

## **PERSECUTION OVERRULED FOR GOOD.**

– FEB. 28. – ACTS 8:1-17. –

**"They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." – Acts 8:4.**

THE tendency of the early believers, as we have seen, was to gather together – to swarm. This was evidently in harmony with the divine program, to foster and establish the Church in the religious capital of the world. Those first few years were evidently designed of the Lord to permit the Church to put on the armor of God, to grow from babes in Christ, by the use of the sincere milk of the Word, and afterward by its strong meat, up to the stature of Christian manhood; – thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work. This gathering at Jerusalem was in harmony with our Lord's direction before his ascension, when, after instructing them to preach the gospel, he added "beginning at Jerusalem." But now Jerusalem, having had its full period of favor, the Church having been rooted and established, the divine plan led on to a wider work; and the persecution which arose at the time of Stephen's martyrdom became very general in the city of Jerusalem, and very grievous, and led to the flight of many of the faithful who, we are told, went [R2110 : page 57] everywhere – especially throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. The apostles no doubt considered it a part of duty that they should remain at Jerusalem as a kind of center of influence; partly because they had not yet fully learned the lesson that the gospel they preached, although to the Jew first, is also to the Greek and the whole world.

(3) Saul of Tarsus was an energetic man, on whichever side of a question he stood. When an opponent of the Lord Jesus and his Church and gospel, he was its most active enemy, and we cannot doubt that his activity in the matter was backed, as he himself afterward declared, by a "good conscience," which believed that he "verily did God service" in opposing what he considered to be the sect of the Nazarene.

God seems to be specially on the lookout for just such earnest characters, and they are far more certain to get the truth than are the cold, listless and indifferent kind [R2110 : page 58] who neither love nor hate either righteousness or sin. Peter and James and John were of this positive and strong character, and they with the Apostle Paul, consequently, were the ones most freely used by our Lord in conveying the blessings of the gospel to us and to the world.

(4-13) It will be noticed that in the primitive Church there was no such distinction of class as there is in the nominal church to-day. There was no division into clergy and laity, but they were "all one in Christ Jesus." The division of the church into clergy and laity took place when the great falling away came, which developed into Papacy; and from that baneful influence many have not yet fully escaped. All of the early Church were preachers, and if persecuted they went everywhere preaching the Word. An instance is given respecting this preaching. One, Philip – not the Apostle – did successful work in a city of Samaria and was used of the Lord in casting out devils and healing the sick, the means then in use for drawing attention to the gospel. The results of his preaching were marvelous – even Simon the sorcerer became a believer.

Sorcery, witchcraft and enchantments of olden times were manifestations of Satan and demons for the delusion of mankind, and were strictly forbidden under the Mosaic law. The same evil spirits in more recent years have slightly altered the character of the demonstrations, and so-called Spiritualists are their "mediums." The change is merely made in conformity to the changed conditions, and both are to be reckoned amongst "the works of the flesh and the devil." There can be no fellowship between the power of the adversary working in his agents for witchcraft and Spiritism and the power of Christ working in his agents and representatives and through the Word of truth. The two are in opposition, however much at times the evil may claim relationship to the good. So it was in Samaria, as related in this lesson: the gospel opposed the doctrines of devils propagated

through witchcraft and sorcery, the effect was to make the people *free*, and even Simon the medium was convicted and professed outwardly a conversion and was baptised.

Philip's discourse is but briefly outlined, but it was along the same lines as the discourses of the apostles noticed in the previous lessons. He preached the "things concerning the Kingdom of God." How fully he explained these things – that the Kingdom would be a spiritual Kingdom, that flesh and blood could not enter it or even see it, and that not the Jewish nation would be heirs of that Kingdom with Messiah, but only such as become believers in Jesus, devoted to him and suffer with him, thus attesting their loyalty to the divine plan. We cannot doubt, however, that Philip preached the second coming of Messiah to establish and exalt with himself the Kingdom heirs now being sought out, and subsequently through that Kingdom, to bless the world of mankind. We cannot doubt that he urged them to believe in Christ, and by a consecration to him to become joint-heirs with him in the Kingdom, if so be that they suffered with him, that they might also reign with him. Nor did his preaching omit the things pertaining to "the name of Jesus Christ," and connecting his name as Messiah with all the Kingdom hopes which were before the Jewish mind. We doubt not that he pointed out to them that the names of Moses and of Abraham and of the prophets, although great, were insufficient for salvation – that there is none other name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved.

(14-17) It is worthy of note that Philip the evangelist, although possessed of the holy spirit and possessed also of certain gifts of the spirit, did not possess the power to communicate such gifts to others. Evidently that power resided only in the twelve apostles – Paul being the twelfth in place of Judas. Consequently, two of the apostles were sent to lay their hands upon the believer and to communicate the gifts of the holy spirit.

After seeing the wonderful gifts and powers which the apostles were able to communicate, and no doubt after he had received a gift from them himself, Simon the sorcerer offered the apostles money in order to be endued with this apostolic power of communicating gifts of the spirit to others. Hence the name, "Simony," given to any attempt to purchase spiritual powers. Up to this time Simon had passed for a thoroughly converted man; but on the strength of this evidence of his non-appreciation of spiritual things the Apostle Peter tells him with very great plainness of speech that he has neither part nor lot in the matter but is yet in the gall of bitterness – is still unregenerate – merely a spectator and not a participator in the spiritual things.

Alas! how many to-day, like Simon, are associated with spiritual things, but have neither part nor lot in them; who merely give their money in hope of some advantage, and not with an appreciation of the spiritual things.

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