

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, December 10th, 1876.—The Spread of the Gospel.—Acts, xi. 19-30.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 19-21.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them." Mark xvi. 20.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts vii. 1-4. Tuesday, Acts ii. 5-13. Wednesday, Acts iv. 32-35. Thursday, Acts ix. 26-31. Friday, Romans i. 13-17. Saturday, Exodus xxxv. 1-7. Sunday, Galatians iii. 7-14.

ANALYSIS.—I. Gospel preached at Antioch. Vs. 19-24. II. Paul arrived at Antioch. Vs. 25, 26. III. Acts sent to Jerusalem. Vs. 27-30.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 19. Where was Phoenicia? Where was Cyprus? Where was Antioch? When was Antioch founded, and by whom?

Vs. 20. Where was Cyrene? Who are meant here by the Grecians?

Vs. 22. Why did the Church send Barnabas to Antioch? Of what country was he? What have we learned of his character already? Acts iv. 37; ix. 27.

Vs. 23. Does Barnabas now hesitate about admitting Gentiles to the blessings of Christianity? Why not? What better things can converts do than to "cleave to the Lord"? Matt. xxiv. 13; Rev. xix. 21.

Vs. 25. How long had Saul been in the regions of Tarsus? Where had Barnabas kindly served Saul? Chap. ix. 30. Why does he seek Saul's services now?

Vs. 26. By whom were the disciples called "Christians"? Why so called?

Vs. 29. Why send these men to Jerusalem? What did this benevolence of the Gentile Christians prove to the Jews?

EXPOSITION.—The last lesson put before us God's formal announcement and demonstration of the universality of the gospel. The present lesson presents its universality in a striking example. Antioch was the metropolis of Syria. See Acts vi. 8; xi. 19, 27, 28; xv. 1-5; Gal. ii. 11, 12. We find in our lesson the planting, the growth, and the fruitage of Christianity in that place.

I. The Planting. Verse 19.—Now they which were scattered abroad. Referring to viii. 4. The story of Philip, and that of Peter, had been introduced to show the advance of truth and the revelation of divine purpose. The ministry of Christ furnishes examples of the extension of both the salvation and its proclamation beyond Jewish limits. So too does the Old Testament. Upon the persecution. Literally, from the affliction; that is, in consequence of the affliction which was a consequence of the "persecution." It will be remembered that this was the occasion of the Samaritans receiving the gospel (chap. viii.). So that this lesson goes with that to show how seeming defeat may become glorious victory. Phoenicia. "A tract of country of which Tyre and Sidon were the principal cities, to the north of Palestine, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea." Cyprus. "The well-known island off the coast of Syria. Its greatest length is one hundred and forty miles, with a width varying from five to fifty miles. It was anciently exceedingly productive. It was mined for precious stones, iron, lead, tin, and copper. It is frequently mentioned in Scripture. To none but unto the Jews only. Conforming in this to their understanding of Christ's requirement and God's purpose.

Verse 20.—And, Or, rather, but, contrasting these men with those of verse 19. These were a part of the "scattered" or dispersed ones; but while the rest, who were also the mass of the dispersed, pursued one course, these took a different course. Men of Cyprus and Cyrene. Cyrene was the name of both a province and a city with the province. The province lay on the north coast of Africa; west of Egypt, in what is now Tripoli. These men, natives or at least citizens of these places, were either Hellenists, that is, foreign Greek speaking Jews, or proselytes to the Jewish faith, and hence had gone up to Jerusalem. ii. 8-10. That they were foreigners, rather than natives of Palestine, helps to explain their disregard of the rigid Jewish rule, while it was quite natural for Cyprians to make their way to neighboring city of Antioch. Spoke unto the Grecians. Greek-speaking Jews. The word translated *Grecians*, means

Greeks purely; that is, mere Gentiles, and not Jews. Preaching the Lord Jesus. The great theme then and over. The whole account seems to imply that this preaching was without any knowledge of the revelation made to and through Peter and Cornelius.

Verse 21.—The hand of the Lord was with them. To help on their cause. A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. A genuine "revival of religion," as we now use that phrase. The belief is here put first, probably as designating the inward acceptance of Christ, while the turning designates the corresponding outward conduct. The work of God was the regeneration of the hearers.

