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The Sabbath School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON 7.

First Quarter Lesson 9 March 2 1902 THE STONING OF STEPHEN.—Acts 7: 54-8: 2.

Read Acts 7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Pray for them which despitefully use you.—Matt. 5: 44

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Immediately after the last lesson, four or five years after the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost.

Place.—The trial took place in the hall of the Scaedrim, near the temple at Jerusalem. The execution probably was near the brook Kedron, opposite Gethsemane, in the valley between Olivet and the north-east of the city, to which place the gate of St. Stephen now leads.

Circumstances.—Stephen is on trial before the Sanhedrim for blasphemy and treason against his nation and religion.

STEPHEN'S ADDRESS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM.—Acts 7: 53 1. The address was almost entirely Scriptural, based on facts which his auditors accepted.

2. It was a historical argument.

3. It brought out facts neglected by them.

4. It was a rehearsal from memory of facts which he learned more from his teachers than from reading of the Scriptures himself, as in those days it was very difficult for a layman to have possession of the Scriptures. Hence, while the great facts are stated correctly, and the course of the history is true, yet there are a few unimportant statements which do not agree with our Scriptures.

An incidental error in such a case does not impeach the truthfulness of the history or its teachings.

5. He shows that he accepts Moses as a prophet, and that even his preaching of Jesus as the Messiah was simply the proclamation that Moses' prophecy had been fulfilled.

6. He showed them that they are doing to Jesus just what their fathers did to Moses and the prophets.

7. The address was less a defense to himself than of the truth that Jesus was the Messiah. Stephen cared less for himself than for his cause.

What can be learned of Stephen from his address. (1) His gentle graciousness; (2) his acquaintance with Scripture; (3) his power of logic; (4) his courage and fearlessness; (5) his unselfishness; (6) his zealous temperament; (7) his faithfulness to duty.

THE SCENE IN THE COURT ROOM.

—Vs. 54-57. They were cut to the heart. Distracted with rage, greatly exasperated. They were accused of murdering their Messiah. Being full of the Holy Ghost. Not a sudden inspiration, but a permanent state. Looked up steadfastly into heaven. With mind outstretched and intent he looked into heaven. The tumultuous scene around him all faded from his vision, and he saw the celestial city, the glory of God, the angels waiting to welcome him and Jesus standing (as if ready to help and sustain him) on the right hand of God, as if saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. He now knew Jesus was alive, and able to sustain him in his trial. And (he) said, "I told what he saw. Then, enraged by such blasphemy (so they called it) Cried out with a loud voice. In order to drown his words.

Insight into realities. That which Stephen saw through the opened heavens was a greater reality than the angry Sanhedrim or the stones in the valley. God, heaven, eternity, spiritual things are far more real than this world's gold or cares or pleasures. This world without a vision into heaven, this life without a consciousness of eternity, are meager and narrow.

Our brightest visions often come in our hardest trials. Often from a pillow of stones come, as to Jacob at Bethel, the brightest visions of the soul. From weariness and pain and trouble arise the steps that lead to heaven. Stephen, when stoned by a mob, saw the heaven opened, and Jesus on the right hand of God. Paul from a Roman prison saw his crown of righteousness. Life's Pisgahs and Mounts of Transfiguration are built on the hard rocks of affliction and trial.

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN.

—Vs. 57-60; Acts 8: 2. Run upon him with one accord. We can judge how fierce must have been the rage which turned a solemn Sanhedrim into a mob of murderers. Cast him out of the city. According to the Mosaic law, malefactors among the Jews were executed without the gates of their cities (Lev. 24: 14). Our Lord suffered without the gate. And stoned him. The most severe Jewish punish-

ment, but not allowed by the Romans at this time, without confirmation from the governor. The death of Stephen was a murder, not a legal execution. And the witnesses. According to the law of Moses the witnesses were to cast the first stone (Deut. 17: 6, 7), as a guard against making unjust charges. Laid down their clothes. Their outer garments. At a young man's feet used to denote any man of age between twenty-four and forty. Whose name was Saul. The same who became afterwards the great apostle to the Gentiles. He was probably thirty four or thirty-five years old at this time. He was probably a member of the Sanhedrim, and active in condemning Stephen. And they stoned Stephen. They went on stoning while he was praying. Receive my spirit. Into the mansion Jesus had gone to prepare. And he knelt down. While they were stoning him. And cried with a loud voice, so that his persecutors could hear him, and understand his spirit, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. The prayer for his murderers is identical in spirit with Christ's upon the cross. And... he fell asleep. Marking his calm and peaceful death.

8: 1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. The word implies hearty approval. He probably voted against him, and spoke against him in the Sanhedrim. At that time. Immediately after the stoning. There was a great persecution against the church.

The severity and the variety of suffering may be imagined from James' description (Jas 2: 6, 7), and Paul's in 2 Cor. 11: 23-25. They were all scattered abroad. For the extent of the dispersion, overruled to the enlargement of the church. see Acts 11: 19, 20. Throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, where they would be less exposed to persecution than at Jerusalem. And devout men including both Jews, as Gamaliel and Nicodemus, and Jewish Christians. Made great lamentation, some as a protest against the lawless and rash act of the majority; while the whole Christian church would lament over the loss of such a godly and useful man.

THE MARTYR'S CROWN.—1. The Three Crowns. Stephen's name signifies in Greek, a crown. He received three crowns: (1) The beautiful crown of grace with which the Lord adorned him. (2) The bloody crown of thorns, which, like his Saviour, he wore in suffering and in death. (3) The heavenly crown of honor.

