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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Lesson II.—Third Quarter, For
July 11, 1909.

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Text of the Lesson, Acts xvii, 16-40.
Memory Verses, 29-31—Golden Text,
Acts xvi, 31—Commentary Prepared
by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

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The scene of this lesson is Philippi. The special places in the city are the prayer meeting, the prison and the home of Lydia. The principal incidents are the casting out of the evil spirit, the cruel treatment and imprisonment of Paul and Silas and the conversion of the jailer and his household. And the great workers are, as always, God and the devil. Thus the story is in greater or less measure duplicated every day until finally the devil and all his followers shall be sent to the place prepared for them and the kingdom shall be the Lord's, "Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (Ps. lxxii, 11). In whatever part of the conflict we may find ourselves we must at any cost stand wholly apart from all that is of the devil, for all that is either of God or the devil, no matter how it may look to our eyes. As the servants of God proceeded to the place of prayer a young woman met them who cried, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who shew unto us the way of salvation," and this she did many days. Now, this was the truth that she uttered, as were also the words of the evil spirit in Mark i, 24, "Thou art the holy one of God," but Jesus would have none of that, and Paul would have none of this, recognizing it to be of the devil, so in the name of Jesus he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. Good words and good works, as men judge, do not necessarily indicate the spirit of God as the one who is speaking and working. No one ever said more beautiful and wonderful words than Balaam, and yet he is associated in Jude 11 with Cain and Core, and we are taught to beware of such as he. Those who do not honor Jesus as God are not of God and therefore must be of the evil one, and yet many such are honored today as if they were truly sent of God, and to talk against them would cause possibly as great a tumult as did the casting out of this demon at Philippi. Some say we must be broad minded and acknowledge the good in all religions, but as the truth is in Jesus and not in other so called leaders we must be as narrow as Paul and as Jesus Himself, who told the religious leaders of His day that they were of the devil.

When people's gains are touched they are apt to become suddenly indignant against unrighteousness as viewed from their standpoint, as the men in our lesson did and later those at Ephesus (chapter xix, 23-29). Paul and Silas were therefore arrested, many stripes laid upon them, and they were cast into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks. Where now was the "all power" of Him who sent them forth, the "power over all the power of the enemy?" (Matt. xxviii, 18; Luke x, 19). As well ask the same concerning Joseph and Daniel and all others who have been permitted to suffer for His sake. Paul knew that he was called to suffer for Christ's sake, and he assures us that it is our privilege also (Acts ix, 16; Phil. i, 29). To glorify God is everything, and, if we can do that best by suffering, then suffering is the way. With aching bodies and feeling that they had been shamefully treated (I Thess. ii, 2), they prayed to God and by His grace were able to sing praises to Him so loudly that all the prisoners heard them. Like Jehoshaphat's singers, they praised the Lord before they saw deliverance (II Chron. xx, 21, 22). It is well to "bless the Lord at all times and have His praise continually in our mouth" (Ps. lxxiv, 1). Not only were they heard throughout the prison, but in heaven also, and suddenly the prison was shaken by an earthquake, all doors opened and every one's hands loosed. Some one has said that, although they had not influence enough on earth to keep them out of jail or to get them out, they had power enough from heaven to shake the prison to its very foundations. The jailer also was shaken to his very soul and would have killed himself; but, finding his prisoners all safe, he is convicted of sin and, falling down before Paul and Silas, asked what he must do to be saved. Gathering his household together, they had the way of salvation set before them by these messengers of the Lord, and that night he and all his confessed Christ by baptism.

We may judge from Paul's preaching, as recorded elsewhere, just what he would tell them of the condition of all men by nature, of the grace of God in giving His Son to die for sinners, the just for the unjust; of His being made a curse for us, of His resurrection, ascension and coming again. Doubtless Paul would say, "It was to Him we prayed down there in the dungeon. His praises we sang, and in heaven He heard us and did this wonderful thing and kept you from killing yourself that you might be saved and after witnessing and suffering here for awhile share with Him His kingdom and glory." To believe is to receive (John i, 12), and there and then this household received Jesus as their Saviour. What joy in heaven as well as on earth, according to Luke xv, 7, 10. It was worth while to suffer, to be unjustly and cruelly treated and imprisoned, to bring this to pass.



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