

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.
THIRD QUARTER.

STUDIES IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

(Condensed from Peabody's Select Notes.)

Lesson XI. Sept. 11. Acts 8: 26-40.

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."—John 3: 36.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE INQUIRER. 26. And the (better, an) angel of the Lord. Whether he appeared in some visible form, or by some inward communication, or by vision, is not revealed, and is a matter of small consequence. But in any case it was a real messenger bringing a real message from God. *Spoke unto Philip.* The decision, or evangelist, not the apostle. This message came to him doubtless while he was somewhere in Samaria. *Arise, and go toward the south.* Which would lead him directly across all the roads that led from Jerusalem to Gaza. But the particular one is immediately described so that he can recognize it. *That goeth down.* For Jerusalem is on high land, and any road toward the coast must be a descending one. *From Jerusalem unto Gaza.* Gaza was the chief of the five cities of the Philistines, 50 miles south-west of Jerusalem, three miles from the Mediterranean, and 10 miles from Askelon. *Gaza (i. e. strong, a fortress)* is one of the oldest cities of the world. It was the scene of Sampson's exploits. *Which.* The way, not the city. *Is desert.* "Thinly inhabited, and unfit for tillage."

27. And he arose and went. Apparently not knowing the purpose for which he was sent. "He walked by faith not by sight." "He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." "If, like Jonah, he had looked for excuses, he would have found them in abundance." When he had obeyed, then the reason was made evident to him. Let us learn this, that they who unhesitatingly do God's command, to them does He reveal His will more fully.

In its largest sense the term Ethiopia was applied to all the African lands south of Egypt; more definitely, it included the northern Nubia, Senaar, Kordofan, and part of Abyssinia. Its inhabitants were black in color and large in stature. Their land appears to have been one of wealth, and to have maintained some commercial relations with Palestine. "This man was not, as some have suggested, a Jew who lived in Ethiopia, but must probably have been a heathen convert to Judaism, and now was returning home from a pilgrimage to the chief shrine of his adopted religion. We know that at this time there were many Jews in Ethiopia. A eunuch of great authority, the word, although meaning a chamberlain or a servant of the bed-chamber, denoted, as now, the condition of a man who was chosen to watch over the women's apartment in great houses. Such persons, deprived of family ambitions, were thought more trustworthy than others, and often held high offices. Under Candace. Not the name of an individual, but of a dynasty. *Queen of the Ethiopians.* The kingdom of Meroe was governed at this time by queens, who bore the title of Candace, as the king of Egypt had that of Pharaoh, and the emperors of Rome that of Cæsar. *Charge of all her treasure.* Treasure-houses were common in the East, where not only money but also important documents were kept (Exa. 5: 17; Father 4: 7). Of these treasure-houses this eunuch was the custodian.

II. SEEKING LIGHT FROM THE WORD OF GOD. 27. Had come to Jerusalem for to worship. He had learned about the true God from the Jews of his own country, and about his temple and worship at the religious capital. THE SINCERE INQUIRER. This Ethiopian was a notable example of a sincere inquirer. (1) He had a religious, invincible value of religious convictions. (2) He did not wait for the whole way to be made plain, but as fast as he saw the way he went before him, he walked in it. (3) He had been at whatever cost, amid the most unfavorable circumstances. (4) He sought earnestly for more light. He went to church. He studied the Word of God. (5) He was not discouraged although the full light did not come at once.

III. AN UNEXPECTED INTERPRETER. 29. Then (and) the Spirit (the Holy Spirit of God) said unto Philip, i. e. by a prompting from within. God leads us, as He did Philip here, by inward impulses not only, but by judgment, providence, sound sense, his Word applied to hearts made tender by the Spirit. It is a great mistake to imagine that God's voice within us comes wholly through impressions and impulses. Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. No doubt this royal treasurer has a numerous retinue, and a single traveller on a desert road would be doing what was natural in attaching himself to a train of people who were journeying in the same direction. Philip would therefore be able to approach and hear what was read without being deemed an intruder.

30. And Philip ran thither. Swiftly, eagerly, obeying the divine monitor. And heard him read. Philip walked or ran alongside the chariot while the Ethiopian was reading aloud. And said, Understand thou what thou readest? The very question would lead the Ethiopian to feel that Philip was one that could help him; and hence the invitation to come up into the chariot was natural.

31. How can I, except some man should guide me? The passage in Isaiah was a very difficult one for a Jew to understand. It seemed almost impossible to put together the idea of Christ as a sufferer, as despised and slain, and the promise that he should be a glorious king, triumphing over the world. Only the facts could solve the problem. And he desired (besought) Philip. This is stronger than the word of Christ to do so. The humility and thirst for instruction of this great courtier are very remarkable, and the instance of the joint use of the written word and the living teacher is noteworthy.

