

THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

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STEPHEN'S DEFENCE.

OCTOBER 1st.—Acts vii. 1-50.

Golden Text: Romans ix. 5.

I. PERSONS.—*Stephen*.—His character as revealed to us: Acts vi. 5, 8, 10: and vii. 55. The nature of his preaching: the charge against him Acts vi. 11, 13, 14, illustrated by his own defence, shows that he was the forerunner of St. Paul in warning against the abuse of privileges, such as the temple, the law, the holy land; or depending on such as substitutes for religion. He was the first of the seven deacons, and to him the word "martyr" is first applied: Acts xxii. 20.

The High Priest and Sanhedrim.—The great Ecclesiastical Council of the Jews, consisting of seventy judges, all of whom had to be fathers of families. The president sat in the middle, and around him in a semi-circle, were the other members. One of the seventy present on this occasion was probably Saul of Tarsus: Acts vii. 28 and 26, 10.

PLACE.—The room in which they met was the hall "Gazith" or "the stone chamber," partly within and partly without the Temple Court; or in one of the Courts of the Temple open to the sky. "This holy place" Acts vi. 13, 14.

The Scene.—Stephen is on trial. With calm dignity the president asks him, "Guilty or not guilty?" He faces the Court, and pleads.

II. *Nature of the Defence*.—A Review of their own History.—As he touches each successive stage, he quietly brings out that the true religion was always spiritual, not local; and that their fathers had always rejected those whom God had sent. At the same time, he shows himself to be a true Jew, believing in the divine mission of his people.

v. 2-8.—God appeared to Abraham when in a heathen land, before the promises or the covenant. The Jews believed, too, that Abraham's kindred had rejected him for teaching the worship of the true God. God blessed Abraham for his faith. He had "not so much as to set his foot on" of the holy land. He had to buy even a sepulchre in it: Gen. 23. He was told that 400 years would pass away before his seed should inherit it—yet he believed.

v. 9-19.—God appeared to Joseph, intending to deliver his brethren by him; but their fathers rejected Joseph, and sold him for thirty pieces of silver.

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE.

OCTOBER 8th.—Acts vii., 20-30.

Golden Text: Hebrews x. 9.

v. 20-36.—God appeared to Moses, and made him the ruler and deliverer (redeemer) of the people; but *this* Moses they rejected. (The deeds of one man are ascribed to those who are of the same mind, Rom. i. 32). So with *this* Jesus: Acts ii. 36. All this divine economy was *previous* to the law, or the temple, or the possession of the holy land.

v. 37.—The Pharisees thought that they believed in Moses: John ix. 29. Hear then the words of Moses: Acts iii. 22; Deut. xviii. 15. Moses was a prophet of a unique kind. He redeemed from Egypt, and began the Church of Israel: Num. xii. 6-8; Deut. xxxiv. 10. "One like unto me," said Moses, "would come to redeem from a worse bondage, and begin His own Church": Heb. iii. 2-5. "Hear Him."

v. 38.—Moses was mediator between the Angel of the Covenant and the people. "Lively;" only living, not life-giving as Christ's. Deut. xxxiii. 2.

v. 39-41.—Another instance of rejection by "the fathers" of God's messenger. "Made" Gods, cannot be Gods: Ex. xxxii, 4; Num. xiv. 4; Neh. ix. 18. The law then of which they boasted, had not kept their fathers from idolatry.

v. 42-45.—A summary of God's dealing with them from their wilderness idolatry down to the times of Amos. They pretended to offer sacrifices to God, but He did not accept them, because they secretly bore about the portable shrine of Moloch (Mars), and of Kemphan or Chiun (Saturn). (Mars was worshipped under the figure or fashion of a man, and Saturn under that of a star). They did this, though they had in the wilderness the shrine that witnessed of Jehovah, made after a figure or fashion divinely appointed,—which shrine they bore with Joshua into the Holy Land. The taking possession of the land was not complete till the time of David. During all this time, "the fathers" had frequently rejected God and the saviours He sent them.

v. 46-50.—Though David asked permission (2 Sam. 7.2) to build (Ps. cxxxii. 2-5), and Solomon did build God a house, David, Solomon, and the prophets repudiate the idea that God is confined to any locality: 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 14, 16; 1 Kings viii. 27; Isa. lxvi. 1-2).