



LESSON.—SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1909.

Paul a Prisoner—The Plot.

Acts xxiii., 11-24. Memory verse 11. Read Acts xxii., 30—xxiii., 33.

Golden Text.

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust. Psal. xci., 2.

Home Readings.

Monday, October 4.—Acts xxii., 30—xxiii., 11.
 Tuesday, October 5.—Acts xxiii., 12-22.
 Wednesday, October 6.—Acts xxiii., 23-35.
 Thursday, October 7.—Phil. iii., 1-14.
 Friday, October 8.—Luke xxi., 10-19.
 Saturday, October 9.—Psal. xxvii.
 Sunday, October 10.—Psal. xci.

FOR THE JUNIOR CLASSES.

The last we heard of Paul last Sunday he was in the Roman prison in Jerusalem, and the Roman captain, Claudius Lysias, who had put him there, did not know why he ought to be in prison, so he thought the best thing he could do would be to find out what Paul really had done that deserved putting in prison. You know that nursery rhyme about 'Bad Johnny?'—

John's a bad boy. What's he done? I can't say;
 Let's find out to-morrow and whip him to-day—

Well, that's just about the way everybody was treating Paul now. Claudius Lysias was sure he must have done something very bad, or all the Jews would not make such a row about him, so he commanded him to be beaten, but finding that he was a Roman citizen, he let him off the beating but still he put him in prison and had him chained up for the night. Next day he called all the Jewish leaders together and thought he would find out what Paul really had done. But he didn't get much of a chance, because Paul had hardly begun to speak when the Jews began quarrelling again, and they got so angry that Captain Lysias was afraid they would kill Paul between them, and sent the Roman soldiers to save him again. Paul's friend, who had travelled to Jerusalem with him, a Doctor Luke, was in the city at this time, and he tells us all about what happened in our lesson to-day.

FOR THE SENIORS.

The lesson calls for little explanation or elucidation. It is a fascinating bit of history told in a straightforward way by one who was doubtless an eye-witness and had a great admiration for the intrepid little apostle, Paul, who was not afraid to speak for himself nor too slow witted to take hold of an advantage that offered itself. Paul is on the defensive here more than on any other occasion that is recorded. He expects no justice from a court wholly swayed by prejudice. His first attempt to present his own point of view brought a response that assured him of that. A manly disgust at injustice flamed out for an instant to be checked at once by that Christian respect for law and rulers which all the apostles taught (Rom. xiii., 7; I. Pet. ii., 13-17; Jude 8-10), but he could not take back the truth he had spoken. There is no evidence that Paul was seeking a martyr's death. Willing to suffer for Christ's sake he was, and to die if need be, but he had a manly feeling that life was worth living, and there is a suspicion that he was a little distressed at the position in which he stood; a suggestion supported not only by his quick witted acceptance of the one way out that offered (verse 6), but also by the cheering vision which God vouch-

safed his much tried servant. The assurance that this vision conveyed of God's guiding hand and protective care did not make Paul foolishly inclined to disregard the threats of the Jews in future; the plot of which his young nephew warned him he did not resignedly say 'we will leave in God's hands,' but took the means that lay ready to frustrate it without delay. The lesson closes with Paul back again in Caesarea two weeks after he had left it on his way to Jerusalem (Acts xxi., 8-15). The puzzled Lysias, anxious to avoid trouble and seeking to turn the occasion to his own advantage (verse 27) is a picture which Luke has convincingly introduced into his story. Bible references on the subject of God's care for his children are Rom. viii., 28; Phil. i., 12; Josh. i., 9; Psal. xxiii., 4; xci., 1-4.

(SELECTIONS FROM TARBELL'S 'GUIDE.')

The Jews who had made such oaths could, in case of failure, easily procure absolution from their rabbis. Lightfoot gives the following quotation from the Talmud: 'He that hath made a vow not to eat anything, woe to him if he eat, and woe to him if he eat not. If he eat, he sinneth against his vow; if he eat not, he sinneth against his life. What must a man do in his case? Let him go to the wise men, and they will loose his vow; according as it is written. The tongue of the wise is health.'—Paton J. Gloag.

15. 'The Bezan verse gives "We ask you to do this for us: when ye have summoned the council, signify." This makes clear that the Sanhedrim was first to meet on the morrow and then send a formal message to Lysias' (Rackham).

23. 'He called unto him two of the centurions.' There are many things which we would be glad to know at the moment when Paul leaves Jerusalem never to see it again. What were the thoughts of his great heart? Did he communicate with James and the elders? Did he have an opportunity to say farewell to his kinsfolk? Luke omits everything else to write minutely how the order and discipline of the Roman world rescued Paul and defeated the hate of Judaism. He tells the number of soldiers, the number of their commanders, he describes the journey and makes us see the whole event as distinctly as if he had been there. We can almost hear the rattling of the soldiers' sabers, and the clang of the horses' hoofs as they start down the road to Antipatris. If Luke lingers thus over the story and fills it with details, he must intend to show how God's invisible hand could use the world power, which He had ordained, to serve Him in protecting His servant from apostate Judaism.—J. M. Stifler, in 'Introduction to the Acts.'

