

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

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

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 2-4.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”—1 Timothy iii. 13.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 1 Corinthians xii. 27-31. Tuesday, 1 Cor. ix. 7-14. Wednesday, 2 Tim. ii. Thursday, 1 Tim. iii. 8-13. Friday, Genesis xlviii. 18-21. Saturday, Matthew xxvi. 59-68. Sunday, Exodus xxxiv. 29-35.

ANALYSIS.—I. An exigency met. Vs. 1-4. II. “The Seven” chosen. Vs. 5, 6. III. The word of God increased. Vs. 7. IV. Stephen’s faith and works. Vs. 8. V. Brought before the council. Vs. 9-15.

“THE SEVEN.”—The Saviour prescribed no other orders or servants than apostles for the government of his church. He left it to them to regulate its affairs as future exigencies might demand. Up to this time (probably A. D. 35) the presence of the apostles and the unbroken harmony of the church had supplied every want. But now there seems to be a need of division of labor, as between the spiritual and the temporal affairs of the growing Christian community. Abounding as it did in works of loving-kindness, it was all but inevitable, in the absence of divided and orderly ministrations, that some of the Lord’s poor and aged ones should be unintentionally overlooked. The practice was begun, apparently continued for a time only, of furnishing a dinner or supper every day for Christian widows, including, doubtless, destitute persons and orphans; and as some of these were relatives of foreign and Greek-speaking Jews, they may not have shared as bountifully of the common fund as the kindred of the Jews of Palestine. Hence the wisdom of the appointment by popular choice of seven to be *almsholders*, “usually called *deacons*,” Luke nowhere calls them such, that name even not being used in this narrative. In chap. xxi. 8 they are called “The Seven.”

EXPOSITION.—I. The Seven Elected.

Verse 1.—*And in those days.* By comparing the dates given at the heads of the last and of this lesson, two years are supposed to have passed since the events of the fifth chapter. The Sanhedrim meanwhile would seem to have acted on Gamaliel’s advice, and the Christians on the Lord’s command. The consequence was comparative quiet and great growth; or, as Luke says: “the number of the disciples was multiplied.” There arose a murmuring, etc. The increase of numbers and prosperity brought some decrease of absorbing devotion to Christian work, and thus more opportunity to think of self and worldly interests. The “Grecians” were Greek-speaking Jews and proselytes from abroad. *Because their widows were neglected, etc.* The complaint originated with the foreigners; the neglect with the natives. It will be fair to suppose the fault, whatever it was, about equal on the two sides. For the arrangement that existed in the churches several years after this, see 1 Tim. v. 3-16. The “widow indeed,” is one who is left alone in the world without any relations or Christian friends responsible for her support. It was not the principle or the practice of the early Christians to encourage idleness. They insisted upon it that “he who will not work shall not eat.”

Verse 2.—*The twelve.* Matthias had been accepted in place of Judas. Called *the multitude.* Because it was a matter of universal interest. The principle is here recognized that to the whole body is committed its interests, and not to a certain few within the body. *It is not reason, etc.* This implies that thus far they had given the matter only such general oversight as did not interfere with their spiritual duties. The greater importance of the work of preaching made it unreasonable to turn from it to the other service. The principle is still good, and should lead Christians to relieve their religious teachers of all secular labor and anxieties, so far as possible, that they may give their whole strength and time to their special work. *Seven men.* Seven is the symbol of complete-

ness. Or were they to alternate in some special duty connected with the business, perhaps giving one for each day of the week? *Honest report.* The nature of the trust and the existing dissatisfaction urgently demanded. *Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.* Full of that wisdom needful for this work. *Whom we may [will] appoint.* The office of apostle was temporary and unique, and their authority is not perpetuated in any church officer or officers.

Verse 4.—*Give ourselves continually to prayer.* The pre-requisite, preparation, condition, atmosphere, life of preaching.

Verse 5.—The names are all Greek, but at this time the Jews in Palestine, as well as out, were wont to have a name of Greek form as well as of Hebrew. Hence it is not certain that all were Grecians, though doubtless a fair proportion of them were. Nicholas is called a “proselyte,” i. e., a convert to Judaism from heathenism.

II. The Arrest of Stephen.

We have the occasion of the arrest in vs. 7, 8. It was in general the prosperity of the cause, and in particular Stephen’s part in the work.

