

Wherever Paul laboured, circumstances assumed an extraordinary shape. The zeal which he awaked was an enthusiastic zeal; his friends would, if it had been possible, have plucked out their eyes and given them to him; the hatred that he provoked, was a hatred that could be satisfied only by blood. No wonder then, that the early history of the church is given under the head of the labours of Paul.

In the passages set at the head of this article we have a minute account of his miraculous conversion; among which may be noticed the following things.

1. At the time when his conversion took place, his fierce hatred to Christ and his cause was at his height. The sublime spectacle of Stephen's death; the patience and piety of his victims, had won from him no sentiment of admiration for a cause which produced such valuable results. He still urged on his murderous course; ferociously intruding into houses for the purpose of discovering the Christians, he dragged forth men and women and committed them to prison.— Having succeeded in intimidating and scattering the church, there was little more for him to do at Jerusalem. Flushed with success and impelled by the terrible propensities of his nature, he offered himself to the Sanhedrin, and solicited permission to persecute the Christians at Damascus.

When and how the Gospel was introduced into Damascus we are not informed. It may be supposed, that some Jews of Damascus had been converted on the day of Pentecost: and also, that some of those "scattered abroad" had gone thither seeking shelter. In whatever way the gospel may have been carried thither, it is probable that the Christians were considerably numerous. Had it not been so, Damascus would not have been a field of operation sufficiently extensive, for such an enterprising character as Saul.

The reason for his applying to the high priest for letters to the synagogues at Damascus was this. In all the provinces of the Roman empire, the Jews were governed by a senate of their own, and had a chief magistrate elected by themselves, who presided over it. Though living in foreign countries, the Jews were permitted to live according to their own customs so far as could be done out of Judea. "The high-priest and elders at Jerusalem, were regarded by all the Jews as the interpreters and administrators of the law, and the foreign Jews considered themselves as actually under their jurisdiction. In all countries they implicitly obeyed the mandates sent them from the council at Jerusalem; just as, in after-times, the clergy of the Romish communion in every country of Europe, obeyed implicitly the mandates of the Pope and conclave at Rome."* A commission from the high-priest would secure to Paul the ready and willing assistance of all the Jews of Damascus.

* McKnight's Life of the Apostle Paul.