

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN EARLY CHURCH HISTORY. A. D. 60. LESSON V. PAUL BEFORE FELIX; or, Convicted by the Truth. Acts 24, 10-25. November 4.

EXPLANATORY.

THE GOVERNOR. Antonia Felix "procurator of Judaea, a freedman of the Emperor Claudius, appointed about A. D. 52. Answered. For the accusation read the preceding verses. Paul proceeds to answer these by a calm, dignified denial. No flattery, no circumlocution, no invective, but only sound argument and an honest statement of fact. Many years. Six to eight. In that time Felix had become acquainted with the peculiarities of the Jews, and could the more readily understand the defence of Paul. But twelve days. Seven spent in purification, (chap. 21, 27.) and five since his arrest. Ver. 1. Went up...to worship. Not to incite tumult, not to overthrow the worship of the Jews, but to worship in the temple. He challenges them to prove that at any time in that twelve days he had committed any of the acts of which he was accused. Accusation is not proof, yet how many judge even good and true men on mere report. "Judge not lest ye be judged."

BUT. Paul is ready to confess Christ even before his enemies. Are we? The way which they call heresy. They accused him of being a "ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes," the only time this term is used to designate Christians. The words "heresy" and "sect" are the same in the original. There were three other "sects" among the Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Is it, therefore, a great crime to belong to another sect? God of my fathers. No schism, no new religion, but a fuller and more perfect development of the old covenant. Believing all things. The old Scriptures are not to be ignored; they are the real basis of the Gospel. No one who can thus say with Paul, need fear the name "sectarian" or "heretic."

HOPE. Another point wherein he is not a schismatic. His hope is the same which they wait for, (a better translation than allow,) but with him it is a living and directing power—with them it was mere patient waiting. Resurrection of the dead. The foundation of the Christian hope—it may be said to be the hope, for "if Christ be not raised then your faith is vain. 1 Cor. 15, 17. Both just and unjust. "For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Rom. 14, 10.

HEREIN. In this hope, and because of this hope. The Christian's trust in the grace of God, and in the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, does not lead him into laxity of life. Compare the similar expressions of the other apostles, Peter and John. 2 Pet. 3, 14; 1 John 3, 8. Exercise myself. Note the energy in this word. The athlete must go through a careful training both continuous and untiring if he would succeed. There is little hope for the Christian who does not "strive to enter in." Luke 13, 24. We are to give "all diligence," (2 Pet. 1, 5) "press toward the mark," (Phil. 3, 14), "be careful to maintain good works," (Titus 3, 8), and "fight the good fight of faith." (1 Tim. 6, 12).

MANY. "Several."—Lange. "Not so strong as many."—Con and Howson. It was five years. Chap. 18, 21, 22. Alms-offerings. Two objects of the visit, both inconsistent with that of which he was accused. The alms were probably those spoken of in Rom. 15, 25, 26; the offerings, those of the pentecost, and purification. Chap. 20, 16, and 21, 26. Certain Jews from Asia. Not the officers of the temple, nor those here to accuse him. Those who were commanded to appear (chap. 23, 30) were not these, so Paul challenges those who had come to testify to any evil which they had found in him other than his avowed belief in the resurrection. Voice. Saying.

MORE PERFECT KNOWLEDGE. Felix in his six or eight years must have learned about the Christians. Indeed, there were Christian soldiers in his own city, and probably among his own guards. Chap. 10. He, therefore, knew more perfectly than was developed in the trial the belief of Paul, and the hatred of the Jews. That way. Used in the Acts to designate the Christian religion. Chap. 9, 2; 19, 9, 23. He deferred them, that is, he adjourned the court, and deferred the case. He had power to defer it as long as he liked, and his reason was, doubtless, only an excuse to avoid offending the Jews. Vers. 26, 27. Commanded. He kept Paul still a prisoner, under the charge of a soldier, though with large liberty. But, alas! he was mainly selfish in his motive, hoping Paul or his friends would purchase his liberty. Verse 26.

DRUSILLA. Daughter of Herod Agrippa I., married to Azizus, prince of Emesa,

and seduced from him by Felix, through a Cyprian sorcerer named Simon. While thus living in adultery with Felix she bore him a son, Agrippa, and perished with him in the eruption of Vesuvius. As her aunt, Herodius, under quite similar circumstances, heard John the Baptist, so she desired to hear Paul concerning the faith in Christ. How many, while living in sin, listen to the Gospel, possibly hoping to hear some word to ease their conscience, but with no thought of forsaking their sins.

REASONED. Paul sought not his own safety through the favour of the judge, but took this opportunity to preach him a sermon which would, by the aid of the Spirit, reach his conscience. Righteousness. The state of right living, justice to God and man. Just what Felix was not doing. Temperance. Not merely abstinence from strong drink, but a curbing of all appetites and passions...another home thrust—though we have no reason to suppose that Paul made any personal application. A wise teacher will avoid giving personal offence. Judgment to come. As the Holy Spirit brought these truths home to the conscience of Felix, and he realized that he must give an account for his actions to a Judge who could not be bribed, no wonder he trembled. He became alarmed, but, alas! to quiet his fears he dismissed not his sins but the preacher. A convenient season. A mere excuse; he did not desire to hear more on this subject. But, alas! many still deceive themselves by the same excuse—not now but some more convenient time, when they are tired of an perhaps, or death is a little nearer—then they will call. But God is calling now, and it may be with others as it was with Felix, the more convenient time will never come.

GOLDEN TEXT.—And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. Acts 24, 25. DOCTRINE.—Conviction of sin. Acts 27; John 16, 9. The next lesson is Acts 26, 6-20.

A QUAKER, having married for his wife a member of the Church of England, was asked after the ceremony by the clergyman for his fee, which he said was a crown. The Quaker, astounded at the demand, said if he could be shown any text in Scripture which proved the fee was a crown, he would give it. Upon which the clergyman directly turned to the 12th chapter of Proverbs, verse 4, where it is said, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." "Thou art right," replied the Quaker, "in thy assertion; Solomon was a wise man. Here is thy money which thou hast well and truly earned."

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