

Peter Preaching to the Gentiles.

MAY 6.

ACTS X: 30-44.

Golden Text, Acts 10: 45.

HITHERTO Christianity had been regarded as a matter exclusively affecting the Jews. They were God's chosen people. The law of Moses was of divine origin, and it was for them. Circumcision was an essential part of the Mosaic ritual and a prerequisite to admission into the church; but now it is declared that uncircumcised Gentiles also may be admitted into discipleship on equal terms with the Jews. The two visions recorded in the previous verses stamp the new departure with the seal of divine authority. V. 30. *Cornelius*—was a Gentile: probably an Italian, who had abandoned idolatry. He observed the stated hours of Jewish worship in the synagogue. He was a good man, v. 2, acted consistently with the light which he had, and now he is looking for more light. He was a captain in the Roman army having command of 100 men. Two other *centurions* are mentioned with commendation, Matt. 8: 10; 27: 54. V. 31. Notice the intimate connection between prayer and almsgiving; the one naturally follows the other, and because sincere and unostentatious both were acceptable to God. V. 32. *Joppa*—35 miles south of Caesarea. *Call Simon*—The gospel is not to be proclaimed by angels, but by human instrumentality, 2 Cor. 4: 7. V. 33. *Immediately*—a fine instance of Christian decision, and readiness to receive divine teaching through the lips of God's messenger. *We are all here*—his household and friends. *Before God*—for the purpose of instruction in sacred things. Those who meet for worship, thus "to hear," not to criticize, are sure to receive some benefit. V. 34. *Opened his mouth*—began to preach the gospel to those assembled. *God is no respecter of persons*—This was his text, embodying a truth which Jewish prejudice had never before realized and which many people still require to be taught. V. 35. It is not to be inferred from this that one creed is as good as any other, only that a man's nationality will not disqualify him from partaking of the heavenly gift. God has respect to personal character and motive. Nor can it be argued that mere morality will save any one. Comparing Peter's vision with that of Cornelius, we learn that outward observances are of secondary importance, Gal. 5: 6; Col. 3: 11. Vs. 36-38 contain a distinct declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and Saviour of all, Gentiles and Jews. V. 43. Here we have, (1) the procuring cause of salvation *through His name*, (2) the universality of the offer of salvation, *whosoever*, (3) the condition—*believing in him*, (4) the nature of it—*remission of sins*—not merely from the penalty, but from the power and dominion of sin. V. 44. As at Pentecost, a visible manifestation of the Holy Ghost gave convincing power to Peter's words, attesting the plan of salvation which he preached to be divine and essential. No profession of faith can be accepted as genuine that does not lead to a righteous and godly life, Matt. 12: 33.

The Spread of the Gospel.

MAY 13.

ACTS XI: 19-30.

Golden Text, Acts 11: 21.

CHRISTIANITY enters upon a new epoch—the founding of a church in which the Gentile element predominates. Antioch now rivals, if it does not, indeed, eclipse Jerusalem in ecclesiastical interest. V. 19. *They that were scattered*, but did not cease from work. *Phenice*, or Phoenicia, a narrow strip of country, north of Galilee, on the seaboard, a part of Palestine never taken possession of by the Israelites. It included Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut, famous for their manufactures and commerce. It was only once visited by Christ, Matt. 15: 21. It is now a land of ruins, the whole coast being strewn with them. *Cyprus*—birthplace of Barnabas, a large island, sixty miles from Phenice, (see map) lately ceded to Britain. *Antioch*—300 miles north from Jerusalem, in St. Paul's time a splendid city of 200,000 inhabitants. *Preaching the word*—who the preachers were is not known, but these first foreign missionaries were doubtless laymen of the dispersion who carried their religion with them and commended it to others. They preached only to Jews, because they had, as yet, no assurance of the calling of the Gentiles. V. 20. These men of Cyprus and Cyrene were Hellenists, Greek speaking Jews. The *Grecians*, in R. V., the Greeks, i.e. the Gentiles. This was the first time the gospel had been preached to them as a class. V. 21. *The hand of the Lord*—It is probable that miracles of healing were wrought by these missionaries. V. 22. Jerusalem was still recognized as "head quarters" and as having the supervision of the provincial churches. *Barnabas* was an early convert, a gifted speaker, and liberal, ch. 4: 36, 37. The object of his embassy to Antioch would be to enquire into the rumours that had reached Jerusalem of Gentiles being received into the church, and to see how affairs were conducted at Antioch. Being himself a Grecian Jew he was familiar with their language, and would naturally be in sympathy with the workers. Vs. 23, 24. *He was glad*—Good men always rejoice in the good work done by others, and are ready to acknowledge it. It is *man* not to do so. *Much people were added* as the result of his faithful and judicious discharge of duty. V. 25, 26. So hopeful was the field, he felt that the best available man should be sent to Antioch, and who so good as Saul of Tarsus? *When he found*—He had to look him up, for he was away on some of his missionary excursions in Cilicia. What a dangerous time they must have had during that "whole year." *Called Christians*—Hitherto they had been known as "disciples," "brethren," "believers," "saints," &c. They did not assume the name themselves, nor is it likely that the Jews would give it to them. It must have originated with the heathen Gentiles, who coined a word by which they thought to ridicule the new sect. Vs. 27-30. *Prophecy*—literally preachers, 1 Cor. 12: 28, 29; Eph. 4: 11. *Agabus*—the name occurs again, 20 years later, Acts 21: 10.