

THE GOSPEL AT ANTIOCH.

Oct. 30. A. D. 40-44.
Lesson, Acts 11, 19-30. Golden Text, Acts 11: 21.
Memory vs. 21-24. Catechism Q., 101.

The lesson goes back and links itself to the persecution that arose about Stephen, tells how the result of that was so different from what the persecutors intended,—how instead of hindering God's cause they spread it so much the more, even to Antioch, the capital of Syria, 300 miles north from Jerusalem.

I. The Gospel given to Antioch, vs. 19-21.

II. The first "Christians" at Antioch, vs. 23-26.

III. The "poor" collection at Antioch, vs. 27-30.

I. vs. 19-21. *Scattered abroad*—They thought it an evil thing that they had to flee for their lives. They went forth weeping bearing precious seed. But God meant it for good. *Phœnicia*—Phœnicia, a narrow strip of level country lying west of the range of Mount Lebanon, along the Mediterranean, and containing the cities of Tyre and Sidon. *Cyprus*—An island in the Mediterranean. *Antioch*—A city of Asia Minor, long afterward one of the leading centres of Christianity. *Jews only*—They had not yet learned the lesson taught to Peter at Caesarea, (see last lesson). *The Grecians*—The men of Cyprus and Cyrene were of broader view than the Jews who had scattered from Jerusalem and preached the gospel to the Grecians by whom it was heartily accepted. Many believed and turned to the Lord.

II. vs. 22-26. *Tidings*—Strange, glad tidings of the spirit of the gospel. *Barnabas*—Hearing of this wondrous work of grace, the Church at Jerusalem sent forth a trusty messenger to see the nature and extent of it. *Glad*—The work was all that could be expected. The kingdom of Christ was extending as they had scarcely dreamed of. *Cleave*—This is the needed exhortation in every work of grace, *cleave to the Lord*. *Seek Saul*—Saul had been for some time living in seclusion in Tarsus, his native city, whither he had fled from persecution at Jerusalem. Barnabas now seeing the great opening at Antioch and the need of a helper, bethought him of Paul who was not far away, at Tarsus, went after him, took him to Antioch, and for a year they labored there. This was the first year of Paul's great work as the Apostle of the Gentiles. *Called Christians*—Perhaps by their enemies as a term of reproach, but if so it was only one of the many instances in which the malice of Satan defeats its own ends and tends to the glory of God.

III. vs. 27-30. *Send relief*—The spirit that animated the early Jewish Christians when they sold their possessions and goods and gave to every man as every man had need, showed itself at Antioch, and will always show itself where Christ is, for it is the spirit of Christ. *Ability*—This is the true rule of Christian giving. They gave where there was need, without waiting to be asked, and gave according to their ability. These first so named "Christians" were a pattern to all Christians of every age. *To the Elders*—The Church at Jerusalem had sent forth Barnabas to see the work at Antioch. More than a year afterward he comes back with this token of the genuineness of the work.

1. All efforts to stop the spread of the gospel are in vain.

2. When Christians leave their homes for other lands, from whatever cause, they should carry their Christianity with them and make it known by life and work.

3. True Christianity will show itself in doing good to the bodies as well as to the souls of men.

PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON.

Nov. 6. A. D. 44.
Lesson, Act. 12: 1-17. Golden Text, Ps. 34: 7.
Memory vs. 5-8. Catechism, Q., 102

The persecution that had arisen about Stephen had some time since quieted down. Paul, a moving spirit in it had, more than four years since, joined the Christians. The disciples, scattered from Jerusalem and working elsewhere, were not so constantly before the eye of the Jewish authorities and there was a period of rest. Now, about the time that Paul and Barnabas came up to Jerusalem with the donation from Antioch for the poor, Herod Agrippa was king over all Palestine, and, perhaps for reasons of his own at first, and afterward to please the Jews, took into his own hands the work of persecuting the Christians. How he was foiled, in the case of Peter, we are told in the present lesson.

There are here two places mentioned, the prison and the prayer meeting, and two scenes in each place, four scenes in all.

I. The Prison, all dark, vs. 1-6.

II. The prayer meeting, vs. 5, 12.

III. The Prison, deliverance, vs. 7-11.

IV. The prayer meeting, praising, vs. 13-17.

I. vs. 1-6. *Vex certain*—the more prominent and offensive to the Jews—*Killed James*—the first recorded death among the true apostles. *Four quaternions*—i.e. four fours, 16 soldiers, or four watches of four men each. *Easter*—The passover, see revised version. Easter was an invention of a later age. *Two chains*—A ring around Peter's left wrist was linked to a ring around a soldier's right wrist, and a ring around Peter's right wrist was linked to a ring around a soldier's left wrist. *Sleeping*—It was calm trust in Peter, but what a picture of the guilty, sleeping men bound in sin, sleeping on as if they were safe. *Keepers*—The other two soldiers of the watch.

II. vs. 5, 12. *Prayer v. 5*—This was all they could do. *Without ceasing*—They did not get discouraged and give up. *Many praying, v. 12*, it was the last night, there seemed little hope, but still they prayed. What an example to us as we pray for souls in bondage to sin.

III. vs. 7-11. How like to what the spirit of God does in awaking the slumbering sinner and striking off his bonds in answer to prayer. *Arise*—How many are awakened and go to sleep again and their waking brings no deliverance. *Follow me*—Christ's command to every one set free from bondage to sin. *His own accord*—When we are following God's leading He will remove the obstacles. *Come to himself*—He had been in a dazed state thinking he was dreaming.

IV. vs. 12-17. *House of Mary*—He knew where to find kindred spirits. *Praying*—for him, see v. 5. *Hearken*—They would be afraid of the Jews and she would ask "who is there" before opening. *Opened not*—What a touch of nature, forgetting to let him in she ran to tell the news. *Mad*—When told that their prayers were answered, they would not believe it. How we dishonor God by our lack of faith. *Astonished*—Even when they saw the answer they were amazed.

1. God cares for his own and will always deliver them in his own way.

2. God always hears and answers prayer. "Sometimes He says yes and sometimes He says no," but he always says what he sees to be best.

3. How weak and unworthy our faith in the promises of the heavenly Father.

4. Prayer is an unfailing resort for the Christian, even in the darkest hour.