii. 3 we learn that he was the teacher of Paul. He is generally identified with the very celebrated Jewish doctor Gamaliel, who is known by the title of "the Glory of the Law," and was the first to whom the title "Rabban," "our master," was given. He was president of the Sanhedrim under Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, and is reported to have died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Onkelos, author of the Targum, one of his pupils, built a rich funeral pile for him with the honor of a king. So passed away the brightest ornament of the Rabbinical school.

EXPOSITION.—I. The Apostles before the Sanhedrim.

Verse 27.—And when they ["the captain and his officers," vs. 26] had brought them [the apostles]. From Solomon's Porch, as described in vs. 26. They [the escort] set them [caused them to stand] before [in] the council [Sanhedrim.] See iv. 7 where Peter and John were placed "in the midst" of the council, whose members sat perhaps in a circle or semi-circle, so as to have a person or persons brought before them at the circle's centre, and thus in full view of each member. When we remember that this was the highest tribunal of the nation, that it was made up of the very chiefest of the chief, that it comprised not less than seventy-one members, that it was held in highest veneration by the Jews, and that it had so recently given proof of its disposition and its power in dealing with Christ, we can better understand what it was for the apostles thus to be confronted by the council; with everything against them, everything except a holy cause, a clear conscience, a mighty faith in God, the Spirit's power, and the protecting presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the high priest asked them. But doubtless not till after a little space of silent scrutiny, every eye riveted on them, almost every eye flashing out scorn and rage. The high priest (probably Annas, iv. 6) as president, spoke for the council.

Verse 28.—Did not we straitly command you. Literally, "command you with a command." See the command in iv. 18. It was given to Peter and John, but was of course for all the apostles, and in fact for all the Christians, as represented by Peter and John. In [upon] this name? It has been suggested that he abstains from speaking the name of Jesus, because it was to him and the rest so utterly and intensely hateful. To teach upon the name, was to make him who bore the name the foundation of the doctrine; and so of the new faith, hope, religion, iv. 11. Filled Jerusalem, etc. A testimony, even from the enemy, of the triumph of the cause. See on vs. 13. And intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Still avoiding the use of the name. "To bring the blame upon them," was to hold them guilty of putting Christ to death unjustly, criminally without and against legal or moral justification; to hold the council guilty of his death, and to induce everybody else to do the same. A special reference to such language as that in ii. 22-24; iii. 13-16; iv. 10. Note especially the phrase "your rulers" in iii. 17, showing that the apostles were wont publicly in express terms to charge upon the council the chief responsibility for Christ's death. No wonder the council were exasperated, and yet they ought to have

remembered that they had said, in answer to Pilate: "His blood be on us and on our children."

Verse 29.—The apostles do not deny the charge. Their plea consists of a fact and a principle. The fact is that God bids them persist; the principle is that God's authority is supreme, his orders none may countermand. The principle Peter first propounds in this verse: We ought to obey God rather than men. He assumes that all will agree in that as a moral axiom. Like a true preacher, he does not urge this merely in self-defence, but as a warning and appeal coming from the God of righteousness and of mercy, to flee from God's wrath rather than to vent their own.

Verse 30.—God of our Fathers. Showing that the apostles were preaching the old, old gospel, and were true Israelites, not renegades. Raised up Jesus. Not here "from the dead," but as in 1 Kings xiv. 14; Acts xiii. 23. Slew and hanged. Or rather slew by hanging. On a tree. Literally, a stick of timber.

Verse 31.—Exalted. Including the resurrection and ascension. With his right hand. More exactly "to his right hand," that is, to the place of honor and power, for the seat at the king's right hand was that of the highest honor. Matt. xxviii. 18. Hence he appears in his true character of Prince and Saviour, a Prince who saves, who was made Prince that he might save. "Mediatorial King." Psalm ii. To give repentance. The Holy Spirit changes the hearts of sinners, and is the gift of God through Christ.

Verse 32.—His witnesses. Bound by the whole force of God's authority to act the part of witnesses, and not stop even at the Sanhedrim's command. And so is also the Holy Ghost. Attesting the apostles' character as witnesses, and also independently witnessing in "signs and wonders."