II. The Growth. Verse 22.—The church which was in Jerusalem. Acknowledged as the mother church. They sent forth Barnabas. It does not appear that an authority over the disciples in Antioch was implied by their act. The desire both to help the cause there, would be ample reason for their action. Barnabas was an admirable selection.

Verse 23.—Had seen the grace of God. Seen the fruits of God's grace in the number, character, and walk of the converts, as well as in the progress of the work. Was glad. Being convinced that it was God's work. He was himself a Cyprian (iv. 36), and could hence more easily escape from Palestinian prejudices. Exhorted them all. All the converts, whether Jews or Gentiles; so uniting with the other workers, and helping them on, as a "man of consolation." With purpose, etc. Pleading for constancy, advice, aims to none on beginning the divine life.

Verse 24.—The character of the man is given as the chief explanation of his course, as stated in verse 23. "A good man." This word "good," in distinction from "just" or "righteous," seems to have a meaning somewhat akin to that in Rom. vi. 7. There was sanctified magnanimity. Having a large generous nature. Full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Note the fullness of power, the nature of the power, and the result of the power. Much people. Additional to the "great number" of verse 21, and largely through the labors of Barnabas. "The human element" in revivals was as conspicuous at the beginning as now, and not more to be disregarded now than it was then. Unto the Lord. So also in v. 21.

Verse 25.—To Tarsus. Saul's own city. To seek Saul. Implying that his place of labor was not certainly known. Compare in verse 26 the word "found." His retirement to Tarsus. Dr. Hackett puts at A. D. 40, and this invitation to visit Antioch at A. D. 43. ix. 30.

Verse 26.—Brought him to Antioch. To assist in the work of preaching, etc. Note that here not Saul, but Barnabas is leader, and that Saul goes as cheerfully in this as afterward in the other relation. His question always was, "Lord, what wilt thou?" A whole year. Namely, A. D. 44. The work greatly prospered throughout the year. Called Christians first at Antioch. The disciples seem not to have called them selves thus. In xxvi. 28, and 1 Peter iv. 16, the only other places where the word occurs in the New Testament, it is spoken of as given by those not disciples. The word has a Latin ending which suggests, but does not prove, that the Romans originated the term, most likely in reproach. The Jews, it is well argued, would not have called them thus, as they denied that Jesus was the Christ; that is, the Messiah.

III. The Fruitage. Verse 41.—Prophets. Men receiving supernatural revelations. xv. 32; Eph. ii. 20; 1 Cor. xii. 28.

Verse 48.—Agabus. Com. xxi. 10. Twenty years later. Throughout all the world. Howson says: "The reign of Claudius from bad harvests and other causes, was a period of general distress and scarcity over the whole world." In the fourth year of his reign, we are told by Josephus, that the price of food became enormous, and great numbers perished. Josephus speaks of large contributions of food made at this time to the Jews by Helena, the mother of Izates, king of Adiabene, and a recent convert to Judaism. Agabus, like Josephus, may have designated only Palestine by the phrase "the whole world" or inhabited land, while the phrase "the earth," that is, the land, so often used by Jews for "their land"; that is, Palestine.

Verse 29.—The disciples. Namely, those of Antioch, of whom alone Luke is here speaking. Vs. 27. Every man according to his ability. No general statement as to what fraction of one's income should be paid for such purposes is given in Scripture, no man can tell what is another's ability. Each must stand or fall to his own Master, who is Jesus. The brethren which dwell in Judea. They gave on the principle of 1 Cor. ix. 11.

Verse 30.—To the elders. As the chief officers of the church for distribution. Barnabas and Saul. The most prominent of the men at Antioch, whose visit might serve other ends than merely to make over the funds. For notice of a like visit by them on a like errand at a later day see Gal. ii. 1.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, December 17th, 1876.—Peter's Release.—Acts xii. 1-17.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

The New Year.

It's coming, boys,
It's almost here;
It's coming, girls,
The grand new year!
A year to be glad in,
Not to be sad in;
A year to live in,
To gain and give in;
A year for trying,
And not for sighing;
A year for striving,
And hearty thriving;
A bright new year,
Oh! hold it dear.
For God who sendeth,
He only lendeth.

The bunch in Nannie's throat.

