

LESSON NOTES.

FIRST QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

A. D. 34-37.] LESSON X. [March 11

THE SEVEN CHOSEN.

Acts 6. 1-15. Commit to memory verses 6-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.—Acts 6. 3.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

God overrules the difficulties within and without the Church, to the greater progress of the Gospel.

DAILY READINGS.

M. Acts 5. 29-42.
 T. Acts 6. 1-15.
 W. 1 Tim. 5. 1-25.
 Th. 2 Tim. 4. 1-8.
 F. Matt. 10. 16-31.
 Sa. Matt. 26. 59-68.
 Su. 2 Cor. 3. 1-18.

TIME.—Somewhere between A.D. 34 and A.D. 36, 37. The lesson probably occupies nearly all of these two years.

PLACE.—Jerusalem.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—After the release of the apostles from imprisonment, the converts to Christianity increased rapidly. All Jerusalem was filled with their teaching. We now come to the record of the events which led to a great era in the progress of the Church, its enlargement as a universal religion, and its spread among the Gentiles.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—1. *Grecians*—Hellenists, the Jews who were brought up in foreign lands and spoke Greek instead of Hebrew. *Hebrews*—The Jews whose home was in Palestine, and who spoke in Aramaic, a form of Hebrew. *Dutiful ministrations*—Of the money or food given by the wealthier to supply the wants of the poor (see ch. 4 34-37). 2. *Leave the sword*—The preaching of the Gospel. *Serve tables*—To dispense food and money. 3. *Stephen*—His name means "a crown." He was one of the Grecian Jews, but we do not know anything of his early life. *Philip*—The Evangelist, by whom the Eunuch was converted. *Procherus*, etc.—Nothing is known of these men. *Proselytes*—A Gentile who had become a Jew. 9. *Synagogue of the Libertines*—i. e., of the freedmen, probably the children of Jews who had been made captives by the Emperor of Rome, and set free. *Cyrenians*, etc.—People from Cyrene in N. Africa. The different nationalities at Jerusalem, if of sufficient numbers, had each a synagogue of their own. Paul belonged to the Synagogue of Cilicia. 11. *Suborned men*—Induced them to swear falsely. *Blasphemous words*—Evil speaking against God and sacred things. Stephen probably said that Jesus fulfilled the law, and the new religion should take the place of the Jewish sacrifices and temple. And this was construed into blasphemy.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—Grecians and Hebrews.—How the murmuring arose.—How the difficulty was arranged.—The work of the deacons.—Stephen.—Suborned.—Blasphemy.—The false witness.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—What difficulties had the Church had to encounter before this time? Did they prevent the Church from growing? What was the last one? What was done with the apostles?

SUBJECT: PROGRESS BY DIFFICULTIES.

1. **FIRST DIFFICULTY, — MISTAKES, AND MURMURING IN THE CHURCH (v. 1).**—What time is referred to by "those days"? What is said of the progress of Christianity? Who were the Grecians? The Hebrews? What difficulty arose between them? How might it naturally arise? Were the apostles to blame? Where did the money come from for the aid of these widows? (Acts 4. 34-37.) Why is such a dismission as this recorded of the early Church? From what does it warn us? How does it instruct us? In what way is the record a comfort to us?

2. **PROGRESS.—TO A BETTER ORGANIZATION FOR CHRISTIAN WORK (vs. 2-7).**—Who had the care of this work hitherto? (ch. 4. 35.) Why had they not time to attend to it themselves? (ch. 4. 42.) What is meant by serving tables? What plan was proposed now to avoid the difficulty? What order of men was instituted now? What were their duties? What must their character be? (1 Tim. 3. 8-12.) Why was such a character needed for those who "served tables"? Who were appointed to this office? Who spoke them? Who appointed them? What

do you know about these men? Why did the apostles lay hands upon them? What do you learn from the fact that most of them appear to have been "Grecians"? What was the twofold work of the apostles? What was the effect of this amicable arrangement upon the Church? In what two directions do we thus learn that progress was made by means of this difficulty and its settlement?

3. **SECOND DIFFICULTY, — FALSE ACCUSATIONS (vs. 8-14).**—What was Stephen's character? What was the source of his power? Could all the disciples have done as great things as he did? What were the synagogues named in verse 9? To which of them may Paul have belonged? What did Stephen do in these synagogues? Of what was he accused? How far was this witness false? Did Jesus destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses?

4. **PROGRESS.—TO THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL (v. 15).**—How did God show his approval of Stephen? Could a bad man have had such an appearance? Does our character change our appearance? In what ways did Stephen's martyrdom tend to the spread of the Gospel? (Acts 8. 1.)

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. Mistakes and errors occur in the best Churches and the best people.
 2. A free, generous treatment will overcome the danger from them.
 3. These mistakes are recorded (1) as a warning, to be avoided; (2) for instruction, how we should treat them; (3) for comfort, lest we be discouraged at our infirmities.
 4. Be careful to avoid all impartiality.
 5. There should be division of labour in the Church.
 6. All Church workers should have three qualifications, (1) a good report, (2) the Holy Spirit, (3) wisdom.
 7. Working and praying should always go together.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole School in Concert.)

7. How had the Church grown during its first five years? **Ans.** There was a great number of Christians, and "Jerusalem was filled with their doctrine." 8. What trouble then arose? **Ans.** Complaints of partiality in distributing alms. 9. How was it overcome? **Ans.** By a generous action, and wise choice of men. 10. What is said of one of these men? (Repeat ver. 8.) 11. What did his enemies do to him? **Ans.** They falsely accused him of blasphemy.

