

Persecution Renewed.

MARCH 4.

ACTS V: 17-32.

Golden Text, Acts 5: 29.

THE awful death of Ananias and Sapphira had made a solemn impression on the people. Many were converted, crowds came from all parts of the country to Jerusalem, and many miracles of healing were wrought by the disciples. The rulers determined to put a stop to the movement. Vs. 17, 18, *The high-priest—Annas—filled with indignation* that the orders of the council had been so little heeded, ch. 4: 18, had the apostles imprisoned a second time. V. 19. This is the first reference in the Acts to the ministry of *angels*, the existence of which was denied by the Sadducees, ch. 23: 8. The opening of the prison doors would confirm the apostles' faith and should have convinced the rulers that in opposing them they were fighting against God. Vs. 20, 21, *Go, not to escape, but like brave men to preach the gospel* were boldly than ever. As soon as the temple gates were opened in the morning they began to address the people. Vs. 21, 24. Imagine the mortification of the council on sending for their prisoners to hear that they were at their old work, preaching the new doctrines. It seemed that prison walls could not hold these apostles; there must be some magical influence behind all this. What to do they knew not. V. 26. This time the captain of the temple himself goes with the officers of justice and with a shew of deference requests their presence in the council. *They feared the people*—what a wonderful change the gospel had already wrought on men who a short time before had said of Jesus "Crucify him!" Had the apostles chosen to appeal to the people now the mob would have taken their part and stoned the rulers. V. 28. They are charged with contempt of court. *In this name*—They disdain to mention the name of Jesus, perhaps because they were ashamed to do so. *Filled Jerusalem*—a noble though unintentional testimony to the success of their preaching. *This man's blood upon us*—not that they feared divine vengeance for the murder of the Messiah, but that the people would turn against them, disown their authority and perhaps overturn the existing form of government. V. 29. No reference to their miraculous escape, but an appeal to their sense of right and wrong. See Josh. 24: 15; 1 Kings, 18: 21. V. 30, *Peter* is not ashamed to mention the name of Jesus. A holier thing he could not say just then than that God had raised Him from the dead, who, at their instigation, had been sentenced by Pilate to the most ignominious death. V. 31. *A prince and a Saviour*—expressing the royalty which all Israel looked for in the Messiah, and the saving character of it which they had utterly lost sight of. *Do give repentance, &c.*—He alone can bestow these precious gifts, Rom 5: 18; Ephes. 2: 8; James 1: 17. V. 32. *To them that obey him*—those who do not obey God have no right to expect forgiveness, Rom. 2: C: 10. No compromise can be made between the world and religion, Jno. 12: 26; 2 Cor. 6: 15-18. They who serve God need fear no evil, for greater is He that is with them than all that are against them. Rom. 8: 31.

The Seven Chosen.

MARCH 11.

ACTS VI: 1-13.

Golden Text, Acts 6: 3.

THE church, now four or five years old, had already passed triumphantly through an ordeal of persecution and had made many converts. Now it was disturbed by an internal trouble which threatened its harmony. It began with a "murmuring" about the management of its temporal affairs. *The Grecians against the Jews*. The Jews were of two classes, (1) those born and brought up in Palestine; (2) those who had been scattered abroad by their national propensity for colonizing and trading, but who had returned to Palestine. Those called "Grecian" were not necessarily from Greece, but they spoke the Greek language, which at this time prevailed in all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, in contradistinction to the Palestine Jews, who spoke Hebrew. Betwixt these two classes there had sprung up a sectional jealousy, and each naturally looked with special anxiety after the support of their poor. There was probably no *intention* to slight the widows of the Grecian Jews; only some little omission afforded a pretext for *grumbling*. Such things occur still. Of far more consequence than the alleged grievance is the promptness with which the apostles dealt with it. Vs. 2, 3. A public meeting was called and measures adopted to prevent a recurrence of the mistake. The apostles could not do everything themselves; there should therefore be a sub-division of labour. Seven prudent business men should be appointed by the meeting—a strong argument that the laity should be recognized in the government of the church. The *number*, though accounted sacred by the Jews, was unimportant but they must be men in every respect fitted for the office, honest, impartial, and above suspicion. The resolution was unanimously adopted and the fact that the names of all the seven were Greek implies that a fine conciliatory spirit prevailed and that the "Grecians" were allowed to have the majority on the new board. V. 6. Although this is the first mention of ordination by imposition of hands in the New Testament, the practice (still in use) had its origin in very ancient times, Num. 27-22. The new deacon turned out to be a public speaker of marvellous power. The synagogues referred to corresponded to our churches, of which there were then in Jerusalem some 480. Some of them belonged to the "Grecian Jew," just as we find in large cities now, English Scotch, French, Dutch, or German churches. That of the *Libertines* possibly took its name from certain Jews who a century before were sent captive to Rome, and, being at length liberated, returned to their native land, acquired the name of Libertines (Freedmen) and built a synagogue for themselves. Stephen, instead of preaching to the common people, disputed with the rabbis in the different synagogues skillfully turned their own arguments against them, and thereby raised a storm of opposition which culminated in his death by violence. V. 15. *As the face of an angel*—God designing thereby to put honour on his faithful witness. Many martyrs and co-sufferers have shewn like serenity.