Verse 8.—*The word of God increased.* The word was more and more widely received and obeyed. *A great company of the priests.* They were the least likely to accept the new “faith”; or, as the word here means, the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 8.—*Faith and power.* “Power,” or spiritual influence over man, consequent on his faith. *Did [was doing] great wonders, etc.* Luke feels no need to caution his readers against supposing that the miracles were really from Stephen and not from God. See iii. 12, 16. Probably, before his election he had worked in this way, and by his election was furnished with new opportunities and inspirations.

Verse 9.—*Them.* In consequence of Stephen’s success. *There arose—i. e., from the previous state of quiet.* See on vs. 1. *Certain of [from] the synagogue—which was at Jerusalem.* The *Libertines.* “Freedmen, Jews, or the sons of Jews, who having been slaves at Rome had acquired their freedom.” “When Pompey overran Judea about B. C. 63, he carried a vast number of the Jews to Rome, where they were sold into slavery. Most of these, or their children, the Romans afterward liberated, as they found it inconvenient to have servants who were so tenacious of the peculiar rites of their religion.”

Verse 10.—*And they were not able, etc.* The original shows that this dispute and this experience of inferiority and defeat was continuous, recurring again and again in conflict after conflict. *The wisdom and the spirit.* The wisdom and power given by the Holy Spirit. Vs. 5.

Verse 11.—*Suborned men.* Secretly bribed them to testify falsely, to perjure themselves. *Blasphemous words, etc.* The very charge urged against Christ. To speak against Moses; i. e., against the books of Moses, was, and is, to speak against God, since Scripture was written by inspiration of God.

Verse 12.—*And they.* Not the witnesses, but those who suborned them. *Stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes.* This shows the desperate determination of the ringleaders, and reminds us of Ps. ii. 1-3, and its application in Acts iv. 25-28. They make one grand combined onslaught. They seem to have felt that there was more hope of success in pitching upon Stephen than upon the apostles. *Came upon him and caught him.* The original denotes a violent seizure and removal, such as the madness of the actors naturally prompted.

Verse 13.—Before the Sanhedrim. See in last lesson on vs. 27. *This man ceaseth not.* He was a persistent disputer. *This holy place.* The Temple, in one of whose porches or halls, as we have seen, the Sanhedrim usually met.

Verse 14.—*Shall destroy this place, etc.* The Temple and Temple worship were superseded by Christ, and this, no doubt, Stephen asserted.

Verse 15.—*Looking steadfastly.* Awaiting a reply to the accusation. *Saw his face, etc.* Lighted up with heavenly radiance in the Spirit.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 1. Who were the men who made the complaint? What was the cause of complaint? How could this neglect have been unintentional? What is pure religion still? James 1. 27.

Vs. 2. What kind of tables did the apostles now leave to others.

Vs. 3. Why were seven chosen? Are they called deacons in Scripture? May the order not have grown out of their appointment? Whose selected these seven? Who ordained them?

Vs. 4. To what duties did the apostles wish to give themselves wholly? Why first the prayer?

Vs. 5. Of how many of the seven do we hear afterward?

Vs. 7. What class of converts is mentioned here? Luke xxiii. 10.

Vs. 9. Stephen met with prompt and strong opposition; whence did it arise?

Vs. 11. How was the opposition conducted? In what respects had Stephen offended them?

Vs. 14. What is meant by “this place”? Matt. xxvi. 60.

Vs. 15. Was this a natural or a supernatural radiance? See Exodus xxxiv. 9. —Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 25th, 1876.—Review.

YOUTH’S DEPARTMENT.

First Ripe Strawberries.

A little girl once had a bed of strawberries. She was very anxious that they should ripen and be fit to eat. At last the time came.

“Now for a feast,” said her brother to her one morning, as he picked some beautiful berries for her to eat.

“I can’t eat these,” she said, “for they are the first ripe fruit.”

“Well,” said her brother, “all the more reason for our making a feast; for they are so much the greater treat.”

“Yes, but they are the first ripe fruit.”

“Well, what of that?”

“Why, you know the Bible says we must honor the Lord with all our first fruits.” And dear father says he always gives God the first out of all the money he gets, and that then he always feels happier in spending the rest; add so I wish to give God the first of my strawberries, too.”

“Ah! but,” said her brother, “how can you give strawberries to God? And even if you could, he wouldn’t care for them.”

“Oh, but I’ve found out a way. You remember how Jesus said; ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ So I mean to take them to Mrs. Perkins’ sick child. She never gets strawberries—they’re so poor.”

