

# HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE FIRST CENTURY



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THE present volume intends to instruct the general reader in the knowledge of the early Fathers of the Christian Church. It may thus be learned how the Church passed through the Apostolic era into that of the "Apostolic Fathers". These Fathers belong to the period between the close of the New Testament Canon and the days of St Irenaeus (*AD* 160) a period during which the record of the progress of the Church and of its heroes is very scanty. From the time of the great Bishop of Lyons onwards we have an abundant Church literature, and much fuller details in history than before. We see at that epoch how the Church had spread itself far and wide, but the seed had grown almost secretly. There were many writers during the interval whose works have perished, though, it is even now possible that some of them may yet be found buried away in the lumber rooms of Eastern monasteries.

CHAPTER 1.

*CONDUCT AND PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES TO THE TIME OF THE DEATH OF STEPHEN; WITH THE CAUSES WHICH OPERATED TO PROMOTE THE SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL*

THE Kingdom of Christ, or the Church of Christ, may be said to date its beginning from the time when the Head of that Church and Kingdom rose in triumph from the grave. The Son of God, as He Himself informs us, had shared His Father's glory before the world was; and the scheme of redemption had been laid in the counsels of God, from the time of the promise being given, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head: but this gracious and merciful scheme had not been fully developed to mankind, till Jesus Christ appeared upon earth, and died upon the cross.

It had indeed pleased God, at sundry times and in divers manners, to acquaint the Jews with the coming of their Messiah; but the revelation had been made obscurely and partially: it was given to one nation only, out of the countless millions who inhabit the earth; and the Jews themselves had entirely mistaken the nature of that kingdom which their Messiah was to found. They overlooked or forgot what their prophets had told them, that He was to be despised and rejected of men; and they thought only of those glowing and glorious predictions, that kings were to bow down before Him, and all nations were to do Him service. The prophecy of Daniel (though there might be doubts as to the precise application of its words) had marked with sufficient plainness the period when Christ was to appear; and when Augustus was Emperor of Rome, a general expectation was entertained, not only by the Jews, but by other nations also, that some great personage was shortly to show himself in the world. The Jews had strong reasons for cherishing such an expectation. If the sceptre had not actually departed from Judah, it had not been sufficient to preserve their independence, or to save them from the disgrace of being a conquered people. That this disgrace was shortly to be removed, and that their fetters were soon to be burst asunder, was the firm belief of a large proportion of the Jewish nation; and the name of their Messiah was coupled with ardent aspirations after liberty and conquest.

It was at this period, when the minds of men were more than usually excited, that the voice was heard of one crying in the wilderness, "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord*". John the Baptist was the forerunner of the long-promised Messiah; but, instead of announcing Him to his countrymen as a king and a conqueror, he opposed himself at once to their strongest prejudices. They prided themselves upon being God's chosen people; and, as children of Abraham, without thinking of any other qualification, they considered their salvation to be certain. John the Baptist persuaded his followers to get rid of these notions. He taught them to repent of their sins; and, instead of trusting to outward ceremonies, or to the merit of their own works, to throw themselves upon the mercy of God, and to rest their hopes of heaven in a Saviour, who was shortly to appear. This was a great step gained in the cause of spiritual and vital religion. The disciples of the Baptist were brought to acknowledge that they had offended God, and that they had no means in themselves of obtaining reconciliation. It was thus that they were prepared for receiving the Gospel. John the Baptist made them feel the want of that atonement, which Jesus Christ not only announced but which He actually offered in His own person to God. And not only was John the forerunner of Christ during the short time



that he preceded Him on earth, but even now the heart of every one, who is to receive the Gospel, must first be prepared by the doctrines preached by John: he must repent of his sins, and he must have faith in that One who was mightier than John, who was then announced as about to appear, and who shortly did appear, to reconcile us to His Father, by dying on the cross.

John the Baptist proclaimed to the Jews, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand; and though it is not probable that many of them understood the spiritual nature of the kingdom which was to be established, yet they would all know that he spoke of the Messiah; for the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, were expressions which they had long been in the habit of using for the coming of Christ. When the Christ was actually come—not, as the Jews expected, with the pomp and splendor of an earthly king, but in an obscure and humble station—He began His preaching with the same words which had been used by the Baptist, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. When He sent out His twelve disciples to preach these glad tidings to the cities of Judaea, He told them to use the same words. From which we gather, that the Kingdom of God, or of Christ, was not actually come when Jesus was born into the world, nor even when He began His ministry. It was still only at hand. Jesus Christ did not come merely to deliver a moral law, nor to teach us, by His own example, how to live, and how to die. These were indeed the great objects of His appearing among us as a man; and the miracles which He worked, together with the spotless purity of His life, were intended to show that He was more than man: but Jesus Christ came into the world to atone for our sins, by dying on the cross. This was the great end and object of His coming; and Christ did not properly enter upon His kingdom till the great sacrifice was offered, and He had risen again from the dead. It was then that the Church of Christ began to be built. The foundation of it, was laid in Christ crucified; and the members of it are all the believers in Christ's death, of every country and every age. It is this Church, of which, with the blessing of God, we may attempt to trace the history.

Jesus Christ had a great many followers while He was upon earth. Many, perhaps, sincerely believed Him to be the Messiah; but it is probable that very few understood the spiritual nature of the deliverance which He had purchased. The task of explaining this doctrine to the world was committed by Him to twelve men, or rather to eleven; for the traitor was gone to his own place: and when Jesus Christ was ascended into heaven, we have the spectacle before us of eleven Jews, without a leader, without education, money, rank, or influence, going forth to root out the religious opinions of all the nations of the earth, and to preach a new and strange doctrine, which was opposed to the prejudices and passions of mankind.

The doctrine itself may be explained in a few words. They were to preach faith in Christ crucified. Men were to be taught to repent of their sins, and to believe in Christ, trusting to His merits alone for pardon and salvation; and those who embraced this doctrine were admitted into the Christian covenant by baptism, as a token that they were cleansed from their sins, by faith in the death of Christ: upon which admission they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, enabling them to perform works well-pleasing to God, which they could not have done by their own strength. The commission to preach this doctrine, and to admit believers into the Christian covenant by baptism, was given by Christ, while He was upon earth, to the eleven apostles only; and one of their first acts, after His ascension, was to complete their original number of twelve, by the election of Matthias, who was known to them as having accompanied Jesus from the beginning of His ministry.

It is needless to observe that this small band of men, if we give them credit for the utmost unanimity and zeal, was wholly unequal to the conversion of the world. There is also reason to believe that, at this time, they had very imperfect insight into the doctrines which they were to preach; but their Master had promised them assistance which would carry them through every difficulty, and fit them for their superhuman labor. Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost which followed His ascension into heaven, He kept His promise by sending the Holy Spirit upon them, in a visible form, and with an effect which was immediately connected with their commission to preach the Gospel. The twelve apostles suddenly found themselves enabled to speak several languages which they had never learned; and the feast of Pentecost having caused the city to be filled, at this time, with foreign Jews, from every part of the world, there was an immediate opportunity for the gift of tongues to be exercised by the apostles, and observed by the strangers.

We have thus, at the very outset of the Gospel, a convincing proof of its truth, and of its having come from God; for nothing but a miracle could enable men to converse in languages which they had never learned; and if the apostles, by means of the gift of tongues, propagated a false doctrine, it must follow that God worked a miracle to assist them in propagating a falsehood.

The effect of the miracle was such as might have been expected. There must have been some hundreds of persons in Jerusalem, who had not only witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, but who were partly acquainted with His life and doctrines. The foreign Jews were probably strangers to His history; but they now heard it, for the first time, from men who proved their inspiration by evidence which could not be resisted. The apostles took advantage of the impression which this miracle had caused. They explained to the multitudes the great doctrines of the Gospel; and the result was, that on this, which was the first day of their preaching, no fewer than three thousand persons were baptized, professing themselves to be believers in Jesus Christ. These persons were not yet called Christians, nor do we read of their being known at present by any particular name; but they were distinguished by a spirit of brotherly love and charity, which might have been sufficient of itself to show, that their religion came from God.

### *State of Judea in time of Christ*

It may here be convenient to take a hasty sketch of the political state of Judea at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion. It was, in every sense of the term, a conquered country, though the Jews were very unwilling to allow that they were subject to any foreign dominion. Their independence, however, had been little more than nominal, ever since the taking of Jerusalem by Pompey, in the year 63 before the birth of Christ. This was the first transaction which brought them directly in contact with the overwhelming power of Rome. Herod the Great, who was not properly a Jew, but an Idumaeon, though he dazzled his subjects by the splendour and magnificence of his reign, was little else than a vassal of the Empire; and he saw the policy of paying court to his masters, who, in return, allowed him to reign over a greater extent of territory than had been held by any Jewish prince since the time of Solomon. Still there was a large party in the country which could not shut their eyes to the fact that Herod was a foreigner, and that the influence of foreigners kept him on his throne. To get rid of this influence by an open insurrection was hopeless; but Herod's connection with Rome, and his introduction of Roman manners among his subjects, kindled a flame, which was smothered for some years, or

only broke out partially and at intervals, but which ended in the final ruin of that devoted people.

Upon the death of Herod the Great, which happened not long after the birth of Christ, the Romans put in execution the usual policy of conquerors, and made resistance still more difficult on the part of the conquered, by dividing their territory into parts. Judea was given to one of the sons of Herod, and Galilee to another; but the still more decisive step had already been taken, of including Judea in the general order which was issued by Augustus, that the whole empire should pay a tax. The money was not levied in Judea till some years after the issuing of the edict. The opportunity chosen for this unpopular measure was on the deposition of Archelaus, who had held Judea since the death of his father, and was removed from his government, to the great satisfaction of his subjects, about the year 8. The Romans now no longer disguised their conquest. They did not allow the Jews to retain even the shadow of national independence; but Judea was either made an appendage to the presidentship of Syria, or was governed by an officer of its own, who bore the title of Procurator. One of these procurators was Pontius Pilate, who was appointed in the year 26, and held the office at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion. He continued to hold it till the year 36, when he was banished to Vienne in Gaul, and there is a tradition that he died by his own hand; but we know nothing of his directing any measures against the apostles, during the remaining years of his holding the government of Judea.

It seems to have been the general policy of the Romans, not to interfere with the religious customs and prejudices of the Jews. The usual residence of the procurator was at Caesarea, on the sea-coast, and he only went up to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, or on other extraordinary occasions. With the exception of a Roman garrison, which occupied the tower of Antonia, and was always ready to overawe the inhabitants in case of a tumult. Jerusalem had, perhaps, less the appearance of a conquered city, when it was the capital of a Roman province, than when it was the residence of Herod, who called himself an independent sovereign. The high-priests still exercised considerable power, though the Romans had seen the expediency of taking the appointment to this office into their own hands, and of not allowing the same individual to hold it for a long time.

It might be thought, that this foreign interference, in a matter of such high and sacred importance, would have been peculiarly vexatious to the Jews; but the competitors for the office, who were at this time numerous, were willing to be invested with the rank and dignity of the priesthood, even at the sacrifice of their national pride. The same feelings of ambition and jealousy inclined the high-priest, for the time being, to pay great court to the Roman authorities; and, so long as this good understanding was kept up between the two parties, the influence of the procurator was as full and complete as he could desire; though, to outward appearance, the management of affairs was in the hands of the high-priest.

Such was the state of things, when the apostles began their commission of preaching a new religion in Jerusalem. The narrative of the Evangelists will inform us, that the procurator had no wish to interfere in such questions, except at the instigation of the priests and the Sanhedrim. Even then, he took it up more as a matter of state policy, than of religion; and it was necessary to persuade him that Jesus was setting Himself up as a rival to the Emperor, before he would give any orders for His execution.

As soon as he returned to Cesarea, the field was left open for the Sanhedrim to take what steps it pleased for checking the apostles and their followers. There was always, however, need of some caution in any measures which were likely to excite a popular

commotion. The turbulent character of the Jews, as well as their suppressed impatience under the yoke of conquest, were well known to the Romans, though they pretended not to be aware of it; but the troops which garrisoned the capital, had special orders to be on the watch against every appearance of riot or tumult. It thus became necessary for the high-priests to avoid, as much as possible, any public disturbance in their plans against the apostles.

The Romans had no objection to their practising any violence or cruelty against the followers of Jesus, so long as they did it quietly; and this will account, in some measure, for the Gospel making such rapid progress in Jerusalem, though the same persons continued in authority who had put Jesus publicly to death. The miracles worked by the apostles were evidences which could not be called in question; and the more general was the sensation which they caused among the people who witnessed them, the less easy was it for the high-priests to take any decisive steps.

It is not likely that the Gospel would be embraced at first by the rich and powerful among the Jews. These were the men who had excited the populace to demand the crucifixion of Jesus; and our Lord Himself appears to have foretold, that the poor would be most forward to listen to the glad tidings of salvation. Such was undoubtedly the case in the infancy of the Church; and the apostles did not forget, while they were nourishing the souls of their converts, to make provision also for supplying their bodily wants.

Those believers who possessed any property, contributed part of it to form a common fund, out of which the poorer members of the community were relieved. It is a mistake to suppose that the first believers gave up the right to their own property, and, in the literal sense of the expression, maintained a community of goods. The Gospel taught them, what no other religion has taught so plainly and so powerfully—that they were to give an account to God of the use which they made of their worldly possessions, and that they were to look upon the poor as their brethren. They, therefore, abandoned the notion that God had given them the good things of this life for their own selfish enjoyment. They felt that they held them in trust for the benefit of others, as well as of themselves; and a part, at least, of their income, was to be devoted to the relief of those who would otherwise be in want.

### *Beginning of Apostolic Preaching.*

Charity, in the fullest sense of the term, was the characteristic mark of the early Christians; but the bond which held them together, was faith in a common Saviour: and they immediately established the custom of meeting in each other's houses, to join in prayer to God, and to receive the bread and wine, in token of their belief in the death and resurrection of Christ. There is abundant evidence that the Lord's Supper was celebrated frequently, if not daily, by the early Christians. It, in fact, formed a part of their ordinary meal; and scarcely a day passed in which the converts did not give this solemn and public attestation of their resting all their hopes in the death of their Redeemer.

Their numbers increased rapidly. The apostles worked stupendous miracles. Many of the converts were themselves endued with the same power of speaking new languages, or of doing extraordinary works; and, before many weeks had elapsed, not only were some priests and Levites numbered among the converts at Jerusalem, but the new doctrines had begun to spread through the neighbouring towns.



The attention of the Jewish authorities was soon attracted to the apostles and their followers. Several causes combined at this time to raise among the Jews an opposition to the Gospel. The zealous patriot, whose numbers were increasing, and who were becoming more impatient of Roman domination, had indulged a hope that Jesus would have raised the standard of the Messiah, and headed an insurrection against the conquerors. Instead of seconding their wishes, He always inculcated obedience to the government, and was put to a disgraceful death.

The followers, therefore, of such a man, if they were not too despicable to obtain any notice, were looked upon as enemies to the liberty of their country. All those persons who were immoral in their conduct, but, at the same time, pretenders to sanctity, could not fail to be offended at the severe reproofs which they received from Jesus and His disciples. The notion that righteousness was to be gained by an outward observance of legal ceremonies, was utterly destroyed by the preaching of the Gospel. The kingdom of heaven was said, by the new teachers, to be thrown open to all persons who repented of their sins and believed in Christ: and hence every one who was self-righteous, every one who boasted of his privileges as a descendant of Abraham, felt it to be a duty to persecute the disciples of Jesus.

It was not, however, so easy a matter to suppress the new doctrines. The people looked on with amazement, and even with terror, while the apostles were working their miracles; and when they preached in the Temple there was no want of multitudes who listened eagerly to their words. Every day increased their popularity; and the authorities had not courage to act openly against them. If they succeeded in arresting one or more of them privately, their prison doors were miraculously thrown open; and instead of being brought to answer their charge or receive their sentence, they returned to disseminate their doctrines more publicly and boldly than before. If some false disciples insinuated themselves into their company, the immediate detection of their hypocrisy exhibited still more plainly the superhuman power of the apostles.

Thus Ananias and Sapphira pretended to bring the whole of the sum which they had received for the sale of some land, and offered it as their contribution to the common fund. The apostles knew that the statement was false; and while the falsehood was hanging on their lips they both fell dead. The judgment may appear severe, but we may be sure that it was necessary. The sufferers had, in the first instance, been seeking for applause under the mask of charity, and then thought to impose upon the very persons whose miracles had been the cause of their own conversion. The times did not allow of such cases being multiplied, or escaping with impunity. Treachery from within might have made it impossible to resist the attacks which were threatening from without; and the death of Ananias and Sapphira must have had a powerful effect upon wavering and worldly minds, which were already half-convinced, but were still only half-resolved to lay down their pleasures and their vices at the foot of the Cross.

Dissensions among the rulers themselves contributed in some measure to save the apostles from molestation. The Pharisees and Sadducees looked upon each other with feelings of jealousy and hatred. The Pharisees were most numerous, and reckoned among their sect the most learned expounders of the Law; but many of the rich and higher orders were Sadducees. Both parties agreed in persecuting the followers of Jesus; but the Sadducees were still opposed to them, for maintaining so forcibly the doctrine of a Resurrection. The Pharisees were equally willing to see the apostles imprisoned, or even put to death; but they would not consent that they should suffer for preaching the Resurrection of the dead; and thus the Gospel made more progress, because its enemies could not agree among themselves as to the means of suppressing it.

The high priest and his family happened at this time to be Sadducees; but Gamaliel, who was the most learned man of his day, and whose opinion had most weight in the council, was a Pharisee.

Jesus Christ had not Himself left any directions for governing His Church; none, at least, are recorded in the books of the New Testament. During His abode on earth, He chose out twelve men from among His followers, to whom He gave a special commission to preach the Gospel, not only in Judea, but throughout the world.

He also, on one occasion, sent out seventy other disciples, to declare to their countrymen, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. But they could only announce it as at hand. It is plain, that when the kingdom was begun, and believers were to be gathered into it, He intended the keys of this kingdom to be given to the apostles. It was upon them that the Church was to be built. The commission of preaching and baptizing was given solemnly to them on the last occasion of their seeing their Master upon earth. Their first recorded act, after His ascension, was to supply the deficiency which had been caused in their number by the treachery and death of Judas. All which seems to point out the twelve apostles as a distinct order from the rest of the believers, and to show that the management of the new community was intended, by their Master, to be committed to their hands.

Their first office, therefore, was to announce the offer of salvation. When any persons accepted it, it was for the apostles to admit them, by baptism, to the privileges of the new covenant; and, if they had had nothing else to do but to baptize, their time would have been fully occupied. They had also to attend the different places where prayer-meetings were held, and where the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered. When the fame of their miracles had spread, they were constantly called upon to exercise their preternatural power in healing the sick: and when we learn that the converts amounted to many thousands, within a few days after the descent of the Holy Spirit, it is scarcely possible to conceive that the apostles could have met these various demands upon their time without calling in some assistance.

The public fund which had been raised for the relief of the poor required much time, as well as discretion, in the distribution of it; and the apostles soon found themselves obliged to commit this part of their office to other hands. The business was sufficiently laborious to occupy seven men, who were chosen, in the first instance, by the body of believers, and were then ordained for their special ministry, by having the hands of the apostles laid upon them. They were called Deacons, from a Greek term, which implies ministration, or service; and their first duty was to attend to the wants of the poor; but they also assisted the apostles in other ways, such as explaining the doctrines of the Gospel, and baptizing the new converts. In one point, however, there was a marked difference between them and the apostles. When they had persuaded men to believe, they could admit them into the Christian covenant by baptism; but they had not the power of imparting to them those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which it was the privilege of the apostles only to confer, by laying on their hands.

This division of labour, which was caused by the appointment of the deacons, not only gave the apostles much more time for preaching the Gospel, but their appointment is itself a proof, that, at this time, the believers in Christ were not much molested by the Jewish authorities. The seasons most favourable for promoting a persecution, were when the great festivals came round, such as the Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles. On these occasions Jerusalem was filled with thousands of Jews from different parts of the world. Many of these strangers had never heard of the name of Jesus before their arrival in Judaea. So long a journey was likely to be undertaken by those who

were most zealously attached to the law. Their previous notions of the Messiah would lead them to expect a triumphant conqueror, and an earthly kingdom: so that, when they reached the land of their fathers, with their minds already worked upon by religious excitement, they would easily be persuaded to look with horror upon men who preached against the law, and against all the privileges which the Jews supposed to belong to their Temple and nation. The apostles and their followers were represented as preaching these doctrines; and, though the charge was very far from being true, yet the foreign Jews would hear them maintaining that Jesus was far greater than Moses, and that righteousness was not to be obtained by the law.

