

Philip and the Ethiopian.

APRIL 8

ACTS VIII: 26-40.

Golden Text, Acts 8: 39.

PHILIP was one of the seven deacons, ch. 6: 5. After the death of Stephen he went with others to Samaria where he had begun a remarkably successful ministry, v. 6-8, when the unexpected summons reached him—"Arise and go." To abandon so hopeful a work on such short notice and without any ostensible reason was a severe trial of his faith: but, like Abram, he went, Heb. 11: 8. *Gaza*, the scene of Sampson's exploits, is one of the oldest cities in the world, fifty miles S.-West from Jerusalem. V. 27 *Ethiopia*—a term applied to all Africa outside of Egypt. The Ethiopians were black in colour and were looked upon as the meanest of the nations. Yet the gospel is sent to them. This man was the chamberlain or chief state officer of Candace—a general name given to the female rulers of that country. *Had come to worship*—Wealth and position are not incompatible with a spirit of true devotion. He was probably a proselyte, who had renounced idolatry, and had travelled some 1,200 miles to be instructed by the Apostles in the Holy City. Vs. 28-30. To reach Egypt he must pass over this desert road, and to relieve the monotony, he takes up the copy of the Septuagint which he had procured in Jerusalem and perhaps now for the first time had begun to read it for himself. *The Spirit* that led Philip to address him was, we may believe, nothing more than the natural impulse of a man full of missionary zeal, ready to embrace every opportunity of doing good to others. *Understandest thou?* The question was an important one. We cannot profit by the Scriptures unless, in some degree, we understand them. Vs. 31-33. *How can I?* A genuine exhibition of sincerity and humility. Those who would learn must first see their need to be taught. *The place of the Scriptures*—see Isa. 53: 7, 8. V. 34. *Of whom speaketh the prophet?* He must have heard when in Jerusalem of the crucifixion of Jesus and of the subsequent growth of the Christian Church, but he had failed to connect this prediction with its literal accomplishment. Vs. 35-36. *Philip began*—taking that passage as his text, and reviewing the whole life of Christ, he shewed conclusively that in Him this prophecy was fulfilled—that he was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of sinners. The next question shews how skillfully he had dealt with this enquirer,—"*What doth hinder?*"—Nothing stands in the way of any man's salvation but the wilful rejection of Christ. V. 37. *If thou believest*—This verse is omitted in the R. V. but the condition is true nevertheless, ch. 16: 31; Mark 16: 16; Rom. 10: 10. Vs. 38, 39. The circumstances favour the view that they alighted from the chariot, went barefoot into the water, and that Philip sprinkled water upon him, agreeably to the imagery of the prophet whose words they had just been reading, Isa. 52: 15. Vs. 39, 40. We see here how the gospel was propagated in those early times, and how doors of usefulness are often opened in unlikely places.

Saul's Conversion.

APRIL 15.

ACTS IX: 1-18.

Golden Text, Acts, 9: 18.

SAUL was born at Tarsus in Cilicia about the year 2, B. C. His parents were Jewish Hellenists. His father was a Roman citizen in good circumstances. He was himself a Pharisee and received a liberal education, having studied under Gamaliel, ch. 22: 3. He also learned a trade, ch. 18: 3. He took the Latin name of Paul in preference to the Hebrew, Saul, when he entered upon his ministry to the heathen. It is doubtful if he ever saw our Lord in the flesh, but he must have become familiar with the new religion during his residence in Jerusalem, and his natural force of character led him to oppose it with all his might. (see Conybeare and Howson's Life of St. Paul) V. 1. *Breathing out*—ever since the martyrdom of Stephen he cherished deep-seated enmity to the cause, Rom. 8: 7, planning how he might root out the Christian sect. *The high-priest*—Ananus, the virtual head of the Sanhedrim. V. 2. *Desired letters*—as a passport, and authorization. *Damascus*, see Jan. RECORD, page 21. *The Synagogues*—rather to the elders and rulers of the several churches. *Of this way*—sympathizers with the new movement. *Bound*—charges of heresy must be brought before the supreme court at Jerusalem. V. 3. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus is 133 miles. *A light*—so much brighter than the light at noon, he was dazed by it and fell to the ground. V. 4. "*Saul, Saul,*"—there was a tenderness in this repetition of his name, and in the question "*Why persecutest thou me?*"—not my disciples nor my church. V. 5. *Lord*—This word in his lips was only the customary utterance of respect for a superior. *Jesus whom thou persecutest*—Dishonour put on Christ's followers is an insult to Himself. The words which follow are omitted in the R. V., but the orientalism is expressive of the refractory ox, only driving the goad deeper by kicking against it, intimating not only the vanity of his attempts to crush the gospel, but the injury he was doing to himself. V. 6. *Lord*—now the title seems to have a new meaning. *What shall I do?* The conviction had flashed upon him that what he had been doing hitherto was all wrong, and that he had already some measure of confidence in the mysterious personage who had thus arrested him in his mad career. *Go into the city*—"go and reflect upon your past misdeeds: needed guidance will be granted in due time." V. 7. His companions, less affected by sounds they did not understand, were sooner on their feet than he, yet stupified and confused. He had seen what they did not see. V. 8. Saul arose humbled and subdued, but blind and helpless—a needed discipline. *Brought him into Damascus*—who had thought to enter it as a distinguished ambassador! V. 9. So great was the conflict of his feelings he could neither eat nor drink. But they were three precious days which he could never forget. V. 10. *Ananias*—a Jewish convert in good standing, ch. 22: 12, whose name only occurs in this connection.