Then away ran the children to give the strawberries to the sick child. And when they saw her put out her thin, white arms, and take the ripe, round, juicy fruit in her little, shriveled fingers, and when they saw her eyes glisten, and her little faded lips smile, they felt as if they had a far richer treat than if they had kept the ripe fruit for themselves. And they were sure that God had accepted their offering.

Black Hands.

Joe was a negro man, who used to go through the streets collecting garbage.

He was driving his dogs through the street one day, when a lady and her little girl passed by on the side-walk. As he stood looking at her, a boy on a velocipede whirled round the corner behind them. They did not see him, and he was going so fast that he could not stop himself. Joe saw in a flash that the child would be knocked down. He sprang to the sidewalk and snatched the little girl in his arms. The velocipede went whizzing by, and grazed Joe’s arm as he leaped aside; and the little girl not guessing the danger she had escaped, began to scream.

“How dare you touch my child, you impudent thing?” said the mother.

Poor Joe was thunderstruck. “I didn’t mean no harm, missis,” he said, humbly. “I was afeared she’d git run over; that’s all.”

“Run over, indeed! That’s a likely story. Don’t you dare to put your black hands upon her again.”

And away went the angry lady without giving him time to explain.

“Well, I see clean discouraged,” he said. “Dis nigger nebbes see de like o’ dat afore.”

“Don’t mind it, Joe,” said a sweet voice at his ear. It was another lady who knew him, and who had seen what had happened. “They were rude and ungrateful; but I saw what you did, and so did the Lord. He knows, Joe.”

“And he won’t mind my black hands, will he?” asked Joe.

“The whitest ones in the world couldn’t

have done anything kinder,” said the lady. And so Joe was comforted by her gentle words; and the Lord knew, you may be sure, for white hands and black are equal in his sight, when kind deeds are done by them.—*Young Reaper.*

White Bears.

The polar bear is quite as untamable as the grizzly, and generally resents any familiarity; hence he is allowed to walk to and fro in his cage, which he does with a surly and restless mood.

The flesh and skin of the white bear are both highly prized by the poor inhabitants of the North, and the skin has a value in all parts of traffic.

In warm countries, and in the poplar regins, the bear is active all the year round; but in climates like our own, where extremes of temperature alternate, the bear has a habit of hibernating; that is when deep snow and cold weather come on, the animal seeks some hole or burrow, where it will remain for weeks in a semi-torpid state, living on the fat which has been accumulated during the season of plenty. In this condition it generally has one of the fore-paws in his mouth, which it sucks with much earnestness, more doubtless for the purpose of keeping the mouth moist than, as is generally supposed, drawing the fatty substance of the body once more into the stomach for re-digestion.

A Mother’s Words.

A mother on the green hills of Vermont was holding by the right hand a son, sixteen years old, mad with love of the sea. And as he stood by the garden gate one morning, she said:

“Edward, they tell me—for I never saw the ocean—the great temptation of a seaman’s life is drink. Promise me, before you quit your mother’s hand, that you will never drink.”

“And,” said he (for he told me the story), “I gave the promise, and I went the globe over, Calcutta and Mediterranean, San Francisco and Cape of Good Hope, the North Pole and the South. I saw them all in forty years, and I never saw a glass filled with sparkling liquor that my mother’s form by the gate did not rise up before me, and to-day I am innocent of the taste of liquor.”

Was not that sweet evidence of the power of a single word? Yet that is not half.

“For,” said he, “yesterday there came into my counting-room a man of forty years.

“Do you know me?”

“No.”

“Well,” said he, “I was once brought drunk into your presence on shipboard; you were a passenger; they kicked me aside; you took me to your berth, and kept me there till I had slept off the intoxication; you then asked me if I had a mother, I said I had never known a word from her lips. You told me of yours at the garden gate, and to-day I am master of one of the packets in New York, and I came to ask you to come and see me!”

How far that little candle throws its beams! That mother’s words in the green hills of Vermont! O, God be thanked for the mighty power of a single word!

Heaven.

A little boy was walking in the fields with his mother, one day. He looked up to the sky, and said: “Oh, mother, heaven is so far off, I’m afraid I shall never get there.”