### *Death of Saint Stephen*

It was at one of these festivals, perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles, which followed the Ascension, that Stephen, who was one of the most active of the seven deacons, was stoned to death. He was drawn into dispute by some of the foreign Jews; and when they found him superior in argument, they raised against him the cry, that he had blasphemed Moses and the law. Being dragged to trial upon this hasty charge, his sentence was as speedily passed, as it was executed. He has always been called the first Christian martyr; and, like his heavenly Master, to whom he offered a prayer, as his soul was departing from his body, his last and dying words were uttered in behalf of his murderers.

This was the first open act of violence committed against the Christians since the crucifixion of the Founder of their religion: but even this is to be looked upon rather as an act of popular frenzy and excitement, than as a systematic attack authorised by the government. There is no evidence of the Roman authorities having been called upon, in any way, to interfere; and so long as there was no riot or public disturbance, they gave the Sanhedrin full permission to decide and to act in all cases which concerned religion. The affair of Stephen was exclusively of this nature; and though we cannot but view with abhorrence the monstrous iniquity of his sentence, it may have been strictly legal, according to the practice of the nation and of the times. The trial of the martyr took place in the Temple: his death was by stoning, as the law required in case of blasphemy; and the first stones were thrown by the witnesses. All which seems to show that the forms of law were closely attended to, even in such a violent and hasty proceeding. The haste was, perhaps, necessary, that the whole might be over before the Romans could interfere, which they might be likely to have done, if a disturbance had been raised within the city: and it was probably from the same cause that the prisoner was hurried to his execution without the walls: such a spot was fitter for the scene of cruelty than the area of the Temple, or the streets, which were now crowded, in consequence of the festival; and when the work of death was complete, which need not have required many minutes, there was nothing to excite the suspicion or vigilance of the Romans. No opposition seems to have been offered to the friends of the deceased carrying off his body, which was committed to the grave with the usual accompaniments of lamentation and mourning.

It has been doubted whether the Jews at this period possessed the power of inflicting capital punishment; but the history of Stephen appears to prove that they did. His execution, as has been observed, was precipitate, but we cannot suppose that it was altogether illegal, or that the Romans had taken away from the Jewish authorities the exercise of such a power. Offences against the procurator, or which could be construed into acts of resistance to the laws of the empire, would, of course, be tried before Roman tribunals, or in courts where other laws than those of Moses were recognised: but it is

demonstrable that the laws of Moses were still in force, in matters not merely of a civil, but of a criminal nature; and the Romans were too politic to irritate a conquered people by depriving them at once of all their ancient usages. No attempt had hitherto been made (or at least, by no regular act of the government) to force the Jews to adopt any religious rights of the heathen; and questions of religion were left entirely to the decision of Jewish tribunals. If Stephen had been taken before a Roman officer, he would have dismissed the case without even giving it a hearing; or, if he had listened to the complaint, he would have pronounced it to be one which had no relation to the laws of Rome, and in which he was not called upon to interfere.

It can hardly be denied that this is a favourable circumstance for the Gospel at the time of its first promulgation. Its earliest enemies were the Jews, whose bitterness and malevolence could hardly have been exceeded: but their power to injure was not equal to their will. Had they shown their hatred of the Christians by a public persecution of them on an extensive scale, the Romans would probably have thought it necessary to quell the disturbance: and thus the new religion made a rapid progress in the city which was the head-quarters of its deadliest enemies. But, if the Romans had joined in opposing it, the contest must have appeared hopeless. Our faith may tell us, that even then the victory would have been on the side of truth, and God Himself would have interposed to defeat the adversary; but, humanly speaking, the Gospel would have had much less chance of making its way, if the power of Rome had been arrayed against it in its infancy.

As we pursue the history, we shall find the whole strength of the empire put forth to crush the new religion; but the tree had then taken deep root, and though its leaves and branches were shaken and scattered by the tempest, it stood firm amidst the shock, and continued to take root downwards, and to bear fruit upwards. The fire and sword did their work; but they began too late to do it to their uttermost. Had the Gospel been preached while the sceptre of Judah was still grasped by a firm and independent hand, it might have crushed the rising sect before it had attracted many followers; or, had an edict from Rome prohibited the apostles from speaking in the name of Jesus, the mandate must have been obeyed; but Christ having appeared at this particular time, when the Jews, as a nation, retained but a remnant of power, and when their Roman conquerors did not care to trouble themselves with a religion which they affected to despise, the result was highly favourable to the progress of the Gospel.

The Christians were for a long time considered by the heathen to be merely a Jewish sect; and the toleration, or the contempt (for either expression might be used), which protected the Jews in the exercise of their religion, afforded also the same protection to the Christians. The Jews would have exterminated Christianity, but had not the power: and the Romans were in some measure the unintentional protectors of the very religion which they afterwards tried so perseveringly, but so fruitlessly, to destroy. So true it is that God had chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty.

## CHAPTER II.

### FIRST PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS

THE death of Stephen was only the beginning of cruelties. If the popularity of the apostles had before protected them, the feeling of the people towards them had now greatly changed. It is possible that the calumny was generally believed, that the new doctrine was subversive of the Temple and the law. It was at least believed by the foreign Jews, who had filled every part of the city: and the original hatred of the chief priests and scribes would burst out with more violence, from having been for a time suppressed. The persecution which ensued called forth the talents and activity of a young man, who now attracts our attention for the first time, and who, if human causes had been suffered to operate, might appear to have been born for the extirpation of Christianity. This man was Saul.

He was a native of Tarsus, in Cilicia; and his father, who was a Pharisee, had given him a learned education. The schools of his native city, which were at this time in great repute, would have instructed him in heathen literature; but Saul was sent to Jerusalem, to finish his studies under Gamaliel, who has already been mentioned as the most celebrated expounder of the Jewish law. The young Pharisee united great talents with a hasty disposition, and passions which could easily be excited; but his sense of religion had taught him to restrain them, except when he thought they could be devoted to the service of God; and, in an age which was peculiarly marked by wickedness and hypocrisy, his moral character was unimpeached and unimpeachable.

To a mind constituted and trained like that of Saul, the doctrines preached by the apostles would appear peculiarly heretical. As a Pharisee, he would approve of their asserting a future resurrection; but when they proved it by referring to a Man who had been crucified and come to life again, he would only put them down for enthusiasts or impostors. When he heard that this same Man was said to be the Messiah; that He and His followers denied that righteousness could come by the law; that circumcision, and the whole service of the Temple, were denounced as useless, without faith in an atonement, which made all other sacrifices superfluous;—when the new doctrines were thus represented, the zeal of Saul at once pointed out to him that it was his duty to resist them with all his might. He appears to have come to Jerusalem, with some others of his countrymen, to attend the festival, and to have taken an active part in the attack upon Stephen. The dispute was at first carried on in words; and the foreign Jews (among whom we may recognise Saul and the Cilicians), undertook to refute the doctrines which had made such progress among the native inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Saul was probably a man of much more learning than Stephen; but we may infer that the latter had the advantage in argument, when we find his opponents having recourse to violence and outrage. The zeal of Saul carried him still further than this; and the first Christian blood which was shed by the hands of persecutors, is to be laid, in part, to the charge of Saul, who at least encouraged the death of Stephen, if he did not himself lift a stone against him, and was present when the spirit of the martyr returned to God who gave it.

The high-priest and his council were too happy to avail themselves of such an instrument for destroying the effect which had been caused by the miracles of the



apostles. The death of Stephen was followed by similar outrages against many other persons who were believers in Jesus, and who were now imprisoned or killed, if they did not save themselves by flying from the city. The apostles maintained their ground; but the deacons, and most of their adherents, sought an asylum elsewhere. Saul was among the most active instruments in this first persecution of the Christian Church; and when he was about to leave Jerusalem, at the close of the festival, he made a proposal to the high-priests for carrying on the same system of attack in other places.

His journeys from Tarsus to Jerusalem were likely to make him acquainted with the large and populous city of Damascus; but whether he had lately visited it himself, or whether he had his information from the Jews who attended the festival, he had heard that the new doctrines were professed by some persons of both sexes in Damascus. This city was now in the military possession of Aretas, a petty prince of Arabia, whose daughter had been married to Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great; but when Herod took his brother Philip's wife to live with him, the daughter of Aretas resented the insult by leaving him, and returning to her father. Aretas immediately made war upon his son-in-law, whom he defeated in a pitched battle; and the Romans neglecting at first to take up the quarrel, he held possession for some years of an extended territory, and among the other places, he put a garrison into Damascus. His fear of the Romans would make him likely to court the favour of the Jews, who were very numerous in that city; and Saul could hardly have found a place where he was less likely to be checked in his attacks upon the Christians.

Damascus is at a distance of 150 miles from Jerusalem; and Saul's journey thither is the first intimation which we have had of the Gospel having spread so far. There is, however, great reason to believe, that, even at this early period, it had been carried into several countries. Of the three thousand who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, some, if not many, had been foreign Jews; and the new doctrines would be carried by their means into distant parts of the world within a few weeks after their first promulgation. There is, therefore, nothing extraordinary in Saul being aware that Christians were to be found at Damascus; and, having provided himself with letters from the high-priest at Jerusalem, addressed to the Jewish authorities, he set out, with the intention of speedily returning with a train of Christian prisoners. God, however, had decided otherwise. Saul the persecutor was to become the chief preacher of the religion which he had opposed; and to Him who had decreed this change it was equally easy to accomplish it.

### *Conversion of St Paul.*

There is no need to dwell upon the miraculous circumstances of the conversion of Saul. It is sufficient to mention that Jesus Himself appeared to him by the way, and revealed to him His future intentions concerning him. It was even added that he was to preach the religion of Jesus to the Gentiles, which would, perhaps, have been more revolting to Saul's previous sentiments than his own adoption of the religion which he had persecuted.

Nothing, however, short of a special miracle would have been likely to persuade any Jew that salvation was to be extended to the Gentiles; and when this communication was made to Saul, we may say with truth that he was more enlightened on this point at the first moment of his conversion than all the apostles who had had so much longer time for understanding the Gospel. Saul was blinded by the vision, and did not recover his

sight till he had been three days in Damascus. He was then admitted into the Christian covenant by baptism; and either on account of the prejudice which still existed against him, or with a view to receiving more full revelations concerning the doctrines which he was to preach, he retired for the present into Arabia.

In the meantime the persecution had almost, if not entirely, ceased in Jerusalem. While the city was filled with foreign Jews, who attended the festival, the high priests found no want of instruments for executing their designs against the Christians. The houses in which these persons met for the purpose of prayer were easily known, and many innocent victims were thus surprised in the act of devotion, and sentenced to punishments, more or less severe, on the charge of conspiring to subvert the laws of Moses.

The crowded state of the city, which on such occasions often led to riots in the streets, would allow these acts of cruelty and injustice to pass without any special notice from the Roman garrison; and while several Christians were put to death, many others found it necessary to escape a similar fate by leaving Jerusalem. The colleagues of Stephen in the office of deacon were likely to be particular objects of hatred to the persecuting party. They appear all to have sought safety in flight; and thus the very means which had been taken to extirpate the Gospel, conveyed it into a country which would have been least likely to receive it from Jewish teachers. This was Samaria, whose inhabitants still cherished their ancient hostility to the Jews; and while the persons who attended the festivals, had carried Christianity into countries far more distant, Samaria, which was so near, was likely to hear nothing concerning it.

It will be remembered that Samaria had for many centuries been inhabited by a mixed race of people, whose religious worship was corrupted by Eastern superstitions, but who still professed to acknowledge the one true God, who was the God of Abraham, and who had revealed Himself by Moses. It is known that when the ten tribes were carried captive to Assyria, the conquerors sent a numerous colony of strangers to occupy the country; and these men brought with them different forms of idolatry and superstition. There is, however, reason to think that a greater number of Israelites continued in the country than has been generally supposed.

The inhabitants of Samaria continued to speak the same language which had been spoken by all the twelve tribes until the time of the Babylonish captivity, which is the more remarkable, because the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, had laid aside their original Hebrew, and had learnt from their conquerors to speak Chaldee. Very few of them could understand their Scriptures in the language in which they were written; and though copies of them were still multiplied for the use of the synagogues, the Hebrew words were written in Chaldee letters; whereas the Samaritans still continued to use the same letters which had always belonged to the Hebrew alphabet.

The Bible informs us of the quarrel which arose between the Samaritans and the Jews, when the latter began to rebuild Jerusalem upon their return from captivity; and we know that the same national antipathy continued in full force at the time of our Saviour appearing upon earth. There was, however, little or no difference between them as to the object of their worship. The God of the Jews was worshipped in Samaria, though the Samaritans denied that there was any local or, peculiar sanctity in the Temple at Jerusalem. They held that He might be worshipped on Mount Gerizim as effectually as on Mount Zion; in which opinion they may be said to have come near, though without being conscious of it, to one part of that law of liberty which was established by the Gospel.

Another point in which they differed from the Jews was their rejection of all the books of the Scriptures except the five which were written by Moses; but these were regarded by the Samaritans with almost the same reverence which was paid to them by the Jews. It must have been principally from these books of Moses that they learnt to entertain an expectation of the coming of the Messiah; but the fact is unquestionable, that the notion which had for some time been so prevalent in Judea, that the promised Deliverer was about to make His appearance, was also current in Samaria.

In some respects, therefore, we might say, that the Samaritans were less indisposed than the Jews to receive the Gospel. One of the great stumbling-blocks to the Jews, was the admission of any people beside themselves to the glories of the Messiah's kingdom; and, according to their own narrow views, it was as impossible for the Samaritans to partake of these privileges, as the Gentiles. It was probably on account of this prejudice, that when our Saviour, during the period of His own ministry, sent out His disciples to preach the Gospel, He told them not to enter into any city of the Samaritans. He knew that the feelings of the two nations towards each other were as yet too hostile to admit of this friendly intercourse; but when He was about to return to heaven, and was predicting to the twelve apostles the final success of their labours, He told them plainly that they were to preach the Gospel in Samaria. He added, that they were to carry it also to the uttermost parts of the earth; and it is probable that, at that time, the apostles were as much surprised with the one prediction as with the other. The admission of Samaritans to the Messiah's kingdom must have appeared strange even to the apostles; and this first step in the extension of the Gospel was owing to the accidental circumstance of so many Christians flying from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen.

Philip, one of the deacons, took refuge in Samaria, and announced to the inhabitants that the Messiah was already come, in the person of Jesus. The working of miracles was by no means confined to the apostles, but many of those upon whom they laid their hands received and exercised the same power; and we need not wonder that Philip gained many converts in Samaria in a short time, when we remember that his preaching was confirmed by the evidence of miracles.

### *Simon Magus*

One of his hearers was a person who holds a conspicuous place in Ecclesiastical History. His name was Simon, and from the success with which he practised the popular art of magical delusions, he acquired the surname of Magi, or the Sorcerer. He is said, by many early writers, to have been the founder of the Gnostics, a new sect of philosophers, who were now rising into notice, and who had their name from laying claim to a more full and perfect knowledge of God.

These opinions seem to have been most prevalent in Alexandria, and to have been a compound of heathen philosophy, the corrupted religion of the Jews, and the Eastern notion of two principles, one of good, the other of evil. They believed matter to have existed from all eternity; and they accounted for the origin of evil, without making God the author of it, by supposing it to reside in matter. They also imagined, that several generations of beings had proceeded, in regular succession, from God, and that one of the latest of them created the world, without the knowledge of God.

This explained why the world contained such a mass of misery and evil; and the Gnostics boasted that they were able to escape from this evil by their superior knowledge

of God. But when it is said that Simon Magus was the founder of the Gnostics, it is meant that he was the first person who introduced the name of Christ into this absurd and irrational system. For, as soon as Christianity became known by the preaching of the apostles, the Gnostics laid hold of as much of it as suited their purpose, by giving out that Christ was one of the beings who had proceeded from God, and who was sent into the world to free it from the tyranny of evil; thus confirming, though under a heap of errors, the two great doctrines of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and that He came into the world to save us from our sins.

Simon Magus had an opportunity of hearing the doctrines of the Gospel when Philip the Deacon was preaching in Samaria; and, being conscious that his own miracles were mere tricks and delusions, he was likely to be greatly impressed by the real miracles of Philip. He, accordingly, joined the rest of his countrymen who were baptized; though we cannot tell how far he was, at that time, sincere in professing his belief in Jesus Christ. Being himself a native of Samaria, he must have shared in the general expectation, that the Messiah was about to appear; and when he heard the history of Jesus, as related by Philip, he probably believed that the predictions concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus; but the school of philosophy in which he had studied, taught him to mix up several strange notions concerning the person of the Messiah, with those which he had collected from the scriptural prophecies.

It is certain, however, that the conversions in Samaria were extremely numerous; and when the apostles heard of it, who had continued all the time at Jerusalem, they sent down Peter and John to finish the work which had been so successfully begun by Philip. The latter had not the power of giving to his converts the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking foreign languages, or healing diseases; but when the apostles came down, they caused still greater astonishment, by laying their hands on those who had been baptized by Philip, and enabling them to exercise these miraculous gifts.

Simon now showed how little his heart had been really touched by the doctrines of the Gospel. He was still thinking of nothing but how he could carry on his ancient imposture; and he even offered the apostles money, if they would sell him the power of communicating these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. It is needless to say that his offer was rejected.

The history of Simon is, from this time, so mixed up with fable, that we scarcely know what to believe concerning him; but there is reason to think that he visited many places, and particularly Rome, dispersing as he went his own peculiar philosophy, and perhaps carrying the name of Christ into many countries which had not yet received the Gospel from any of the apostles. His followers were very numerous, and divided into several sects, from all of whom no small injury was caused to the Christians, by prejudicing the heathen against them, and by seducing many true believers to adopt the errors and impieties of Gnosticism.

The Gospel, however, had gained a footing in Samaria, and thus far one of the Jewish prejudices was overcome; and since Philip was sent immediately after, by a special revelation from heaven, to baptise an Ethiopian eunuch, it is not improbable that this was also done to remove another prejudice which was likely to prevail with the Jews, who knew that eunuchs were forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord, and who might, therefore, think that they were excluded from the Christian covenant. It was thus that the minds of the Jews were gradually prepared for the final extension of the Gospel; but, for some time, it was preached only to the Jews, and it appears to have spread rapidly through the whole of Palestine, and to have met with little opposition for some years after the conversion of Saul. This apostle (for we may already call him by this

name) continued a long time in Arabia; and while he was preparing himself for his future labours, the other apostles were engaged in making circuits from Jerusalem, to visit the churches which they had planted.

*St James, the Lord's Brother.*

Being thus obliged to be frequently absent from Jerusalem, they left the Christians of that city to the permanent care of one who was in every way suited to the office of superintending them. This was James, who, in addition to his other qualifications, was a relation of our Lord. The Scriptures speak of him, as well as of Simon, Joses, and Judas, as being brothers of Jesus Christ; but few persons, either in ancient or modern times, have taken this expression in its fullest and most literal sense, and supposed these four persons to have been sons of Joseph and Mary. Some have conceived them to have been half-brothers, the sons of Joseph by a former wife; but perhaps the most probable explanation is, that they were the sons of another Mary, the sister of the Virgin, by a husband whose name was Cleophas; and thus, though James is called the brother of our Lord, he was, in fact, his cousin.

It seems most probable that he was not one of the twelve apostles, and consequently, that he was a different person from the James who is described as the son of Alphaeus. Such, at least, was the opinion of a majority of the early writers; all of whom are unanimous in speaking of James as the first bishop of Jerusalem. We are, perhaps, not to infer from this, that he bore the name of bishop in his own lifetime; and his diocese (if the use of such a term may be anticipated,) was confined within the limits of a single town; but the writers who applied to him this title, looked rather to its primary meaning of an inspector or overseer, than to the sense which it acquired a few years later, when church-government was more uniformly established; and, by calling James the first bishop of Jerusalem, they meant that the Christians of that city, who undoubtedly amounted to some thousands, were confided to his care, when the apostles found themselves so frequently called away.

We have seen that the Church of Jerusalem contained also subordinate officers, named Deacons, who were originally appointed to assist the apostles, and would now render the same service to James. A few years later, we find mention of Presbyters or Elders; and though the date of their first appointment is not recorded, it probably arose out of the same causes which had led already to the ordaining of deacons, and to the election of James; which causes were the rapidly increasing numbers of the Christians, and the continued absence of the apostles from Jerusalem. The title of Presbyter may have been borrowed from the Jewish Church; or the persons who bore it may have been literally Elders, and selected on that account from the Deacons, to form a kind of council to James, in providing for the spiritual and temporal wants of his flock.

