

## The Persecuted Church – On A Mission

### Acts 8:1-8

The earlier persecutions of **Acts chapters 4 and 5** involved persecutions of the Christian leaders, the apostles, by the Jewish leaders, primarily the priests. This persecution was much more severe, as it involved the lay people and came from the unrelenting hands of Saul. Yet God's work prospered in that the gospel was widely spread outside Jerusalem.

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, the persecution of church in Jerusalem was increased greatly. Prominent in leading the persecution was young Saul, going so far as to enter homes and dragging men and women off to prison (**Acts 8:1-3**). This led to the dispersion of the church throughout Judea and Samaria, though the apostles remained in Jerusalem. Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word, including Philip (one of the seven men selected to help needy widows, **Acts 6:5**). Preaching Christ and performing miracles, many Samaritans believed and were baptized and there was great joy.

### Saul Persecutes the Church

<sup>1</sup>Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup>And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup>As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

### Christ Is Preached in Samaria

<sup>4</sup>Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. <sup>5</sup>Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. <sup>6</sup>And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup>For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup>And there was great joy in that city.

1. Why do you think God allows the church to suffer persecution? Thus far, the church has remained in Jerusalem, but persecution has scattered them in the regions of Judea and Samaria (**v. 1b**). Is this the way you expected the great commission to be fulfilled (**Acts 1:8**)?
2. Why would "devout men" (**Acts 8:2**) lament over Stephen's death?
3. Saul, who later becomes Paul, is the one ravaging the church. What can we learn about our enemies and how might we treat them in light of that?
4. When facing persecution and suffering, do you see it as an opportunity to bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ?
5. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? What brought it on? How did you react?
6. In light of our experiences, does persecution strengthen or weaken our witness/faith? What sort of attitudes should we have when we face persecution?
7. How significant was Philip going to Samaria? Why did Philip go to Samaria to preach Christ?
8. What dangers do we face when we become complacent in our ease, comfort, and prosperity? What state do you think the church is in now?