Verse 33.—Out to the heart. Literally, "sever asunder," that is, convulsed in a paroxysm of rage, not like those in ii. 37, convicted of sin. Took counsel. Determined, that is, in their rage, which doubtless broke out in disorderly threats of vengeance.

II. The Sanhedrim in Consultation.

Verse 34.—It appears that the Pharisees also, as well as the Sadducees, were well represented in the council. A doctor [teacher] of the law; that is, of the Old Testament, which was the foundation of both the civil and religious law of the nation. Commanded. His personal influence gave to his word authority.

Verse 35.—Ye men of Israel. Respectful. Calm dignity in contrast with the fury of the rest. Take heed. It is bad for men ever to act from rage, and worst of all for a legal assembly to do so.

Verse 36.—Theudas. "The year of the death of Herod the Great was remarkably turbulent; the land was overrun with belligerent parties under the direction of insurrectionary chiefs." Not improbably Theudas was one of these. His bad repute, and disastrous end, made him a good example to cite.

Verse 37.—Judas. Mentioned by Josephus in his "Jewish Wars," i. 8, 1; and his "Antiquities of the Jews," xviii. 1, 1. In the days of the taxing. Intimating that his cause was the resistance of the taxation, which was by the Roman government.

Verse 39.—But if it be of God. Implying that in his view it might be. Lest haply. A courteous and pleasant introduction of an unpleasant thought. Be found; that is, be proved or made to appear thus by the event. Eeen to fight against God. More exactly, "God-fighters also," as they were confessedly men-fighters. If the men whom they wished to kill were really God's witnesses they opposed God in opposing them.

III. The Result.

Verse 40.—To him [Gamaliel they agreed. Largely because of his great personal influence, partly because of the manifest soundness of his advice, and partly, too, because the few minutes had served to cool down the fire of their fury and bring them to sense. Beaten [scourged] them. By the Romans this was a punishment for slaves, and the scourge usually consisted of "several chains with knobs of metals at their extremity, appended to a short handle, or of a twisted and knotted lash."

Verse 41.—Rejoicing. Not at their escape, but at the honor of their dis-

Verse 42.—Daily, etc. Unmolested. The Nazarene was Victor.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 27. Before whom were the apostles now brought?

Vs. 28. What command had they violated? Where is this found? Acts iv. 18.

Vs. 29. To what should preachers of the gospel ever appeal? What is the preaching of the cross in men's judgment? 1 Cor. i. 18.

Vs. 30. Why does Peter refer to the God of his fathers? How had the Jews degraded Jesus? How had God exalted him? What is meant by "to give repentance"? What by "forgiveness of sins"? Who can forgive sins but God only? Mark ii. 5-7. Does not this imply the divinity of Jesus?

Vs. 32. What did the apostles call themselves? To what proofs did they appeal? Have we any of these proofs ourselves?

Vs. 33. What was the effect of Peter's sermon? Did it melt wax or harden clay? 2 Cor. ii. 16.

Vs. 34. What is known of the personal history of Gamaliel? Who were two of his pupils? What does he advise the council to do?

Vs. 37. Did Jesus, like Judas, resist public authority? Matt. xxii. 17-21. What became of Theudas and Judas?

Vs. 38. What was Gamaliel's advice? What his argument?

Vs. 39. What was the original intention of the council? How far toward it do they go?

Vs. 41. Did the apostles feel at all disgraced?

Vs. 42. What did they not cease to do?

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 18th, 1876.—The Seven Chosen.—Acts vi. 1-15.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

Because she loved him.

"I hate boys! and I wish with all my heart old Bluebeard would carry them away and hang them up by their thumbs, as he did his wives, that I do!" said Susie Lewis, changing her seat for the fourth time in five minutes, and settling herself to read again.

"Who cares what you hate, old Crosspatch? Besides, Bluebeard's dead; and I don't believe he ever did live," answered Susie's brother, rolling, cushions and all, off the sofa on to the floor as he spoke.

"My name is not Crosspatch, I thank you; my name is Susanna May Lewis; and Bluebeard did live, whether you believe it or not. I suppose you believe Daniel lived?" inquired Susie, indignantly, snatching her dress out of her brother's reach.

"Who was Daniel?"

"O! That shows how much attention you paid to your last Sunday's lesson, Frederick Lewis. Daniel was a judge in Jerusalem—at least I think so."