Wherever the apostles founded a church, the management of it was conducted on the same principle. At first, a single presbyter, or, perhaps, a single deacon, might be sufficient, and the number of such ministers would increase with the number of believers; but while the apostles confined themselves to making circuits through Palestine, they were themselves the superintendents of the churches which they planted.

It seems most correct to take this view of the office of the apostles, and not to consider each, or any of them, as locally attached to some particular town. It is true that all of them planted several churches, and these churches continually looked upon some



particular apostle as their first founder. There are cases in which the apostles are spoken of as the first bishops of these churches; but there is no evidence that they bore this title in their own lifetime, nor could the founder of several churches be called, with propriety, the bishop of all of them, or of any one in particular.

### *The Christian Ministry.*

Their first care seems to have been to establish an elder or elders, who were resident in the place; but they themselves travelled about from city to city, and from village to village: first, within the confines of Judea, and at no great distance from Jerusalem; but afterwards, in more extensive circuits, from one end of the empire to the other. There appear also, in addition to the presbyters and deacons, who may be called the resident ministers, to have been preachers of the Gospel, who were not attached to any particular church, but who travelled about from place to place, discharging their spiritual duties. These men were called, in a special manner, Evangelists.

One of them was Philip, who, as we have seen, had first been a deacon of the Church at Jerusalem; but after his flight from that city, he seems to have resided principally in Caesarea, and to have preached the Gospel wherever he found occasion, without discharging his former office of deacon in any particular church. Such labours must have been peculiarly useful in the infancy of the Church; and we have the authority of Scripture for saying that a special distribution of spiritual gifts was made to the evangelists, which qualified them for their important work. Mark and Luke are, perhaps, to be considered evangelists, in this sense, as well as in the more common one of having published written Gospels. Both of them were preachers of the Gospel for many years before they committed the substance of their preaching to writing: and we may suppose that such men were of great assistance to the apostles, by accompanying them on their journeys, or by following up and continuing the work which had been so successfully begun.

It was during one of these circuits of the apostles that another important step was made in the extension of the Gospel, which had hitherto been preached only to the Jews.

It was natural, that people of any other country, who resided in Palestine, and became acquainted with the religion of the Jews, should be led to see the absurdity of their own superstitions, and to adopt a belief in one God, instead of worshipping many. Such appears to have been the case in all the towns which contained a Jewish synagogue; and though the persons who were thus far converted did not conform to the burdensome parts of the Mosaic law, they attended the service of the synagogue, and worshipped the one true God, who had revealed himself in the Jewish Scriptures.

Some persons have called them "proselytes of the gate," to distinguish them from "proselytes of righteousness," who adopted circumcision, and became in every respect identified with the descendants of Abraham. A Greek or Roman, who was in any degree a convert to Judaism, could hardly live long in Palestine without hearing of the new religion, which was spreading so rapidly by the preaching of the apostles but the apostles themselves did not at first understand that they were to preach it to any person who was not a true Israelite, or, at least, a circumcised proselyte.

It pleased God to make a special revelation to Peter upon this subject; and the first Gentile who was baptised was Cornelius, who was a centurion of the Roman forces, quartered at Caesarea. Nothing could be more convincing to the persons who were present at his baptism than that God approved of the admission of this Gentile into the

Christian covenant; for he and his companions received the visible and miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit: but though Peter, upon his return to Jerusalem, related the whole transaction, and at the time satisfied the persons who had been disposed to blame him, we shall see that the question of the admission of Gentiles to the Gospel was not yet fully and finally decided.

*Paul's Admission into the Church.*

It is probable that Saul had from the first been more enlightened upon this subject than the rest of the apostles; for it was announced to him from Heaven, at the time of his conversion, that he was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. We left him in Arabia, and we do not hear of his commencing his office of preacher till the third year after his conversion, when he returned to Damascus. The Jews, as might be supposed, were excessively enraged at the success which attended him; for his learning gave him great advantage in argument; and the circumstances attending his conversion were likely to be known in Damascus. His enemies, however, prevailed upon Aretas, who still held command of the city, to assist them in their designs against Saul; and finding himself in personal danger, if he stayed there any longer, he thought it best to go elsewhere: but the gates were so carefully watched, to prevent his escape, that his only chance was to be let down the wall in a basket; and, by this contrivance, he eluded the vigilance of his enemies.

He then proceeded to Jerusalem. But with what different feelings must he have entered it from those with which he had last quitted it, when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Christians! He was still zealous and fervent; still seeking to do God service; but his heart had been humbled and disciplined by the Gospel. The Christians at Jerusalem were at first afraid of him; but he found a friend in Barnabas, whose family was of Cyprus, and whose conversion was the more remarkable, as he had held the office of a Levite.

There is a tradition that he had been a fellow-pupil with Saul in the school of Gamaliel; but whatever cause may have made them acquainted, he was aware of the change which had been worked in the mind of Saul, and, upon his recommendation, the former enemy of the Gospel was cordially received by the Church at Jerusalem. None of the apostles were now in the city, except Peter; and this was the first interview between him and Saul. If Peter could have had any doubts remaining concerning the admission of Gentile converts, they were likely to be removed by his conversations with Saul: but the latter had not yet entered upon the field which was afterwards opened to him, in preaching to the Gentiles. His skill in disputation was exercised at present with the foreign Jews who happened to be residing at Jerusalem; for the prejudices of these men were generally less deeply rooted than those of the permanent inhabitants of Judaea. Saul, however, had made himself too notorious on his former visit, for his extraordinary change to pass unnoticed; and finding the same scene likely to be acted against him which had driven him from Damascus, he staid in Jerusalem only fifteen days, and returned to his native city of Tarsus. He continued there for some years; but we cannot suppose that he was inactive in discharging his heavenly commission. He, perhaps, confined himself to the limits of Cilicia; and there is reason to think that his preaching was the cause of Christian churches being established in that country.

The period of Saul's residence in Cilicia was one of tranquillity and prosperity to the Church at large. The Jews at Jerusalem were not inclined to relax their hostility; but, during the latter part of the reign of Tiberius, the presence of Roman troops in Judaea

would be likely to act as a protection to the Christians. Pontius Pilate was deposed from his government in the year 36, and Judaea was then annexed to the presidentship of Syria. This brought Vitellius the president, with his forces, more than once to Jerusalem; and the presence of a Roman army, which always operated as a restraint upon the Jews, would so far procure a respite from molestation to the Christians.

Tiberius was succeeded, in 37, by Caligula, who, at the beginning of his reign, bestowed a small territory, with the title of king, upon Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great. In the following year, he added Galilee to his dominions: but this liberality to an individual was coupled with most insulting cruelty to the Jewish nation. For the four years of his reign he was engaged in a fruitless attempt to force the Jews to erect his statue in their Temple. The opposition to this outrage kept the whole of Judaea in a ferment; and though the President of Syria wanted either inclination or power to enforce his master's command, and the Jews succeeded in their resistance, they were so occupied in measures of self-defence, that they had little time to think of the Christians. This may account, in some measure, for the peace which the churches enjoyed for some years after the conversion of Saul; and the Gospel had now made considerable progress in distant countries. It had been carried as far as Phoenicia, and the island of Cyprus; but the place where it flourished most successfully, next to Jerusalem, was Antioch.

### *The Disciples called Christians.*

We have no account of the first establishment of Christianity in Antioch, which was the principal city of Syria, and the residence of the Roman president, except that some of the believers who fled from Jerusalem during Saul's persecution, are said to have travelled thither, being probably Jews who resided there, and who had gone up to the festival. These persons may be considered the founders of the Church of Antioch, which therefore deserves to be ranked the second in order of time, as it was next in importance to that at Jerusalem. It was too far off to be visited at first by any of the apostles: and the number of Christians appears to have been considerable before the apostles heard anything concerning them.

The events which occurred at the end of the reign of Tiberius caused a more frequent intercourse between Jerusalem and Antioch; and it was about the period of Caligula's death, in 41, that the apostles thought fit to send Barnabas to visit the Christians of Antioch. We have hitherto anticipated the use of the term Christians; but it was about this period that it came to be applied to the believers in Jesus. They were also called Nazarenes, because Jesus had spent so many years of his life in Nazareth, and was generally supposed to have been born there: and the Jews would have particular pleasure in applying this name, which conveyed an idea of reproach, to Jesus and His followers. The believers who resided in Antioch were the first to assume the more pleasing and more appropriate name of Christians, which came into general use, both with friends and enemies, a few years after the period of which we are now speaking.

Barnabas may have been selected for this mission on account of his connection with the island of Cyprus, which is not very distant from Antioch; but he was well suited for it, on account of his zeal. He soon saw that a favourable field was opened for propagating the Gospel; but the Church of Antioch had sprung up of itself, and there was probably a want of persons, not only to direct, but to instruct the flock, whose numbers were daily increasing.

Barnabas, therefore, took the important step of going to Tarsus, and engaging the services of Saul, with whom, as we have seen, he had more than ordinary acquaintance. Saul had, probably, been engaged, for some years, in preaching the Gospel in his native city and its neighbourhood; and he now returned with Barnabas to carry on the same work at Antioch. They continued there for more than a year; and there is nothing which leads us to suspect that the Christians in that city met with any molestation; but everything indicates that the Gospel spread rapidly, and not merely among people of the lowest ranks.

In the year 44, Saul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem; and the cause of their journey presents another pleasing picture of the charity of the early Christians. This year, which was the fourth of the reign of Claudius, was memorable for a severe famine, which visited several parts of the empire, and particularly Palestine, and lasted several years. The famine had been foretold some time before at Antioch by a man named Agabus, who came down from Jerusalem; which fact is of importance, as furnishing an instance of those preternatural gifts of the Spirit which were so plentifully diffused among believers of every description in the first century.

### *Deliverance of St Peter.*

We might have been prepared to find the apostles endued occasionally with the power of foretelling future events; as we also know that they were sometimes enabled to read the thoughts of men before they had been uttered by the mouth: but there is reason to think that the gift of prophecy was by no means uncommon among the early Christians. It is well known to readers of the New Testament, that this gift of prophecy is often spoken of without reference to a knowledge of future events; and that it means the power, which was possessed by many believers, of understanding and interpreting the Scriptures. This power, though it may be acquired to a considerable extent by ordinary means, was imparted in a preternatural way, to many of the first believers, who were known by the name of prophets: and, since no gift could be of more essential service to the early Church, when so many new converts were to be instructed in the faith, it is probable that the prophets, in this sense of the term, were much more numerous than those who were gifted to foretell future events. It is, however, certain, that prophecy, in this latter sense, or prediction, was exercised occasionally by the Christians of the apostolic age. Agabus, as we have seen, possessed such a power, and foretold the famine which was to happen in the reign of Claudius: and as soon as it was known that the Christians in Judea were suffering for want of food, their brethren at Antioch raised a subscription, and sent the money to Jerusalem, by Saul and Barnabas.

The Jews had now, once more, a king of their own: for Herod Agrippa, who had received but a small territory from Caligula, was presented by Claudius with the valuable addition of Judea and Samaria; so that his kingdom was nearly as large as that of his grandfather. Though Agrippa was really a vassal of Rome, the Jews had recovered a nominal independence; and whenever they were free from foreign oppression, they were sure to think of schemes for harassing the Christians. Agrippa, also, would find it his policy to indulge them in these measures; and about the time that Saul and Barnabas arrived from Antioch, he was carrying on a persecution.

Two, if not more, of the apostles happened to be now at Jerusalem, and Agrippa was aware of the importance of securing the leaders of the rising sect. The two apostles were Peter and James, the latter being the brother of John the Evangelist. Agrippa

contrived to get both of them into his power, which was soon followed by his ordering James to be beheaded. He appears to have been the first of the apostles who was put to death, and nothing authentic is known of his history before this period; but it seems most probable, that he had not yet undertaken a journey into any distant country, though he may have been actively employed in Judea, and the neighbouring districts.

Peter's execution was reserved for a more public occasion, when the feast of the Passover, which filled the city with foreign Jews, would be finished: and these feasts, as has been already stated, were generally the signal for the persecution of the Christians. In this instance the design was frustrated. Peter was delivered from prison by a miracle, and effected his escape from Jerusalem; and the innocent blood which Agrippa had caused to be shed, was speedily avenged, by the king being suddenly struck with a painful and loathsome disease, which soon carried him off. In the meanwhile, Saul and Barnabas had executed their commission, by delivering the money which had been subscribed for the suffering Christians, and then returned to Antioch.

But the famine is known to have continued some years longer; which may perhaps have operated favourably for the Christians: for, not only had the Jewish rulers sufficient occupation in providing remedies for the national calamity, but some, at least, of those who had been opposed to the new religion, could hardly fail to observe and admire the effect of its principles, in teaching men to love one another, and to give such proofs of their charity in the present season of general distress. It is certain, as we shall have occasion to see, that the liberality of the Christians towards their suffering brethren continued for some years; and there are also indications of the churches of Judea being exposed to no particular persecution for some time after the death of Agrippa. His son, who was also called Agrippa, being only seventeen years of age, at the time of his father's death, was not allowed to succeed him in the government, and Judea was once more subject to a Roman procurator. The first, who was Cuspius Fadus, and his successor, Tiberius Alexander, were so unpopular with the Jews, and the feeling of hostility to Rome was now becoming so general throughout the country, that this may have been another cause of the attention of the Jewish authorities being drawn away from the Christians.



CHAPTER III.  
PAUL'S FIRST JOURNEY

WE are now arrived at a most interesting period, not only in the personal history of Saul, but in the propagation of the Gospel. Little is known concerning the evangelical labours of many of the apostles; but it cannot be doubted, that they fulfilled their Master's injunctions of carrying His doctrines into distant countries; and most, if not all, of them appear to have commenced their missionary journeys about the period at which we are now arrived. Hitherto, Samaria and Galilee had formed the limits of their ministry; but the churches of these countries were now regularly established, and Christianity was spreading so fast in other parts of the world, that it was become highly expedient for the apostles to extend their travels. Had they delayed to do so, there was a danger of the new converts receiving the Gospel with an admixture of errors and corruptions; particularly where the Gnostic doctrines had gained a footing; and the power of imparting the miraculous gifts of the Spirit was confined to the apostles only.

It was at this eventful period, that Saul, who was peculiarly the apostle of the Gentiles, set out on his first apostolic journey. The believers at Antioch were ordered, by a special revelation, to send forth Saul and Barnabas on this hazardous enterprise; and they commenced it by crossing over to the island of Cyprus. The Gospel had been preached there some years before, which facilitated the success of the two apostles: but the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul and chief governor of the island, was an event which could hardly have been anticipated, and was owing to the miraculous powers which the apostles exercised. Having traversed the whole length of the island, they crossed over to the opposite continent; and, during the course of a rapid journey, they planted several churches in Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Pamphylia. In almost every place they met with the same reception,—of a ready hearing on the part of the Gentiles, and of obstinate resistance on the part of the Jews.

More than once their lives were in danger; but a timely retreat, or, if that was denied, a special miracle, preserved them from their enemies; and the opposition of the Jews was so constant and incurable, that the two apostles openly avowed their intention of devoting themselves, in future, to the conversion of the Gentiles. It was on this journey, that Saul appears, for the first time, to have used the name of Paul; whether he had always borne the two names, as was customary with many of his countrymen, or whether he found it safer, when travelling in heathen countries, to adopt a Roman name. We shall, therefore, cease, from this time, to call him Saul. It was under that name that he had been known as a persecutor of the Church: but it was under the name of Paul, that he preached the doctrine of the cross, and that he wrote the Epistles, which have been cherished by believers of every age, as a ground-work of their faith and hope.

It was probably in the year 45 that this southern part of Asia Minor received the Gospel by the preaching of Paul and Barnabas; and having completed their circuit by returning to Perga, at which place they had landed from Cyprus, they again set sail, and found themselves once more at Antioch. The discussion which was raised by the report of their operations, confirms the remark made above, that the baptism of Cornelius was not considered to have decided the question concerning Gentile converts. The Church of Antioch, which was not, in any sense, dependent upon that of Jerusalem, may, from the

first, have admitted Gentiles within its pale; and Paul and Barnabas, on their late journey, had established the principle in its fullest extent, that no sort of proselytism to the Mosaic law was necessary for a heathen before or after his conversion. This, however, was not the doctrine of a large party belonging to the Church of Jerusalem; and some of these men coming down at this time to Antioch caused great distress to the Gentile converts, by saying that they not only ought to conform to the customs of the Mosaic law with respect to food and other matters of that kind; but that, if they hoped to be saved, it was absolutely necessary for them to be circumcised. Here was a direct subversion of the Gospel covenant, which promised salvation by faith in Christ.

With a view to conciliate the Jews, or to avoid giving them offence, the Gentile converts might have agreed to observe some of the commandments and prohibitions enjoined by Moses; but when they were told that faith alone, would not justify them, unless they were circumcised, all their former hopes seemed to be destroyed. It was impossible that such a doctrine, could, for a moment, be admitted by Paul, who had received a commission from heaven to preach to the Gentiles, justification by faith, and who had lately been imparting to a large number of Gentile converts the same preternatural gifts which the Jews had received. It was of the utmost importance that the question should be finally settled, and with the general consent, as far as it could be obtained, of the whole Christian Church. For this purpose, it was essential to ascertain the opinion of the apostles; and the attention of the Christians at Antioch would naturally be turned to their brethren at Jerusalem. The apostles, however, had ceased for some time to be resident in that city; but it was visited occasionally by some of them: and Paul and Barnabas, who had been the chief instruments of converting the Gentiles, were commissioned to go to Jerusalem, and to bring back a definitive sentence as to the controverted point.

### *Council of Jerusalem.*

The council which was held upon this subject is one of the most interesting events which happened during the life-time of the apostles. Peter and John were at this time at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were therefore able to come to a full understanding with them; and all the firmness of Paul's character was necessary to carry the point which he had so deeply at heart. Among the persons who had gone up with Paul was Titus, who had himself been converted from heathenism. Some of the more bigoted Jews insisted upon his being circumcised; but Paul as resolutely opposed this being done, and Titus continued uncircumcised.

The question was then discussed in a full assembly of believers. Peter delivered his opinion, as plainly as Paul could have done, in favour of the Gentile converts; and the whole council being agreed upon the point, a decree was drawn up by James, as head of the Church at Jerusalem, and delivered to Paul and Barnabas. This decree set the question about circumcision entirely at rest. No Gentile was required to submit to it; nor was any part of the Mosaic law imposed upon the Gentiles as necessary to their salvation. But, at the same time, a strong desire was expressed that no offence should be given to the Jews.

There were certain customs which, in themselves, were indifferent, but which few Jews, even after their conversion to Christianity, could be persuaded to lay aside. Of this nature was their abhorrence of eating any animal with the blood in it, or any meat which had been offered in sacrifice to an idol. The Gentiles had no such scruples; and the Jews,

who were always unwilling to sit at table with any but their own people, were likely to be seriously annoyed by seeing the Gentile converts paying no attention to a command so positively given by Moses. Accordingly, the letter written from the council recommended strongly that the Jewish prejudices should be consulted in these matters. The Gentile converts were advised to abstain from eating anything which would offend the Jews; and the laxity of morals among the heathen was so deplorable that the council thought fit to add a special injunction against the sin of fornication.

Such appears to be a correct account of the council which was held at Jerusalem, and of the decree which was then drawn up. Many fanciful reasons have been assigned for the apostles laying these particular injunctions upon the Gentile converts; but the simpler view here taken of the transaction may serve to show that the prohibitions were given, not as if the things prohibited were absolutely wrong in themselves, but because the Jewish and Gentile converts had no chance of living amicably together, unless the Gentiles made concessions upon certain points.

It was also a great concession on the part of the Jews when they released the Gentile Christians from the obligation of being circumcised. But here it was necessary for the apostles to stand firm. The great doctrine of Justification was in danger if circumcision had been enforced: but no evangelical principle was affected by the Gentiles consulting the Jewish prejudices at their meals: on the contrary, the Gospel pointed out the necessity of their not giving offence, even in the smallest matters, to any of their brethren.

