

SCHOLAR'S NOTES.

(From the International Lessons for 1876 by Edwin W. Rice, as issued by American Sunday-School Union.)

CONNECTED HISTORY.—Our former lessons in Acts closed with "The Seven Chosen." Stephen, one of the seven, had spoken with such wisdom and power of Jesus and true piety that the Jews were not able to answer him. So they had him arrested, and charged with speaking against Moses, the temple, and the law. He now defends himself against these charges.

LESSON I.

OCTOBER 1.]

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE. [About 35 A. D.]

READ Acts vii. 1-19. RECITE vs. 1-5.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.—Rom. ix. 5.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—"The Lord sent redemption unto his people."

DAILY READINGS.—M.—Acts vii. 1-19. T.—Gen. xii. 1-9. W.—Rom. iv. 1-25. Th.—Gen. xlvii. 1-20. F.—Ps. xxxiv. 1-22. Sa.—Gen. i. 1-14. S.—Ex. i. 6-22.

TO THE SCHOLAR.—Notice how Stephen proves that all God's dealings with his people point to the very changes which the Jews accused Stephen of proposing to make, and so shows them that they are fighting against God.

NOTES.—Mesopotamia (between the rivers), a country between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, about 700 miles long by 20 to 250 broad. Only the north-western portion of it is commonly spoken of in the Bible. In Hebrew the name was "Syria of the two rivers."—Charan, the Greek word for "Harran." Dr. Beke locates it near Damascus, in Mesopotamia or Padan-aram (Gen. xi. 32), about 150 miles north-west of Ur.—Chaldeans, people of Chaldea, of which Babylon was the capital.—Sychem—Shechem, and perhaps Sychar, now called Nablus, a city between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, about seven miles south of Samaria.—Threescore and fifteen souls, Stephen was probably a Greek, and quoted the Greek Bible, which reads 75. The Hebrew reads 70. Gen. xlvii. 27. This has been explained—(1.) By saying that the Greek version and Stephen counted three wives of Jacob and two sons of Judah. (2.) That to the 66 of Gen. xlvii. 26 it adds the wives of Jacob's sons, except Judah's, who was dead; or (3.) That in Gen. xlvii. 20 the Greek version adds the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh from 1 Chron. vii. 14-21, while the Hebrew omits them because not born until afterward. In either of these ways the difference is easily explained.—(Alexander.)—Four hundred years, round numbers as in Gen. xv. 13.

EXPLANATIONS AND QUESTIONS.

Lesson Topics.—(I.) GOD'S COMMAND TO ABRAM. (II.) GOD'S CARE OF JACOB.

I. GOD'S COMMAND TO ABRAM. (1.) high priest, as president of the Sanhedrim or court; are these things so? guilty or not guilty. Men, brethren, the crowd or audience; fathers, probably the members of the Sanhedrim, his judges; God of glory, these words show his reverence; Mesopotamia . . . Charan. See Notes. (3.) thy country. Gen. xii. 1. (4.) dwell. Gen. xi. 31. (5.) inheritance, possession; foot on, "not a foot," a common proverb or remark. (6.) strange land, Egypt (Gen. xv. 14). (7.) entreat, use them ill. (7.) judge, do justice to, punish; serve me, worship me. (8.) covenant, Gen. xvii. 10.

I. Questions.—Of what was Stephen accused? Acts vi. 11. Before what court was he brought? How were witnesses found? How did Stephen's face appear? State the question of the high priest. What does Stephen try to show? How? Where does he begin his account of God's dealings with Israel? Relate the facts he states in regard to Abram.

II. GOD'S CARE OF JACOB. (9.) patriarchs, sons of Jacob; sold Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 27, 36); God was with him. Gen. xxxix. 2, 21, 23. (10.) favor . . . of Pharaoh. Gen. xli. 41. (11.) dearth, drouth, famine; sustenance, food. (12.) our fathers, Gen. xlii. 1, 2. (13.) second time. Gen. xlv. 3. (14.) threescore and fifteen. See Note. (16.) Sychem (see Note); Abraham, some read Jacob for Abraham; Emmor, Greek word for Hamor. Gen. xxxiii. 19. (18.) another king. Ex. i. 8. (19.) subtilly, deceitfully, artfully; cast out. Ex. i. 22.

II. Questions.—How was Joseph sent into Egypt? Who was with Joseph? How was he favored? How honored? What great calamity soon followed? How was Jacob distressed by it? Where did he send for food? How many times? When did Joseph make himself known to his brothers? To whom were they then made known? v. 13. Who invited Jacob and his family into Egypt? How long were they there? How prospered? How oppressed? By whom? How did all this prove that God was leading them? How does this speech show Stephen's reverence for God?

Illustration.—God's promises. Where is thy casket of promises? Open the jar of jewels. Count over the diamonds that flash in thy hand like stars. Compute the worth of that single jewel. "Ask and ye shall receive;" or that other ruby. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." Bring forth that royal Kohinoor. "He that believeth shall be saved." Then remember who it is that gave them, and to what an unworthy sinner, and tell me if they are not exceeding great and precious. When Caesar once gave a man great reward, he exclaimed, "This is too great a gift for me to receive." But Caesar said, "It is not too great a gift for me to give." So the smallest promise in thy casket is too much for thee to deserve; yet the most magnificent promise is not too much for the Kings of kings to bestow.—(Spurgeon.)

CONNECTED HISTORY.—After giving a brief account of God's dealings with Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, and the oppression in Egypt, Stephen speaks of the way God delivered Israel by Moses; of Israel's rebellion and idol-worship; of the tabernacle and temple to witness for the true worship.

