

The Sunday-School.

SECOND QUARTER,
LESSON V.—May 3.

PAUL ARRESTED.

ACTS 21: 30-39.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.* 1 Peter 4: 16.

THE LESSON extends from Acts 21: 17-22: 30.
LEARN BY HEART.—Rom. 8: 28; Acts 10: 28-31.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.* Paul arrived at Jerusalem Friday, May 27.—*Ramsay.* The feast of Pentecost was Saturday, May 28. The mob was during the following week, about June 1.

Place.—Jerusalem, at the home of James, or the meeting-place of the church, and in the Temple Courts.

Place in the History.—The end of the third missionary journey; and the beginning of the series of events by which Paul was brought to Rome.

PAUL'S RECEPTION AT JERUSALEM.—Vs. 17-19. —The journey described in our last lesson ended in Jerusalem, and was the completion of Paul's third missionary tour.

Paul made his home with one of the older disciples named Mnason. The brethren received Paul and his companions with great pleasure.

It was twenty years since Paul left Jerusalem on his persecuting mission to Damascus. Seven years ago Paul had made a visit of several days, reporting the work accomplished during the first missionary journey, and obtaining the decree of the church in favor of welcoming the Gentiles. He had made a brief visit at the close of the second missionary journey. The next day the elders and leaders of the church met and Paul reported to them the wonderful things which God had wrought among the Gentiles. It is probable that at this time the contributions of the Gentile churches were presented.

THE SLANDERS AGAINST PAUL.—Vs. 20-22. There had been vague rumors that Paul taught that not only the Gentiles, but even the Jews, need not keep the law of Moses. To some Paul seemed to be undermining the foundations of the kingdom of God, to be destroying all their hopes.

The facts were: (1) That Paul obeyed the Jewish ceremonial law personally, as a rite, as a matter of race, not as a condition of salvation. (2) He taught that the Gentiles need not become Jews, nor obey the Jewish ritual. (3) The law was not necessary for salvation for either Jew or Gentile. No forms could save any one, not even a Jew, but only faith in the Lord Jesus. (4) The promises to the Jews were to be fulfilled in those, both Jews and Gentiles, who by faith, became true children of Abraham and heirs of the promises. His teachings brought to Jews and Gentiles the liberty of the children of God. They made Christianity a universal religion.

THE PLAN FOR REFUTING THESE SLANDERS.—Vs. 23-26. In order to

refute these slanders, the leaders of the Jerusalem Christians proposed to Paul a plan, the heart of which was to prove that Paul did not reject the Jewish law. Four men had come to Jerusalem to complete a Nazirite vow. Paul reluctantly agreed to pay their necessary expenses, and for a week "to live with four paupers in the chamber of the temple which was set apart for this purpose; and then to pay for sixteen sacrificial animals and the accompanying meat-offerings; and to stand among these Nazirites while the priest offered them, and to look on while the men's heads were being shaved and while they took their hair to burn it under the boiling cauldron of the peace-offerings.—*Farrar.*

A man might attach himself to a Nazirite, or a company of Nazirites, join in the final process of purification, which lasted, probably, for seven days, shaving his head, and offering sacrifices with them. This was considered in itself a devout act, especially if the newcomer defrayed the cost of the sacrifices.

THE MOB ASSAULTING PAUL IN THE TEMPLE COURTS.—Vs. 27-31. The apartment appropriated to the Nazirites was in the Court of the Women, the entrance to which was through the Gate Beautiful. A balustrade of stone fenced off this and the other more sacred enclosures from the Court of the Gentiles, into which any one might enter. Some of the Jews from Ephesus who had opposed Paul so bitterly there were present at the feast. They recognized their fellow-citizen Trophimus with Paul in Jerusalem, and imagined that he had brought him into the Court of the women, and thus was defying the law. Then arose a fearful mob. *All the city was moved (excited) and they took Paul (laid violent hands upon him), and drew (dragged) him out of the temple (the inner Court of the Women), and beat him, with the intent to kill him. And forthwith (immediately) the doors were shut, the great folding doors of the Gate Beautiful. They were closed for fear the inner court might be further polluted by bloodshed.*

Practical. 1. We see the great evil of acting upon our mere suppositions without ascertaining the facts. 2. Many good persons are slandered by our reporting as facts what are only our own inferences and impressions. 3. One of the great evils is the attempt to defend religion by the irreligious spirit. God's work can never be well done by the devil's methods.

