

The Scattered Church

Acts 8

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Acts 8:1 (ESV)

The persecuted church ADVANCES the Good News about Jesus Christ. In the wake of Stephen's martyrdom the church is scattered resulting in new people hearing the good news about Jesus.

Recent events: THE ATMOSPHERE

- (1) **It is now the early 30's AD 31/34 A.D./CE**
- (2) The disciples know that Jesus has come as promised throughout the Old Testament, was crucified for the sin of the world (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-8), and was raised from the dead.
- (3) Jesus has been with them for 40 days after Jesus' resurrection.
- (4) The Holy Spirit arrived in power as Jesus promised would happen.
- (5) People heard their own language when only one person was talking (Peter).
- (6) Fearful disciples of Jesus are now fearlessly testifying that Jesus was raised as promised and is the promised Savior-King.
- (7) Several thousand people have come to believe and follow Jesus as Savior-King (the early church is just beginning in Jerusalem).
- (8) The disciples have been told to shut their mouths about Jesus, but they will not stop obeying God (cf. Acts 5:29). They have been flogged for their faith in Jesus (cf. Acts 5:41)
- (9) The early church, having experienced great grace, is lavishly sharing their lives and possessions as the people of God.
- (10) There has also been hypocrisy within the church at great cost.
- (11) God's word is advancing—a large number of Jewish PRIESTS are becoming Jesus' followers!
- (12) **Life-threatening charges against a church layman.**
- (13) **In front of the Jewish Sanhedrin he explains the history of Israel through a re-occurring pattern:**
 - (1) **God at work, raising up a deliverer**
 - (2) **Israel's in various ways rejects GOD and HIS DELIVERER—**
 - **Joseph;**
 - **Moses;**
 - **the Prophets;**
 - **JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF.**

The last words I remember from my grandmother: "I know He's here right now."

Last Words: Acts 7:51-60

- (1) "Behold, I see the heavens opened up, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (cf. Daniel 7:13) (7:56)
- (2) "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (7:60)
- (3) Unseen Court there that day-
 - a. Stephen for a moment has glimpses of Jesus Himself co-reigning with the Father.
- (4) **Lynching of Stephen (they will have no part of Stephen's message about Jesus).**
 - a. **Pile of garments laid at Saul/Paul's feet—he Whole-heartedly affirmed Stephen's Stoning. (7:58) cf. 22:17-21**

A Wave of Persecution Scatters the Church

Acts 8:1-3

- (1) **Saul (Paul) completely affirms of Stephen's execution**—will later mark his life (cf. Acts 22:17-21)
- (2) **The church largely scatters throughout Judea and Samaria** fleeing this persecution.
 - (except the apostles—possibly because they were HEBREW rather than Greek.)
- (3) **Saul tries to crush the fledgling church** --with all that he has in his bones.
 - (1) What do you think it would have been like to know that a fellow believer in our area was stoned for his faith in Jesus?
 - a. How would this affect your willingness to talk to others about Jesus?
 - (2) What do you think it would be like to see your family hauled away because of their faith?
 - a. How might this affect your relationship with God?
 - (3) Imagine a growing movement to completely end Christianity in our area.
 - a. How would that impact your work?

*(Words of a persecuted believer to Nik Ripken): "Don't you ever give up in freedom what we would never give up in persecution." ~Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God**

Gospel Gossips: The Good News Spreads by Displaced, Persecuted Jesus people.