The Jews themselves were released from the ceremonial parts of their law, as soon as they believed in Christ; but there is reason to think that very few availed themselves of this liberty. The apostles continued to live as Jews, with respect to all legal observances, except when they thought that they could advance the cause of the Gospel, by showing that it was really and truly a law of liberty. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, by no means laid aside his Jewish habits; and yet, when there was no fear of offending the Jews, or when he saw his converts inclined to give too much importance to outward ceremonies, he showed, by his own practice, as well as by his precepts, that he was perfectly at liberty to live as a Gentile. The spirit of charity, and the furtherance of the Gospel, are the two principles which enable us to understand the conduct of Paul individually, and the celebrated decree of the council.

With respect to the Gentile converts, the decree was at first received by them as a great relief, because it freed them from the necessity of circumcision; and the other part which related to articles of food, could hardly be said to impose any hardship upon them. But in process of time, what was intended by the apostles as a measure of peace and brotherly concord became a burden upon the conscience, and almost a superstition. The order against eating any animal with the blood in it was intended merely as a precaution, when Jews and Gentiles were living in habits of social intercourse; but the prohibition was considered to be in force long after the cause of it had ceased to exist; and there is evidence that Christians, for some centuries, refused to allow blood to be mixed in any manner with their food.

### *Disagreement between Paul and Peter*

Paul now took leave of Peter and John, with little prospect of their meeting each other soon, if at all, in this world. They were going to engage more actively than before in their respective ministries; and it was well understood between them that Paul had

been specially chosen to convert the Gentiles. Peter considered himself to be more peculiarly the apostle of his countrymen; but he fully recognised Paul as his brother and fellow-labourer. The bodily wants of the Christians in Judea were interesting alike to both of them. The famine, which had begun two years before, was still severely felt; and Paul undertook, as he travelled in other countries, to excite his converts to assist their brethren in Judea by a pecuniary collection. With this charitable understanding they parted, and, it need not be added, that when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with the decree of the council, the contents of it were highly gratifying to the Gentile converts.

It does not appear that they were again molested on the score of circumcision: but the good sense and expediency of the late decree were very apparent, when the Jews and Gentiles came to meet together in familiar and social intercourse. Notwithstanding the advice which had been given, it would seem that the Gentiles sometimes shocked the Jews in the article of their food; or, perhaps, the Jews carried their scruples to an unwarrantable length. It was either now, or at a later period, that Peter came to Antioch. Whenever it was, he once more met with Paul; and, though we may hope that the two apostles again parted on friendly terms, there was, for a time, considerable altercation between them.

Peter thought fit to take part with those of his countrymen who declined joining the Gentiles at their meals, though he had before associated familiarly with them, and had shown his conviction that the Jewish customs were unnecessary. He now appeared to attach a greater importance to them, and even Barnabas followed his example. But Paul still stood firm.

He saw, as before, that this excessive attachment to unessential points might lead weaker brethren to suppose that they were really essential. He stated this publicly to Peter, and censured him for what he was doing: but, though the Church at Antioch, which contained many Gentiles, was not in much danger of being led into error upon this point, we shall have abundant proof that there was still a large party at Jerusalem whose views of Christian liberty were much more confined than those of Paul.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *PAUL'S SECOND JOURNEY*

IT was now time that the great apostle of the Gentiles should I undertake a second missionary journey. It was his wish to have travelled, as before, in company with Barnabas: but they disagreed as to taking with them a nephew of Barnabas, and set out in different directions. We may truly say, in this instance, that God brought good out of evil. It was evil that the two apostles should have any feelings of towards each other: but the division of their labours carried the Gospel more rapidly over a greater extent of country. It was natural that Barnabas should begin his journey by visiting Cyprus, the country with which he was connected by birth; and it was equally natural that Paul should take an interest in the Cilician churches, which were among the first that he had planted, but which he had not visited on his former journey. His present companion was Silas, or Silvanus, who had come with him on his last return from Jerusalem; and, having passed through Cilicia, they visited the countries of Pisidia and Lycaonia, which had received the Gospel from Paul and Barnabas about a year before.

They now carried with them the letter of the council which settled the Christian liberty of the Gentile converts; and this might at first make us still more surprised to find Paul requiring one of his own converts to be circumcised. This was Timothy, who was a Jew only on his mother's side, and had not been circumcised before. He had probably embraced the Gospel during St Paul's former visit to this country; and the apostle perceived in him so much zeal, together with such a knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, that he decided upon engaging him as a companion and fellow-labourer.

The policy of having him circumcised was very apparent; for no Jew would have listened to his preaching if this ceremony had been known to be omitted. Nor was there anything inconsistent in Paul circumcising Timothy, though he was bearer of the decree which pronounced such an act unnecessary, and though he had himself persisted in preventing the circumcision of Titus. If he had consented in the case of Titus, he would have countenanced the notion that faith in Christ was not sufficient for justification without circumcision; for that was then the question under discussion.

But Timothy had been baptized into all the privileges of the Gospel, without being circumcised. Hundreds, if not thousands, of converts had been admitted in the same country, who were wholly independent of the Law of Moses. It was only when Paul decided to take Timothy with him on his journey, and when he wished to make him serviceable in converting the Jews, that he used the precaution of having him circumcised. To Timothy himself, it was a mere outward ceremony; but it might make him the means of persuading others to embrace the doctrines which he bore impressed upon his heart.

Paul and his companions now traversed a much larger portion of the continent of Asia than he had visited on his first journey. Churches were planted by them in Phrygia and Galatia; and when they came to the sea-coast at Troas, their company was further increased by Luke, who is supposed to have been a native of Antioch, and a proselyte to the Law of Moses. He had followed the profession of a physician; but, from this time, he devoted himself to preaching the Gospel, and for several years was either a fellow-traveller with Paul, or took the charge of churches which the apostle had planted. It was



a bold measure for four Jews to introduce a new religion into Greece, the country which might still be said to take the lead in literature and science, though it had yielded in arms to Rome. The Greeks and Romans had long been acquainted with the Jews; but they looked upon their religion as a foolish superstition, and treated their peculiar customs with contempt.

This treatment might be provoking to individual Jews, but it generally ensured for them toleration as a people; and hence they were seldom prevented from establishing a residence in any town within the Roman empire. The Jews repaid this indulgence by taking little pains to make proselytes. In their hearts they felt as much contempt for the superstitions of the heathen, as the latter professed openly for the Jews; but they were content to be allowed to follow their own occupations, and to worship the God of their fathers without molestation. The Christians might have enjoyed the same liberty, if their principles had allowed it; and for some time the heathen could not, or would not, consider them as anything else than a sect of the Jews. But a Christian could not be sincere without wishing to make proselytes. He could not see religious worship paid to a false God without trying to convince the worshipper that he was following a delusion. The Divine Founder of Christianity did not intend it to be tolerated, but to triumph. It was to be the universal, the only religion; and though the apostles, like the rest of their countrymen, could have borne with personal insults and contempt, they had but one object in view, and that was to plant the Cross of Christ upon the ruins of every other religion.

This could not fail, sooner or later, to expose the preachers of the Gospel to persecution; for every person who was interested in keeping up the old religions would look upon the Christians as his personal enemies. Hitherto, however, we have seen the heathen take little notice of the new doctrines. They had been first planted in Palestine, where the heathen had, necessarily, little influence; and those countries of western Asia, which were the next to receive them, were some of the least civilized in the Roman empire. Whenever the Gospel had met with opposition, the Jews were the promoters of it. They considered the Gospel as destructive of the law of Moses: and the notion of being saved by faith in a crucified Redeemer was opposed by the bigoted Jews with the most violent hostility.

The apostles were now entering upon a new field. They were approaching the countries in which learning and philosophy had made the greatest progress; and the pride of learning, when ignorant or regardless of the knowledge which comes from heaven, has always been one of the most formidable enemies of the Gospel. The Greeks and Romans were also intolerant of any new religion. The Greeks were unwilling to listen to it, unless it was connected with some system of philosophy. The Romans had passed many laws to prevent the introduction of new religions; and though these laws were not always enforced, it was in the power of any magistrate, who was so disposed, to execute them with vexatious severity.

### *St Paul in Europe.*

Paul and his companions had not been long in Macedonia, before they were exposed to a persecution of this kind. Philippi was the town in which they were first arrested; and Paul and Silas were thrown into prison, after having been publicly scourged. It is not easy to understand the precise nature of the charge which was brought against them; and the magistrates of a provincial town may not have been particular in observing the forms of justice towards two Jews.

We know, however, that they were accused of violating some of the laws of Rome; and they might have been said to do this, when they denounced all the religious observances of the Romans as wicked and abominable. Heathenism was the established religion of the empire; and the apostles, by endeavouring to destroy it, might naturally be said to be setting themselves against the laws. Added to which, the unbelieving Jews took pains to publish everywhere, that the Christians looked up to Jesus as their king; by which they meant to persuade the heathen authorities, that the Christians were not loyal to the emperor: and it appears to have been upon one or both of these charges, that Paul and Silas were thrown into prison at Philippi. Their imprisonment, however, did not last long. Their chains were loosened by a miracle; and the magistrates were too happy to persuade them to leave the city, when they found that both of them possessed the freedom of Rome.

It might perhaps excite our surprise, that Paul did not plead his Roman citizenship before he was scourged and imprisoned, and to have escaped these indignities; but we cannot tell what motives he may have had for suppressing this fact, when he was first brought before the magistrates. His miraculous release was the means of converting the jailor and his family to believe in Christ; and the salvation of even one soul was a sufficient compensation to the apostle for any sufferings which he might undergo. Had he pleaded his citizenship at first, though he would not have been scourged, he might have been imprisoned, or even put to death, on the charge of treason against the laws; so that, by taking such a course, he might have delayed, or even destroyed, his efficiency as a preacher of the Gospel: whereas, by submitting to the indignity of being scourged, and by frightening the magistrate, who had ordered the punishment without knowing the condition of his prisoner, he obtained immediate release, without even going through the form of a trial.

His imprisonment at Philippi did not last more than a single day; and though it was found advisable for himself and Silas to leave the city, Luke appears to have continued there; and there is reason to think, that the Macedonian churches enjoyed the advantage of his presence for some years.

Paul and his two other companions visited Amphipolis, Appollonia, Thessalonica, and Bercea. In almost every town they found the same scene acted over again—of the Jews exciting the populace against them, and endeavouring to expel them by the interference of the magistrates. They could not, however, prevent the Gospel making great progress in Macedonia. The miracles which Paul worked, and the spiritual gifts which he imparted to his converts, made a much greater impression than the misrepresentations and calumnies of the Jews. The Christians of Thessalonica were held in particular esteem by the apostle, and it was with great reluctance that he paid them so short a visit; but his bigoted countrymen obliged him to retire: and, not satisfied with driving him from Thessalonica, they followed him to Berea, and forced him once more to take his departure.

Silas and Timothy continued in Macedonia, but Paul went on to Athens; and, without any companion, ventured to preach the doctrines of the Cross in the most philosophical and most superstitious city of Greece. His success must have been quite as great as he expected, when Dionysius, a member of the Court of Areopagus, became one of his converts; and, leaving the Christians at Athens under his charge, he arrived, before winter, at Corinth.

The name of Dionysius the Areopagite became very celebrated in after ages; but it was principally in consequence of some voluminous writings, which have been quoted as written by him, but which are undoubtedly spurious, and were perhaps composed as late

as the fourth century. Little or nothing is known authentically of Dionysius, except the brief notice of him which is found in the Acts of the Apostles; but a bishop of Corinth, who lived within a hundred years of this time, speaks of him as having been the first bishop of Athens: from which we may safely conclude that the Athenian Christians were committed to his care. The Church of Athens continued to flourish for a long time, and we know the names of some of its bishops in the second century; so that there may have been good reasons for the memory of Dionysius being held in such esteem. Paul does not appear to have resided long at Athens: but, while he was at Corinth, he was at no great distance off; and the Athenian converts may have had the benefit of his counsel, if he did not occasionally visit them in person.

### *The Epistles to the Thessalonians.*

This was the extent of his travels in the south of Greece; and he must have thought Corinth an important station for his missionary labours, when he stayed there the long period of eighteen months. The Jews tried in vain to excite the proconsul against him; but Gallio, who filled the office, happened to be a man who had no taste for religious disputes; and the fact of Paul having succeeded in converting Crispus, the chief person in the synagogue, must have been a great triumph to the cause of the Gospel. During his residence at Corinth, (from which place he wrote his two epistles to the Thessalonians,) Paul was joined by Silas and Timothy, from Macedonia; and the result of their united efforts was the founding of a flourishing church in one of the largest and most learned cities of Greece.

The learning of the Greeks was a new evil which the apostle had to contend with; and one which was more fatal to the souls of men, than the sword of persecution. Religious impressions are not often destroyed by opposition; but persons who would walk fearlessly to the stake, for the sake of the Gospel, may be seduced, by a show of learning, to take a false view of the religion which they profess. Paul's Corinthian converts were surrounded with dangers of this kind. His own education had made him well suited to dispute with heathen philosophers; and the church which he founded at Corinth, was a proof that his arguments were successful as well as powerful. The Gnostic doctrines, which were spoken of above, in connection with the history of Simon Magus, appear, at this time, to have spread as far as Corinth; and if heathen superstition was likely to hinder men from embracing the Gospel, the errors of the Gnostics were likely to pervert and ruin those who had already embraced it: all which may enable us to understand why Paul stayed such a long time at Corinth.

Early in the year 48, he sailed from Greece; and having touched at Ephesus, proceeded to Jerusalem, where he kept the feast of Pentecost. This unhappy country had been suffering many calamities since his last visit to it, two years before. After the death of Herod Agrippa, it had again fallen under the government of Roman procurators; and, as if these officers, who were proverbially rapacious, were not sufficient to practise oppression, when appointed singly, there were now two men, Cumanus and Felix, who had the districts of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, divided between them.

The reign of Claudius was, in other respects, unfavourable to the Jews. That emperor, for some reason or other, which is not expressly told, ordered them all to quit Rome; and we know that this edict must have caused several thousand persons to look for a home in other countries. It can hardly be doubted that many Christians were sufferers at the same time; for the heathen had not yet learned to distinguish them from

the Jews. But this can hardly be called a persecution; and their banishment may not have been owing to any cause connected with their religion. There is also reason to think that the prohibition against their returning to Rome did not last long, but it was likely to have caused many Jews to go back, for a time at least, to the land of their fathers, and their residence in Palestine would serve to increase the feelings of hatred against the Romans, which the rapacity and violence of the procurators had already fomented. Paul's visit to Jerusalem, at this season of misgovernment, was short; and, going from thence to Antioch, he found the Christians of that city continuing in the flourishing condition in which he had left them. Tradition is constant in naming Euodius as the first bishop of Antioch; and we may, perhaps, conclude that he had already entered upon his office, at the time of Paul coming to the city, in the year 48.

### *St Paul at Ephesus.*

After leaving Antioch, the apostle traversed, for the second time, the whole extent of Asia Minor, and took up his residence at Ephesus, which he had visited a few months before, on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem. Ephesus was the capital of a province, and the residence of the Roman proconsul. If its fame for learning and philosophy was not equal to that of Athens or Corinth, it was probably the city of the greatest wealth and luxury which Paul had as yet visited. Whatever was splendid and costly had particular attractions for the inhabitants of Ephesus. They had also been addicted, for a long time, to the arts and delusions practised by the pretenders to magic; and, at the period of Paul coming to reside among them, the Gnostic philosophy, of which magic formed a prominent ingredient, was beginning to gain ground in this part of Asia Minor. All this may account for Paul choosing to make so long a residence in Ephesus. It opened a new and wide field for his apostolical labours; and it was also a central spot, from whence he could easily visit in person, or at least receive accounts from the churches which he had planted in Greece.

There is no evidence of the Gospel having made much progress in Ephesus itself before the arrival of Paul. It had been visited by Apollos, a learned Jew of Alexandria; who, after being converted to Christianity by some of Paul's companions, passed on to Corinth, and was of great use to the Christians in that city, who were now deprived of the presence of the apostle.

Paul's residence at Ephesus continued for great part of three years, though it is not necessary to suppose that he confined himself for the whole of that time to the walls of the city, or even to its neighbourhood. He appears to have paid visits to his converts in other parts of Asia Minor; and there is scarcely any period but this to which we can ascribe those persecutions and misfortunes which befell him in preaching the Gospel. He speaks of having been imprisoned and scourged on several occasions: he had also suffered shipwreck three times; and there is good reason to think that on one, at least, of these voyages he had visited the island of Crete. It is certain, from his own words, that he planted the Gospel there, and that Titus, who accompanied him, was left by him to take charge of the churches. This is the earliest notice which we find of any regular plan of church government. The island contained many distinct congregations, as might be expected from its numerous cities and towns. Each of these congregations was governed by its own presbyters; but the appointment of the presbyters was specially committed by Paul to Titus, who stayed behind in the island to arrange these matters; and while he continued there he acted as the resident head of all the Cretan churches.

The superintendence of so many Christian communities was now becoming very burdensome to the apostle; and it gives us a melancholy idea of the inherent corruption of the human heart when we find Paul's Corinthian converts so soon forgetting the instruction which he had given them, or, at least, listening to false and insidious teachers. He had resided among them for the long period of eighteen months, and the Church of Corinth might be considered, at the time of his leaving it, to be one of the most flourishing which he had hitherto planted.

He had, accordingly, bestowed upon its members a plentiful distribution of these preternatural gifts of the Spirit which it was the privilege of the apostles alone to communicate. It was hardly possible for men to lay aside their belief in Christ when they had such standing evidence of their religion coming from God; but the very abundance of these spiritual gifts was the cause of jealousies and irregularities among the Corinthian Christians.

Forgetting that they had received these miraculous powers as an evidence to themselves and others of the truth of what they believed, they were fond of exercising them merely for ostentation, and to prove that they were themselves more highly favoured than the rest. The gift of tongues was particularly calculated for this idle display. The apostles, as we have seen, possessed it to a wonderful extent; and they must have found it of the greatest service when they had to preach the Gospel to men of different nations.

But it was also a most convincing evidence to men who were not travelling into foreign countries, and who had merely to converse with their immediate friends and neighbours. If a native of Corinth, who had hitherto been able to speak no language but Greek, found himself, on a sudden, and without any study on his part, able to converse with a Jew, or with any other of the numerous foreigners who came to the port of Corinth, he could hardly resist the conviction that the power was given him by God; and when he knew also that he received it in consequence of Paul having laid his hands upon him, and that he did not receive it till his mind had fully assented to the doctrines which Paul had preached, it seemed necessarily to follow that his assent to these doctrines was approved by God.

### *The Gift of Tongues.*

Thus far the gift of tongues operated as an evidence to the believer himself, and was calculated to keep him in the faith which was so preternaturally confirmed. But it would also have the effect of convincing others; for if a Corinthian, who was not yet converted, heard one of his acquaintance speaking a foreign language, and if he knew that the power of speaking it was acquired in a moment, he would be inclined to argue, as the believer himself had done, that a religion which was so powerfully confirmed must come from God. It was with this double view, of keeping his own converts steadfast in their faith, and of enabling them to win over the heathen to join them, that Paul appears to have distributed these gifts so abundantly in all the churches which he planted.

It was not the immediate object of preaching the Gospel in foreign countries which made the gift of tongues so valuable at Corinth; and we know that in their own religious meetings, where there were perhaps no persons present except Jews and Greeks, and consequently no occasion existed for conversing in foreign languages, yet the Christians who possessed such a gift were frequently in the habit of exercising it.



It seems obvious to remark that such an exhibition of the gift of tongues would be of no service, not even as an evidence of preternatural power, unless the other persons present in the congregation understood the language which was thus publicly spoken. If a native of Corinth delivered a speech in Persian or Celtic, it was necessary that some of the persons present should know the words to belong to those languages; for, without this knowledge, there was no evidence of a miraculous gift, and the speakers might have been merely uttering unintelligible sounds, which differed, not only from the Greek, but from every other language.

Though the Corinthians abused the power which had been given them, there is no reason to think that their abuse of it showed itself in this way. They were fond of speaking in unknown tongues; but they were merely unknown to the inhabitants of Corinth, who had learned nothing but Greek: they were real languages, which were known and spoken in other parts of the world; and if an inhabitant of one of these countries had happened to be present at the meeting, he would have recognised and understood the sounds of his own language.

The apostle, however, had provided that these unknown tongues should become intelligible even to the Greeks of Corinth. It was a most astonishing miracle, that a man should be suddenly able to express his ideas in a language which he had never learnt. But the power of the Holy Spirit was not confined to influencing the organs of speech: it acted also upon the organs of hearing, or rather upon the faculties of comprehension; and some persons found themselves able to understand languages which they had never learnt.

