

into three special epochs. From chaps. 1 to 7 we have an account of the church at Jerusalem—its beginning by the baptism of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, its triumphs, its persecutions and its first martyrs. Chaps. 8 to 12 show us the Gospel overleaping the city of its birth and going forth to Samaritans through the preaching of Philip, and to Gentiles at Cesarea by Peter, it was a preparation, a teaching time, the Church was having set before it those great lessons which the inherited prejudice of centuries made it so hard to receive, that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." In chaps. 13 to 14 we have an account of the first missionary journey, under the direct command of the Spirit of God to the church at Antioch, the chosen messengers being Paul and Barnabas.

**Notes and Comments.**—Ver. 1.—"Certain men:" names not given, an ancient tradition states that Cerinthus was one of them, "came down" from Jerusalem to Antioch—the thought is that they were sent by the Judaizing party. "Except circumcised:" the phrase likely stands for the whole ceremonial law of Moses which they would have imposed upon the converts, so the "cross of Christ" stands for the whole gospel of Christ. "Cannot be saved:" so they put a rite in the place of faith, the ritual for the spiritual.

Ver. 2.—Just as we should expect, "Paul and Barnabas" withstood such teachings. "Discussions and disputations:" the phrases indicate violent controversy and debate; "they determined" (REV., "the brethren appointed"): Paul tells us (Gal. 2:2) that he went up "by revelation," that may mean, however, a revelation to the Church, or to certain individuals in it, as on the occasion of the first missionary journey. "Certain other:" Titus was one (Gal. 2:1, 3). "To Jerusalem:" the Apostles were there and the first converts.

Ver. 3. Not only did these delegates to Jerusalem possess the confidence and sympathy of the Church at Antioch, but the brethren there manifested it by going a part of the way with them. "Phenice and Samaria:" directly on their route; here they found "brethren:" converted, many of them, doubtless by the ministry of Philip. It has been well observed that the very route they took was an assertion of the principle for which they were contending, as they might have taken another route and avoided these Gentile churches. "Great joy:" by their visit and the tidings they bore of the conversion of the Gentiles.

Ver. 4. "Received:" officially, after private interviews, as we learn from Gal. 2:29, with James, Peter and John. Then there was a general gathering of the Church to discuss this important matter. "Declared all things:" told the story of their journey among the Gentiles and of the wonderful results that had followed. "With them:" the phrase is significant, it was God's work, not their own, they were simply the instruments in His hands.

Ver. 5. "Sect of Pharisees:" the most extreme of the adherents of the Mosaic law. "Needful:" etc., how hard a thing to conquer prejudice, how little these men understood the religion into which they had entered; do Christians as a whole understand it much better to-day.

Ver. 6. "Apostles and elders:" but the whole church was present and concurred in the decision (vers. 22, 23); "this matter:" there were two questions to decide: must the Gentiles be circumcised? and were they bound to observe the law of Moses?

Ver. 7. "Much disputing:" each side, the Jewish-Christian and the Gentile-Christian, set forth its views, the apostles appear to have allowed a free expression of opinion, probably at some length. "Peter:" true to himself, foremost always, yet it was specially proper that he should be first now, for, as he reminds his hearers, it was

through him that God, at the first, sent the word to the Gentiles, which was followed by belief unto life. "A good while ago:" from ten to fourteen years. God had settled this question long ago.

Vers. 8, 9. The Jews thought that the objection to circumcision was a sign of sin in the heart. No, says Peter, "God who knoweth the heart, and therefore cannot be deceived," has borne witness to the genuineness of their conversion by "giving them the Holy Ghost," whom, the inference is, He gives only to those who are pleasing to Him. The Holy Ghost had been given first to Cornelius, and afterward to the Gentile church at Antioch. "Put no difference" (REV., "made no distinction"), "purifying their hearts:" the real uncleanness of the Gentile as of the Jew, was in the heart, when that was cleansed impurity did not cleave as those Pharisees supposed, to the body. "By faith:" God's method.

Ver. 10. If this be so then "Why tempt ye God:" this is the application of Peter's argument; God had received the Gentiles without circumcision, if they refuse they put themselves in opposition to God, and commit the sin of tempting Him. "A yoke:" etc., a Jew's description of the burdensome character of the Mosaic ritual; when Peter thus speaks of it and describes its character he gives up the Mosaic law as binding, he says, practically, that no man was able perfectly to fulfil it, and therefore that it cannot be the means of salvation.

Ver. 11. There are various renderings of this verse, but they practically give the same truth—that there is only one way of salvation for Jew and Gentile, which is "by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ;" Paul could not have said more than this.

#### HINTS TO TEACHERS—WHAT AND HOW TO TEACH.

**Prefatory.**—Get a clear understanding of the position of these Judaizing teachers, and let your scholars see that although they were in error, seriously so, yet that it arose, as many errors do, from distorted truth. Put yourself for a moment in the place of these men. For centuries they had been a peculiar, a select people, all the glory of their national life rested upon the fact that they were the chosen of God; they were isolated from Gentile nations, and had been taught to look upon them as outside the covenant, and although there were circumstances in their own history, which, if read aright, would have taught them a nobler truth, yet the other idea loomed up so large as to shut out the view of modifying truths. It is not surprising that centuries of tradition had made this feeling of superiority over the Gentiles in the sight of God so great that it was impossible for them, as a whole, to believe that this was to end, and that other nations were to stand on the same plane of God's favour, without conforming to Jewish rites—becoming proselytes, in fact, to Jewish law, before they could become Christians. Similar questions of this religious and social exclusiveness hinder the progress of the gospel to-day in some parts, notably in India; a Hindoo will not eat with a Parsee or a Mohomedan, nor will a Brahman with a Pariah. The circumstances of the lesson formed the first great internal crisis in the history of the Church, and it is for you to show how the Lord was with his people guiding them, leading them out of the wilderness of a formal religion into the Canaan of spiritual freedom and truth. It will be well to read Gal. 2:1-10 in connection.

**Topical Analysis.**—(1) The dispute about circumcision (vers. 1, 2). (2) Counsel sought from Jerusalem (ver. 3). (3) The discussion at Jerusalem and Peter's speech (vers. 4-11).

On the first topic it will be well to point out the importance of the question raised, the vast interests involved; it was a question whether Christianity was to be only a reformation of Judaism, a purer form of a local faith, or whether it was

\* REV. will always mean Revised version of the N.T.