IV. NEW LIGHT FROM OLD SCRIPTURE. 32. (Now) The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. The essential truth taught here by the figures of the

sheep and lamb, is the quiet non-resistance with which Christ submitted to all the indignity put upon Him. But the context in Isaiah clearly indicates that there is also implied the truth that the Messiah should fulfil by His own death the type afforded by the slaying of sheep as sacrifices under the Old Testament dispensation. The chapter from which it is taken contains no less than eleven distinct references to the vicarious character of Christ's sufferings.

33. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away. His judgment, the judgment (justice) due to Him. His rights of justice were withheld by His enemies. See the account of the trial of Jesus. Who shall declare His generation? Schaff renders it as follows: "But though so lowly, so mean, so poor was His semblance on earth, who shall declare His generation? It is ineffable! for He is the eternal Son of God, begotten from everlasting of the Father." His life is taken from the earth. The Hebrew admits of no other meaning than that the sufferer was hurried to a violent death.

35. Then Philip . . . began at the same scripture. Which was fulfilled in Jesus, and has been fulfilled in no other. And preached unto him Jesus. *Litany.* Announced to the glad tidings, Jesus. Philip showed the strange and marvelous correspondence between the many descriptions of the Messiah in the prophets and the then well-known life of Jesus of Nazareth. He placed Jesus in His life, death and character, beside the picture of the Messiah which the prophets had painted, and all could see that the picture was a portrait of Jesus.

V. FAITH IN THE CHRIST. 36. Into a chariot, and he sat beside him. The unknown, and the attempts to identify it with any existing spring or wady are almost necessarily fruitless, since not even the road, much less the location on it, is known with any degree of certainty. *Behold water!* as if already, his mind filled with light and his soul set free, he was eagerly looking out for the first water in which he might seal his reception of the truth, and be enrolled among the visible disciples of the Lord Jesus. *What dost hinder me to be baptized?* Faith within and water without were ready.

37. If thou believed, etc. This verse is wanting in the best manuscript, and was probably inserted from some marginal note made to keep readers from error. But the words are exactly true, and are found in other Scriptures, and are implied in the fact of baptism. It is precisely that believing with all the heart which is the condition of a profession of faith. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He believed with his mind and his heart. He believed in Him as his Master and his Saviour. Such faith, leading to love and obedience, is salvation."

VI. CONFESSOR OF CHRIST. 38. He commanded the chariot. He ordered the chariot-driver to stop, and of course the whole retinue would see what took place, and they may certainly be regarded as the audience of a congregation to be established in Ethiopia. He baptized him. Without waiting further to instruct him, or delaying for a public ceremonial. Baptism was the divine mode of confessing Christ. No better, no stronger, no more beautiful, no more expressive way of confessing Him has ever been found or imagined. As soon as one becomes a true Christian he naturally desires to confess Christ. Confession strengthens the character and confirms the faith.

39. The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip. The words clearly relate a supernatural disappearance of Philip. But in what way is not stated. He went on his way. Through Gaza and Egypt to Ethiopia, home. *Rejoicing* in his new-found treasure, in his conscious possession of Christ and His salvation. Nothing else in the world could bring so much joy.

A Joyful Missionary.

Henry Martin was not only a man of great talent, but his mathematical and linguistic attainments were almost unrivalled; but all the dignity to which he aspired was for Jesus' sake to be the servant of those in India and Persia among whom he labored. "I do not wish," he said, "for any heaven upon earth beside that of preaching the Gospel of Christ to immortal souls." It was, indeed, to him, a most joyous work, and he was one of the most faithful of Christians, though sometimes he has been represented as otherwise. When he was about to set out for Persia, Sir John Malcolm, of Bombay, gave him a letter of introduction to Sir Gore Ouseley, the British ambassador in that country. Sir John introduced him as "altogether a very learned and cheerful man, but a great enthusiast in his holy calling. I am satisfied that if you ever see him you will be pleased with him. He will give you grace before and after dinner, and admonish such of your party as take the Lord's name in vain; but his good sense and great learning will delight you."

The writer of this letter was right in his estimate of this eminent missionary and of his influence. The British Minister in Persia and other leading foreigners, and also natives in high positions, were greatly pleased with him, and some of them were much influenced for good by him. During his whole illness at Tabriz, the ambassador from England and his wife tenderly nursed him, and when he recovered and completed his translation of the New Testament, Sir Gore Ouseley presented a copy of it to the king of Persia, who publicly expressed his approval of the work.—*Spirit of Missions.*

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Off for Europe.