It is plain that all the Christians at Corinth did not possess this power. Those who exercised the gift of tongues in the congregation, were, as has been already remarked, unintelligible to nearly all their hearers; but there were some who were gifted to understand these foreign languages; and when one person had delivered the words which the Spirit put into his mouth, another person translated them into Greek, and so made them intelligible to all that heard them. In this manner the gift of tongues had a practical use, beyond the evidence which it furnished to the truth of the Gospel; and the Christians, who attended the meetings without having themselves received either of these gifts, had the advantage of receiving instruction from persons who were manifestly under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

But though the edification of the Church was the ultimate object of all these gifts, there were many of Paul's converts at Corinth, who, after he had left them, forgot the purpose for which they had received such invaluable blessings. The gift of tongues was by no means the only instance of preternatural power which was imparted to believers. Miracles of various kinds were worked by them; of which, the curing of diseases was, perhaps, the most remarkable: but the possession of such extraordinary powers gave rise, in not a few instances, to jealousy and self-conceit. This may partly be ascribed to the ordinary and natural corruption of the human heart, which was likely to show itself more openly when Paul was no longer present to repress it; but it was also fostered by false and insidious teachers, who took advantage of the apostle's absence, not only to make a party for themselves, but to disparage his personal character, and to unsettle his converts as to their religious belief.

The usual fickleness of the Greeks, as well as the love of disputation which marked their philosophy, and which caused them to divide themselves into sects and schools, obtained for these false teachers a too ready hearing among the Christians at Corinth; but though a large party in the place continued attached to Paul, the attachment partook more of a sectarian spirit than became brethren professing the same faith; and others of

their body openly professed themselves followers of different leaders, who had either been the means of converting them, or had put themselves at the head of a party.

### *Danger of Judaizing.*

There is evidence that Paul's apostolical labours were impeded by false teachers in other places than Corinth; and the mischief can, in some instances, clearly be traced to that mistaken zeal for the Law of Moses, which had led the Christians of Jerusalem to insist upon the Gentile converts being circumcised. It has been mentioned that even the decree of the apostolical council did not satisfy the bigots of this party; and some of them appear to have followed Paul in his journeys, and to have taken a pleasure in unsettling the minds of his converts concerning the manner of justification. This was strikingly the case with the imperfectly civilized inhabitants of Galatia, who had lent themselves eagerly to some Judaizing preacher, and had adopted the fatal error, that faith would not justify them, unless they conformed to the Law of Moses.

The great mixture of Jews with the Gentile converts, in every place where a church had been established, made it extremely probable that an error of this kind would meet with many persons to embrace it. The Christians of Greece, if we may judge from those of Macedonia and Achaia, do not appear to have been in so much danger from this quarter: but the religion and the philosophy of heathenism were themselves a sufficient snare to the new converts; and much of the trouble and anxiety which were caused to Paul by the misconduct of the Corinthians, may be traced to that spirit of pride and ostentation which displayed itself in the Grecian schools.

There are also some traces of Gnosticism having found its way into Corinth, though it flourished most luxuriantly in Asia Minor, and particularly in Ephesus. Wherever the Jews abounded, the extravagances of Gnosticism were also popular; which may be accounted for, not only by many Jews becoming Gnostics, but by these philosophers having borrowed so largely from the religious opinions of the Jews. It is possible that the name of Christ may have been familiar to many persons, by the discourses and writings of the Gnostics, before they had met with an apostle, or a disciple of the apostles, to instruct them in the truths of Christianity.

Doubts about the lawfulness of marriage, abstinence from certain kinds of food, and the questions connected with ascetic mortification of the body and its appetites, may be traced in whole, or in part, to the doctrines of the Gnostics. Paul was often called upon to give his opinion upon such points as these; and we always find him drawing a broad line of distinction between duties which are expressly defined in Scripture, and those matters which, being in themselves indifferent, become right or wrong, according to circumstances, or to the consequences which flow from them.

His leading principle was to impress upon his converts, that nothing was essential but that which concerned the salvation of their souls; and that nothing could promote their salvation which was not in some way or other connected with faith in Christ. His own practice was in illustration of this principle. If viewed at different times, or in different places, and with reference to some particular points of practice, his conduct might have been accounted inconsistent; but he was uniformly consistent in doing nothing and omitting nothing which might lead men to think that outward works could justify them. If a disciple abstained from any gratification, from a principle of faith, he was allowed to follow his own conscience; but if the abstinence made him uncharitable,

or was viewed as being in itself meritorious, he was told plainly that the Gospel is a law of liberty.

### *Gnosticism.*

In all such questions we can perceive the sound practical sense and kindly feeling of the apostle, as well as the instruction and illumination which he had received from above. But in opposing the inroads of Gnosticism, he had other points to consider than those which are in themselves indifferent, and may be left to the conscience of each believer. The name of Christ held a conspicuous place in the system of the Gnostics ; but there were parts of their creed which destroyed the very foundations of the doctrine of the Gospel. Thus, while they believed the body of Jesus to be a phantom, and denied the reality of His crucifixion, they, in fact, denied their belief in the death of Christ, and with it they gave up altogether the doctrine of the atonement. They believed that Christ had come from heaven to reveal the knowledge of God; but this was done by His appearing upon earth, and had no connexion with His death. Christ, said they, pointed out the way by which man might be reconciled to God; but it was not by offering Himself as a sacrifice; and the reconciliation was effected when a man was brought to entertain the true knowledge of God.

So also the doctrine of the resurrection was explained away and reduced to nothing by the figurative language of the Gnostics. The reunion of soul and body at the general resurrection had always presented great difficulties to the heathen. The notions even of their wisest philosophers had been so vague and uncertain upon this subject that the apostles may be said to have introduced a totally new doctrine when they taught that all who believed in Christ should rise again to an eternity of happiness. Some had believed the soul to be mortal as well as the body; others could not, or would not, understand how the body after being reduced to dust could be restored to life. But the Gnostics, while they professed to agree with the language held by the apostles, gave to it a figurative interpretation, and said that each person rose again from the dead when he became a Gnostic. The resurrection, therefore, was with themselves a thing already past; and when they died they believed that they were removed immediately from earth to heaven.

It is to be feared that many persons fell a prey to these false and insidious teachers; and the apostles were naturally led to appoint some one person, as was the case with Titus in Crete, to watch over the churches of a particular district. It was the same anxiety for the souls of his flock which caused the apostle of the Gentiles to write so many epistles, which, though filled with local and temporary allusions, and often containing answers to specific questions, were intended also to furnish instruction and consolation to believers of every country and every age. It seems probable that the Epistles to Titus and the Galatians, as well as the first Epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy, were written during the apostle's residence at Ephesus, or shortly after. When he wrote to the Corinthians he had planned a journey which was to take him through the continent of Greece to Corinth, from whence he meant to proceed to Jerusalem; and though his departure from Ephesus happened sooner than he expected, he was able to execute his design of visiting Greece.

It is plain that the Gospel made great progress in that part of Asia while Paul was residing at Ephesus; nor is there any evidence of the government having as yet interfered formally to oppose the success of his preaching. The necessity for his leaving Ephesus was caused by a sudden, and apparently unpremeditated, tumult, which was excited by

the workmen whose livelihood depended upon the national worship being kept up. These men felt the demand for images and shrines becoming daily less; and it was plain that if Christianity continued to advance, their own gains must speedily be destroyed. It was not difficult, in a city like Ephesus, where the Temple of the Goddess Diana was one of the wonders of the world, for these interested tradesmen to raise a cry in defence of the popular superstition. The attempt was made, and succeeded. The people took up the cause, as they vainly imagined, of the Goddess Diana; and if the apostle had ventured among them during the heat of their excitement he would probably have been torn in pieces.

There are traditions which speak of his being condemned to fight with wild beasts in the Amphitheatre of Ephesus; and the notion may appear to be countenanced by an expression of his own; but there is no certain evidence of his having been exposed to such a punishment. At a later period, and perhaps in the apostle's own days, the Christians were made the victims of such barbarities; but if Paul had been treated in this manner, it must have been with the consent, and by the order, of the civil magistrates; whereas we know that some at least of the persons who presided over the shows and games in the Amphitheatre were disposed to favour Paul. He might also have pleaded his Roman citizenship, if his life had been endangered by such a cruel sentence: all which makes it most probable that he was not exposed to any special persecution, beyond what came upon all the Christians during the continuance of the popular excitement.

### *St Paul again in Macedonia.*

But though he thus escaped with his life, he felt it advisable to quit the city; and, leaving Timothy with the same authority over the Christians which he had committed to Titus in Crete, he set out for Macedonia. While he was traversing the latter country he was met by Titus, who was not only able to give him an account of his own flock but also brought him a favourable report of the Corinthian converts. The Macedonian churches were found in a flourishing condition, having had the advantage for some years of the personal superintendence of Luke and other zealous teachers. They were now called upon to give a proof of their principles by contributing money for the relief of the Christians in Judea, and the call was readily obeyed. When Paul left the country he carried with him a large sum, which had been subscribed for this purpose by the Macedonian Christians; and having prepared the Corinthians for a visit by a second epistle, written to them from Macedonia, he arrived among them before winter, and stayed with them three months.

The Corinthian converts, as already stated, had caused considerable anxiety to the apostle, since the time of his first visit to their city. The spirit of party was showing itself in an attachment to different preachers of the Gospel; and the laxity of morals, which had always been peculiarly prevalent in Corinth, had led to many irregularities. In his first epistle, he had been obliged to use a tone of authority and rebuke; but the effect of it was as successful, as it was seasonable. Though the false teachers had tried to alienate the Corinthian Christians from their spiritual father, he found them not only penitent for what had happened, but willing to obey all his directions and commands. They followed the example of their Macedonian brethren in subscribing for the Christians in Palestine; and though we know little beyond the mere fact of Paul having passed the three winter months at Corinth, we may safely pronounce this to have been one of the periods in his eventful life which caused him the greatest consolation and satisfaction.

His zeal in the cause of the Gospel was not confined to watching over the churches which had been planted by himself in Asia and Greece. He now extended his views to the west of Europe, which, as far as we know, had not hitherto been visited by any of the apostles. It is, however, plain that the Gospel was spreading itself in that direction, as well as in the east. We have already seen it carried into distant countries by the Jews who returned from the festivals, or by those who had been driven from Jerusalem by persecution. The first of these causes was likely to make Christianity known in Rome at a very early period. When converts were made under these circumstances, they were in danger of receiving the truth with a certain admixture of error; and such may have been the case at Rome: but the favourable account which Paul received at Corinth concerning the state of the Roman Christians, was such as to make him more than ever anxious to visit them in person. He was still bent upon going to Jerusalem with the money which he had collected: but when that mission was accomplished, he intended to go to Rome; and one of the most interesting and valuable of his epistles was written to the believers in that city, during his residence at Corinth.

As soon as the Winter was passed, he set out for Jerusalem; but, instead of going by sea, he retraced his steps through Macedonia. He was joined at Philippi by Luke; and though he was now attended by several companions, they do not appear to have met with any molestation on their way. The journey was performed principally by sea; and wherever they landed, they appear to have found some of the inhabitants already converted to the Gospel. Five years had elapsed since Paul's last visit to Jerusalem; and during that period, his unhappy country had been exposed to sufferings of various kinds. Felix had contrived to get rid of his partner in the office of procurator, and the Jews were in some respects gainers, by having only one person to insult and pillage them; but robbers and murderers infested the country in such numbers, that the government was scarcely strong enough to suppress them; and impostors were now rising up in every direction, who gave themselves out to be the Messiah, and deluded many persons to follow them. It had been the policy of the Romans to change and depose the high-priests, as best suited their own purpose, which opened a new and constant source of intrigue among the candidates for that office; and whoever was fortunate enough to obtain it, did not scruple to employ force to get rid of a rival. At the time of Paul's arrival at Jerusalem, it was difficult to say who was the legitimate high-priest. The station had been filled by Ananias; but upon his going to Rome to answer some complaint, a successor was appointed in the person of Jonathan, who had been high-priest once before. Felix found it convenient to put Jonathan to death; and before a new appointment was regularly made, Ananias returned from Rome, and resumed the office of high-priest. It was just at this period that Paul arrived in Judea; and though there were many things in the aspect of his country which could not fail to give him pain, it is probable that the Jews had been drawn off from persecuting the Christians, by being themselves harassed with so many internal and external evils.

### *St Paul is attacked by the Jews.*

It is certain that the Jews who had embraced the Gospel amounted at this time to many thousands; but most, if not all of them, still adhered rigidly to the Mosaic Law. Whether there were many who so entirely misunderstood the Gospel, as to think that faith alone could not justify them without compliance with the law, we are not able to decide; but there is reason to think that there were very few Jews who did not feel bound, even after their conversion, to observe the legal ceremonies. Many of these persons could



not, or would not, understand the principles which were preached and practised by Paul; and when his enemies gave out, that he taught the Jews, as well as the Gentiles, to look upon the law as of no importance, the report was readily believed, and raised a strong prejudice against him. He had contrived to reach Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost, at which time the city was always filled by a great influx of foreign Jews. These men could not be ignorant of the progress which the new opinions had made among their countrymen. Paul would naturally be looked upon as the great leader of this defection from the faith of their fathers; and thus the believing and unbelieving Jews united in viewing him with feelings of suspicion, if not of hatred, which feelings were increased by its being known that he was now travelling in company with Gentiles.

The conduct of Paul on this occasion enables us fully to understand his views with respect to the obligation of observing the Law of Moses. He had constantly told the Gentiles, that there was no necessity for their observing any part of it; and he had been equally explicit to the Jews, in telling them that the law was of no effect at all in procuring their justification: if they continued to observe its ceremonies, they were to look upon them merely as ceremonies: and, accordingly, when he was living with Gentiles, who cared nothing for the law, he felt no scruples in disregarding its precepts; but when he was living with Jews, whose consciences would have been hurt by a neglect of the legal ceremonies, he observed all the customs in which he had been brought up. His conduct on the present occasion was exactly in conformity with his principle. Having consulted with James, who still continued at Jerusalem as the resident head of the Christian Church, and who perfectly agreed with Paul in his notions about the law, he took upon himself the vow of a Nazarite, and appeared publicly in the Temple, as a person who submitted implicitly to the Law of Moses. This conformity, though it might have satisfied the Judaizing Christians, was not sufficient to remove the prejudices which the unbelieving Jews had conceived against the apostle. Seeing him upon one occasion in the Temple, they got together a crowd of people, with the avowed intention of putting him to death. Nor would they have failed in their purpose, if the commander of the Roman garrison, who was always on the watch to prevent an insurrection, had not suddenly come upon them with his troops, and rescued Paul out of their hands.

This interference of the military saved his life, but was the cause of his sustaining a tedious imprisonment, first at Cesarea, and afterwards at Rome. The Roman officer who had rescued him from the fury of the people, having ascertained that he was a Roman citizen, sent him to Cesarea, where Felix, the procurator, usually resided. Paul was here kept a prisoner for two years, though his friends had free permission to visit him, and his confinement in other respects was not rigorous. Felix himself admitted him more than once into his presence, and listened to him while he explained the doctrines of the Gospel: but no practical impression was produced upon his wicked heart. He was well aware how unpopular he had made himself to the Jews by his cruelty and rapacity, and though he was not base enough to deliver up the apostle as a victim of their malice, he so far gratified them as to keep him in prison during the two years of his continuing in his government.

### *St Paul imprisoned at Cesarea.*

This was the first serious check which Paul had received in the course of his evangelical ministry. Twenty-two years had now elapsed since his conversion, eight of which had been employed in spreading the religion of Christ through different heathen

countries. During this period he had met with constant opposition from the prejudices of the Jews, and had occasionally suffered from the irreligion or superstition of the heathen. But still the Gospel gained ground: the Grecian philosophers were too weak to stand against him in argument; and the Roman government had not yet learnt to treat Christianity as a crime. Even Felix, while he was unjustly detaining Paul as a prisoner, was the unintentional cause of saving his life, and of reserving him for future labours in the service of his heavenly Master. For a time, however, the career of the great apostle was checked; and it is now that we feel particularly, how much the history of the early Church is confined to the personal history of Paul. We should wish to know what progress the Gospel was making in other countries during the two years that Paul was imprisoned at Cesarea. The other apostles had now been engaged for some years in fulfilling their Master's command of spreading his religion throughout the earth; but we know little of the scenes of their respective preaching. The eastern parts of the world, rather than the western, appear to have been traversed by them. Asia Minor and Greece, as we have already seen, received their knowledge of the Gospel from Paul; to whose name we may add those of Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silvanus, and Luke, as the persons who were most active in evangelizing those countries.

Luke, as has been already stated, accompanied Paul to Jerusalem: but there is no evidence that any of the apostle's companions were made to share in his imprisonment. It is more probable, that they all preserved their liberty; and though Paul's personal exertions were for the present restrained, he was under no restrictions as to receiving visits from his friends; and even distant churches might still enjoy the benefit of his advice and superintendence. It has always been asserted, that Luke composed his Gospel, if not at the dictation, at least under the direction of Paul; and no more probable period can be assigned as the date of its composition, than the two years which were passed by Paul at Caesarea. There is good reason to think that Luke was with him during the whole of this period. He had first travelled in his company in the year 46, and had only left him to take care of the Macedonian churches. Like all the other persons employed in preaching the Gospel, he received the miraculous assistance of the Holy Spirit; and as far as human instruction or example could fit him for the work of an evangelist, he had the advantage of hearing Paul explain those doctrines which had been revealed to himself from heaven.

When they arrived in Palestine, they found, as might naturally be expected in that country, that several writings were in circulation which professed to give an account of the life and actions of Jesus. Many of these histories would probably be incorrect, even when written by friends; but the open enemies of the Gospel would be likely to spread reports concerning its first Founder which would be full of misrepresentations and falsehood. It would therefore become necessary, for the sake of those who already believed, as well as of those who were to be converted, that some faithful narrative should be drawn up concerning the birth of Jesus, His miracles, His doctrine, and His death. It has been said by some writers, that this was done within a few years after the ascension of our Lord, and an early date has often been assigned to the Gospel of Matthew: but it is perhaps safer to conclude, that none of the four Gospels were written till about the period at which we are now arrived; and the Gospel of Luke may be the first of those which have come down to us as the works of inspired Evangelists.

## CHAPTER V.

### *PAUL IS SENT TO ROME*

IT was stated in the last chapter, that Paul continued two years in prison at Cesarea. He, in fact, continued there during the remainder of the government of Felix, who was succeeded by Porcius Festus in 55, which was the second year of the reign of Nero. On the first occasion of Festus visiting Jerusalem, the Jews endeavoured to prejudice him against his prisoner, and the procurator would have gratified them by sacrificing Paul to their malice. Paul, however, was too prudent to trust himself at Jerusalem; and instead of accepting the offer of having his cause heard in that city, he exercised his privilege of a Roman citizen, and demanded the right of having it heard by the emperor in person, at Rome.

Festus could not refuse this appeal; though if he had been left to himself, he would at once have given the apostle his liberty. The latter might also have met with a friend in Agrippa, who had lately received a farther accession of territory, with the title of king. Being now on a visit to Festus, he heard the story of Paul's miraculous conversion from his own mouth; and the apostle's impressive eloquence made, for a short time, some impression upon him: but Agrippa appears to have had but one object, that of keeping on good terms with the Roman government; and he followed up this principle so successfully, that he retained his dominions during the reigns of five successive emperors, from most of whom he continued to receive favours; and he survived the destruction of Jerusalem by several years.

We need not therefore be surprised, if the effect produced upon him by Paul's preaching soon passed away; but, at the time, he bore the fullest testimony to his innocence, and would gladly have concurred with Festus in restoring him to liberty. The apostle, however, had himself precluded this by appealing to the emperor, which he perhaps perceived to be now his only chance of visiting Rome. Had he been released from prison, the Jews were still actively on the watch to kill him, and it would have been extremely difficult for him to have escaped from Palestine with his life.

Once before, they had laid a plot for destroying him upon a voyage by sea; and it was to avoid this conspiracy, that he had taken the circuitous course of going back through Macedonia, when he made his last journey to Jerusalem. This may have been one of the reasons which inclined him to put in his claim of being heard in person by the emperor; and the appeal having been once made, Festus had no choice as to complying with his demand. He accordingly sent him to Rome in the autumn of 55; but the vessel in which he sailed had a most tempestuous passage, and was at length wrecked on the island of Malta. This obliged the crew to pass the winter in that island, and Paul did not reach Rome till the beginning of the following year. But his journey from Puteoli, where he landed, enables us to conclude that the Gospel had already made considerable progress in Italy. He found some Christians among the inhabitants of Puteoli; and the believers at Rome, as soon as they heard that he was coming, sent some of their body to meet him by the way.

