

Acts 8:1-25
CBBC
10/19/2025

Introduction—If you were to describe the church to someone, what would you say about it?

The Gospel is attacked. The church had grown from 120 to around 20,000, possibly more, within a matter of weeks if not months. God was working through the apostles by having them proclaim Jesus Christ, crucified, and the coming of the Kingdom. They confirmed that through some incredible miracles. Even when they were imprisoned, God miraculously released them. The church had grown so big that they created deacons. This office was given authority to distribute contributed money to make sure that no one went hungry, in this case, specifically, widows.

One of these deacons, Stephen, starts proclaiming the Gospel, and even though he was not an apostle, God gave him the ability to do signs and wonders to confirm the truth of what he was saying. The Hellenistic Jews, Jews who had been raised elsewhere and had come back to Jerusalem, went to war with him. They couldn't win the war of words, so they lied and had him brought up on false charges. He stands to defend himself, and gives this incredible message that traces the history of Israel and their ongoing rejection of God's revelation. He tells his audience, "You are the same. In killing Christ, you are no different than the men who killed the prophets." Everyone loses it, drags him out, and stones him to death.

This is all done under the watchful eyes of Saul. We know that he was considered one of the greatest of the Pharisees of that time, intelligent, full of character and determination to see the God of the Law be exalted. Stephen and what he represented were a direct rebuke to everything he claimed to believe in. He stood as a

witness and in approval of the death of Stephen, claiming that it was totally justified under the Jewish Law, which not only included the Law, but the traditions that followed.

Stephen's death acted as a catalyst. I believe that the religious leaders were waiting for this opportunity. The local Jewish leaders piggybacked off the Hellenistic Jews and justified persecution. They decided they were going to wipe out the Christians. So there arose a great persecution. Godly men buried Stephen, but then we are told that Saul ramped up. He doubled down. He got a new hobby. He was going to get rid of the Christians. We are told that he "ravaged"? the church. It tells us that he went from "house to house" and dragged off the men and women, sending them to prison. This is not talking about him randomly going to houses, but we see this same phrase used back in chapter 5, talking about where people were worshipping. They were in the Temple, and they were meeting in their houses. So Saul is going into those houses where learning and worship had taken place, and they are breaking up those meetings and dragging Christians out.

Saul's hostility should not surprise us. Over in Matthew 10, Jesus told his disciples that His presence would bring hostility in places where there shouldn't be any hostility. (Matthew 10:34-39) There is nothing in the New Testament that tells us that the hostility will go away. As the church grows in holiness, it reveals the depravity and sin of the world. It does not let the world lie to itself about who they are. They are not noble rebels. They are fools and headed to destruction. The church is always going to have its back against the wall, but at the same time, the church is incapable of falling because it is held up by Jesus Christ. It is going to exist until God remakes reality into

the New Kingdom. Even when Jesus is directly ruling, people are going to hate Him, and by extension, those who love Him and look like Him.

There is an old saying, “You can tell a man by the quality of his enemies.” One of the ways you can tell that the church is the church is that the church is hated and who it is hated by. If the world is comfortable with the church, the church is doing it wrong.

A lot of the Christians take off. They head not only into the country surrounding Jerusalem, which is Judea, but they are also heading into Samaria, which I submit, they would not have voluntarily done. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, and we know later that there is a vibrant Jerusalem church as Paul collects offerings for them.

The Gospel spreads. 4-8

We would think that this is a disaster, that something terrible has happened, and we cannot underestimate the fear and damage that was caused. It is terrible. It is awful. But there are two beautiful things here that we need to notice.

First of all, most, if not all, of these believers who were scattered did not abandon Christ. Remember that Jesus warned that it would be a danger. He told them that they would be persecuted for His name’s sake. He also told them that if they denied Christ’s lordship, specifically to escape persecution, they weren’t really believers. When persecution came, it came like a tidal wave and swept the believers to places they didn’t want to live, but they still clung to Christ. It was not because they were great, but because the baptism of the Holy Spirit is so transformational that they couldn’t walk away. (John 6:37)

The second wonderful thing is that they were preaching the word. As they were scattered and sent about, they told the people why they were there. I’m here because I

follow Christ. He is worth following. He was executed and rose again on the third day. So, they run from persecution, and they head elsewhere. They not only keep their identity as believers, but they live it out. They keep talking about Christ. They are there because of Christ and what He has done.

Not only that, but you had someone named Philip who went there, and he started proclaiming Christ. We don't think this was the apostle Philip, but someone who was this incredible evangelist. The people are all listening to him carefully. He is also doing miracles that confirm the truth of what he is saying. God supplies the people who are needed. Yes, the apostles are all back in Jerusalem, but God raises up Philip and sends him out. There is something else we need to remember about Samaria. Is this the first time that they have heard about Christ?

Remember back in John 4 when Jesus and His disciples visited a town called Sychar, and Jesus had a conversation with a woman there about the state of her soul? That was in Samaria.

Remember back in Acts 1:8, that Jesus told them that they were to go into all nations, and He started with Judea and Samaria. They were to head out in that direction. They did, and the Gospel was being proclaimed there. That is wonderful. This is incredible, and it is a reminder of what Joseph says back in Genesis 50:20, You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Persecution would not have happened unless God had allowed it. Why did God allow it? There are many reasons, but one we know for sure. When believers are comfortable, we are never as proactive as we should be. The church was starting. People were coming to Christ. It was amazing. Who would want to leave? God told

them to leave, but I'm sure that they kept telling themselves, "We will wait until we do this, or do that." God used persecution to take the Gospel into places the people were not inclined to go.

It also demonstrated how great Jesus is. Rather than abandon Him, I would rather leave my country and live among strangers. Christ is glorified, and therein I rejoice.

Conclusion—Do we live lives that make unbelievers uncomfortable for the right reasons? As we grow in Christ, the world should have a love/hate relationship with us. They appreciate some of the things we do, but they despise us for why we do it, because they despise our Lord.

God is glorified in our persecution more than when He is glorified in our comfort.