“My dear,” said his mother “heaven must come to us, before we can go it.” He didn’t understand what she meant. Then she told him what Jesus said when he was on earth. These were his words: “If any man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” Jesus is willing to come into your heart. He is standing and knocking for you to let him in. And when he comes in, he brings heaven with him. He will make a Heaven in your heart, if you will let him come and dwell there. But if we don’t let him come and dwell in our hearts here, he won’t let us go and dwell with him in heaven hereafter. “Heaven must come to us before we can go to it.”

The daughters of Sir Edward Thornton the English Minister at Washington, wear thick-soled shoes, plain, unpinned black dresses and heavy, old-fashioned cloaks. They are pictures of health.

The Lord’s Pocket Book.

“Whose pocket book is that which you carry?” said a friend to a business man, as he drew a well filled wallet from his pocket.

“Why my own, of course. Whose else could it be?” was the prompt reply.

“To whom the pocket book belongs depends on another question. If you belong to the Lord, I guess the purse is his also.”

“Well,” said the man, thoughtfully, “I hope I do belong to the Lord, but your remark throws a new light on this subject. It never impressed me before, as it does just now, that I am to carry and use this pocket book, ‘My pocket book,’ as my Lord directs. I must think this matter over, for I confess honestly I never have looked at it in the light in which you place it.”—*The Christian Giver.*

Character Grows.

From the minute a babe begins to notice surrounding objects, his character is under the process of formation. Day by day, through infancy and childhood, here a little and there a little, character grows with the growth, and strengthens with the strength, until, good or bad, it becomes almost a coat of mail. Look at a model man of business—prompt, reliable, cool, and cautious, yet clearheaded and energetic. When do you suppose he developed all the admirable qualities? When he was a boy. Let us see the way in which a boy gets up in the morning, works, plays, and studies, and we will tell you just about what kind of a man he will make. The boy who is late at the breakfast table, late at school, and never does anything at the right time, stands a poor chance to become a prompt man.

The boy who neglects his duties, be they ever so small, and then excuses himself by saying, “Oh, I forgot! I didn’t think!” will never be a reliable man. And the boy who finds a pleasure in the pain of weaker things will never be a noble, generous, kindly man—a gentleman.

A BABY AT OUR HOUSE.—The Boston Post is the author of a good story of a bachelor friend.

Our friend was riding a day or two ago through Athol, in this State, when he overtook a little girl and boy apparently on their way to school. The little girl appeared to be five or six years old, and was as beautiful as a fairy. Her eyes lit up with a gleam of intense happiness, and her cheeks glowed with the hues of health. Our bachelor looked at her for a moment admiringly. She met his glance with a smile, and with an eager voice saluted him with,

“Have you got a baby?”

He was struck aback by the question, and something like a regret stole over his mind as he looked upon the animated and beautiful little face before him.

“No,” he answered.

“Well,” she replied, drawing her tiny form proudly up, “we have,” and passed on, still smiling to tell the joyous news to the next one she might meet. What a world of happiness to her was concentrated in that one idea—the baby! And in her joy she felt as if all must have the same delight she had; and it was a matter of affectionate pride to her that lifted her heart above the reach of ordinary envy, for in the baby was her world, and what else had she to crave? Such was the reflection of our friend, and he remembered it long enough to tell it yesterday in State street.

POLITENESS.—The other evening, says an Indianapolis paper, a young lady abruptly turned the corner and very rudely ran against a boy who was small and ragged and freckled. Stopping as soon as she could she turned to him and said, “I beg your pardon. Indeed, I am very sorry.” The small, ragged and freckled boy looked up in blank amazement for an instant; then, taking off about three-fourths of a cap, he bowed very low, smiled until his face became lost in the smile, and answered “You can hev my parding, and welcome, Miss; and yer may run agin me and knock me clean down an’ I won’t say a word.” After the young lady passed on he turned to a comrade and said, half-apologetically “I never had any one ask my parding, and it kind o’ took me off my feet.”

“Papa, me has been baptized, ain’t me?” asked a little three-year-old. “Yes dear.” “Then me won’t have to be baptized again?” “No; but can you remember anything about being baptized?” “I dess I can.” “Well, what did the minister do to you?” “He shoved up my sleeve, and stuck a knife in my arm.”

A lady of fashionable distinction being a subject of conversation in Robert Hall’s presence, some one said, “Is she not a great belle?” “I should think so,” said Hall, “for she is noisy, empty and brazen.”

Now they say the report of that shower of flies in Canada is true enough if you knock the “f” off flies. They often have such showers in Washington.—*Norristown Herald.*

In good fortune be not too elevated and confident. In misfortune be not too despondent.