

APOSTOLIC STUDIES, ON THE PRIMITIVE OR INFANT CHURCH OF CHRIST.

(13.) CHRIST'S FIRST MARTYR: Acts 7, and 8: 1-4.



STEPHEN, when called upon by the High Priest to answer the charges preferred against him, reviewed the history of Israel, and showed that they, the descendants of the Patriarchs, were now rejecting Christ as the Messiah, whom God had sent in fulfilment of His promise. They listened patiently to his eloquence until he brought their crimes home to them; then they became wild with rage, and gnashed on him with their teeth. The great Council and those around them of like mind, then appear to have become as a mob of savages, thirsting for blood.

Stephen was wonderfully sustained. The Spirit of God filled his soul. A heavenly vision was spread before his eyes, as he looked upward and beheld the Divine Glory. This he would not have seen had he surveyed the mob. At this glorious sight he exclaimed, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." Hearing this, instead of being awed, they made a rush, hurried him out of the city, and, without any trial or conviction, stoned him to death. He fell calmly asleep, calling upon God to receive his spirit, and praying for his murderers.

So died the first Christian victim of persecution, with Saul, the future Apostle of the Gentiles, standing by, having the witnesses' clothes at his feet, approving and encouraging the murder. See Deut. xiii.: 9, 10; 1 Kings 21: 13, 14; Luke 23: 34; and Acts 22: 20.

Sudden death was sudden glory to the proto-martyr.

After him came an army of martyrs in many lands, whose blood was the seed of the Church. According to tradition, all the Apostles except John died violent deaths, as follows:—Andrew was bound to a cross, preaching to his persecutors, until he died. Peter was crucified with his head downwards. James was slain with the sword, (Acts 12: 2). Philip was hanged. Bartholomew was flayed *alive* until he died. Matthew was slain with the sword. James the Less was thrown from the Temple and beaten to death. Lebbæus Thaddæus was killed. Thomas was run through the body with a lance. Simon Zelotes was crucified. Matthias (who was chosen an Apostle in place of Judas Iscariot), was first stoned and then beheaded. John, the loving and beloved disciple, died

a natural death; having reached the venerable age of about one hundred years. He was ordered by Nero, the most cruel of all the Roman Emperors, to be put in a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death most miraculously: and afterwards Domitian (Nero's successor) banished him to Patmos; and some time after that he was re-called by Nerva (Domitian's successor).

After the death of Stephen, a general persecution took place, by Saul and others, against the Infant Church. Its members were thereby scattered abroad, and the good seed was planted far and wide. To God be given all the praise!

(14.) PHILIP THE EVANGELIST: Acts 8: 5-40.

After the death of Stephen, and on account of the persecution at Jerusalem, Philip the Evangelist, the second named of the seven Deacons, went down to Samaria, preached the Gospel, wrought miracles, and saw many persons converted; among whom was Simon the Sorcerer, who was baptized. In Acts 21: 8, 9, we find that Philip lived at Caesarea, and entertained Paul and his company at his own house on their way from Europe to Jerusalem; and that Philip had four daughters who did prophesy, and were teachers in the Church. Here, most likely, Philip spent the rest of his days, performing the work of an Evangelist, and bringing up his family in the fear of the Lord.

In 1 Kings 16: 24, it is stated that Omri, King of Israel, the father of Ahab, founded Samaria, and made it the Capital of the Kingdom of Israel. After several years it became a place of little consequence. In the time of Philip, Caesarea was the Capital of the whole land of Palestine, having one of the best harbors on the whole coast, improved by Herod the Great.

The preaching of Philip must have been of a high order. He had the power of fixing the attention of his hearers, and also of performing miracles, of healing diseases, of causing unclean spirits, or real demoniac possessions, to come out of many so afflicted; and in consequence there was great joy in that city; and no wonder, when they heard such glorious truths, and were the subjects of saving grace and power.

Having believed, Philip baptized them, both male and female.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH is described as an officer of great authority under the Queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasures, and who had come a great distance to Jerusalem to worship,—Ethiopia being an African State southward of Egypt, and about a thousand miles from Judea. Being perhaps a Jew, either native or proselyte, he shewed