

Sunday School Department.

International Bible Lessons, 1877.

STUDIES IN THE ACTS.

JULY 22—Paul at Lystra.—Acts xv: 8-20.
A. D. 48.

HOME READINGS.

Monday. The living God.—Acts vi: 8-20.
Tuesday. The one God.—Isaiah vi: 1-5.
Wednesday. The eternal God.—Psalm cii: 11-28.
Thursday. The slightest thing.—Psalm xli: 6-31.
Friday. The all-wise God.—Psalm cxxxix: 1-24.
Saturday. The holy God.—Isaiah vi: 1-13.
Sunday. Th. glorious God.—Ex. xxxiii: 12; xxxiv: 8.

GOLDEN TEXT.

But the Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King.—Jer. x: 10.

INTRODUCTORY.

"From the scenes of the last two lessons, Paul and Barnabas turned eastward, toward the interior of Lycaonia, and visited first Iconium, the principal city of the Province. Repelled by Jewish opposition, they journeyed to Lystra, where they preached the gospel to an ignorant and superstitious people. Our lesson relates the story of a miracle and its misapprehension, the explanation of the apostles, and the sudden reversion of the popular mind from divine honours to bitter persecution."

THE MIRACLE.—V. 8-10.

V. 8. Lystra—a city of Lycaonia, one of the provinces of Asia Minor. Its situation is uncertain, probably represented by some ruins on the eastern portion of the great Lycian plain. It was not far from Derbe (v. 6). Timothy was probably a native of Lystra, converted during Paul's first visit there. For Paul's second visit to Lystra, see xvi: 1-4.—(Compare 2 Tim. iii: 10, 11.)

Impotent... never had walked. Luke, 'the beloved physician' (Col. iv: 14) is characteristically minute in describing this case. The physical condition of this poor man resembles the spiritual condition of every sinner.

V. 9. Perceiving—from the hopeful, eager face of the man, perhaps; or by miraculous insight into his heart. "If the apostle could see the spark of faith in the beggar's heart, how much more distinctly can the all-seeing eye of the Lord see it in us."—Brady.

Faith to be healed, more literally, faith to be saved.

V. 10. With a loud voice.—To assure the man, and to inform the crowd. Stand upright on thy feet.—Human effort must meet Divine grace.—See Acts iii: 6; ix: 34. Leaped and walked.—An instantaneous, complete cure.—See Isaiah xxxv: 6.

THE MISAPPREHENSION.—V. 11-13.

V. 11. Speech of Lycaonia—probably a corrupt Greek country dialect. "They evidently understood the apostles speaking in Greek, which was the language of all good society in that age."

The gods are called down.—"The ancients believed that the gods often visited the earth in various disguises. The very name of this province kept in memory an old tradition about these two deities calling upon Lycaon, its king." In the likeness of men.—"Men's hearts are hungry for 'God manifest in the flesh'; a craving which is satisfied in Christ, the God-man."—See Acts xxviii: 6.

V. 12. Barnabas, Jupiter.—Chrysostom says it was on account of "his commanding presence." Jupiter (Greek, Zeus) was the king of the gods. Paul, Mercurius (Greek, Hermes).—Mercury was the herald, interpreter, and the most eloquent of the gods. For Paul's account of his own personal appearance, consult, in connection, 2 Cor. x: 1-10.

V. 13. Before their city.—The temple of Jupiter was outside the city gates, and he was regarded as the tutelary divinity of Lystra. Oxen and garlands—victims for sacrifice, crowned with flowers.

THE EXPLANATION.—V. 14-15.

V. 14. Apostles.—Notice here that Barnabas, as well as Paul, is included among the apostles. Heard.—They were evidently not on the spot where these preparations were going on, but were informed by some of the converts probably. Perhaps the apostles had not well understood the rude dialect of the people, though the latter may have well understood the more correct and polished Greek of the apostles.

Rent their clothes.—"An oriental way of indicating great alarm and abhorrence. 'Policy would have counseled them to accept the honours, that they might possess greater influence over the populace; but their devotion to God was too deep to accept of reverence due to Him alone.'"

V. 15. Sirs, why do ye these things?—"Christ never thus rejected worship, though His apostles did: showing that He realized, and they believed that He was God."

Passions.—Grace does not lift men above nature, but gives control over it. Vanities—idolatrous customs.—See Psalm cxv: 4; Deut. xxxii: 21, &c.

V. 16. All nations, that is, all Gentile nations, in their own ways.—"Not through Divine indifference, but to show their utter helplessness, by mere human reason, to find out God."

V. 17. Without witness.—"Every mercy is God's messenger to man."—See Psal. xli: 1, 2; Rom. x: 20, &c.

V. 18. Scarce restrained.—"The superstition of years, however absurd, cannot be uprooted in an hour. People are very slow to confess themselves mistaken in their beliefs." This is human nature all over.