A sailing day at the docks of any of our huge ocean-going boats is an interesting and amusing occasion. The dock itself is nothing more than a long shed stretching out several hundred feet into the river, with two offices, one on either side, and littered all over with cases, bales, and cases of merchandise, either uncalled for from the last steamer in or waiting for the next out-going vessel. And the baggage! It comes down on the transfer wagons and on the hotel buses and carriage foot-boards—mountains of it. Some of it is labelled "Cabin," but most of it "Hold," and you see it run up the baggage gangway and swing out over the open hatchway. There is a rattle and crash at the donkey engine, and these American "boxes" are consigned to the depths below. Next in importance is the hand baggage, and this consists not only of bags, but overcoats, rugs, and wraps of every conceivable description. The experienced traveller has been told that they weigh all the trunks in Europe, and charge accordingly, so he loads himself down with bundles and boxes galore, forgetting that the first principle of a successful going abroad is to travel in "light marching order."

It is surprising, too, how much enthusiasm may be kindled in the breasts of your friends when you are going abroad. In fact, you never can tell the measure of your own popularity until an occasion of this kind, when they combine to give you a "send-off," often going so far as to hire a tug and an "Elysian" band of music to accompany the party going abroad as far down the bay as the chartered steamer can keep pace with the Cunard, White Star, Guion or Inman liner, or what is more to the point, when the "send-off" party reach a few of the white-caps and the inrolling swell; from the lower bay. Some friends have seen all smiles and cheers, others lachrymose and full of sighs. And there by the rail is a party of five, silent and constrained amid so much light-heartedness and hilarity. It is mother and father and two sisters; the brother is leaving behind a pile of steamer chairs, and the wandering eager look, that brilliant sunken eye, and hectic flush on the pale cheek tell why he, when too late, is going abroad. And how many times some people will kiss each other, how many last messages, and frequently, too, commissions which mean an infraction of Uncle Sam's custom laws at the end of the return trip, are exchanged at the last moment.

In the midst of all this turmoil and crowding and pushing to and fro, the old timers, with their record of many voyages, look on in amused disgust, and wonder why some people can make such a fuss about such a little thing as going abroad.

A fortune, too, is spent on flowers. Huge baskets, set pieces, wreaths, bouquets, and cut flowers ad infinitum over the tables of "Social Hall," and make the already close atmosphere stifling and stifling. You hear how many last messages, and frequently, too, commissions which mean an infraction of Uncle Sam's custom laws at the end of the return trip, are exchanged at the last moment.

Here comes an excited group up the companion ladder. You hear a commotion between man and woman about keys left on her bureau, and you are conscious she has left the keys of her steamer trunk behind. The man fairly shoots down the gangway, leaps into the nearest cab, and begins a wild drive for those keys. Meanwhile the woman haunts the entrance to the gangway, and five minutes after the man is gone she finds the missing key securely stowed away in her pocket-book. Her troubles of going abroad are beginning early.

Now that ponderous whistle deafens the ears of all on board. There are final tears and smiles and embracings, a rush down the gangway by the well-dressed mob, and then some climb on the near by cases or gather on the outer end of the dock to catch the last glimpse of the ship. Handkerchiefs are tied to canes and parasols; there is much cheering and last farewells. One young man calls out in a stentorian voice: "Give my love to Mary!" "whereat there are cheers and laughter. And now at the far end of the dock there is a rattle and rumble, and two cable cars tearing along—one contains a belated passenger, who has just had time to scramble on board the other, the man who went after the key. And as the lady holds up the missing article, a conciliatory smile upon her face, that man sinks back upon a bale of goods, looking unutterably things. The key to the situation is plain to everybody. Now the "planks" are down, and slowly and silently the huge black ship, that seems so high out of the water that she looks like a great warehouse afloat, backs out of her dock, and is soon in midstream. Slowly yet she swings around, and finally squares away, her nose pointing for the Narrows. A moment she seems to hang, and to be taken aback by the tide, then forges ahead. The flag is dipped, and then baled down from the flag-pole on the dock, and those on board are at last going abroad.—*Harper's Weekly.*

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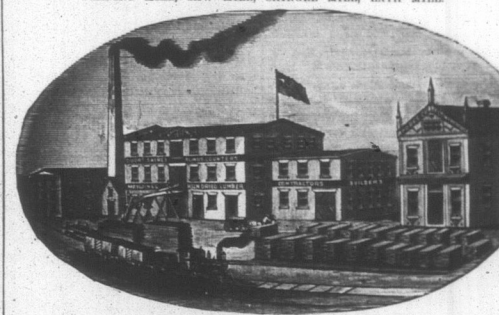
The European sparrows among us have been caught murdering young swallows, eating the eggs of the martin, stealing the nests of other birds, snatching the worm from the bill of the laborious robin, driving her away and even killing her. Yet the war of extermination against this noisy, ununsocial foreigner should be tempered by mercy, as it is better to suffer the results of his bad character than to allow our children to develop habits of cruelty in attempting a general slaughter of the intruder.

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