



LESSON,—SUNDAY FEBRUARY 21, 1909.

## Stephen the First Christian Martyr.

Acts vi., 8-15; vii., 54—viii., 3. Memory verses vii., 55, 56. Read Acts vi., 1—viii., 3.

### Golden Text.

They stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Acts vii., 59.

### Home Readings.

Monday, February 15.—Acts vi., 1-15.  
 Tuesday, February 16.—Acts vii., 1-16.  
 Wednesday, February 17.—Acts vii., 17-34.  
 Thursday, February 18.—Acts vii., 35-53.  
 Friday, February 19.—Acts vii., 54—viii., 3.  
 Saturday, February 20.—Ex. xxxiv., 29-35.  
 Sunday, February 21.—Rev. vii., 9-17.

### FOR THE JUNIOR CLASSES.

Do you remember what we have been studying about these last few Sundays? About the beginning of the Christian Church just after Christ died, and how the disciples tried to do what Jesus would have had them do. What did Jesus do when He was here on earth? He helped the poor, and healed the sick, made lame people able to walk, made blind people see again, taught the people about God and good things, and all the time, as Peter once said, 'He went about doing good.' Did the Jewish rulers thank Him for all He did for the people? No, we know that they hated and crucified Him because they were jealous of Him. Now we have been studying about Christ's disciples who, like Jesus, were teaching the people, helping the poor, and healing the sick. Can any one tell me what the Jewish rulers did to stop them? Yes, first of all they put Peter and John in prison, then later they put all the disciples in prison and had them scourged before they let them go. Now to-day we are to learn about one of Christ's followers that they even killed. What does our golden text say? 'And they stoned Stephen.' We want to find out who Stephen was, and what he did that anybody should have so cruelly killed him.

### FOR THE SENIORS.

The little that there is said about Stephen is not the measure of what might well be said about such a splendid character, but it is not the way of the Bible to eulogize. The facts are given simply, and little space though they occupy, they set forth one of the finest characters in the history of the world. The trouble that seemed to threaten the peace and growth of the early church was met with prompt measures on the part of the apostles. It is another indication of the snare that there is in money at all times if it is not carefully watched against. These foreign Jews in the old national city had been for some time cared for and helped, yet as the suspicion crept in among them that they were not being treated quite so well as others, discontent and jealousy awoke. The apostles realized that the early simple organization could no longer exist. The growth of the church brought in new problems that had to be met by new methods. It is notable that one of the foremost among the seven deacons now chosen, Stephen, was a Hellenist himself, one of those Greek-speaking Jews from other lands among whom the trouble had arisen. Another was Nicolas, a foreigner who was not even a Jew by birth. Philip, too, the only other one of the deacons whose work we hear much of, was apparently a Grecian Jew. So we find that although the Jews native to Jerusalem formed by far the larger part of the early church membership, they were glad

to show their confidence in their brethren of foreign birth by choosing trustees of the poor fund from among them. Stephen naturally set to work earnestly in the work for which he was most fitted, not trying to deal with the Jews of Jerusalem where the apostles were so successful, but disputing with the foreigners as they gathered in their own synagogues in the city. They were none the less bigoted Jews for their foreign birth, and when they found his arguments unanswerable they stopped short at nothing in order to silence him. It was not the truth which they were anxious to support, but 'the traditions of their fathers' (Matt. xv., 1-9; Mark vii., 9; Gal. i., 13, 14). That is the great danger of forms and formalism at all times: that they may build up a barrier against the reception of new light, and make the worshipper cling to the form instead of to his God. These Jews were willing to break the tenth commandment in order to silence this unanswerable man, Stephen. The introduction of Saul at the close of this story is of the greatest interest. We see him a young man, hardened in fanaticism, perfectly sure he was right, glad to have even the smallest part in the death of Stephen; sharp contrast to the picture presented by the dying man, gentle and forgiving in his last breath. Stephen's was not the gentleness of indecision or weak character. Look at his attack in verse 51. In the fervor of his address he is not slow to see that his argument is stirring his audience against him, and that if he is to place his most telling blow, he must do so promptly. The fact that the rulers took his execution in their own hands at a time when the nation was not allowed by the Romans to inflict the death penalty seems to be explained by dating this incident during the time between the deposition of Pilate and the arrival of the new governor. Even were it towards the end of Pilate's governorship, as some place it, it would be little likely that Pilate, who realized his insecurity and the representations already made against him at Rome by the Jewish rulers, would stir up still further antagonism by calling the Sanhedrin to account in any way.