All day long, little Nannie had looked woe-begone. At dinner the food on her plate remained almost untasted. Instead of playing at "house-keep" with her dolls, she sat by the window looking out at nothing, for she did not seem to see the trees and grass and flowers in the yard. The truth was, Nannie was in trouble. She had disobeyed her mother—a thing she had not done before since she could remember; at least, not such a large disobedience as this was. It came about in this way: Her mother said she must never go in a skiff on the river unless with her father, and she had been rowing every evening that week with Sol Simpson and his sister, Mary. Sol was sixteen, and could row like a man; but that was not the thing. Her mother had said she was not to go on the river without her father took her.

"There's an awful lump in my throat," she said to herself. "I feel sure mother will find out all about the rowing. I do wish I hadn't gone! I wonder if everybody that does wrong has a bunch in their throat as I have? Oh, me!" She tried practising at the piano, but she could do nothing but blunder. She thought of her new Sunday school book; she would read in it. So she seated herself and began. In ten minutes she threw it aside. It was a story about a disobedient girl. What did she want to know about a disobedient girl? She already knew more about such girls than was wholesome!

"Why don't you eat your supper, Nannie?" said her mother that evening at the tea-table.

The little girl burst into tears.

"Are you sick, my child?" said the mother tenderly.

Still Nannie continued to cry, and it was not till she was about to retire that she told her mother what had happened.

The gentle mother took her on her lap and told her how wrong it was for her to do as she had done, and how unhappy she was sure to be if she continued to do so.

"But I will not disobey you again. No, never, as long as I live. I would not have that great bunch in my throat again, not for all the rowing in the world. But, mother, it's clear gone now. What made it?"

"It was only a little bunch that, conscience sent to stay there to make you feel bad for doing wrong, and now that you have confessed your sin, conscience has taken it away."

"Would it have staid all the time if I had not told you?"

"I think it would have gone after a while, but then it would have left you with a bad feeling in your heart, and you would have continued to do wrong."

"What is conscience?"

"It's a tender little guest sent to stay

in our bosoms, and warn us from doing evil deeds. It will warn us again and again; but if we will not heed it, after a time it ceases to trouble us, and we are left to go on doing wrong."

"I hope it will make a bunch in my throat every time I do wrong."

"It will; but if you don't heed it, and try to get back on the right track again, it will do no good, and very soon it will cease to remind you that you are committing sin."—The Little Sower.

Bertie's Sermon.

It was Sabbath afternoon. The mother sat in the nursery window, and little Bertie, the youngest, sat on the floor, with his dolls around him. Smoothing the tangled and the rumpled dresses carefully, he arranged them in a semicircle. Then, rising, he placed a chair before him for a desk, and looking quiet sober, said:

"Now, children, you must be very good and quiet, for I am going to preach to you. This is my text. 'I am the door.' Pausing a moment, he repeated, 'I am the door.'—that means Jesus. Am—am?—that says it is yearly so. The—that is one, only one; and—door—opening the door and standing in the door-way—"we all come in through the door, and we all go to heaven—through Jesus."

A beautiful little Gospel sermon, was it not? Bertie had heard, and Bertie had remembered.

Who of our young readers can do as well as three-year old Bertie? Watchman.

Mother's warning remembered too late.

"Johnson, the officer says you were drunk, and that you haven't drawn a sober breath for a week. How is that, Johnson?"

"Yes, honor," said Johnson, as he dropped one arm over the rail, and leaned back heavily on the policeman who supported him by the shoulder, "yer honor, it's true. I've been drunk for a week, as you say, an' I haven't got a word to say to defend myself. I've been in this court, I guess, a hundred times before, an' every time I've asked yer honor to let me off light. But this time I don't have no fear. You can send me up for ten years; it's all one now."

As he spoke he brushed away a tear with his hat, and when he paused he coughed a dry hacking cough, and drew his tattered coat closer about his throat. "When I went up before," he continued, "I always counted the days an' the hours till I'd come off. This time I'll count the blocks to the Potter's Field. I'm almost gone, Judge."