LESSON II.

OCTOBER 8.]

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE. [About 35 A. D.]

READ Acts vii. 35-50. RECITE vs. 47-50.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.—Heb. x. 9.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—"The law is a shadow of good things to come."

DAILY READINGS.—M.—Acts vii. 20-50. T.—Ex. iii. 1-22. W.—Deut. xviii. 9-22. Th.—John v. 36-47. F.—Ex. xxxii. 7-24. Sa.—Ex. xl. 1-19. S.—Ps. lxxviii. 51-72.

NOTES.—Red Sea, east of Egypt, and about 1,400 miles long; its greatest width is 200 miles; divided at its northern end by the Sinaitic peninsula into two arms or gulfs, the eastern one about 130 miles long by 15 wide, the western (the one spoken of in this lesson) about 180 miles long and about 20 wide.—Moloch, the fire-god or idol of the Ammonites. Jewish rabbins say the image was of brass, with the head of an ox and the members of a man. It was hollow, was heated from below, the children offered to it being placed in its arms, and drums beaten to drown their cries. Jer. vii. 31; Lev. xviii. 21; 2 Kings xxiii. 10.—Remphan, the image of the star-god Saturn, or of the sun. Some, with less probability, understand Remphan (Arabic, chiron) to mean a framework for carrying the idol.—Babylon, first called Babel (Gen. xi. 9), afterward a famous city, the great capital of the Chaldean (Assyrian) kingdom. It flourished from about 2,000 B. C. to about 500 B. C. It was of vast size and grandeur, having wide streets crossing each other at right angles, hanging-gardens, great towers, brazen gates, a wall around it said by Herodotus to be 300 feet high and 85 broad. It was taken by Cyrus; again by Darius Hystaspes, and the wall destroyed 510 B. C.; by Xerxes, who destroyed the temple of Belus 29 years later; by Alexander, who completed the destruction of the city about 325 B. C. See Jer. xxv. 12 and 21.

EXPLANATIONS AND QUESTIONS.

Lesson Topics.—(I.) ISRAEL'S REBELLION UNDER MOSES. (II.) THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE FOR TRUE WORSHIP.

I. ISRAEL'S REBELLION. (35.) refused, rejected; the same, this very rejected one; deliverer. Ex. xiv. 19. (37.) prophet, meaning Jesus. Acts iii. 29. (38.) spoke to him (Ex. xix. 3, 17); lively oracles, the law. Rom. ii. 2. (39.) would not obey. Ex. xvi. 2. Num. xx. 3. (40.) Make us gods: Ex. xxxii. 1. (41.) calf, image of the Egyptian god Apis; wot not, know not. (42.) gave them up. (Ps. lxxxv. 12); host of heaven, sun, Saturn, Mars and the stars (see v. 43); prophets. Amos v. 25. (43.) Moloch (see Notes); Remphan. See Notes.

I. Questions.—Of whom did Stephen now speak? Why did the Israelites reject Moses? How did God use him? How many wonders or plagues were sent upon Egypt before Pharaoh let Israel go? Describe the miracle at the Red Sea. How long were the people in the wilderness? Why so long? Of whom did Moses speak to Israel? What did Moses give to Israel at Sinai? How did they sin under Aaron? How did God punish them? To what worship were they given up? Of what other sin were they guilty? [Of unbelief.] Of what sin were the Jews guilty in Stephen's time?

II. THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE FOR TRUE WORSHIP. (46.) tabernacle. Ex. xxv. 40; Heb. viii. 5-7; fashion, pattern, plan. Ex. xxvi. 30.

(45.) Jesus, Greek form of "Joshua" not Christ, but Joshua is here spoken of (46.) desired, wished. 1 Chron. xxii. 7. (47.) Solomon built 1 Kings vi. 1. (48.) Howbeit, yet, however; dwelt. Acts xvii. 24. (49.) my throne. Is. lvi. 1, 2.—The division of the text into verses here confuses the meaning. (Alexander.)

II. Questions.—What place of true worship had the Israelites in the wilderness? By whom given? How made? After what plan? By whom brought into Canaan? By whom brought to Jerusalem? Where from? 2 Sam. vi. 2. Who died on the way? Why? What did David wish to build for God? Why forbidden? 1 Chron. xxii. 8. Who did build it? In what does God not dwell? Where is He said to dwell? 2 Chron. vi. 39; Isa. lvii. 15. How may we have Him dwell with us?

Illustration.—Weakness of idols. A little boy once took a stick and broke all the idols in the house except the largest, into the hands of which he put a stick. When the man of the house saw this, he angrily asked, "Who has done this?" "Perhaps," said the boy, "the big idol has been beating his little brothers." "Nonsense!" said the man; "don't talk such stuff! Do you think I'm a fool? It was you, you little rascal! And I'll beat you to death with the same stick!" "But," replied the boy, "how can you trust a god so weak that a child's hand can destroy him? If he cannot take care of himself, how can he take care of you and the world, let alone making you?" The heathen stopped to think, broke his idol, and sought the true God.—(Biblical Museum.)

Tabernacle of Moloch, some think the word translated tabernacle means the pole upon which the image of this idol was carried; others say it was a kind of palanquin or covered litter or carriage in which the image was carried by being borne upon the shoulders of servants, as persons of state now are in the East.

HEAVEN GOD'S THRONE. EARTH GOD'S FOOTSTOOL.

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