'Pull your own Oar.' Christ never promises smooth water to His followers. Nor is His Church a vast assemblage of towboats, pulled along by sheer power of the divine will. Each Christian has his own oar of personal responsibility to pull, and his own rudder of conscience to steer with, and must 'work his passage' as a free agent.—Theodore L. Cuyler, in the 'Presbyterian.'

There's but one way in which man can ever help God—that is by letting God help him.—Ruskin.

Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.—Cromwell.

That prayer is insincere which is not followed up by hearty efforts to secure the thing sought.—Marcus Dods.

(FROM PELOUBET'S 'NOTES.')

For the Fifth Time the Sanhedrim, the supreme court of the Jews, has to adjudicate upon the claims of the new Kingdom of God. After Jesus Himself, Sts. Peter and Paul, the Twelve, and St. Stephen, St. Paul now stands before them. . . . Peter and the Twelve appeared to the Sanhedrim as men 'unlearned,' men of the people, and they addressed their judges as Rulers and Elders. Stephen, on a higher level, spoke to them as Brethren and Fathers. Paul, as their equal in birth and learning, calls them Brethren. He had occupied a seat either upon the bench, or among 'the disciples of the learned.'—Rackham.

The high priest Ananias presiding over the council, was, according to Josephus a lawless tyrant of violent and unscrupulous conduct, by means of which he had acquired enormous wealth. 'We are told that he reduced the inferior priests almost to starvation by defraud-

ing them of their tithes, and sent his creatures to the threshing floors with bludgeons to seize the tithes by force.'

Verse 3.—Within two years this Ananias was deposed, and four years later he met a terrible death at the beginning of the Jewish wars. In a sedition raised by his son and a band of Sicarii (assassins) he hid in a sewer of the palace, and was drawn out and slain. All this was the fruit of the character which led him to his act of insulting injustice against St. Paul.

Verse 15.—The plan was to ask Lysias to bring Paul down from the barracks in the castle to the Sanhedrim hall, under pretense of examining him further. A small guard would seem sufficient. They would excite a tumult, murder Paul, and represent the murder as a mere accidental incident. At this time 'as we learn from Josephus, the Sicarii abounded, and murders were of daily occurrence. So numerous were these zealots that a few years after this an army of them took possession of Jerusalem and held it for several days, murdering the principal men and committing great atrocities.'—Gloag.

Junior C. E. Topic.

Sunday, October 10.—Topic—Not idlers, but workers. II. Thess. iii., 7-13.

C. E. Topic.

Monday, October 4.—Praying for the pastor. Rom. xv., 30-32.

Tuesday, October 5.—Willing helpers. Acts vi., 1-7; I. Cor. xii., 28.

Wednesday, October 6.—Standing by in danger. II. Tim. iv., 6-12.

Thursday, October 7.—By generous support. I. Cor. ix., 1-14.

Friday, October 8.—By following wisely. Heb. xiii., 7, 17, 18.

Saturday, October 9.—By regular attendance. Heb. x., 19-25.

Sunday, October 10.—Topic—How can we help our pastor? Ex. xvii., 8-13.

A Soul Saving School.

A brochure by two eminent workers amongst the young, Amos R. Wells and A. F. Schauffler, D. D., bearing the above title has this supposititious dream by a Sunday-school teacher in its opening chapter. He (the teacher) saw the Lord Jesus standing with His arms stretched out, and in His eyes was an eager look. 'Where are the souls of My children?' He asked the teacher. 'Here are their bodies,' the teacher was able to reply. 'They come to school very regularly and promptly.' Jesus took the bodies and they turned to dust in His hands.

'Where are the souls of My children?' Christ insisted.

'Here are their manners,' faltered the teacher. 'They are quiet and very respectful; they listen carefully. Indeed, they are beautifully behaved.'

Jesus took their manners, and they turned to ashes in His hands.

Our Lord repeated the question, 'Where are the souls of My children?'

'I can give you their brains,' the teacher answered. 'They can name all the books of the Bible forward and backward. They can repeat the list of the Hebrew kings. They know in order the seventy events of Your life on earth. They can recite the Sermon on the Mount from beginning to end. Really, they are excellent scholars.'

Jesus took their brains, and lo! they dissolved to vapor, and a puff of wind blew them away.

'Where are the souls of My children?' urged our Lord, with sorrowful longing.

Then the teacher was filled with agony that broke the bands of sleep. 'Alas!' he cried, 'I have done much for my children, but it is all nothing because I have not also done the one thing. Henceforth my teaching, though it traverse in many ways, shall have One goal, and perhaps it may be given me to dream that dream again.'

The vivacious writer has no doubt depicted an ideal result in the class as far as it went, but the perfection of details secured has served to bring into relief the defect in much Sunday-school work. Decision Day should set the time and tune for the work of the year. Let us aim high, and begin at once to do it.—'Sunday School Teacher.'