

## The Sunday School.

### BIBLE LESSON.

Adapted from Hurlbut's Notes.

First Quarter.

Lesson IX.—February 18. Acts 8:1-17.

#### THE DISCIPLES DISPERSED.

##### GOLDEN TEXT.

They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word, Acts 8:4.

THE SAMARITANS were a mixed race of Jews and Gentiles, who accepted the Pentateuch only as their Bible. Down to this century the Jews of Palestine hate them more bitterly than they hate either Christians or Turks. This hatred is compounded of race antagonism, of repeated tribal strife, of social intercourse socially and in business, and religious bigotry and jealousy. The city of Samaria first comes into notice as built by King Omri to be the capital of Israel (1 Kings 16:23, 24).

#### I. THE CHURCH SCATTERED. VERSES 1-4.

1. SAUL WAS CONSENTED UNTO HIS DEATH.—To Stephen's death. If Saul was, as we suppose, a member of the Sanhedrin, he had doubtless voted against Stephen. AT THAT TIME.—On that very day. THERE WAS A GREAT PERSECUTION AGAINST THE CHURCH.—We are not to think of "the church" as having yet developed any such elaborate organization as is now shown by almost every one of the "denominations;" the phrase means simply the body of believers in Jesus. EXCEPT THE APOSTLES.—They had not yet fully adopted Stephen's advanced views concerning the Mosaic law, but were still scrupulous adherents to its ritual; besides, some portion of the veneration with which the people had formerly regarded them (Acts 3:13) still remained. Both causes would make it less hazardous for them than for some others to remain. It is probable that not all the Christians of Jerusalem had approved of Stephen's aggressive course.

2. DEVOUT MEN.—Probably not Christians, but orthodox Jews. This is a notable indication of the general leavening of thought at this time. GREAT LAMENTATION.—A public demonstration of sorrow and esteem; intended as a protest of the more moderate Hebrews against Stephen's tumultuous murder.

3. MADE HAVOC.—Under ecclesiastical authority. HAILING.—An old English word akin to "hauling." AND WOMEN.—Repeated also in Acts 9:2 and 22:4 as a great aggravation of his cruelty.

4. THEREFORE.—The persecution ministered to the success of the truth. PREACHING.—Not only in set sermons, but by every sort of utterance. THE WORD.—The Gospel of Christ.

#### II. THE CHURCH GROWING. VERSES 5-17.

5. PHILIP WENT DOWN.—Philip the "evangelist." Doubtless Philip the apostle remained in Jerusalem with the other apostles. If the evangelist of Samaria had been an apostle it would not have been necessary to send Peter and John down there to superintend his work; and in Acts 8:40 this Philip is traced to Caesarea, while in Acts 21:8 we find him characterized as "Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven." Doubtless his missionary zeal fixed upon him this distinctive title of evangelist. PREACHED CHRIST.—Better, "preached 'the Christ'" announced that the Messiah had come.

6. ALL CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES may be gathered under two heads: to live Christ, and to preach Christ; to duplicate the Master in all human sympathy, heroic rectitude, and dependence on the Father, while, at the same time, proclaiming Jesus as himself the divinely accepted propitiation for the sins of the world.

7. THE PEOPLE WITH ONE ACCORD GAVE HEED.—"The multitudes." A great contrast to the recent outbreak of rage in Jerusalem. Perhaps the favorable reception of Philip may have been partially due to recollections of the visit of Jesus. Evidently it was largely due to the wonderful beneficent power which Philip miraculously exerted. This we are expressly informed by the phrase HEARING AND SEEING THE MIRACLES.

8. UNCLEAN SPIRITS.—Cases of demoniacal possession are frequently mentioned in the gospels. Precisely what they were no man can now tell. There are not lacking in modern times diseases which are at once physical and moral in their character, and which closely resemble some phases of demoniacal possession. Delirium tremens is one of these, and there are many others. It does not follow from the reference in the New Testament that all cases of demoniacal possession were of precisely the same sort. Nor is there any direct statement that they only began with the time of Christ and ceased shortly after-

ward. But if we admit that Jesus was more than mortal, and was introduced into this world for the purpose of redeeming an alienated race to God, it is not strange if the manifestations of the enemy of souls were more assertive and defiant than at any other time. PALSIES.—Cases of paralysis, a common affliction in the East.

