



Expansion Despite Opposition

“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3).

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“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:1-4).

Stephen has been stoned to death. The persecutors saw that as a great opportunity to extend their anger to the church with a view to exterminating it. This resulted in the scattering of the church in Jerusalem. However, instead of destroying the church, it served the opposite effect of expanding the Church beyond the vicinity of Jerusalem only, fulfilling the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18 “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”. All through the ages, the church has grown more during times of intense persecution than in times of peace. Note the following salient points:

- 1) The text begins with a reference to Saul (vs 1) - a pointer to the significant role he would play as events unfolds.
- 2) The great persecution centred on the church at Jerusalem (vs 1) as that is where all the believers were concentrated. Christ’s instruction in Acts 1:8 was “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”. However, the believers were satisfied to stay at Jerusalem and enjoy the fellowship of others.
- 3) Persecution forced them to flee throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria in line with Christ’s plan for spreading the gospel (vs 1). Sometimes it takes troubles to drive Christians into obedience, but it does not have to be so!
- 4) Although the membership were scattered, the apostles remained at Jerusalem (vs 1).
- 5) The body of Stephen was buried, although his spirit and soul had already been received into

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heaven (vs 2).

- 6) Following the burial of Stephen, Saul turned his attention towards wreaking “havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (vs 3).
- 7) “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (vs 4). As the apostles were still at Jerusalem, the ordinary members who were scattered abroad became the new evangelists and ministers of the Gospel - sharing with others what they had been learning at Jerusalem. This is the way it ought to be today.
- 8) God’s work cannot be stopped by opposition, trials, temptations and persecutions as illustrated by Paul’s rhetorical question in Romans 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”
- 9) “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). Moses vision of a burning bush that was not consumed is a picture of the church under persecution.
- 10) We therefore need to heed Peter’s admonition “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.... Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:15,19).
- 11). In John 16:33 Jesus admonished the disciples “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”.

God used Satan’s plot to destroy the early church, to actually accomplish His plan of not only preserving but expanding the church. Your situation may be different but God will do the same for you.