

The Sunday-School.

SECOND QUARTER.
LESSON VII.—May 17.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

ACTS 24: 10-16, 24-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.*—Psa. 23: 4.

THE LESSON includes the whole chapter.

LEARN BY HEART.—Vs. 15, 16, 25.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—Time. May, A. D. 57 or 58, and the two succeeding years.

Place.—Cesarea, the capital of the province of Judea.

Place in History.—The two years in prison at Cesarea, preparatory to going to Rome.

THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL.—Vs. 1-9. Five days after Paul was imprisoned in Herod's palace, the high priest Ananias, accompanied by a deputation from the Sanhedrim, and by a professional advocate, Tertullus, arrived in Cesarea from Jerusalem to present their charges against Paul. The charges were:

1. *Treason against Rome.* Paul is charged with being a pestilent fellow, and with being a mover of sedition (insurrection) among all the Jews throughout the world, referring to the mobs of the Jews against him.2. *Heresy against the Jewish Religion.* "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."3. *Sacrilege* in profaning the temple, as charged by the Jews, who thought that Paul had brought an Ephesian Gentile into the forbidden precincts of the temple.PAUL'S ANSWER TO THE CHARGES.—Vs. 10-21. Then Paul... answered. Paul's preamble was at once courteous and true to fact. *Forasmuch as... thou hast been of many years a judge.* Felix had been in office five or six years. *I do the more cheerfully answer.* The long experience of Felix in Judea would enable him to understand the facts Paul was about to state. *There are yet but twelve days,* therefore Felix could easily ascertain the exact facts. *Since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.* It was just the opposite of exciting tumult. *They neither found me in the temple disputing.* He was a quiet, peaceful worshipper. *Neither raising up the people, etc.* These acts, disputing and raising up a popular tumult, are denied with reference to these three places, the temple, the synagogue, and the city. *Neither can they prove the things.* That he had excited sedition. *After the way which they call heresy.* Paul presented three reasons why his way of worship was not a sect or heresy, but a way.1. He worshipped the same God as the Jews. *So worship I, the God of my fathers.* It was no strange or foreign god whom he worshipped, but Jehovah whom the Jews worshipped.2. He believed and obeyed the Jewish Scriptures. *Believing all things which are written in the law.* His whole doctrine of the Messiah was founded on the Scriptures. Christ and his gospel did not destroy the law and the prophets, but fulfilled them.3. He held to the same hopes as the Jews. Paul agreed with the Pharisees in having hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, and therefore immortal life. *Both of the just and the unjust, the first to everlasting life, and the others "to shame and everlasting contempt."* Herein, inthis confession of faith and principles. *Do I exercise myself.* Implying training one's self. The whole aim of Paul's life was to be free from such evils as had been charged against him. *A conscience void of offence,* a conscience that does not stumble, nor is a cause of stumbling to others. *Toward God* in heart and worship, and *toward men* in good deeds.

PAUL'S TWO YEARS IN PRISON AT CESAREA.—Vs. 22-27. Paul's defense was so strong that Felix deferred his decision till he could learn the truth from the Roman officers who had witnessed the scenes in the temple. Felix feared the Jews too much to release Paul, and yet wished to avoid the injustice of condemning him. Accordingly Paul was kept a prisoner for two years. He was doubtless chained to a soldier, but his friends had free access to him, the rigors of prison discipline were relaxed, and every possible favor granted as to food and lodging. Thus he was kept as long as Felix remained governor.

PAUL'S ADDRESS BEFORE FELIX.—*Felix came.* Either to Cesarea after an absence, or to some reception room in the prison. *With his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess.* She was endowed with extreme beauty. *He sent for Paul.* Either from curiosity to see such a well-known man, or from some remnant of conscience and thought of a better life, or, as in v. 27, in order to extort money from him. *And he heard him concerning the faith in Christ.* Paul preached the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, argued. He presented the great moral truths which were essential to the Christian life. *Of righteousness,* and all the duties which man owes to man. *Temperance,* having the passions and powers of the soul under the control of reason and conscience.

NOTE (1) that these were the virtues in which the two before him were most lacking. Felix was the worst governor Judea ever had. He had corrupted Drusilla, the wife of Azizus, a petty king, and was living with her in adultery.

NOTE (2) that Paul condemned the vices by teaching and picturing the opposite virtues. He let the truth convict them.

NOTE (3) the boldness of Paul, like that of John the Baptist reproving Herod. He was wholly in the power of these two to whom he preached. As in the cases of Herod and Herodias, and Ahab and Jezebel, the wife was more to be feared than the husband. *And (the) judgment to come.* With its rewards for virtue, and punishment for sin and crime. Paul presented this motive in all its terrible force to persuade those before him to enter upon the life of righteousness and self-control.THE EFFECT OF PAUL'S APPEAL.—*Felix trembled.* Well might he be filled with fear. His conscience told him that what Paul said was true. *Go thy way for this time.* Fear sent away not the sin, but the preacher.*When I have a convenient season.* He put off deciding to repent, but his good feelings vanished. The convenient season never came. To have become a Christian would have been costly, but so was sin. *He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul.* There are several sources from which Felix might have expected that Paul could derive funds to buy his liberty. He knew from Paul's own statement (v. 17) that he had been collecting

money for the poor at Jerusalem. Then Paul had many friends who would "pluck their very eyes out" to save him from prison. But in any case Paul would not be willing to give bribes even if money were plenty.

VIOLETS FOR MOTHER.

She walked timidly into a florist's where the young proprietor was selling a society girl a big bunch of American Beauties. She was 9 years old. An old shawl covered her head and shoulders, showing garments scrupulously clean beneath it.

"I want some violets to take to my mamma," said the little one, holding out a dime.

"I think some cheaper flowers would do, my girl," said the man.

"No, sir," came from the tot. "I want violets. Ain't that money 'nuff to pay for them? My mamma is sick an' my papa's dead. Mamma, she gets whiter and whiter every day, and jes' coughs off. This morning she felt so weak and bad I jes' thought she'd die. But she said if she could only live until the warm springtime came again, and she could smell violets once more, she jes' new she'd get better, an' I had this dime, so I—"

But the florist was fumbling before a glass case marked "Violets, 75 cents per dozen," and there was moisture in his eyes and an ache in his throat.

In a little while he had a big bunch—more than a hundred—wrapped up. He gravely took the child's ten cents, gave her the precious blossoms and held the door open, bowing her out as gallantly as if she were some grand customer.

The dime he carefully wrapped up in a piece of paper and put in his purse.

"Dying for a breath of springtime and the sweet odor of violets," he muttered.

That's all.

But that 10 cents! Why that dime would almost buy a sinner's ransom at the gates of heaven.

And God's recording angel smiled as he wrote the name of that young florist, like Ben Adhem's name, above all the other names that day.

NOT THE SAME.

A young man who had robbed his father and ran away from home came back after an absence of five years. His mother's heart leaped for joy when she learned that he was coming and greeted him with all the wealth of a mother's love. But two hours later she threw herself into the arms of another member of the family and weeping said, "He is not my boy. He is dead to his mother's love. His eyes don't look at me as they used to and his voice has lost all of its dear old tones." He was dead in trespasses and sins. Such is the sinner's condition.

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"I was very poorly and could hardly get about the house. I was tired out all the time. Then I tried Ayer's Sarsaparilla, and it only took two bottles to make me feel perfectly well."—Mrs. N. S. Swinney, Princeton, Mo.

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