We are now arrived at an interesting period in the history of Paul and of the Gospel. He had for some time been meditating a journey to Rome; and though at first he had not anticipated that he should visit it in chains, he had at length reached the capital of the

world, and had courted an interview with the emperor himself. We know nothing of the result of this hazardous experiment, except that he was allowed to preach his doctrines without any molestation: but if he obtained this permission by the personal indulgence of the emperor, it is difficult to account for his being detained two more years as a prisoner. It is true, that his restraint was by no means severe; for he was allowed to hire his own residence, and the only inconvenience was that of having one of his arms fastened by a chain to the arm of a soldier.

This would necessarily make his case known among the soldiers, who relieved each other in guarding prisoners. The praetorian guards were now under the command of Burrhus, who had been tutor to Nero, and still retained some influence over him. If this officer took any interest in Paul more than in the other prisoners committed to him, he may have been the means of gaining him a hearing with the emperor; and he may also have introduced him to the philosopher Seneca, who was an intimate friend of his own, and is said by some ancient writers to have formed an acquaintance with Paul. This, however, is extremely uncertain; and we can hardly venture to say anything more, than that the apostle and the philosopher were in Rome at the same time; and that there are expressions in some works of Seneca, which might support the notion of his having seen the writings of Paul.

### *The Roman Imprisonment.*

It would be more interesting to inquire what was the effect produced by the apostle's presence upon the Jews who resided in Rome. There is abundant evidence that they lived there in great numbers. Such, at least, was the case before the edict of Claudius, which banished them from that city; and it has been stated that the edict was revoked before the end of that emperor's reign. It is also plain from the apostle's own letter to the Roman Christians that their church was composed of Jews and Gentiles; and we might suppose the Jewish portion of it to have been numerous from the pains taken by the apostle to guard against the notion that the law of Moses could in any manner contribute to justification. There are, however, no signs of the Jews having excited any prejudice or persecution against him, as they had done in other cities. His being a prisoner was probably his protection; and a recollection of the edict, which had so lately sent them into banishment, would be likely to keep the Jews from hazarding another disturbance. It seems most probable that his principal converts at Rome were Gentiles; and it was this circumstance, so gratifying at the time to the apostle, which, in a few years, brought the Christians under the notice of the magistrates, and exposed them for more than two centuries to the cruelties of implacable enemies.

We have the evidence of the apostle himself that he had some converts in the emperor's own household; and there can be no doubt that Christianity was now beginning to spread among people of rank and fortune. One person may be mentioned as being partly connected with the history of our own country. This was Pomponia Gnequina, the wife of Plautius, the conqueror of Britain, who was undoubtedly charged with being guilty of a foreign superstition; but when it is added that she was the first person who introduced Christianity into this island, we must be careful not to confound a vague tradition with authentic history. The same remark must be applied to the story of Claudia, the daughter of Caractacus, going back from Rome, and propagating the Gospel in her father's territories.

It is perfectly possible for Paul to have assisted in the conversion of Britain or any other distant country by the success of his own personal preaching while he was at Rome: but it does not become us to indulge conjecture where so little is really known. It is certain that up to this time no public or systematic opposition had been made in the capital to the profession of the Gospel; and Paul was not only allowed to deliver his doctrines openly to any of the inhabitants, but persons who came to him from other countries, and brought him accounts of the churches he had planted, had full liberty to visit him. Luke had accompanied him from Palestine, and appears to have taken this opportunity for writing the Acts of the Apostles. Timothy also came to Rome during some part of these two years; and we are indebted to this imprisonment for the three Epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians, as well as for the short Epistle to Philemon, who lived at Colossae, and had been converted by Paul.

The apostle did not recover his liberty till the year 58; and at the time of his leaving Rome we may consider the church in that city to have been regularly established. We have seen that there may have been Christians there very soon after the ascension of our Lord; but if (as appears almost certain) it had not been visited by any apostle before the arrival of Paul, he must naturally be considered the founder of the Roman Church. This is, in fact, the statement of many early writers, though they generally mention the name of Peter as his associate in this important work. That the Church of Rome was founded by Peter and Paul (if we mean by this expression its regular organization, and its form of ecclesiastical polity) may be received for as well-attested an historical fact as any which has come down to us: but the date of Peter's first arrival in Rome is involved in such great uncertainty, and the New Testament is so totally silent concerning it, that we can hardly hope to settle anything upon the subject.

If Peter arrived in Rome before Paul quitted it, that is, in the year 57 or 58, the ancient traditions about the Church of Rome being founded by both of them jointly would be most satisfactorily explained. It is also probable that the two apostles would follow the same plan with respect to this church which had been adopted in others, and would leave some one person to manage its concerns. Here, again, tradition is almost unanimous in asserting that the first bishop of Rome was Linus: by which we are to understand that he was the first person appointed over it after the two apostles had left it; and we may, perhaps, safely consider Linus to have entered upon his office as early as the year 58.

#### *After-life of St Paul.*

Very little is known of the personal history of Paul after his release from Rome. His life was prolonged for eight or ten years, and we may be sure that he devoted it, as before, to the cause of his heavenly Master. He intended to visit Philippi, as well as the churches which he had planted in Asia Minor; and if he fulfilled his intention of travelling in those directions he was probably going on to Jerusalem.

He would be likely, indeed, to have paid more than one visit to the land of his fathers; but that unhappy country could only be viewed with feelings of the deepest affliction by every true Israelite, particularly by one who believed the predictions which Christ had delivered concerning it. Paul would well know that the storm was gathering over it, which, in a few years, would burst upon it to its destruction. There would perhaps be one comfort to him in the midst of his sorrow for his countrymen, which was, that civil disturbances drew off the attention of the Jews from the Christians, and gave to the latter more security in the propagation of their doctrines.



It would be necessary, however, to warn the Christians in Judea of the impending calamity; and this may have furnished the apostle with a motive for visiting them. If he wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews at this time, we may see in it many prophetic warnings which he gave to the Christians concerning the sufferings which they would undergo. There is also some evidence that Matthew published his Gospel about the same period. He dwells, with particular minuteness, on the horrors of the Jewish war; and the Christians of Judea could not fail to notice the earnest exhortations given to them by Christ Himself, that they would quit the city before the siege began. Matthew is always said to have written his Gospel for the use of the Jewish believers, and it was perhaps circulated principally in Palestine; whereas Luke intended his own composition for the Gentile believers.

Though we may feel almost certain that Paul would visit Jerusalem, after his release from Rome, we are still at a loss to account for his proceedings during the remainder of his life; and yet this period was, perhaps, as interesting as any part of the former years which he had devoted to the service of the Gospel. We have traced his progress through the most civilized portions of the world, and even to the capital of the Roman Empire; but he professed himself also under an obligation to preach the Gospel to nations that were rude and barbarous. He had ample time for fulfilling this sacred duty; and tradition has pointed out the west of Europe as the scene of these later actions of his life.

Spain and Gaul, and even Britain, have claimed the great apostle as the first founder of their respective churches; but the writer of history is obliged to add, that though such journeys were perfectly possible, and even probable, the actual evidence of their having been undertaken is extremely small. We have the apostle's own testimony for his intending to visit Spain; and Clement speaks of Paul having gone to the extremity of the west. This may, perhaps, give some support to the notion of his visiting Spain; and if he went to that country by land, he must have passed through the south of France. But the churches in France which claim the earliest origin, trace their foundation rather to the companions of Paul than to the apostle himself; and there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that France, as well as Spain, contained converts to Christianity before the end of the first century.

The same may, perhaps, be said of our own island, though we need not believe the traditions which have been already mentioned, concerning its first conversion; and it is right to add, that the earliest writer who speaks of Britain as being visited by any of the apostles, is Eusebius, who wrote at the beginning of the fourth century; and the earliest writer who names St Paul, is Theodoret, who lived a century later.

Traditions, preserved by such writers as these, at least deserve some attention; but, in later ages, there was such a taste for fabulous legends, and rival churches were so anxious to trace their origin to an apostle, that we are induced to reject almost all these stories, as entirely fictitious. Still, however, it must appear singular, that none of the apostles should have travelled in a westerly direction, and preached to the barbarous nations which had submitted, in part, to the Roman arms. There might appear no more reason against their going to Germany or Britain, than to Persia or India; and when we consider what was actually done by Paul, in the space of little more than three years, we could easily conceive the whole of the world to have been traversed in the same period, if all the apostles were equally active. But the little which we know concerning their individual labours will be considered more in detail presently. It is sufficient, for the present, to repeat the observation concerning Paul, that eight or ten years of his life

remained after his liberation from Rome, during which, we may be certain that he was constantly preaching the Gospel in different countries.

### *Death of James the Just.*

He undoubtedly visited Rome a second time, and received there his crown of martyrdom: but, before we proceed to that event, the order of time requires us to notice the deaths of two other persons, who were of considerable note in the infant church. These were James the bishop of Jerusalem, and the Evangelist Mark.

We have seen the former appointed to preside over the Christians at Jerusalem, in the second or third year after the Ascension of our Lord. He held this perilous situation (for his life must often have been in imminent danger) for about thirty years; and we are perhaps, in part, to trace his own escape from persecution, as well as the constantly increasing number of his flock, to the disturbances and outrages which occupied the Jews and their governors, for some years before the breaking out of the war.

The Jews, however, were well aware of the important service which James had rendered to the Christians; and, in the year 62, they seized a favourable opportunity for putting him to death. Festus, who had kept them in subjection with a strong hand, and who would quickly have suppressed any popular movement, though merely of a religious nature, died in the eighth year of the reign of Nero; and before his successor Albinus arrived, the high-priest, whose name, at this time, was Ananus, put James to death. He knew so little of his victim as to think that he would assist in checking the growth of those doctrines which were spreading so rapidly; and with this view, he placed him on the top of the Temple, that he might harangue the people, and dissuade them from becoming Christians. He did harangue the people; but, as might be expected, he exhorted them to embrace the Gospel; upon which he was immediately thrown down, and either stoned to death or despatched by a fuller's club.

Such was the tragical end of James the Just, who, in addition to his other services, was author of the Epistle which bears his name, and which is addressed to the converted Jews; but the exact date of it cannot be ascertained. His place, as bishop of Jerusalem, was supplied by his brother Simeon, of whose earlier history nothing certain is known; but there is reason to think that Jude, another of the brothers, was one of the twelve apostles; and Joses probably devoted himself to the same occupation of travelling about to preach the Gospel.

The same year, 62, is connected with the death of another distinguished Christian, Mark the Evangelist; concerning whose earlier history we shall say nothing, except that he was probably not the same person with John, surnamed Mark, who accompanied Paul on his first apostolic journey.

If he died in 62, as is stated by Eusebius, he could not be the same with this John, who was certainly alive at a later period, when Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy. Mark the Evangelist is always said to have been the companion of Peter; and tradition also points him out as the first founder of the Church of Alexandria.

The date of his visit to that city cannot be ascertained, but it was probably late in his life; and we might also conclude that he did not go there in company with Peter, or the Alexandrian Church would have claimed the apostle as its founder, rather than the evangelist. Mark, however, may have been sent into Egypt by Peter, and his name is thus

connected with a church which, for some centuries, was the most distinguished for the learning of its members.

His written Gospel appears to have been composed at Rome, to which place he travelled in company with Peter, and he probably continued there some time after the apostle left it; for the Roman Christians, who had heard the Gospel preached by Peter, are said to have requested Mark to commit the same to writing. If Peter visited Rome about the year 58, as was before conjectured, we may approach to the date of the publication of Mark's Gospel; and the writer of it would thus have been likely to see the earlier work, which had been written by Luke; but though the latter Gospel was already in circulation among the Roman Christians, it was not unnatural that the Jewish converts, who would listen with peculiar pleasure to the preaching of Peter, should wish to have a Gospel of their own, written by one of his companions.

The stories of Mark having suffered martyrdom at Alexandria are not deserving of credit; but he appears to have died there in the eighth year of Nero, and to have been succeeded in the government of that Church by Annianus.

### *Christianity in Alexandria.*

The early history of the Alexandrian Church would be extremely interesting, if we had any authentic materials for collecting it; but the fact of its being founded by Mark, is almost the only one which is deserving of credit. It has been stated that Gnosticism, which was a compound of Jewish and heathen philosophy, took its rise in Alexandria; and if men were willing to exchange their former opinions for this absurd and extravagant system, we might suppose that Christianity would not have been rejected by them, as altogether unworthy of their notice.

It appears, in fact, to have attracted the attention of the learned at Alexandria sooner than in any other country. It was a long time before the Grecian philosophers condescended to notice the speculations of an obscure Jewish sect. But the Jews themselves, who resided at Alexandria, were many of them men of learning, and were not only well acquainted with the written works of the heathen, but had frequent opportunities of conversing and disputing with philosophers of various sects who came to Alexandria.

One consequence of this intercourse was, that there was a greater toleration of different opinions in that city than was generally allowed in Grecian schools, where the adherents of one class of doctrines professed to hold all others in contempt. And there is reason to think that the Christians were for a long time allowed a full liberty of discussion in Alexandria, till their numbers began to be formidable to their heathen opponents. This also led to the Alexandrian Christians being more remarkable for their learning than those of other countries; and having to explain their doctrines to Jews and Gentiles who were well accustomed to disputation, they were obliged to take more pains in instructing their converts; and thus the Christian schools were established at an early period, which in the second and third centuries produced so many learned and voluminous writers.

There was also another circumstance which, perhaps, contributed to the diffusion of Christianity, not only in Alexandria, but through the whole of Egypt. There was a set of men living in the country, who in later times might have been called monks or hermits, but who were known in those days by the name of Therapeute. Instead of frequenting the large towns, or taking part in the ordinary affairs of life, they retired into the deserts or

less inhabited districts of the country, and passed their time in a kind of mystical or religious contemplation. Their religion appears to have been free from many of the impurities and superstitions of the heathen, and a resemblance has been traced between some of their opinions and practices and those of the Jews.

It has been thought, indeed, that the Egyptian Therapeute were Jews; and the notion has derived support from the fact, that at the same period there was a Jewish sect living in Palestine, known by the name of Essenes. The habits of these men bore a close resemblance to those of the Therapeute; and there may, perhaps have been some connection between them, which would account for both of them adopting such a singular mode of life. But there are strong reasons for concluding that the Therapeute were not Jews, though some persons of that nation may have joined them from Alexandria; and their religious opinions, as was before observed, contained some traces of a Jewish origin.

It can hardly be denied that the morality of these sects came nearer to the standard of the Gospel than that of any other men who were unenlightened by revelation. In some respects they ran into the extreme of making themselves entirely useless to their fellow-beings; and society could not be carried on if their habits were generally adopted. But if we compare them with what we know of the heathen, or even of the Jews, at the time when the Gospel was first preached, it must be allowed that there was no place where the soil was better prepared for receiving the heavenly seed than among these contemplative and ascetic recluses of Egypt.

There are traditions which speak of many of them having been converted to the Gospel; and such a result was certainly not improbable. We shall also see, in the course of this history, that the first Christians who adopted monastic habits were resident in Egypt, which might be accounted for by some of the Therapeute retaining their ancient mode of life after their conversion. It is to be regretted that so little is known of the effect produced upon these men by the first preaching of Christianity; but it was thought right to give this short account of them, though we can only say from conjecture that some of them received the word of life from the Evangelist Mark.

### *Persecution by Nero.*

Though we know so little of the two great apostles, Peter and Paul, during the later years of their lives, we may assert with confidence that they both suffered martyrdom at Rome, which brings us to the first systematic persecution of the Christians by the heathen. In the year 64 a great fire happened at Rome, which burnt down ten out of the fourteen regions into which the city was divided. The Emperor Nero was strongly suspected of having caused the conflagration; but he tried to silence the report by turning the fury of the citizens against the Christians. The rapid growth of Christianity was sure by this time to have raised against it many enemies, who were interested in suppressing it.

When Paul preached it for the first time at Rome, as a prisoner, he met with no opposition; but during the six years which followed his departure the grain of mustard-seed had been growing into a tree, which threatened to overtop the stateliest and most luxuriant plantations of heathenism. This is the real cause of the different reception which the apostle met with on his first and second visit. If the Emperor had wished to raise a cry against the Christians on the former occasion, he would not have found many,

in proportion to the population of the city, who had even heard of their name. But before his second visit the new religion had gained so many followers that the persons interested in supporting the ancient superstitions began to be seriously alarmed.

The emperor himself would be likely to care little about religion; but he would care still less for the sufferings of the Christians, if he could make his people believe that they had set fire to Rome. It is certain that many calumnies were now beginning to be spread, which were likely to raise prejudices against the Christians. The heathen could not, or would not, understand their abhorrence of a plurality of gods, and set them down as atheists. They were even represented as grossly immoral in their conduct, and as practising horrid and inhuman rites at their religious meetings.

Such notions may have arisen, in part, from the love-feasts and sacraments of the Christians; but they are also to be traced to the Gnostics, all of whom were addicted to magic, and some of them did not scruple to defend and to practise the most licentious and disgusting immoralities. The Gnostics were for a long time confounded with the Christians, by those who pretended to despise all foreign superstitions; and thus, when the Christians were accused of having set fire to Rome, the populace was easily excited to demand their blood.

The emperor's gardens were used as a circus for the occasion; and the remorseless tyrant disgraced himself and human nature by taking part in the games, while the Christians were tortured by new and barbarous inventions, to furnish amusement for the spectators. Humanity shudders to hear of these innocent victims being enclosed in the skins of beasts, that they might be torn in pieces by dogs; or covered with pitch and other inflammable materials, that they might serve as torches to dispel the darkness of the night! The number of persons who suffered in this way is not stated; but the Romans appear from this time to have acquired a taste for persecuting the Christians, which continued more or less to the end of Nero's reign.

It was during this period that the two apostles, Peter and Paul, came to Rome; and it seems probable that Paul arrived first. He approached the capital from the east, and there is no reason to think that he entered it as a prisoner; but he appears to have lost his liberty soon after his arrival; and his imprisonment was now much more close and severe than it had been on the former occasion.

Under other circumstances the apostles would have rejoiced in having the company of Peter; but they were now fellow-sufferers, or rather fellow-victims; and it is not certain whether they were even allowed to visit each other as prisoners, though the place is still shown in Rome in which they are said to have been confined. It seems most probable that Peter wrote his two Epistles before this last journey to Rome; and if he had visited the people to whom the first of them is addressed, we are able to say that he had traversed nearly the whole of Asia Minor.

He had also gone much further to the east, if the Babylon, from which he wrote the Epistle, was the celebrated city on the Euphrates. But it has been supposed by some writers to be a figurative name, by which he chose to speak of Rome; and if this was the case, it is most probable that he wrote the Epistle during some former visit which he paid to the capital. The second Epistle was certainly written not long before his death; but there is no evidence of his having written it during his imprisonment. We may speak with more certainty with respect to Paul, whose second Epistle to Timothy was undoubtedly sent from Rome during the period of which we are now speaking. Timothy was still taking charge of the apostle's converts at Ephesus; and the Epistle pressed him to come to Rome before winter; but whether the two friends met again in this world cannot be ascertained.



The eventful lives of the two great apostles were now drawing to a close. Paul appears to have been called upon to make a public defence; but the sequel shows, as might have been expected, that all defence was useless. He was ordered to be beheaded, that mode of punishment having probably been selected out of regard for his being a citizen of Rome; and as early as in the third century, a spot was shown on the road leading to Ostia, in which his body was said to have been buried.

We are equally in the dark as to the personal history of Peter during his last visit to Rome. There are traditions which speak of his once more encountering Simon, the Samaritan impostor and celebrated founder of the Gnostics, during one of his visits at Rome; but whether such a meeting ever actually took place, and whether it was at this last or a previous visit, is entirely uncertain.

We can only venture to assert, that Peter was imprisoned for some time before his death at Rome; and it is generally stated, that both apostles suffered martyrdom on the same day. Peter, not being a citizen of Rome, was ordered to be crucified, which was a common punishment for criminals of the lower orders. But the apostle showed his humility, by requesting to be fastened to the cross with his head downwards, as if he felt himself unworthy to die in the same manner with his heavenly Master. If the story may be received, which was current at the end of the second century, that Peter saw his wife led out to martyrdom, and encouraged her to bear the trial, it is probably to be referred to the period of his own suffering. The place of his interment was also shown, like that of Paul's, as early as in the third century, but not on the same spot; for Peter is said to have been buried on the hill of the Vatican, where the magnificent church now stands which bears his name.