A. D. 37.] LESSON XI. [March 18.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR.

Acts 7. 54-60; 8. 1-4. Commit to memory vs. 54-60.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.—Rev. 2. 10.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

They that bear the cross shall wear the crown.

DAILY READINGS.

M. Acts 7. 1-25.
 T. Acts 7. 26-60.
 W. Acts 7. 54-60; 8. 1-4.
 Th. 2 Cor. 4. 1-18.
 F. Rom. 8. 16-29.
 Sa. Matt. 27. 57-67.
 Su. Acts 26. 1-11.

TIME.—Somewhere between the Autumn of A.D. 36 and the Summer of A.D. 37. Probably May, A.D. 37, about Pentecost.

PLACE.—Jerusalem. The trial was in the hall of the Sanhedrin in the temple area. The martyrdom was in the valley of Jehoshaphat, between the city and the Mount of Olives.

RULERS.—It was a general time of commotion. Pilate was removed from being governor, and no one was appointed in his place. The Emperor Tiberius died March 16, A.D. 37.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—In our last lesson we left Stephen arraigned before the great Council for blasphemy. He defended himself in a powerful speech (Acts 7. 2-53), at the close of which our lesson for to-day begins.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—54. *Cut to the heart*—The original means slain asunder. They were intensely enraged. 55. *Saw the glory of God*—In his own future home, and God's goodness amid all the evil around him. *Jesus standing*—Not sitting, as usually represented, but standing, as if rising to help defend and welcome Stephen. 56. *Behold I see, etc.*—This is exactly what Jesus had fore-

told to this same Sanhedrin a few years before. 57. *Stopped their ears*—As if unwilling to hear such things. 58. *Cast him out of the city*—They were forbidden to have executions within the city. The place was in the valley of Jehoshaphat, close under the temple walls, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. *The witnesses*—The false witnesses (Acts 6. 11, 13). They were obliged to cast the first stone (Deut. 17. 6, 7). *Young man, Saul*—Afterwards Paul the apostle. He was probably thirty-four or thirty-five years old at this time. 59. *Calling upon God*—"God" is in italics, showing that it is not in the original. He called upon the Lord Jesus. 1. *Saul was consenting*—By his vote, and by aiding the execution. 2. *Devil ut men*—Jews, not Christians, who thus protested against the murder. 3. *Haling*—i. e., hauling, dragging forth.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—Stephen's speech.—His vision.—Why Jesus appeared standing.—The method of stoning.—Praying to Jesus.—Stephen's prayer.—The persecution.—Devout men (v. 4.)

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—How long had now elapsed since the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost? How had the Church grown? What was the state of the country at this time? (See *Rulers*.) Where was Stephen in our last lesson? Give some account of Stephen's speech, and its argument.

SUBJECT: THE CROSS AND THE CROWN.

1. **THE CROWN OF CHRIST'S REVEALED PRESENCE (vs. 54-56).**—Heard what things. Meaning of "cut to the heart." Why did what Stephen said have this effect? What effect ought it to have had? (Acts 2. 38; 3. 19.) What vision was granted to Stephen? Why is it said that he was full of the Holy Ghost at this time? Why was Jesus represented as standing? What was the object of this vision? What vision was granted to Jacob? (Gen. 28. 11-22) Is it true that in our great trials we sometimes have the brightest views of God and Jesus and the truth?

2. **THE CROWN OF MARTYRDOM (vs. 57-60).** What did they do when they heard Stephen's words? Why would this enrage them more? Was there a judicial verdict, or were these the proceedings of a mob? Where was Stephen stoned? Why were the witnesses present? (Deut. 17. 6, 7.) Who were they? (Acts 6. 11-13.) Who took charge of their garments? What did he afterwards become? To whom did Stephen pray in his last hours? What were his last words? In what respects is the Christian's death a falling asleep? What is a martyr? What is the promise to such? (Rev. 7. 13-17) Are there other martyrs than those which appear so to men? When may we be said to have the martyr spirit?

3. **THE CROWN OF GREAT RESULTS IN A WIDER SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL (vs. 4).**—What is said of Saul? Was his conversion a fruit of Stephen's death? What befell the Church at Jerusalem? What does Paul himself say of this? (Acts 26. 10, 11. Gal. 1. 13.) How did this help to spread the Gospel? Should we preach the Gospel wherever we go. In what ways? Is it worth while to suffer that the Gospel may be known to others?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. Conviction of sin if it does not convert will enrage the heart.
 2. Jesus ever watches over his children, and is ready to help.
 3. Our brightest visions, like Jacob's, often come from hard trials.
 4. The Christian never dies, but falls asleep to awake in heaven.
 5. There are many martyrs, crucified on unseen crosses, burned with invisible flames, stoned with reproaches and sneers, but they too shall have their crown.
 6. Christians should preach the Gospel wherever they go.
 7. Man's opposition to the Gospel makes it spread the more.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole School in Concert.)

12. What did Stephen do when accused? **Ans.** He defended himself in a powerful speech. 13. What was the effect? **Ans.** His enemies were still more enraged. 14. What did they do? **Ans.** They stoned him to death. 15. What were his last words? **Ans.** "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." 16. What did the enemies of Christ then do? **Ans.** They caused a great persecution of the Church. 17. What was the result? **Ans.** The Gospel was spread far and wide.

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