### (SELECTIONS.)

The character of Stephen—'A young man of such original genius and special grace that there was nothing he might not have attained to had he been allowed to live. His wonderful openness of mind; his perfect freedom from all the prepossessions, prejudices, and superstitions of his day; his courage, his eloquence, his spotless character; with a certain sweet, and at the same time majestic manner, all combined to set Stephen in the very front rank both of service and of risk. He was already all but the foremost man of his day.'—Alexander Whyte, Bible Characters.

'He liveth long who liveth well,  
 All other life is short and vain;  
 He liveth longest who can tell  
 Of living most for heavenly gain.'

The source of Stephen's power was that he was filled with the Holy Spirit (v., 5). Professor Bruce said of Phillips Brooks, 'The man is just a great water-main attached to the everlasting reservoir of God's truth, and grace and love, and streams of life, as by a heavenly gravitation, pour through him to refresh weary souls.'—Prof. A. V. G. Allen's Life of Phillips Brooks.

Verse 59. 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' To go out of life because we must, is misery, to go out because our wills accept the necessity, is triumph and victory. The one is death indeed, the other is the opening of the spirit to the influx of a larger life. Blessed is he who at that last hour goes willingly, because he knows that he goes after his Lord, recognizing that the grave, too, is a 'place whither the Forerunner for us is entered.' He is Heaven, and Heaven is He. Stephen knew very little of what he was to meet beyond this earth, but he knew whom he was to meet, and that was enough for him.—Alexander Maclaren, in Last Sheaves.

The Martyr Spirit to-day.—A little over three years ago four missionaries were murdered in Lienchou, China. Two of them were young student volunteers, Mr. and Mrs. Peale, who had reached the mission station only the night before. The plan of the Missionary Board had been to send them to Yeung-Kong, and Mr. Kunkle, another young student, to

Lienchou, but as Mr. Kunkle received a fellowship in England and decided to give another year to his studies, the Board, thinking the station at Lienchou the more urgent, sent Mr. and Mrs. Peale there in his stead. Do you think that when the terrible news of what would have been his own fate reached Mr. Kunkle, he would still be willing to go to China? These are the words he wrote to the Board as soon as he learned what had happened: 'I cannot help thinking that had I been more faithful, it would have been I that had gained a martyr's crown, and a better than I spared for the work. Now I earnestly seek the privilege of taking the place of the martyred Peale, and if in your judgment this sad event and the increased need justify my leaving my studies and proceeding at once to China, I am ready to sail.'

### Junior C. E. Topic.

Sunday, February 21.—Topic—Trying to seem better than you are. Acts v., 1-6.

### C. E. Topic.

Monday, February 15.—Elijah in despair. I. Kings xvii., 1-8.

Tuesday, February 16.—Three bitter days. Acts ix., 1-11.

Wednesday, February 17.—The soul cast down. Ps. xlii., 1-6.

Thursday, February 18.—The way of despair. Ps. 91.

Friday, February 19.—Faith's triumph. Rom. v., 1-5.

Saturday, February 20.—The peace that never fails. Phil. iv., 4-7.

Sunday, February 21.—Topic—Pilgrim's Progress Series. II. The Slough of Despond. Ps. lxxix., 1-4, 13-18; 1., 1-3.

### What They Will Study.

You may have trouble in getting your scholars to study their lessons, but you will have no trouble in getting them to study you.—S. S. Teacher.

### Keep Yourself Out of Sight.

A gentleman in Scotland thought he would like to try his hand at fishing during his holidays. Provided with the very best of tackle, he sallied forth and toiled all day, but caught nothing. Towards evening, he espied a little, ragged urchin, with tackle of the most primitive order, landing fish with marvellous rapidity. He went to him and asked him the secret of his success, receiving for reply, 'The fish'll no catch, sir, as lang as ye dinna keep yersel' oot o' sicht.' Fishers of men need not wonder at their want of success if they do not keep themselves out of sight.—Selected.

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