

THE BIBLE CLASS.

PAUL'S FOURTH MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

(For Oct. 23th.—Selections from 1 Timothy and Titus.)

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The abrupt termination of the book of Acts has led to many attempted explanations. A very probable reason assumes that Luke contemplated writing a third treatise, continuing the apostolic history from the first Roman imprisonment of Paul. The assumption that he wrote no more because he knew no more in regard to Paul is incredible, if he outlived him, and this he must have done if the Gospel and the Acts were written, as seems most probable, within the decade after the destruction of Jerusalem. That one who had "traced the course of all things accurately from the first" should leave his friend Theophilus with an unfinished narrative is not what might be expected. In the absence, however, of such a continuation the student of Paul's life must be content to gather what information he can from other sources. Fortunately he is not left in total darkness.

PAUL'S LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS.

Letters purporting to have been written by Paul, two to Timothy and one to Titus, survive and are preserved in the New Testament canon. The genuineness of these letters has, however, been more sharply questioned than of any other of Paul's writings. If he was not liberated from his first Roman imprisonment, their spuriousness must be conceded, since they mention travels for which it is impossible to find a place in the previous history recorded by Luke. But so clear is the Pauline style of these letters, so far above the reach of any second century imitator in their moral and spiritual tone, that the Church has gladly accepted them as genuine relics of Paul's ministry. But this acceptance involves the necessity of supposing that he was liberated when his first trial came on in Rome, and that several years were devoted to missionary work, after which he was again arrested, sent as a prisoner to Rome, suffered a severe imprisonment during which he wrote the second letter to Timothy, and then crowned his life of heroic service for Christ with a martyr's death.

PAUL'S JOURNEYS AFTER HIS RELEASE.

The data for constructing a complete and reliable itinerary of Paul's fourth missionary journey are not at hand. In the Epistles to Timothy and Titus he mentions being in several places. But the precise order in which he visited them is largely a matter of conjecture. His request to Philemon to prepare him a lodging indicates not only a firm conviction that his trial would issue in his release but also a fixed determination to proceed at once to the churches in and around Ephesus, of which that at Colosse, Philemon's home, was one. At Ephesus he found many moral and doctrinal disorders, which required more time for adjustment than he could give. In this position of peril and responsibility he left his beloved Timothy, hoping soon to return from Macedonia. Detained longer than he expected he sent Timothy a letter of instruction concerning the work committed to him. About this time he also visited Crete. Whether the churches planted there were the fruit of his own labors or existed before he came is not clear. Here he left Titus, committing to his charge a work in some respects similar to that of Timothy at Ephesus, and requiring analogous instructions which were embodied in a letter. Whether Paul realized his long-cherished hope of carrying the Gospel as far west as Spain is uncertain. This period of liberation seems to have been one of incessant movement among the churches and of intense activity in strengthening them for impending trials and against the unhealthy crop of heresies which were springing up on every hand.

THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS.

The Pastoral Epistles treat with unusual fulness questions pertaining to the organization of the Christian Church. Writing to Timothy Paul defined the origin and purpose of the Church in the memorable words, "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Unlike the temple of Diana, under whose shadow Timothy labored, the Church was a divine institution, not built by human hands, but composed of a spiritual community of living believers in a living God. Its purpose was to serve as a pillar or support of that body of revealed truth which God has made known to men. Even as the massive roof of Diana's temple was supported by one hundred and twenty-seven columns sixty feet in height, each one the gift of a king. Their strength was such as to promise enduring stability to the temple of which they formed a part; yet all have fallen, the very site of the majestic temple having been lost for centuries. But the Church, though assailed by innumerable foes, and injured by those who have professed to be its

friends, stands more solid from age to age as the divine upholder of truth in the world.

Its officers must be worthy of their sacred trust. Bishops were still overseers, or pastors, of single local churches. The term had not yet developed the hierarchical sense possessed by it since the latter part of the second century. In general the officers of the church must be "without reproach." A teacher of pure morality must himself be a man of pure morals. He who would pluck out a mote from a brother's eye cannot carry a beam in his own eye. His domestic relations must not be a scandal to the Church. In his personal habits and conduct he must exemplify the Gospel of peace, of self-restraint, of liberality, and of kindness. He must not allow men to suspect that his Christian zeal is stimulated by a grovelling love of pecuniary gain. With all these qualifications he must combine a power to present truth to men in such a manner as to win them from sin to righteousness. The moral qualifications of bishops were substantially those required also of deacons and deaconesses. They must be serious in deportment, and free from avarice, intemperate desires, and obsequiousness. They all should remember that in a special sense they represent Christ before the world, and that the success of their ministry depends on the fidelity with which they reflect His image.

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON IV.—PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA.—OCT. 24.

(Acts xxvi. 19-32.)

GOLDEN TEXT—"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."—Matt. x. 32.

TIME AND PLACE—A. D. 60, Caesarea.

INTRODUCTION—While Paul was in the custody of the Roman governor, Felix, his case was deferred from time to time by his corrupt official with the hope that his prisoner would seek his freedom by the payment of money, but failing of this, when, after two years, he was succeeded in the office of governor by Porcius Festus, he left Paul bound. The enemies of Paul at once approached the new governor, asking that Paul might be brought up to Jerusalem and there tried, intending in the event of his consent to lie in wait and kill him. But Festus refused, and appointed a time for hearing the case at Caesarea, and when Paul was brought before him, and it was proposed that he should be sent to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appealed unto Caesar, that is, demanded that his case should be heard by the emperor at Rome. As he was a Roman citizen the governor could do no otherwise than grant his request. While waiting a favorable opportunity to send his prisoner to Rome, Festus received a visit from King Agrippa and Bernice. Paul's case was mentioned to the king and he expressed a desire to hear him. Our lesson gives us in part his address before the king.

VERSE BY VERSE—19. "Agrippa."—King Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II., son of Herod Agrippa who slew James and imprisoned Peter, and the grandson of Herod the Great. "The heavenly vision."—The vision which Paul saw at the time of his conversion.

20. "Damascus." The city where Paul was baptized and professed the Christian faith, the oldest city of the world, one hundred and thirty miles northeast of Jerusalem. "Jerusalem—Judea—Gentiles."—This gives an outline of Paul's labors in the Gospel up to this date.

21. "For these causes."—That is, because of his doctrines and his zeal in teaching them. "Caught me in the temple."—Referring to his arrest two years before.

22. "Continue unto this day."—His work of preaching was continued even while he was a prisoner. "Small and great."—Every rank of society. "Which the prophets and Moses did say." He taught nothing that was not taught in the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

23. "That Christ."—The Messiah promised in the Scriptures. "Show light unto the people."—That is, to the Jews. "Gentiles."—All other nations but the Jews.

24. "Festus."—The Roman governor. "Much learning doth make thee mad."—Paul's teachings seemed to Festus so unreasonable and wild that he could only regard them as the words of a madman.

25. "The king knoweth."—Agrippa was a Jew, and so familiar with the prophecies of the Scriptures. "These things."—The facts of Christ's life and death. "Not done in a corner."—The facts were well known to all the people of Israel.

26. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—Many regard these words as having been spoken ironically, but we prefer to regard them as expressing the feeling of the moment.

27. "Except these bonds."—Referring to the chains with which he was bound.