He paused again, and looked down upon his almost shoeless feet. "When I was a little country boy, my mother used to say to me:

"Charley, if you wait to be a man never touch liquor; an' I'd answer; 'No mother, I never will.' If I'd kept that promise, you an' me wouldn't have been so well acquainted, Judge. If I could only be a boy again for a half a day; if I could go into the old school-house just once more and see the boys and girls as I used to see them in the old days, I could lie right down here and die happy. But it's too late. Send me up, Judge. Make it for ten days or make it for life. It don't make no difference. One way would be as short as the other. All I ask now is to die alone. I've been in crowded tenements for years. If I can be alone for a little while before I go, I'll die contented."

The shoulder of the muddy coat fell from the policeman's hand, and the used-up man fell in a heap on the floor. He was carried to the little room behind the rail. His temples were bathed and his wrists were chafed. But it was of no use. Though his heart still beat, he was fast going to join his schoolmates, who have crossed the flood. The shutters were bowed—the door was closed. He might die contented, for he was left alone.

One drop of essential oil of cinnamon on a small lump of sugar, which must be kept in the mouth until dissolved and then gently swallowed, will cure the hiccup. A teaspoonful of vinegar will also generally give immediate relief at the most obstinate hiccup.

Better to be alone than in bad company.

The Strayed Lamb.

A giddy lamb, one afternoon,
Had from the fold departed;
The tender shepherd missed it soon,
And sought it, broken-hearted;
Not all the flock that shared his love,
Could from the search delay him;
Nor clouds of midnight darkness move,
Nor fear of suffering stay him.

But night and day he went his way,
In sorrow till he found it;
And when he saw it fainting lie,
He clasped his arms around it,
And closely sheltered in his breast,
From every ill to save it,
He brought it to a home of rest,
And pitied and forgave it.

And so the Saviour will receive
The little ones that fear him:
Their pains remove, their sins forgive,
And draw them gently near him,
Bless while they live, and when they die,
When soul and body sever—
Conduct them to his home on high,
To dwell with him forever.

A Sermon from a Pair of Boots.

There lived forty years ago, in Berlin, a shoemaker who had a habit of speaking harshly of all his neighbors who did not feel exactly as he did about religion. The old pastor of the parish, in which the shoe-maker lived, heard of this and felt that he must give him a lesson.

He did it in this way: He sent for the shoemaker one morning, and when he came in said to him:

"Master, take my measure for a pair of boots."

"With pleasure, your reverence," answered the shoemaker; "please take off your boots."

The clergyman did so, and the shoemaker measured his feet from toe to heel, and over the instep, noted all down in his pocket book, and then prepared to leave the room.

But as he was putting up the measure the pastor said to him:

"Master, my son also requires a pair of boots."

"I will make them with pleasure, your reverence. Can I take the young man's measure?"

"It is not necessary," said the pastor; "the lad is fourteen, but you can make my boots and his from the same last."

"Your reverence, that will never do," said the shoemaker, with a smile of surprise.

"I tell you, sir, to make my son's on the same last."

"No, your reverence, I can not do it!"

"It must be—on the same last!"

"But your reverence it is not possible if the boots are to fit," said the shoemaker, thinking to himself that the old pastor's wit were leaving him.

"Ah then, master shoemaker," said the clergyman, "every pair of boots must be made on their own last, if they are to fit, and yet you think that God is to form all Christians, exactly according to your own last of the same measure and growth in religion as yourself. That will not do either."

The shoemaker was abashed. Then he said:

"I thank your reverence for this sermon, and I will try to remember it, and to judge my neighbors less harshly in the future."

"Father," said Jane, "am I a member of the church?" "Yes, my daughter; I initiated you when you were an infant."

"But, father, you know that I have always been a worldly-minded girl. Do you think it is right for me to say that I am in the church?"

"Daughter," he replied, "you remember that in the church there are both wheat and tares, so the Saviour teaches in the parable. You are a tare, Jane! only a tare, I fear!"

"Didn't you initiate me yourself?" "Yes; but why does that trouble you?"

"Why, look, father—he that sows tares is the devil!" The old man looked at the passage, groaned aloud, walked the floor, and made no reply.

One evening, we are told, after a weary march through the desert, Mahomet was camping with his followers, and overheard one of them saying, "I will loose my camel and commit it to God;" on which Mahomet took him up, "Friend, tie thy camel, and commit it to God;" that is, do whatever is thine to do, and then leave the issue with God.

A little girl was asked what was the meaning of the word happy. She gave a very pretty answer, saying, "It is to feel as if you wanted to give up all your things to your little sister."

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