"Well, I think you don't know much more about him than I do," said Freddy, trying to get his heels to rest on the table without altering his recumbent position.

"Yes, I do. He was put into the den of lions; and that is just where I wish you and all other boys were, right now," she added; as Freddy made another dive at her dress.

"Yes, but you see, Miss Susanna, Daniel wasn't put into the lion's den for being bad; he was put in because he was so very good"—and Freddy laid a distinguishing emphasis on the word "very."

"O, you do remember some of your lesson. Well, you won't ever be put anywhere for being very good," and Susie again pushed her chair farther away from the teasing boy.

"How do you know so much, Miss Smartie? I might turn out a saint yet."

"It is time you began then, Fred; and if you don't stop teasing me I'll give you something to help you."

"What will you give me, Popsy Wopsy," said Freddy, pretending that he was going to tip her chair over.

"Let my chair alone, Freddy Lewis, do you hear? Mamma! Mamma! do speak to Freddy!" called Susie, in desperation, as Freddy made another dive at her dress.

"O, mamma is down in the kitchen making a nice little mince-pie for me; she couldn't come now, Miss Susie; so tell me how you are going to help me become a saint," said Freddy, sitting up, and aiming a sofa cushion at Susie's book.

"First by a real good whipping that

you could not forget for a month," answered Susie, dodging the pillow.

"Are you to give it me, Pussy Cat? because if you are I am awfully afraid," said Freddy, holding up another cushion between his sister and himself.

"Freddy, if you won't stop tormenting me, I will throw this book at your head."

"O, do, by all means! for if you do, I know if you aim at my head, you'll be sure to hit the door. Girls can't throw straight;"

"For a good reason, sir—they don't wish to; it is not ladylike."

Just here Tom Gregor, Freddy's chief friend, opened the door. "Hello!" he cried, "Hello, Fred! Trotter says the ice on the pond will bear: the fellows are in for lots of fun. Hurry up; I'll wait at the gate for you."

Freddy followed him with a shout and a bound, and the next instant Susie heard him calling upon his mother and both servants in a breath; "Where's the straps of my skates, mother? Jane, where's my straps? Ellen, I left them on the hall table; nobody leaves anything alone; Mother! Mother! Mother!"

Susie listened for an instant then she heard her mother say, "I am very sorry, dear, but I cannot possibly leave the cake now to help you: ask Susie, she'll find them."

"No, Susie won't," said that little girl to herself; "he ought to put his things away as I do, then he would know where to find them. Besides, he plagued me so hatefully all the afternoon; I'm just glad he's lost his straps; Aunt Sophy would say it was a providential punishment, and I think so too."

Here Freddy opened the door, and looking pleadingly at Susie, said, "I say, Sissy, won't you please help me find my straps; somebody's hid them, and there's Tom calling me. Come, Susie, there's a good girl; I'm real sorry I teased you. Certain I am."

Susie smiled—a bright, sunny smile. "All right, you dear little torment, I'll help you then; but I am sure I don't know where to look for anything of yours, so you can take my straps. Wait, I'll get them for you, I know where my things are, always."

Good girl! Hello, Tom!" he shouted, throwing up the hall window, "wait one minute, Susie's getting me her straps. O, here they are! Thanks! you're a dear little sister—now and then," said Freddy springing out of the window, and making the gate in wonderful time.

"There now," said Susie, "he's gone without his comforter, and he'll get a sore throat again; I don't believe boys have more than one thought at a time, ever; I believe it would be right to put my book away, and take him his comforter." She thought a moment, then resolutely put the tempting volume in its place, hunted the lost straps (which she found in the pocket of Freddy's school jacket,) took the warm, thick comforter off its peg, and wrapping herself up was soon in pursuit of her thoughtless brother.

He was not very easy to catch, and when caught could hardly stand still while Susie's deft little fingers fastened the warm woolen scarf around his neck; but he was not insensible to the loving care, and in his blunt, boyish way, said, "Susie, I'm ever so much obliged, you know; and I wonder what made you think about my throat, after the way I've been teasing you?"

"O, boys can't help teasing, Freddy, any more than bees can help humming; besides," she said, looking admiringly into the merry, rosy face, "besides, Freddy, sister Susie loves you."

