

* ACTS

The Continuing Work of Jesus

* Acts 7:54-8:4

From Martyrdom to Multiplication

⁵⁴ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. ⁵⁸ When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ⁶⁰ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

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.

⁴ Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

(Acts 7:54-8:4)

Martyrdom...Multiplication

A. Stephen's Martyrdom

- God did not intervene to prevent it but He gave sufficient grace for dying

Martyrdom...Multiplication

➤ Dying grace...

1. The assurance that Jesus was the exalted Savior and Lord
2. The anticipation of fellowship with Jesus
3. The ability to forgive his enemies

Martyrdom...Multiplication

B. Great Persecution

- a systematic persecution aimed at destroying the church
- a persecution motivated by supposed zeal for and service to God (cf. John 16:2)

Martyrdom...Multiplication

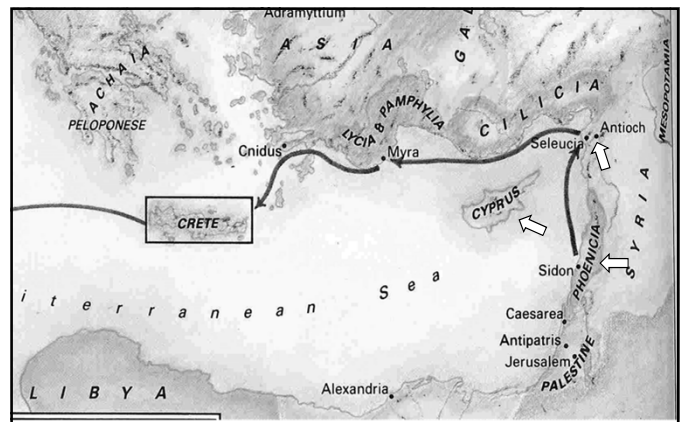
³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons...”

- Paul (Acts 22:3-4)

Martyrdom...Multiplication

➤ Advancement through persecution

- persecution causes the scattering of believers to regions outside of Jerusalem
- wherever believers were scattered they spoke the “good news of the word”
 - cf. Acts 11:19-20



Martyrdom...Multiplication

➤ Implications:

1. The call to personal evangelism by every disciple of Jesus
2. The awareness that prosperity may be more dangerous to the church than persecution