

LESSON IV. THE PERSECUTOR A PREACHER.

Paul's Rehearsal of His Experience.

July 28, 1900.

(Gal. 1:15-24.)

“WHEN it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and tarried with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Then I came into the region of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but they only heard say, He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc; and they glorified God in me.”

(SPECIAL NOTE.--It is often the case, where consecutive portions of Scripture are studied, that as soon as a new lesson is begun, the preceding one is forgotten. This is of course due to the fact that the previous one has not been perfectly learned. It is indeed impossible for any lesson to be thoroughly learned the first time over it. One must come back to it again and again, in order to have it indelibly imprinted in the mind. Hence the necessity for frequent and continual reviews.

This lesson, it will be noted, includes, for the sake of the connection, three verses that were in the last lesson. The student, however, and the teacher as well, should each time study from the beginning of the epistle. Otherwise there will be at the close of the study, only a blur before the mind, instead of a distinct and vivid picture of the whole epistle. Remember that we are to *know* this epistle when we have finished. Each time you review you will be able to pass over the first lessons more rapidly, until you can finally take them all in at a glance; yet it will astonish you to see how many new things present themselves as the text becomes more and more familiar.)

QUESTIONS.

What was it the good pleasure of God to do for Paul?

“To reveal His Son in me.”

For what purpose?

“That I might preach Him among the heathen.”

From what time had God chosen him to this work?

Of what was the calling of Paul to the ministry a manifestation?

“God . . . called me by His grace.”

What was necessary before Paul could preach Christ?

Was the revelation of the Lord through Paul a thing peculiar to him? See 1 Peter 2:9.

As soon as this took place, what course did Paul pursue?

Whose society did he not seek?

Where did he go?

From Arabia where did he go?

How long after his conversion before he returned to Jerusalem?

How long did he remain there?

Which of the apostles did he meet there?

Where did he go from there?

How much acquaintance had he with the churches in Judea?

What was the only thing that they knew about him?

What did they do?

Although Paul had so little intercourse with the apostles and the brethren, and had not learned the Gospel from them, how did he compare with them? See 2 Cor. 11:5.

How was he taught? Gal. 1:11, 12.

NOTES.

1. When Paul came into conscious, personal connection with Christ, he conferred not with flesh and blood. But he was flesh and blood; therefore we learn that he did not take counsel with himself. Many a man who boasts of his independence of men, and his freedom from being led by human opinions, is nevertheless a slave to the opinions of one of the most dangerous men to follow--namely, himself. Taking Christ as counselor delivers us wholly from ourselves. Note the contrast between following the traditions of the fathers, and not conferring with flesh and blood.
2. Call to mind the account of Paul's conversion, in Acts 9:1-22. Note that as soon as his eyes were opened, three days after he saw the Lord in the way, he began to preach Christ with power. How could he do that so soon?--He had Christ in him; he knew the Lord, and had only to tell what he knew. That is all any preacher has to do, or should do.
3. Remember, however, that Paul was not ignorant of the *words* of Scripture, even when he was a persecutor. He was brought up a Pharisee, at the feet of Gamaliel, a highly-esteemed doctor of the law. The Bible is the foundation of all true preaching. If Paul had not been acquainted with it, he could not so soon have confounded the Jews, proving that Jesus is the Christ. The Scriptures that one learns even as an unbeliever, form a basis for the Holy Spirit to work with in effecting his conversion, and can at once be used effectually by him as soon as his conversion enables him to see the true light in them.
4. “After three years”--“after many days.” In reading the record in the Acts of the Apostles we might hastily conclude that it was but a few weeks or months after

Paul's conversion until he returned to Jerusalem, and we would not learn that he went into Arabia. Acts 9:23 tells us that after many days Paul went up to Jerusalem; our lesson tells us that the many days were three years, and that in the meantime he went off by himself into Arabia.

5. Acts 9:23-26 tells us how Paul left Damascus to go to Jerusalem after the three years. The only other reference to his danger at that time and his escape from it, is 2 Cor. 11:32, 33.
6. If we had been living in Judea in the days of Saul the persecutor, we should most likely have looked upon him as a hopeless case. We would have said that, since he had heard Stephen's last inspired discourse, and therefore had had the light and rejected it, he was hardened beyond all possibility of being saved. We might have said some very hard things about him, and it is almost certain that we should not have thought it worth while to pray for his conversion. How little we know of the heart! Saul had had the light, but had not rejected it. God had not given him up. Who knows how many zealous preachers of the Gospel God has now among men who are fighting the truth? Let us lay this lesson to heart, and not say hard things of any, lest we be decrying one of God's chosen ones. And let us beware of thinking any case hopeless.
7. The brethren in Judea, who had suffered from Saul's persecutions, although they had never seen him, glorified God in his behalf, when they heard of his conversion. That was much better than carping about him, and expressing doubts about his sincerity.