This persecution began, as was stated, in the year 64, and the reign of Nero ended in the June of 68; but it is uncertain whether the Christians were exposed to suffering during the whole of that period. The deaths of the two apostles must be placed some time before the death of the emperor; perhaps in the year 67, which thus becomes a memorable and melancholy era in the History of the Church. Some persons have supposed, that the persecution was felt by the Christians not only in the capital, but throughout various provinces of the empire. This point, however, has never been clearly proved.

The rapid progress of Christianity may have led to the same results in different countries, and provincial magistrates may have been encouraged in any acts of cruelty, by knowing that the emperor allowed the Christians to be tortured; but there is no evidence that Nero published any general edict, which made Christianity a crime, or which ordered the magistrates to suppress it. We may hope that, even in the capital, the thirst for blood was satisfied, when that of the two apostles had been shed. The Roman Christians, as we have seen, had been committed some years before to the care of Linus; and there is reason to think that Linus also suffered martyrdom during Nero's persecution. The Church was then committed to the charge of Anacletus, whose name has thus been preserved as that of the second bishop of Rome.

CHAPTER VI.  
LIVES OF THE APOSTLES

BEFORE we pursue the History of the Church in its chronological order, we will pause to consider the progress which had already been made by the Gospel. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, during his first imprisonment at Rome, he spoke of the Gospel having been then preached to every creature which is under heaven.

We are not to press the literal interpretation of these words, any more than of those of our Saviour, who said, when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, *the Gospel must first be published among all nations*. Nevertheless, it was literally true, at the time when the Epistle to the Colossians was written, that the Gospel had been preached in every country of the then civilised world, as well as in many countries which were still barbarous.

Paul himself had visited the whole of Palestine, with part of Syria, including the capital; the sea-coast of Asia Minor, on the south and west, with great part of the interior, and the islands of Cyprus and Crete; Macedonia in its widest signification; Attica, the Peloponnesus, and Rome. All this was done by one man, in the space of twelve years; after which time the same apostle continued his missionary labours for eight years more; and during the whole of both periods, there is every reason to believe, that the other apostles were performing similar journeys with similar success.

It has already been observed, that we know very little of the personal history of the twelve apostles; but the remark may be repeated here, that they probably did not begin their distant travels till the time of Paul's first journey in 45; and there is reason to think that very few of them survived the destruction of Jerusalem. We have already mentioned the little that is known concerning Peter. James, the brother of John, was beheaded in the year 44, before his apostolical labours could have begun, though the fact of his death may serve to show that he had been a zealous preacher to his countrymen at Jerusalem. John himself outlived all the other apostles, and did not die till the end of the century; so that we shall have occasion to notice him hereafter.

Of the nine other apostles, we have very little authentic information, though there are abundant traditions concerning their preaching in distant countries, and suffering martyrdom. These accounts are not supported by the earlier writers, except with relation to Andrew and Thomas: the former of whom is said, by a writer of the third century, to have preached in Scythia, and the latter in Parthia.

The term Scythia might be applied to many countries; but Andrew is said more precisely to have visited the country about the Black Sea; and, ultimately, to have died in the south of Greece. If it be true that the apostle Thomas preached in Parthia, we are to understand this expression of the Persian territories; and he is also said to have travelled as far as India. Some persons have thought to find traces of his apostolical labours in a settlement of Christians lately discovered on the coast of Malabar; and we are told that these persons lay claim to the apostle Thomas as their founder. But though this interesting church may be of great antiquity, there is good reason to doubt the truth of such a tradition; and part of the country which is now called Arabia, was often spoken of in ancient times as India.

It is, therefore, highly probable that Thomas preached the Gospel in the central parts of Asia; and the church of Edessa, a city on the east bank of the Euphrates, may have been planted by this apostle. But the story of Abgarus, the king of that people, having written a letter to our Saviour, and being cured of a disorder by a person sent to him from the apostle Thomas, is worthy of little credit, except as it confirms the tradition of Thomas having preached at Edessa. His remains were shown in that city as early as in the fourth century; and there is reason to think that he did not suffer martyrdom.

There is the same doubt concerning the proper meaning of the term India, in another tradition, concerning the apostles Matthew and Bartholomew. It was reported, at the end of the second century, that a Hebrew copy of the Gospel, composed by Matthew, had been found in India, which had been brought to that country by Bartholomew. It is plain that a Hebrew translation of this Gospel could only have been of use to Jews, who are known to have been settled in great numbers in Arabia: so that, if there is any truth in this story, it probably applies to Arabia, and we may conclude that one or both of these apostles visited that country. Matthew is reported upon other, but later, authority, to have preached in Ethiopia, which was another name occasionally used for Arabia. He is also said to have led a life of rigid abstemiousness, and not to have met his end by martyrdom.

Concerning three of the apostles, Simon, surnamed the Zealot, Matthias, and James the son of Alphaeus, we know absolutely nothing; at least if we follow the opinion expressed in this history, that the James now mentioned was a different person from the bishop of Jerusalem. There was, however, a brother of the bishop, named Jude, who was probably the same with the apostle of that name; and since Paul, in a letter which he wrote in the year 52, speaks of *the brethren of our Lord* travelling about with their wives, and preaching the Gospel, we can hardly help referring the expression to Jude, who at that time was pursuing his apostolical labours; but the particular countries in which he travelled are not known. We learn, from other authorities, that he was married, and left descendants. He was also the writer of the Epistle which is still extant; and there is reason to think that he survived most of the other apostles. It has been stated that none of them lived to the end of the century, except John; but it is probable that Philip died at an advanced age; and his residence, in the latter part of his life, was at Hierapolis in Phrygia. He also was married, and had daughters, which was perhaps the cause of his being sometimes confounded with the other Philip, who was one of the seven deacons, and lived at Cesarea, whose unmarried daughters are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

### *The Twelve Apostles.*

This brief sketch of the personal history of the Apostles will be unsatisfactory to those who would wish to be furnished with anecdotes concerning the founders of our faith. Such a wish is perfectly reasonable, if materials could be found for gratifying it; and the historian of the Church could not better discharge his duty, when engaged upon the affairs of the first century, than in relating circumstances connected with the lives and deaths of the apostles.

Their history would be that of the first propagation of the Gospel. But it has been already stated more than once, that we know very little concerning them; and upon this interesting subject, the Christians of the third and fourth centuries appear to have been almost as much in the dark as ourselves. Traditions must have been extant in the second century, connected with the history of the apostles, and collections of them are stated to

have been made by writers of that period; but they have not come down to our day, except, perhaps, amidst a heap of extravagant fictions, which make it impossible for us to ascertain whether any of the stories are genuine.

The lives of all the apostles may be read in most minute detail, not only in the compilations of modern writers, but in works or fragments of works, which are probably as old as the second century; and we shall see, when we come to that period, that literary forgeries began then to be common, which pretended to relate the personal adventures of the companions of our Lord. The only inspired work upon the subject, which is entitled the Acts of the Apostles, might, with more propriety, be termed the Acts of Paul; and they do not bring down his history beyond the termination of his first imprisonment at Rome.

The account of his second imprisonment, and of his death, might have been related much more minutely, if credit could be given to the statements of later writers; but it is impossible to do so, in the great majority of instances, without laying aside every principle of sound and rational criticism: and the same remark will apply to the voluminous legends which are still extant concerning the rest of the apostles.

We may now pursue the history of the Church during the period which followed the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. There still remain more than thirty years before we come to the end of the first century; but of these thirty years very little is known. We have been able to trace the history of Paul with some minuteness; but the short and scanty account which has been given of the other apostles, will show that very little is known of their individual labours.

The three successors of Nero in the empire held their disputed titles for only eighteen months; and in the year 69 Vespasian was declared emperor. The event which makes his reign so peculiarly interesting, is the destruction of Jerusalem by his son Titus, who, without knowing the counsels which he was called to fulfil, was employed by God to execute His vengeance upon his infatuated and rebellious people. The ecclesiastical historian may be thankful that he is not called upon to describe the horrors of the Jewish war. It is sufficient for our present purpose to state that the discontent, which had been showing itself at intervals for several years, broke out into open hostilities in the year 66, when the Jews were successful in defeating a Roman army commanded by Cestius Gallus. This was the signal for open war. Vespasian himself took the field against them; and the Jews soon found that their only hope was in the power of Jerusalem to stand a siege. The command of the besieging army was then committed to Titus; and though, according to the notions of those days, he was not a blood-thirsty conqueror, it is calculated that more than a million of Jews perished in the siege. The city was taken in the year 72, and, from that time to the present, Jerusalem has been trodden down by the Gentiles.

### *Siege of Jerusalem.*

There can be no doubt that the Jews were partly excited to this obstinate resistance by the expectation that a mighty and victorious prince was soon to appear among them. One impostor after another declared himself to be the Messiah; and the notion was so generally spread of an universal empire being about to begin from Judea, that Vespasian thought it expedient to proclaim the fulfilment of the expectation in his own person. The fact of his first assuming the imperial title in Judaea supported such a notion; but

Vespasian, like other usurpers, was mistrustful of his own right, and could not altogether dismiss his fears of a rival.

We are told that when Jerusalem was taken, he ordered an inquiry to be made after all the descendants of David, that the Jews might not have any person of the royal race remaining. If they had not been too much occupied by their own misfortunes, they would perhaps have gratified their hatred of the Christians by denouncing them to the emperor, as persons who owned for their king a descendant of the house of David. In one sense this was true of the Christians; but though Vespasian might have been inclined to view the Christians with jealousy, there is good reason to think that, on the present occasion at least, they escaped his inquiries.

His only object would have been to ascertain whether any person of the royal line was likely to oppose him as a competitor for the empire. The notion of a kingdom which was not of this world would have given him no uneasiness; and there is no reason to suppose that Vespasian paid any attention to the religion of the Christians, unless we conclude that the miraculous cures which he pretended to perform in Egypt were set up in rivalry to that preternatural power which so many of the first converts had received from the hands of the apostles.

Our Saviour had predicted the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, in the plainest terms, to His disciples. With equal plainness He had warned the Christians to quit the city before the siege began. History informs us that they profited by these merciful predictions; and, if the dates have been rightly assigned to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the publication of them at that period would forcibly remind the Christians of the necessity which there was of flying from the devoted spot.

It has even been said that new and supernatural warnings were given to them, to retire from Jerusalem; but it is certain that, as early as the year 66, before the city was at all surrounded by armies, many of the inhabitants left it; and a place named Pella, on the eastern side of the river Jordan, is mentioned as providing a refuge for the Christians. We may conclude that they were accompanied by Symeon, who, since the year 62, had presided over the church at Jerusalem; and the number of fugitives must have been extremely great, if he was attended by all his flock.

But it is not improbable that several of the Jewish believers quitted Palestine altogether, and settled in different parts of the empire. This would be the case particularly with those who had already laid aside their attachment to the Law of Moses. The destruction of the city, and the dispersion of its inhabitants, would confirm them in their belief that God no longer intended the Jews to be a peculiar people. They would thenceforth cease to think of Juthea as their home; and so far as they could lay aside their national character, they would join themselves to the great body of Gentile Christians, who were now beginning to be numerous in every part of the world.

The effect of so many converted Jews being suddenly dispersed throughout the empire must have been felt in various ways. In the first place the mere accession of numbers to the Christians must have brought them more under the notice of the heathen; and though this was likely to be followed by persecution, it would also operate in making the new religion more widely known, and therefore more widely propagated.

In the next place, it would tend to confirm the notion already entertained by the heathen, that the Christians were merely a Jewish sect: and though the contempt which was felt for the Jews might hitherto have served as a protection to the Christians, this feeling was likely to be changed when the war was brought to a conclusion. The Jews, who had before been only distinguished for a peculiar religion, were now known



throughout the empire as an obstinate and turbulent people, whose desperate courage had for a time defied the whole strength of Rome, and who could only cease to be formidable by being utterly wiped away from the catalogue of nations.

So long as the Christians were confounded with the Jews, they would be likely to share in these feelings of suspicion and ill-will; and persons who might not have cared for the increasing propagation of the Christian doctrines would view with dislike, if not with actual alarm, the general diffusion of opinions which were supposed to be peculiar to the Jews.

### *The Church at Pella.*

These were some of the effects which might have been produced upon the minds of the heathen by the dispersion of so many converted Jews at the close of the war. But it is probable that consequences of a different kind were felt by the Christians themselves. It has been already observed that those countries which received the Gospel before the arrival of any apostle, received it most probably by the hands of Jews; and hence there are traces of even the Gentile converts becoming attached, in a greater or less degree, to the Law of Moses, in every place where a Christian community was formed.

If this had been so from the beginning, it was likely that the adoption of Jewish customs would become still more general when so many churches received an accession of Jewish members. We, perhaps, see traces of this in the practice, which was continued for some centuries, of the Christians observing the Jewish Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, as well as the Sunday, or first day. That the Sunday was called the Lord's day, and was kept holy in memory of the Lord having risen from the dead on that day, can be proved from the practice of the apostles, as recorded in the New Testament.

But there is also evidence that many Christians continued for a long time to attach a religious sanctity to the Saturday, as being the Sabbath of the Jews; and such a custom may have derived support from the cause above mentioned, when so many Hebrew Christians were dispersed throughout the empire. The same remark may be applied to what has been already mentioned in a former chapter, that the prohibition of eating things strangled, or any animal which was killed with the blood in it, was considered of perpetual obligation by all, or nearly all, Christians, for some centuries.

The country in which Pella is situated formed part of the territories given by the Romans to Agrippa, who had prudence and policy enough to keep on good terms with the conquerors, without actually taking up arms against his countrymen. The Christians, therefore, remained unmolested in Pella and the neighbourhood; and as soon as it was possible for them to return to Jerusalem, many of them did so, accompanied by their bishop, and set up again a Christian church amidst the ruins of their city.

Without attributing to the Jewish Christians any want of patriotism, or any feeling of attachment to the Roman government, it was natural for them to view the destruction of Jerusalem with very different emotions from those of their unbelieving countrymen. They knew that this event, disastrous and fatal as it was to their nation, had been positively foretold by the Founder of their religion: many of them had long acknowledged that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was to exist no longer; and the total subversion of the Jewish polity would be likely to make still more of them embrace this once unwelcome truth: to which it may be added, that the expectation of a temporal prince, descended from the family of David, could hardly be entertained by the

Christians, who already acknowledged a spiritual completion of the prophecies in Jesus, the Son of David.

All this would incline them to acquiesce much more patiently than the rest of their nation in the awful judgments of God; and if their Roman masters allowed them to return to the land of their fathers, they would accept the indulgence with gratitude; and though their walls were not to be rebuilt, and one stone of the Temple was not left upon another, they were too happy to return to their homes, as a quiet, inoffensive people, and to continue to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

It might, perhaps, be too much to assert, that from this period the only inhabitants of Jerusalem were Christians, though it is not improbable that such was the case when the settlers from Pella first took possession of the ruins. That these men were sincere believers in Christ cannot be doubted: but there is reason to think that they still continued to observe some of the peculiarities of the Law of Moses; not that they considered any of these ceremonies as essential to salvation, but they had scruples as to leaving them off altogether, and added them, as external ordinances, to the more pure and vital doctrines of the Gospel.

### *Gnostic Sects.*

They had read the account of the baptism of Jesus, on which occasion the Holy Spirit descended visibly from heaven, and lighted upon Him. The Gnostics interpreted this to mean that Jesus, up to the time of his baptism, had been a mere human being, born in the ordinary way, of two human parents; but that, after that time, the man Jesus was united to Christ, who was an emanation from God; and that the two beings continued so united till the crucifixion of Jesus, when Christ left him and returned to heaven. It was their belief in the divinity of Christ which hindered them from believing that He was born of a human mother; and hence they divided Jesus and Christ into two distinct beings—Jesus was a mere man, but Christ was an emanation from God.

The name of the person who invented this doctrine has not been ascertained; but, before the end of the first century, it was held by two persons who became eminent as the heads of parties—the one a Greek, named Carpocrates, and the other named Cerinthus, who, if he was not a Jew, admitted much of the Jewish religion into his scheme of Gnosticism. Both these persons were openly and scandalously profligate in their moral conduct, which enables us to point out another division among the Gnostics; for, while some maintained that all actions were lawful to one who possessed the true knowledge of God, and accordingly indulged in every species of vice, others considered it the duty of a Gnostic to mortify the body, and to abstain even from the most innocent enjoyments. Carpocrates and Cerinthus belonged to the former of these divisions; and Cerinthus, not content with encouraging his followers in the grossest dissipation, held out to them a millennium of enjoyment at the end of the world, when Christ was again to appear upon earth, and his faithful followers were to revel in a thousand years of sensual indulgence.

It is possible that Cerinthus did not rise into notice till towards the end of the century; but Gnosticism had undoubtedly made great progress in the world before the period at which we are now arrived; and though its early history is involved in some obscurity, it is plain that it borrowed largely from the religion of the Jews, as might be expected in a system which was begun by a native of Samaria.

The Ebionites, whose origin led us into this discussion, were a branch of the Gnostics, and they are said to have appeared at first, like the Nazarenes, in the neighbourhood of Pella. Their name signifies, in Hebrew, poor; but it has been doubted whether they were not called from an individual whose name was Ebion. They were represented by the ancients as Jews, and some moderns have considered them to be Christians. But though their tenets partook both of Christianity and Judaism, they cannot properly be classed with either party.

The first Ebionites may, by birth, have been Jews, and they may have fancied that they were embracing the doctrines of the Gospel; but they chose to disfigure both forms of religion, and they should properly be described as a branch of Jewish Gnostics. If they were originally Jews, they made a strange departure from the faith of their fathers, for they did not acknowledge the whole of the Pentateuch, and utterly rejected the writings of the prophets. Notwithstanding this heterodoxy, they sided with the most bigoted of the Jews, in adhering to all the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, although they professed to be believers in Jesus Christ. It was on this principle that they paid no respect to Paul as an apostle; and when his epistles came into general circulation, they were rejected by the Ebionites.

Their connexion with the Gnostics is proved by their adopting the notion that Christ descended upon Jesus at his baptism; and their belief in Christ's divinity led them to maintain that Jesus was born, in the ordinary way, of two human parents. They would not admit any account which spoke of Christ, the Son of God, being conceived in the womb of the Virgin, or of his being united from the moment of his birth with a human being. They had a Gospel of their own, written in Hebrew, and made up in part from that of Matthew, from which they had expunged everything relating to the miraculous conception, and to the birth of Christ. It is stated, however, that the later Ebionites became divided upon this point; and though all of them believed that Christ came down from Heaven, and united himself to Jesus, some of them maintained that Jesus was conceived miraculously by the Virgin, while others, as stated above, believed him in every sense to be an ordinary human being. It should be added in favour of the Ebionites, that though their religious tenets were erroneous and extravagant, their moral practice was particularly strict, which perhaps forms the most prominent contrast between themselves and the Cerinthians.

This account of the Ebionites has been introduced in this place, because they are said to have arisen in the neighbourhood of Pella, about the time of the Christians resorting thither from Jerusalem. It will be remembered that all these Christians were converted Jews, and all of them had once conformed to the Law of Moses. Those who continued to do so were known by the name of Nazarenes: but though they adhered to the ceremonies of the law, they were firm believers in Jesus Christ, and looked for salvation only through Him.

Others of their body, while they kept the same strict observance of the law, adopted the Gnostic notions concerning Jesus Christ, and were known by the name of Ebionites. They were probably of the poorer sort, as was implied in their name; and it does not appear that they were numerous. But there was always a danger among the Jewish converts, lest their attachment to the Law should incline them to adopt the errors of the Ebionites and other Gnostics. There is, however, reason to believe that the church at Jerusalem continued pure. It had witnessed the most awful calamity which had ever befallen the Jewish nation; and its members could not forget, on returning once more to Jerusalem, that a remnant only had been saved, even they who believed in Jesus.

CHAPTER VII.

