

**Will Persecution
Stop You or
Embolden You?**

Background Leading Up to Acts 8

- Jesus ascends to His throne and the Christians (known as “The Way”) follow the lead of the Holy Spirit as they rapidly grow.
- After the apostles are arrested a few times by the Sadducees, Stephen is arrested, falsely accused, & brought to the Sanhedrin.
- Stephen demonstrated what it looks like to follow Christ as he spoke the truth (though many rejected his message) and forgave those who murdered him as he was dying.
- Saul of Tarsus was introduced as the young man who guarded the clothes of those who put Stephen to death.

Acts 8:1-3 (NASB₁₉₉₅) ¹ Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² *Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Saul quickly became the #1 enemy of the church and led a charge to eradicate Christianity.

Saul not only put believers in prison but condemned them to death. Yet, Jesus transformed him into, perhaps, the greatest evangelist who ever lived.

Jesus called the disciples to go into ALL the world, but before persecution, their message stayed in Jerusalem.

Will you pray for those who persecute believers?

Acts 8:4-8 (NIV₂₀₁₁) ⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Persecution does not stop the message, but it can move it. Now, Samaria was included in the expansion of God's Word.

Notice the contrast of verses 7 and 8: Demonic spirits are shrieking, and the Samaritans are responding with great joy.

The signs and words provided by the Holy Spirit drew crowds, but each person can receive or resist the message.

Do you make the mistake of choosing who is 'worthy' to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Acts 8:9-13 (NKJV) ⁹ But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave

Have you chosen to follow Jesus? Is it for His glory or yours?

of God." ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

It is in our nature to worship, but Satan desires that we focus our worship anywhere but God.

Philip faithfully preached God's Kingdom through Jesus. Acts soon reveals the reasoning behind Simon's conversion. Choosing to follow Jesus should not be self-serving.