

talent necessary for their office as the publishers of the Gospel; and these gifts excited great astonishment in Jerusalem, some ascribing it to drunkenness, others to madness.

The disciples of Jesus began to perform miracles, at which the multitude, and their rulers, wondered greatly; but persecution accompanied their benevolent efforts, and Peter and John were twice cast into prison. In the latter instance they were delivered by an angel, who opened the prison doors and brought them forth. These special proofs of the divine agency that was working in their favor, strengthened the faith of old converts, while it invited the adherence of new ones, and led to the formation among them of a social body, by which the goods of every member were held in common. From this circumstance arose the memorable death of *Ananias*, a hypocrite whose fate affords the most striking lesson of that punishment by which falsehood and injustice are generally overtaken. This man had "sold a possession, but kept back part of the price," and when reproached by Peter for his fraudulent dealing, he fell down and died before the angry apostle.

Stephen, a deacon, whose duty was to attend to the civil interests of the church, was soon afterwards stoned to death; but this act of violence, instead of impeding, promoted the progress of the Gospel.

The labors of the apostles were at first confined to Jerusalem; but they gradually extended their endeavors, and made many converts in Judea and Samaria. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, afforded a proof of the wonderful effect of the preaching of the Gospel, and that the nations adjacent to Judea were in some measure prepared for the publication of the doctrines of Christ.

The church, besides the chief priests and rulers, had many persecutors, among whom was Saul of Tarsus, in Cilicia afterwards called Paul, and raised to the dignity of the apostleship.

Paul had received the benefit of the best education which Judea could afford. He was bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, a celebrated doctor of the law—his natural talents were of the first order, and whatever he engaged in, was executed with zeal and ardor. His enmity to the Gospel was so great, that he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and seizing men and women committed them to prison. While engaged in this

warfare, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, he had procured letters from the high-priest to the synagogues at Damascus that if he found any who professed the faith of Christ, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. On his road to Damascus, however, he was arrested in his mad career—the Lord Jesus appeared unto him—he was struck down to the earth, continued blind for three days, and neither ate nor drank. This man became one of the most active and zealous preachers of the Gospel, or, as he himself expressed it, "In labors he was more abundant," than any of the first publishers of the doctrine of Christ. The reason of the Lord's appearing personally to him, evidently was, that it was necessary for an apostle to have seen the Lord, and without this, he could not have held that office.

The apostles had confined their mission to the Jews only, but by special revelation, they were instructed to do so no longer, and Peter was commanded to go to Cesarea, and preach the Gospel to Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band, who his ministry converted.

Herod Agrippa grandson of Herod the Great, persecuted the church, and put to death the apostle James, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John; he also imprisoned Peter, but, at the intercession of the prayers of the church, he was delivered.

The sphere of the labors of the apostle Paul, was chiefly among the Gentiles, and, after traversing great part of Asia Minor, he at length reached Athens, where "his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." (Acts xvii. 16.) Here he discoursed upon the attributes and identity of "the unknown God," to whom an altar had been dedicated, and made proselytes to his doctrine of some enlightened individuals.

Among the collateral labors of this great disciple, we may enumerate his triumph over Elymas, a reputed sorcerer of Cyprus, whom he struck with sudden blindness for attempting to resist the progress of his mission.

Returning into Judea, Paul suffered much persecution, and the multitude having declared, on one occasion, that such a fellow was unfit to live, he appealed from the local judges to Rome, and set forth for that city. Previous, however, to his setting sail, he predicted the great danger of the voyage, and the event showed that he was right. The vessel