*SEES OF JERUSALEM, ANTIOCH, ROME, AND ALEXANDRIA*

THE destruction of Jerusalem, though the details of it cannot be read even now without horror, was not likely at the time to produce any effect upon the external circumstances of the Gentile Church, which was now so widely spread throughout the world. The reigns of Vespasian and Titus present no instance of the Christians being molested on account of their religion; and we cannot doubt that the Gospel made great progress during that period. Very little is known of the history of any particular Church; but the four cities, which afterwards became most celebrated in the Christian world, and which took precedence over all other sees, have preserved the names of their bishops from the beginning. These cities were Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria, which are here mentioned in the order of their foundation; or if Mark went to Alexandria before any apostle visited Rome, the authority of Peter and Paul gave a priority to the latter city over one which was founded merely by an evangelist. The apostolic sees, as they were called, soon came to be looked upon with particular respect; not as having any power or jurisdiction over the rest, but as being most likely to have preserved apostolic traditions, and to have kept their faith uncorrupted.

There were many other churches besides the four lately mentioned, which were founded by apostles, some of which might claim precedence in order of time: but Jerusalem was, without dispute, the mother of all churches; and Rome, as the metropolis of the world, and Antioch and Alexandria, as capitals of provinces, naturally acquired an importance over inferior places. If we may judge from the length of time during which the bishops of these four cities held their sees in the first century, we have perhaps another proof, that Christianity was not then exposed to much opposition from the heathen. The appointment of Symeon to the bishopric of Jerusalem has been already mentioned; and he held that station to the beginning of the following century. It has also been stated, that Euodius is named as the first bishop of Antioch, though the date of his appointment is not ascertained. He was succeeded, and probably about the year 70, by Ignatius, whose interesting history will occupy us hereafter; but his continuing bishop of that see for upwards of thirty years, may be taken as a proof that the period which we are now considering was one of tranquillity to the Christians of Antioch. The same may be said of Alexandria, where the three first successors of Mark held the bishopric for almost half a century.

The church which, on many accounts, would be most interesting to us, if its early history had been preserved, is that of Rome; but the reader will have seen that we know little concerning it, except the fact of its being founded conjointly by Peter and Paul. The names of the bishops of Rome have been handed down from the time of these apostles, but with considerable confusion, in the first century, both as to the order of their succession and the time of their holding the bishopric. It seems, however, most probable that the three first bishops of the imperial city were Linus, Anacletus, and Clement. The name of the latter deserves a conspicuous place after that of the apostles, whose com-

panion and successor he was; and it is to be regretted that we cannot tell whether he lived to the end of the century, or whether he died long before.

This difference of opinion would be of little importance, if Clement had not left a writing behind him which is still extant; and so few events have been preserved in the history of the Church, during the time that Clement was bishop of Rome, that every incident in his life becomes of value. The writing alluded to was a letter written by Clement, in the name of the Christians at Rome, to their brethren at Corinth; and this interesting document has been preserved almost entire to our own day. We may gather from it that the Roman Christians had lately been suffering some persecution, though the storm had then passed away: which has led some persons to suppose the letter to have been written soon after the end of the reign of Nero, while others refer these expressions to a later persecution, which will be mentioned presently, and which happened in the reign of Domitian. The letter was caused by some dissensions in the Church of Corinth, the exact nature of which is not explained: but the Corinthians had shown a fondness for dividing into parties very soon after their first conversion; and notwithstanding the exhortations and reproof addressed to them by Paul, the same unhappy spirit prevailed among them after his death. It appears to have burst out still more violently on the occasion which called forth the letter from Clement; and it is pleasing to see one church taking this kind and charitable interest in the affairs of another.

The letter is full of earnest exhortations to peace, which, we may hope, were not thrown away upon the Christians of Corinth, when we find that the letter was carefully preserved in that city, and, to a late period, was read publicly in the congregation. Nor was Corinth the only place in which it was treated with this respect. Other churches had also the custom of having it read in public; and, whether we regard the apostolical character of its author, or the early period at which it was composed, it was well deserving of holding a place in the estimation of all Christians, next to the writings of the apostles themselves.

The Epistle of Clement may be safely said to be a genuine work which has come down to us from the first century, beside the canonical books of the New Testament; and there is reason to think that it is older than some of the writings of the last surviving apostle, John. It is probable that Christianity, at this early period, had produced many authors. The name of Barnabas, the companion of Paul, and that of Hermas, who is mentioned in his Epistle to the Romans, are both of them prefixed to works which are ascribed respectively to these two persons. It is known that several books were composed at an early period, which were filled with stories concerning our Lord and His apostles. Many of them professed to have been written by apostles; but they were evidently spurious, and some of them appear to have been written by Gnostics. If they had come down to our day, we should, perhaps, have found in them a few authentic traditions concerning the first preachers of the Gospel: but, on the whole, their loss is not to be lamented; and we cannot but acknowledge the merciful superintendence of God, who has allowed the genuine works of the apostles and evangelists to be preserved, while He has protected His Church from being imposed upon by others which were once widely circulated.

The peace which the Christians enjoyed during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, does not appear to have been disturbed during the earlier part of the reign of Domitian. That tyrant exercised too much cruelty towards his heathen subjects, to allow them much time for harassing the Christians; and when, at length, he began to persecute the latter, it was, perhaps, rather to draw off the public attention from his other barbarities, than



from any regard for the national religion. His persecution probably began in the latter years of his reign; and it was felt, not only in the capital, but in various parts of the empire. One cause of suffering to the Christians, which has been mentioned already, arose from their being confounded with the Jews; a mistake which had been made from the first by the heathen, who pretended to despise all foreign religions, and would not take the pains to distinguish the Christians from the Jews.

When Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, it was ordered that every Jew should henceforward pay to the Capitol at Rome the same piece of money which had before been levied upon them for the maintenance of the Temple. Domitian, who probably wanted the money for his own purposes, exacted the payment with great severity; and it is mentioned by a heathen historian, that some persons who professed the Jewish religion, but endeavoured to conceal it, were compelled to pay the tax. There can be little doubt that these persons were Christians, who asserted with truth, that they were not Jews, but were not believed by the officers of the government.

### *Causes of Persecution.*

This measure of the emperor, though flagrantly unjust, may have been attended with little personal suffering to the Christians. But another heathen historian informs us that several persons, about this period, had adopted Jewish manners; one of whom, Acilius Glabrio, was put to death, in the fifteenth year of Domitian, on the charge of atheism. Here we have positive proof of capital punishment being inflicted on account of religion, and atheism was one of the charges frequently brought against the Christians. It was well known that they refused to offer worship to the numerous deities of paganism; and the votaries of idolatry could not, or would not, understand that their religious adoration was confined to one God.

It was also remarked that the Christians had no temples nor images: there was nothing in their forms of worship which met the public eye; and this contributed to give strength to the report that they were, in religion, atheists. It might, however, excite some surprise that this charge, even if it was generally believed, should have given rise to persecution: for, though the Romans, as has been already observed, were by no means tolerant of other religions, and several laws had been passed against the introduction of foreign superstitions, yet it cannot be denied that persons had been known to maintain atheistical principles without having been brought into any trouble on account of their opinions.

Philosophers had openly argued against the existence of any First Cause, or any superintending Providence; and though there were some who did not like to say, in plain terms, that there were no gods, yet it was universally allowed and acknowledged that their principles led, necessarily, to atheism.

The question now presents itself, why these philosophers were suffered to maintain their sentiments, and to oppose the popular mythology, without having any notice taken of them by the laws; and yet the Christians, who were falsely accused of doing the same thing, were persecuted and put to death? It might perhaps be said, that the philosophers confined their reasoning to the schools, and to a few of their scholars, who chose to employ themselves upon such speculations; whereas the Christians preached their doctrines openly, and forced them upon the notice of the public, if not of the government itself. The remark is just, and may lead the way to an explanation of the question

proposed; but we must not forget to add, that what was true with respect to the philosophers, was a mere idle calumny when urged against the Christians.

Atheism was really taught in some schools of philosophy; and the wretched and irrational system made no progress among the great bulk of mankind. The teachers of it were therefore suffered to pursue their speculations without encountering any public opposition. But the Christians, who were accused of being atheists, were the preachers of a doctrine which not merely amused the ear or exercised the head, but forced an entrance to the heart. Wherever it made its way, the national religion, which recognised a plurality of gods, fled before it. The heathen priests, and all who made their livelihood by the maintenance of idolatry, began to feel that the struggle was for their very existence: hence arose the many calumnies which were circulated against the Christians; and when Acilius Glabrio was put to death on the charge of atheism, his real crime was that of refusing to worship more gods than one.

Many persons were condemned on the same grounds; some of whom suffered death, and some had their property confiscated. Among the former was a man of distinguished rank, Flavius Clemens, who had not only been consul in the preceding year, but was uncle to the emperor, and his sons had been destined to succeed to the empire. None of these distinctions could save him: he and his wife Domitilla were convicted of atheism, that is, of being Christians, for which crime Clemens himself was put to death, and his wife banished.

These anecdotes lead us to some of the causes which exposed the Christians to persecution; and we find another in what is said of the same Clemens, by a writer who meant it as a reproach, that he was a man whose indolence made him contemptible. This inattention to public affairs was often objected to the Christians as a fault; and they could hardly help being open to it, when their religion required them to abstain from many acts which were connected with heathen superstitions. It was not that the Gospel commanded them to withdraw from public life, or that they felt less interest in the welfare of their country: but it was impossible for them to hold any office, or to be present at any public ceremony, without countenancing, in some degree, the worship of the gods, or the still more irrational error of paying divine honours to the emperor.

A Christian was therefore obliged to abstain from these exhibitions, or to do violence to his conscience; and it was soon observed that such persons seemed to take no interest in the public festivities and rejoicings, which recurred so frequently for the amusement of the Roman populace. To accuse them, on this account, of indolence and apathy, was perhaps merely an expression of contempt; but a tyrant, like Domitian, might easily be persuaded that a refusal to worship him as a god, implied disaffection to his person and his government. The Christians would thus become suspected of a want of loyalty; and though they prayed daily for the emperor and for the state, yet because their prayers were offered in secret, to the one true God, they were accused of having no regard for the welfare of their country. Domitian probably listened to insinuations of this kind, when he consented to the execution of his uncle, Clemens; and persons who were interested in suppressing Christianity may easily have persuaded him to look upon the Christians as enemies to the state. In one instance he was certainly actuated by jealousy and fear of a rival. He had heard of the report which had been so prevalent at the beginning of the reign of his father, that a great prince was expected to appear in Judea, and that He was to come from the house of David. He accordingly ordered inquiry to be made on the spot; and some professors of Gnosticism gave information that the children or grandchildren of the Apostle Jude were descended from David. These men appear to have resided in Judea, and were in a very humble station; they even worked with their

own hands to obtain a livelihood; and when they were brought into the emperor's presence, he was so struck with their simplicity, and so convinced that they had no thoughts of any temporal kingdom, that he immediately ordered them to be released.

We may hope that the Christians of Palestine were thus protected from persecution; but the same period which was fatal to so many Christians in Rome, was felt with equal severity by their brethren in Asia Minor. The chief city in those parts, which was also the most distinguished for its Christian church, was Ephesus; and, before the end of the century, it had the advantage of becoming the residence of the last surviving apostle.

### *Old Age of St John.*

We have scarcely had occasion to mention the name of John since the year 46, when he was present at the council held in that year at Jerusalem; and we, in fact, know nothing of his personal history, nor of the countries in which he preached the Gospel, till the latter years of his life, which appear to have been spent in Ephesus or the neighbourhood. His presence there was very necessary to check the inroads which were then making upon the true faith by the Gnostics.

There is some evidence that Cerinthus himself was living at Ephesus; and there was no country in which Gnosticism had made more alarming progress. John has himself mentioned a Gnostic sect, which bore the name of Nicolaitans. These men laid claim to Nicolas, who had been one of the seven deacons, as their founder; but it can never be believed that he countenanced the gross impurities of which the Nicolaitans are known to have been guilty.

They also showed the laxity of their principles by consenting, in times of persecution, to eat meats which had been offered to idols. This was now become the test of a genuine Christian. If he was brought before a magistrate on the ground of his religion, and refused to pollute his mouth by tasting a heathen sacrifice, he was immediately ordered to punishment. Many of the Gnostics were equally firm in expressing their abhorrence of heathenism; but some of them found it convenient to comply, among whom were the Nicolaitans; and it has been said that the example had already been set them by Simon Magus, the original father of Gnosticism.

The Nicolaitans had an opportunity of acting upon this disgraceful principle at the end of the reign of Domitian. John's own writings are sufficient evidence that the Christians among whom he was then living had been suffering from persecution. One of them, Antipas, who belonged to Pergamos, has had the distinction of being specially named by the apostle, though we know nothing of the circumstances which attended his martyrdom. It was not long before the apostle was himself called upon to be an actor in the scenes which he describes.

If we could believe a writer of the second century, John was sent to Rome, and plunged into a vessel of boiling oil, from which he came out unhurt. The story is not now generally received as true; but we have his own evidence that he was banished to the island of Patmos; and it was during his residence there that he saw the Revelation, which he afterwards committed to writing.

Banishment to distant islands was at this time a common punishment: and it is probable that many Christians were thus transported from their homes for no other

crime than that of worshipping Jesus, and that they continued in exile till the end of Domitian's reign. The tyrant died in the September of 96, and was succeeded by Nerva, whose first act was to recall all persons from banishment, including those who were suffering on account of religion. This would allow John to return once more to Ephesus; and we may hope that the few remaining years of his life were passed in a peaceful superintendence of the Asiatic churches.

His chief cause of anxiety was from the errors of the Gnostics, which were now beginning to draw away many Christians from their faith in Christ, as it had been taught by the apostles. It has been said that his Gospel was specially directed against these erroneous doctrines; and there are passages in his Epistles which plainly allude to them. But the date of all his writings is attended with uncertainty, except perhaps that of his Apocalypse, which must have been written either in the island of Patmos, or soon after his return to Ephesus. The most probable opinion seems to be that his Gospel and Epistles were also written in the latter part of his life.

It has been said by some writers, that what is called the Canon of Scripture was settled by the Apostle John shortly before his death. But there seems little foundation for such a statement, if it mean that all the books which are now contained in the New Testament were then collected into a volume, and received the authoritative sanction of the last of the apostles. That John had read all the writings of the other apostles and evangelists, can hardly be doubted; for they were composed and published many years before his own death.

We may also be certain that he could not be deceived or mistaken as to the real author of any of these writings; so that in this sense he may be said to have settled the Canon of Scripture: but there is no evidence of his having left any decision or command upon the subject. There are traditions which speak of his having seen and approved of the three other Gospels, and of his publishing his own as a kind of supplement to them; and if we adopt the opinion, which seems much the most probable, that the Gospel of John was written at the close of his life, he would hardly have failed to have had the works of his predecessors in view when he was composing his own.

That his Gospel is very different from the other three, must have been observed by every reader of the New Testament; and the close agreement, even as to words and sentences, between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, has given rise to many conjectures as to the probable cause of it. The agreement is most striking in our Saviour's discourses and parables: and if the writers intended to report his actual words, there would be nothing extraordinary in this; but we may also remember that the evangelists had been engaged in preaching the Gospel for many years before they committed it to writing; and having to repeat the same parable, or the story of the same miracle, over and over again, to different hearers, they would naturally adopt a set form of words.

The apostles had heard each other preach in this way, for perhaps twelve years before they left Jerusalem: and Mark, who accompanied Peter, and Luke, who accompanied Paul, would be likely to agree with each other, and with Matthew, in style, and even in words, when they came to commit to writing what they had been so long in the habit of speaking.

It is also not improbable that the earliest of these three Gospels may have been seen by the two other evangelists; and whichever of them wrote the last, may have seen both the former; which may account still more plainly for there being so close an agreement between all the three. But though they thus support each other in all material points, and no contradictions have ever been discovered in their narratives, so as to throw any

suspicion upon their honesty or veracity, it has often been remarked, that there is sufficient variety between them, to remove any suspicion of their having conspired together to impose a falsehood upon the world.

If we could be certain that John intended his Gospel as a supplement to the other three, we should want no further proof of their credibility. They then come to us under the sanction of an inspired apostle, who had not only seen the same miracles, and heard the same discourses, which the three evangelists had recorded, but who had the assistance of a divine and infallible guide to preserve him from error and imposture. The Gospel, however, of John, does not appear to be strictly and literally a supplement to the other three. Nor need we suppose that its author intended to make it so. It appears to have been composed at Ephesus; and parts of it were specially directed against the errors of the Gnostics. At the same time, it is very probable that John purposely omitted some circumstances in the history of Jesus, because they were already well known from the works of the other evangelists. Wherever he goes over the same ground, he confirms their narrative; but it was obviously his intention to devote a large portion of his work to the discourses of our Saviour; and in this respect, he has supplied a great deal which the others have omitted.

Though we may not admit the tradition that John settled the canon of the New Testament by any formal and authoritative act, yet he may be said to have finally closed it by his own writings: for it is certain that no work has been admitted into the canon or list of the New Testament, whose date is subsequent to the death of John. There is no evidence that the canonical books were ever more numerous than they are at present. None have been lost, or put out of the canon; and when we think of the vast number of Gospels and Acts which were circulated in the second and third centuries, and which bore the names of apostles and their companions, we may well ascribe it to more than human carefulness, that none of these spurious compositions ever found a place among the canonical Scriptures.

On the other hand, there is reason to think that a few of the writings which now form part of the New Testament, were not universally received in the first century, and for some time later. The Epistle to the Hebrews, that of Jude, the second Epistle of Peter, and the second and third of John, were among this number; and there were some churches which do not appear to have received them so early as the rest. This, however, only shows the extreme caution which was used in settling questions of this kind. It was very possible for a letter to be preserved and read in Asia Minor, or Palestine, and yet for many years to have elapsed before it became known in other parts of the empire. As Christianity spread, and the intercourse between distant churches became more frequent, the doubts which had been entertained as to the genuineness of any writing were gradually removed; and though some churches were later than others in admitting the whole of the New Testament, there is no evidence that any part of it was composed later than the end of the first century; so that, though we may reject the tradition of the canon of Scripture having been settled by John, we can hardly doubt, as was before observed, that he had seen and read the writings of all the other apostles before his death.

Anecdotes have been preserved, which show the warm and zealous affection felt by the aged apostle for the souls of his flock. He knew that they were beset with enemies from within and without. The heathen were impatient for license to renew their attacks, and the Gnostics were spreading their poison with the subtilty of serpents. The presence of an apostle among them, as well as the circulation of his Gospel, could hardly fail to check the evil; and a story has been recorded, which we might wish to believe, from its natural and affecting simplicity, that the venerable apostle was at length so weakened by



age, that his disciples were obliged to carry him to the religious meetings of the Christians; and when even his voice failed him, he continued to address them with what might be called his dying words, — "*My dear children, love one another.*" There is reason to think that his life was prolonged till the beginning of the reign of Trajan, who succeeded Nerva in the January of 98; and thus the death of the last surviving apostle coincides very nearly with the close of the first century.

### *Close of the First Century.*

The reader will now have observed the truth of the remark which was made above, that we know very little concerning the last thirty years of the first century; and yet it would be difficult to name any period which was of greater interest to the Church. It was during those thirty years, that all the apostles, except John, who were not already dead, were gradually removed from the world, and committed their flocks to their successors.

Many churches whose early history is unknown, but which were flourishing at the beginning of the second century, must have been planted at this period. There is every reason to think that the progress of conversion was rapid; and what was only a rivulet at the time of the death of Paul, and which is then almost lost sight of, suddenly meets us again at the end of the century, as a wide and majestic stream. But its waters were already mixed with blood; and the heathen, who had learnt under Nero to find amusement in persecution, had leisure during these thirty years to reduce their cruel pastime to a system.

The Gnostics also were unceasingly active during the same period; and one reason why their history is involved in such obscurity, may be traced to the fact of their rising into notice in that part of the first century of which so little is known. The apostles, before their death, had predicted the success of these insidious teachers; and when we come to the beginning of the second century, we find their predictions abundantly fulfilled; so that this dark period was memorable, not only for the commencement of persecution, but for the spreading of an evil which was perhaps more fatal to the Church, by seducing the souls of men, and turning them from the truth of the Gospel to the ravings of the Gnostics.

One fact is, however, strikingly conspicuous in the midst of the obscurity of this eventful period.

Christianity was beset on all sides by obstacles and impediments, and scarcely a single circumstance, humanly speaking, could be said to favour its propagation; and yet we find it, at the beginning of the second century, so widely diffused, and so deeply rooted, that from this time it was able to sustain a warfare against the whole force of the Roman empire, and finally to win the victory.

We know therefore, that for the last thirty years it must have been constantly gaining ground, though we have not the materials for marking the details of its progress: and we can only say, when we see so prodigious an effect arising from so small a beginning, *This is the Lord's doing: it is marvellous in our eyes.*