Acts 8:4-25

- (1) **Displaced, but convinced followers of Jesus Christ. (8:4)**
 - "Gossiping the gospel"—displaced yet convinced about Jesus.
 - Why would you tell them? -Convinced. Obedient. Spirit of God at work in YOUR life.
- (2) **Philip (another layman) preached the good news about Jesus (the promised Savior King has come!) (8:5)**
 - **Gospel for Half-breeds?:** Samaritans were despised as a racially mixed Jewish/Gentile people—they kept some Jewish heritage. (Woman at the well).
 - The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, disdained by both Jews and non-Jews (see notes on John 4:4; 4:20-21). They believed in Israel's God and in many respects maintained their Jewish heritage but were not considered Jews by those from Judah.~ *The ESV Study Bible*, 2096.
- (3) **The power of the Kingdom of God (8:6-7)**
- (4) **Great joy in that city: (8:8)**
 - **(If Christian) Do you remember the joy of forgiveness and freedom from God?**
 - "I'm so happy I could hug a tree."
- (5) **The power of Satan is real: (8:9-13)**
- (6) **Corruption, unfortunately, often accompanies great acts of God: (8:14-25)**
 - **(vs.17) Abnormally, the Spirit, arrived after belief.**
 - *Apostles come from Jerusalem to Samaria—likely helped to unify division [Jews vs. Samaritans]
 - —this was an OFFICIAL recognition and also affirmed Philips ministry.
 - It would also guarantee that the Samaritans, who for many generations had been hostile toward the Jews, would not establish a separate Christian church or be excluded from the church by Jewish believers ~ *The ESV Study Bible*, 2097.

Who is the prophet talking about?

Acts 8:26-40

- (1) **God was at work: “Go to the desert.” (Acts 8:26)**
 - (an angel is sent to Philip), Philip is sent to the desert
- (2) **The Spirit leads without “all of the answers” (8:27-29)**
 - The Spirit of God says, “Go over and join **this chariot**” (8:29)
 - Philip hears the man reading Isaiah out loud.
 - **Imagine someone reading this from the Gospel of John:**
John 3:16–18 (ESV)
¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- **Philip’s heart HAS to leap (THIS is why I am here): “Do you understand this?” (8:30b-33)**
 - Read the Isaiah passage. (8:32-33)
 - Acts 8:32–33 (ESV)
³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.” ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”
 - A **providential meeting** with a “God-fearer” from Ethiopia
 - (modern day northern Sudan).
 - He was in charge of the queens treasury—meaning influential.
 - The **eunuch** was a Gentile God-fearer who **had come to worship in Jerusalem.**
 - The Ethiopia of that time was not the modern country of Ethiopia but **the ancient kingdom of Meroe, which covered what is now northern Sudan south of Aswan to Khartoum.** ~ M. David Sills, “Opportunities and Challenges in Global Missions,” in *CSB Study Bible*, 1732.

(3) **Who is the prophet talking about? (8:34-35)**

- 2 Corinthians 5:21; Luke 24; Gen. 3:15;
- **It was Jesus Christ, not Isaiah, who suffered for the sins of humanity.**
 - *CSB Study Bible, 1732.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Luke 24:24–27 (ESV)

²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

(4) **Identifying with Jesus—the Ethiopian left with JOY! (8:36-40)**

- Jesus’ people simply point people to Jesus.
- The Gospel ADVANCES—Now to AFRICA!!!!!!!
- **The SPIRIT moves Philip AGAIN. (8:39 cf. 2 Kings 2:11—Elijah)**
 - **The HOLY SPIRIT is the KEY player here—God is at work.**
 - **Philip gossips the Gospel wherever he is. (until Caesarea—1.5 hours by car)—stayed a Caesarea (Acts. 21:8)**

To Go:

1. Christian persecution is normal in many places in the world—we often don’t know all that the Lord is doing. (The scattering of the church actually resulted in more people coming to know Jesus.)
 - a. *“Don’t you ever give up in freedom what we would never give up in persecution.” ~Nik Ripkin*
2. Unlikely people heard and believed the good news about the promised Messiah Jesus because Christians obediently shared Jesus. (sometimes providential circumstances)
3. Jesus still saves people today.
 - a. What did Philip do that you couldn’t have done? (forget the dramatic, just the basic part)
 - b. Do you believe that Jesus can save your friends and family?
 - c. Are they any harder to reach than you?

Response:

1. **NON-CHRISTIAN:** If You have not formally **TURNED** from your sin and **TRUSTED** Jesus Christ **as Savior-King**, learn from the Ethiopian man: **“Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - a. God’s promise to us: **“Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
2. **CHRISTIAN:** Are you sensitive to the Spirit of God? Are you available with the gospel? Do you gossip the gospel? How is the Lord calling you?
3. What does the Lord want you to do in response to His word? Do it. He is good!