2. Stephen's Christian life was short, but he accomplished more than most men had they lived as long as Methuselah.

3. Stephen's success lay in the fact that he preserved his manhood and his character untarnished amid great temptations. He was a hero. He was gold tried in the fire. No man's life is a failure who is himself a moral success, and is a victor on the battlefield of the heart.

4. Stephen has part in the triumphs of Christianity through the ages. He holds up before all men an ideal of heroism, courage, faithfulness to duty.

Ignorance that is Criminal.

It is almost criminal, says an exchange, for a mother to rear her daughter in absolute ignorance of all domestic duties, no matter how wealthy one may be. Chance and change often play sad havoc with one's seemingly settled affairs, and the daughter of the wealthiest parents may be reduced to the necessity of earning her own living, or of taking entire charge of the domestic affairs of her own home. A philanthropic woman, who spends most of her time among the poor and unfortunate, came across a young woman who was the victim of this lack of wisdom on the part of her parents. She was married and had three children, when her parents and her husband lost every dollar they had through an unfortunate investment. The young husband was forced to accept a position as a clerk on a small salary, and the young wife was compelled to assume duties of which she was absolutely ignorant.

I never baked a loaf of bread in my life, she said. I never did anything in the kitchen. I don't know how to broil a steak or toast a slice of bread. I don't know how to wash dishes or sweep a room properly. I don't know how to run a sewing machine or how to sew by hand.

It was too true. She was as weak and ignorant and helpless as a child. Fortunately she was not lacking in force of character, vain and foolish as her training had been. Moreover, she loved her husband and her children and was eager to make the most of the situation in which she found herself. What if she had not been thus inclined? What if she had been unwilling or incapable of adapting herself to her changed condition? A wretched house would have been the result,

and the responsibility of it would have rested—where? Let the mothers and the daughters who read this answer. It is criminal to rear a daughter in ignorance of the duties she must assume if her own home is to be the home her husband has a right to expect it will be.

What Men Need Wives For.

It is not to sweep the house, and make the beds, and darn the socks, and cook the meals, chiefly, that a man wants a wife. If this is all he wants, hired servants can do it cheaper than a wife. If this is all, when a young man calls to see a young lady, send him into the pantry to taste the bread and cakes he had made; send him to inspect the needlework and bed-making; or put a broom into her hands, and send him to witness its use. Such things are important, and the wise young man will quietly look after them. But what the true man wants of a wife is her companionship, sympathy, and love. The way of life has many dreary places in it, and man needs a companion to go with him. A man is sometimes overtaken by misfortune; he meets with failure and defeat; trials and temptations beset him; and he needs one to stand by him and sympathize. He has some stern battles to fight with poverty, with enemies, and with sin, and he needs a woman that, while he puts his arm around her and feels that he has something to fight for, will help him fight; who will put her lips to his ear and whisper words of counsel, and her hand to his heart and impart new inspirations. All through life—through storm and through sunshine, conflict and victory; through adverse and favorable winds—man needs a woman's love. The heart yearns for it. A sister's and a mother's love will hardly supply the need. Yet many seek for nothing further than success in honest work. Justly enough, half of these get nothing more. The other half, surprised above measure, obtain more than they sought. Their wives surprise them by bringing a nobler idea of marriage, and disclosing a treasury of courage, sympathy, and love.—Our Home.

Ruskin's Analysis of Mud.

What dirty, dreadful, disgusting stuff! exclaimed a man, regarding that peculiarly unpleasant compound, the mud of London streets. Hold, my friend, says Ruskin: not so dreadful after all. What are the elements of this mud? First, there is sand, but when its particles are crystallized according to the law of its nature, what is nicer than clean, white sand? And when that which enters into it is arranged according to a still higher law, we have the matchless opal. What else have we in this mud? Clay. And the materials of clay, when the particles are arranged according to their higher laws, make the brilliant sapphire. What other ingredients enter into London mud? Soot. And soot in its crystallized perfection forms the perfect diamond. There is but one other—water. And water, when distilled according to the higher law of its nature, forms the dew-drop resting in exquisite perfection in the heart of the rose.

So, in the muddy, lost soul of man is hidden the image of his Creator; and God will do his best to find his opals, his sapphires, his diamonds and dew-drops.—Dominion Presbyterian.

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A MEDICINE WHICH PROLONGS LIFE.

"I have used Ripans Tabules for a number of years and would not be without them. I was troubled with indigestion and constipation, and have noticed since I have been using them that I am getting rid of those terrible bilious spells which afflicted me so long. I have not had any of them since. Of late I have not had any. I had just got over a bad spell of bilious fever and was sitting on the step, when a neighbor came to me and remarked how well I looked. I told him how I had suffered since I was quite young. He advised me to take Ripans Tabules. I said I would try them, and from then I haven't been without them. I can eat anything, including I think with a Tabule instead of dessert. I feel very thankful that I have found something that will prolong my life."

GASTRIC TROUBLES.

"I had suffered three years at least from gastric troubles. I could not sleep at night, such cramps from gases forming on my stomach that I would faint away. I was in such distress that I would have sooner died than live. About three months ago I was suffering and felt as if my body was tied up inwardly. My brother recommended Ripans Tabules to me. My husband advised me to try them. I had been taking physic all the time. I have no more gases, my bowels are regular. I have no more headaches and can sleep well. In fact, I feel as light as the air which I breathe, and that is saying a good deal for a woman who weighs 120 pounds. I am sorry that I did not commence using the Tabules a year ago, for they would have saved me a great deal of pain and suffering."

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