I won't say that Freddy never teased Susie any more; but I do know that that little woolen comforter was a tie between brother and sister, fonder and stronger than many a one that is forged of gold.—Christian at Work.

"Feed My Lambs."

On one side of the river was the great city with its towers and spires, its stately warehouses, crowded with the produce of many nations, its throngs of people coming and going, some in the struggle for daily bread, others in eager pursuit of gain. The morning sun shone brightly on them all; and it shone also upon the forlorn group of children huddled together on the opposite bank.

There were three of them—Tom, and Maggie, and poor lame Will, who lay asleep between the other two on a rag of an old quilt spread upon some scattered straw. The night before they had been turned out of the shanty which they had occupied in fear and trembling since their mother died, two or three weeks ago. The neighbors had given them something to eat, and Tom had earned a shilling or two by odd jobs, but what was that for rent when the landlord came? He took it all, and seized the few bits of furniture besides,

and turned the orphan children out of doors to find a lodging where they could. They found it on the cold ground; and here they are this sunshiny morning; Will forgetting his wretchedness in slumber still; Tom and Maggie looking at one another with hopeless glances. What can they do? where can they go? are the anxious questions their eyes ask, and their tongues do not know how to answer.

Across the river, at the same time, two ladies were sitting together in a cheerful breakfast-room. Dainty food and fruit, and lovely flowers were on the table; pictures and books and luxurious furniture told of wealth and comfort; but the deep mourning dress of one of the ladies, and the hopeless gloom in her face told of sorrow not to be cured by things like these.

"I can't eat; it is no use to try," she said presently, pushing back her plate and cup. "I tell you, Helen, my heart is broken. I have only one desire, that is to lie down and die, and be buried with my child."

"But that is a wrong desire," was the answer very tenderly spoken. "Dear Louise, if you would only try to overcome this grief, to accept it as coming from a Father who loves you; then you would find out the meaning of it, and the blessing it hides for you."

"There is no blessing in a thing that leaves me desolate," said the other. "My child is dead, and my life is empty. I have nothing to do or care for."

"No one has a right to say that so long as he lives," exclaimed Helen; "and you least of all, Louise. Why, look at you! You are young and strong and rich, and if you have lost your child, are there not hundreds of children who have lost their mothers? Come with me Louise," she added, entreatingly, "and let us find some of those children. In comforting them, your sorrow will be comforted."

It was a tender persuasive voice. The young mother yielded to it, half wearily, half from the longing to escape from her own desolate thoughts. And so it happened that in a little while the two were walking together through the city streets towards the bridge that crossed the river.

"There is a nest of shanties on the other side," said Helen, "where one can find enough to do in relieving misery. I saw a little child dead there last week, and the mother did not cry over it, Louise. She thanked God it was taken out of poverty and pain."

But why cannot such children be taken and mine left?" cried the young mother. "There was no poverty or pain in her life; it was all sunshine and beauty and blessedness."

"But you cannot tell how long the sunshine might have lasted on earth. Now, you know, it will last forever, and you have time and opportunity if you choose, to bring beauty and blessedness into the lives of others. Look there at those forlorn children on the ground! Perhaps God has put the opportunity into your hands this moment, Louise."

Was it not, indeed, God's providence that led these willing feet straight to our poor little wayfarers? No need to ask were they sick, were they poor, were they friendless? The story was written on their sad faces; and there was soon work enough in relieving their necessities to fully occupy the thoughts of the bereaved mother. They were not her darling, but the voice of her own lost darling seemed to whisper,

"Take care of them, for my sake."

And a holier voice also spoke to her heart: "If thou lovest Me, feed my lambs." Stray lambs were these, with none to lead them into the Saviour's fold; and there were many more like them, waiting in want and darkness for the helping hand.

"This shall be my work henceforth," was the lady's thought. "God help me to do it faithfully, and to murmur no more."

From that time her house was no longer desolate, for the children of the poor came and went in it; and peace and joy filled her heart while she went about doing the Master's work on earth. She had learned the lesson of her sorrow, and found out how sweet was the love that had chastened her. Would her example might be followed by every other bereaved one whose life is made empty in like manner!—Young Reaper.