

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER—STUDIES IN THE ACTS AND EPISTLES.

JANUARY, 1884.

NOTE.—The Scripture verses to be committed to memory are indicated by an index [227] at the side.

A.D. 50.]

[Jan. 6.

LESSON I.—THE CONFERENCE AT JERUSALEM.

Acts 15. 1-11.

GENERAL STATEMENT.



1 And *a* certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, *b* Except ye be circumcised *c* after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

a Gal. 2. 12.—*b* John 7. 22.—*c* Gen. 17. 10; Lev. 12. 3.

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that *d* Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

d Gal. 2. 1.

3 And *e* being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring *f* the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

e Rom. 15. 24; 1 Cor. 15. 6.—*f* Chap. 14. 27.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

5 But there *a* rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

a Or, rose up, said they, certain.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe.

8 And God, *g* which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, *h* giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us:

h 1 Chron. 28. 9; 29. 17; Jer. 11. 20; 17. 10; 20. 12; chap. 1. 24; Heb. 4. 13; Rev. 2. 23.—*g* Chap. 10. 44.

9 And *i* put no difference between us and them, *j* purifying their hearts by faith.

i Rom. 10. 11.—*j* Chap. 10. 43; 1 Cor. 1. 2; 1 Peter 1. 22.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to *k* put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

k Matt. 23. 4; Gal. 5. 1.

11 But *l* we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

l Rom. 3. 24; Eph. 1. 7; 2. 8.

The most vital question that arose in the history of early Christianity was that whether the Gospel should become a religion for the world, bringing salvation to every race, or whether it was to an obscure sect among a single, narrow-minded, exclusive people; whether men were to be saved by faith in Christ, or by making themselves and their descendants Jews, wearing phylacteries upon their foreheads, and observing the interminable restrictions of a fast-fading Phariseeism. From the day when Saul of Tarsus became a leader in the Church, until the destruction of Jerusalem, forty years afterward, this was the living issue, and upon its settlement depended the centuries to come. Upon the side of a broad Gospel, free to all, having faith in Christ as its sole requirement, we find Paul and his companions in the missionary work of the Church; upon the other side we find certain unnamed Jews, "false brethren," followers of Jesus by profession, but Jews first and Christians in only a minor sense, claiming, but without reason, to represent the mother-Church in Jerusalem, and the weighty influence of the Apostle James, "the brother of the Lord." The lines of division were drawn at Antioch, then the centre of missionary effort, where Paul and Barnabas stood as the champions of liberty in Christ. The contest was transferred to Jerusalem, and again Paul and Barnabas appeared, seconded by all the power of the Church outside of Jewry, pleading with the twelve and the elders for a recognition to Gentile Christianity. The conference at Jerusalem was not a Church council, with plenary power, but a discussion in which all strove for a settlement in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. The great victory was won when Peter, the chief of the apostles, took his place boldly by the side of his brother Paul, and James, the most exact of all the Jews in obedience to the law, avowed the same view, that henceforth there was to be in Christ Jesus neither Jew nor Gentile, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but that salvation was for all men upon the same terms of faith.

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

Verse 1. Certain men. Pharisees who believed in Jesus as the Saviour, but were still strenuous supporters of the Jewish customs, which they regarded as necessary to salvation.