9. GREAT JOY.—The healed sufferers would rejoice; their sympathetic friends would rejoice; most of all would those rejoice whose hearts had partaken of the spiritual blessing.

10. JOY IS ONE OF THE STRIKING CHARACTERISTICS of the new life which Jesus came into the world to give. The kingdom of heaven is said to consist of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," and the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, and peace."

11. SIMON.—Nothing is certainly known of this man except the narrative here given. "Josephus" mentions a magician, so named, but there are historical difficulties in the way of identifying that Simon with this one. BEWITCHED THE PEOPLE.—Charmed them. "Such impostors swarmed over the ancient world, pretending to magical powers derived from the spirit world; they were readers of the stars, interpreters of dreams, fortune-tellers, medicine men—in brief, they exercised the same arts as the modern fortune-teller, and by much the same methods; but they were as much more successful in those days than these, as the age was more ignorant and credulous." GIVING OUT THAT HIMSELF WAS SOME GREAT ONE.—He probably claimed to be, what the people admitted the Great Power of God, personified (see next verse). He was the popular man of Samaria till Philip came.

12. THIS MAN IS THE GREAT POWER OF GOD.—This should read, "This man is the power of God which is called Great." "Power" seems to be here used, as in Rom. 8:38 and Eph. 1:21, to describe a celestial being.

13. SIMON HIMSELF BELIEVED ALSO.—It is easy to say that Simon was a hypocrite; that "what he did believe was not that Jesus was the Messiah, but that Philip was a greater magician than himself;" and that he CONTINUED WITH PHILIP "in order either to hide the shame of his defeat, or to discover the secret of Philip's miraculous power." And his effort to purchase the Holy Ghost (verses 18, 19) would seem partly to justify this view. But it is probable that Simon's mind was really impressed by the power of the truth that Philip preached; and it is quite possible that his profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah was sincere. But in the first place his belief was not a belief of the heart, and in the second place he sadly misinterpreted what he heard and saw.

14. THE APOSTLES.—The body of the apostolate was still united, notwithstanding the persecution by Saul; and the apostles were recognized as overseers and rulers of the church. RECEIVED.—Accepted. THE WORD OF GOD.—"The sum and substance of the Gospel." SENT UNTO THEM PETER AND JOHN.—The establishment of the Gospel in Samaria, among an alien people and by one not an apostle, was a new departure, doubtless alarming to some conservative minds, and plainly requiring the supervision of the twelve. The phraseology clearly indicates that Peter exercised no primacy among the apostles which involved supreme authority. A similar indication is found in Acts 11:2, where "those of the circumcision" call Peter to account for his actions in Caesarea. John appears here for the last time in Acts.

15. WHEN THEY WERE COME DOWN.—Jerusalem stands on high ground, and to almost any other part of the land travelers were said to "go down." PRAYED FOR THEM.—Satisfied that the work of grace was genuine, they besought for these con-

verts the gifts which they themselves enjoyed. THAT THEY MIGHT RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST.—Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This gift was not the ordinary grace of conversion and Christian consciousness of adoption, but the peculiar manifestation of the Spirit, such as was given upon the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), bestowed through the apostles only, except in one remarkable instance, the conversion of Saul.

17. THEN LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM.—As the outward sign of the impartation of divine power, not by a magic form, but bestowed in answer to prayer and in response to faith—"just as water: in our houses comes not from the pipes, but from springs or lakes, yet it comes 'through' the pipes." THEY RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST.—Thus repeating the miracles of Pentecost, though on a smaller scale. Thus upon Samaritan soil, and among a despised race (John 4:9), was established a church having the same marks of divine power as in Jerusalem. "There are no successors of the apostles who possess such miraculous endowments as those Simon coveted and sought to purchase. But the Holy Spirit as an inward and sanctifying gift is offered to all believers independently of priesthood or external rite."

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