THE REACTION.—V. 19, 20.

V. 19. From Antioch.—Coming from Antioch of Pisidia, a distance of 100 miles, to show their hatred to the light and its messengers. Persuaded the people.—See Matt. xxvii: 20. Stoned Paul (2 Cor. xi: 23).—A peculiarity Jewish mode of punishment, and no doubt inflicted by them in their bitter hatred; while the multitude stood calmly by, witnessing this brutal treatment of him whom they were just before going to worship. Compare Paul's position now with his course at another stoning.—Acts vii: 59; viii: 1.

V. 20. Disciples.—The gospel had not been preached in vain, even here; and among this anxious, sorrowing company, perhaps, were Timothy and Eunice (x: 1). Went into the city—to re-assure the converts; and to show the enemies the futility of their malice.

To Derbe—a city only a few hours' journey eastward.

JULY 29.—The Yoke Broken.—Acts xv: 22-31.—A. D. 50.

HOME READINGS.

Monday. The return to Antioch.—Acts xi: 21-28.
Tuesday. The report at Jerusalem.—Acts xv: 1-12.
Wednesday. The decision of the Church.—Acts xv: 13-21.
Thursday. The yoke broken.—Acts xv: 22-28.
Friday. Liberty proclaimed.—Isaiah lxi: 1-11.
Saturday. Liberty from sin.—Rom. vi: 1-14.
Sunday. Liberty through Christ.—John viii: 29-36.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.—Gal. v: 1.

INTRODUCTORY.

After a period of peaceful and successful preaching in Derbe (xiv: 20, &c.) the apostles returned over the same route to Lystra, and to Iconium, Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples

and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." They ordained Elders in the various churches; passed again over that terrible mountain journey between Antioch of Pisidia and Perga (see June HELPER), preached the gospel at the latter place, and finally arrived safely back with the church at Antioch in Syria, which had sent them forth on their eventful missionary tour.

Soon after their return, however, a controversy arose in the church about the Gentile converts. "Many Jewish Christians urged that these new disciples must become Jews, and observe the whole ceremonial law, thus making Christianity a mere branch of Judaism. After a long argument on this vital question, on which the whole future of the Church was at stake, it was agreed to send a deputation to Jerusalem, led by Paul and Barnabas, &c., the decision of the apostles. There the subject was again debated, and it was resolved to send a letter to the Gentile Christians, declaring their freedom from all rites and burdens distinctly Jewish. Our lesson contains this letter, and relates its welcome reception by the Church at Antioch."

THE DELEGATION.—V. 22.

V. 22. Pleased... Apostles... Elders... whole Church.—The private members united in the decision with the apostles and elders; so that the decision went forth from the church at Jerusalem sanctioned by apostolic authority, and the concurrence of that body to which a special respect would be shown by the followers of Christ.—Ripley.

Chosen men... Judas... Silas.—These "chosen men" were probably sent with Paul and Barnabas that the statements of the latter two might be verified by unprejudiced messengers; and the Jewish party would not be able to say that Paul and Barnabas had given a one-sided account of the case. Chifur men—possessing influence, and being themselves prophets.—See v. 32.

THE LETTER.—V. 23-29.

V. 23. Letters.—As possessing more weight, and designed for greater permanence than a mere verbal communication.

Unto the brethren... of the Gentiles.—"Though Gentiles, yet brethren. A noble step upward from Jewish intolerance. The nearer to Christ, the warmer the brotherly love toward all Christians."

V. 24. Certain which went out from us.—See v. 15—but the church did not send them. Troubled you with words.—How much evil is wrought in churches by "word men!" The law.—Not the moral law, but rituals and formalities of the Mosaic law which were no longer of value, now that Christ had come.

V. 25. With one accord.—This was a unanimous vote.

V. 26. Men that have hazarded their lives.—Compare xiii: 50; xiv: 19; 2 Cor. xi: 23. They had proved their fidelity by perilling their lives.

V. 27. The same things by mouth.—They were to have, besides the testimony of the written parchment duly signed, the verbal testimony of two chief men of the church at Jerusalem, and two of themselves. No mistake about the matter therefore.

V. 28. To the Holy Ghost, and to us.—Equivalent to saying, *the Holy Ghost be it.*

"The Spirit directed 'the apostles and elders and brethren' to a right decision. Divine aid had been promised to the apostles in conducting the affairs of the church; and the direction which the minds of the apostles took was by 'word men'—the influence of the Spirit." Compare Matt. xvii: 20; John xvi: 13.—Ripley.

These necessary things.—"Necessary partly from the nature of the things themselves,