THE RESCUE.—Vs. 31-36. *Tidings came unto the chief captain. His name was Claudius Lysias. Of the band, about six hundred men. This cohort formed the garrison of the Castle Antonia. Took soldiers and centurions, to rescue Paul from the hands of the mob. Bound with two chains. One from each of his arms to a soldier on each side of him. This secured the prisoner, yet left him free to walk away with his guards. And demanded. Inquired of the bystanders. Some cried one thing, some another. Most did not know just what Paul had done. Carried into the castle of Antonia. And*

when he came upon the stairs. One of the two flights of stairs which led from the Court of the Gentiles. *He was borne of the soldiers.* No sooner had he got on the stairs which led up into the fortress, than the mob made another rush at him, with yells of 'kill him!' and Paul was carried off his legs, and hurried along in the arms of the surrounding soldiers. *Away with him.* The same cry which echoed before this same tower of Antonia against Paul's Lord.

While Paul was being carried into the castle, he met the commander-in-chief, and said (in Greek, which the chief captain would understand). *May I speak unto thee? Canst thou speak Greek?* In surprise that he was not the ignorant brigand he supposed. *Art not thou that Egyptian.* The Egyptian, whom the chief captain took St. Paul to be, is mentioned by Josephus. A short time before this he had gathered a large body of discontented Jews on Mt. Olivet, whom he had deluded into the belief that he was the Messiah, declaring that the walls of Jerusalem would fall down at his word. *Madest an uproar.* An insurrection. *Into the wilderness.* Between Egypt and Palestine. *Four thousand men.* Josephus says that this Egyptian prophet had led out thirty thousand men. This was the whole number of his followers, and included the *four thousand that were murderers.* 39. *I am a . . . Jew, of Tarsus.* Paul refers to his city Tarsus with just pride; for it was not only the capital of Cilicia and a free city, but its schools of literature and philosophy ranked next to those of Athens and Alexandria amidst Greek universities. *No mean city.* Then, on the stairs overlooking the crowd in the Temple Court, Paul, bound to two Roman soldiers, spoke from his heart to his countrymen.

1. He spoke in Hebrew, the native tongue of his people.
2. He showed that he had been brought up a strict Jew.
3. He described how he had become a Christian, though still a Jew, by the power of the God of their fathers, who had chosen him to preach salvation. He had found forgiveness of sins. He had found the Messiah whom all Jews longed for.

The Jews listened to Paul till he spoke of his mission to the Gentiles, and then their wrath burst forth. They cried out in their rage. Lysias could not understand Paul's speech, but from the fury of the people, he concluded that Paul must be some great criminal. He, therefore, ordered that Paul should be compelled, by torture, to confess his crimes. The mildest form of this mode of examination was by scourging. While they were binding Paul, he quietly asked the officer if it was lawful for them to scourge a Roman citizen uncondemned. The preparations were immediately stopped, the commander was called, and learning that Paul was a free-born Roman citizen, he had reason to be afraid that he had gone too far. It was a grave crime, as Claudius Lysias well knew, to scourge a Roman citizen; so at once he stayed the proceedings pending further inquiries, which he conducted in person.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.—V. The opposition of a mob is no proof or sign that the person or cause assaulted is wrong. It often is incurred because the cause is right.

Poorly?

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2. The wrong here was not in Paul but in the mob. The cause of commotion in our day is not in the reformers, but in those who uphold the evils that should be reformed.

3. Paul used every power that he had to aid him,—his Roman citizenship, his social position, his knowledge of law, his training, and quick wit.

4. Note how men unconsciously and blindly are carrying out God's purposes. Paul's two bitter antagonists, the Jew and the Roman, in trying to overthrow the apostle, are really aiding him. God is using them both to carry out his design. Paul has to be got to Rome, and these two forces are combined to carry him thither.