

“THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYR”

Acts 8:1-13

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INTRODUCTION

Persecution is bad for the Church, right? We should always pray that the Lord removes persecution from us and from other believers, right?

Wrong! In fact, it has been stated correctly that **“the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church.”** Did the apostles pray for the removal of persecution in Acts 4? No, they prayed for boldness in proclaiming the Word. In this passage we see that the Lord used persecution to grow the Church.

We must accept what God gives us—hard times and easy times—and watch Him grow our church despite opposition. JUST DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY!

Please note a few things about last week’s passage. Stephen did not call down a curse upon his persecutors and murderers; he called for two things:

- For the Lord Jesus (note that Jesus is Lord.) to *receive his spirit* (v. 59). He was going directly into Heaven, into Jesus’ presence.
- For the Lord to forgive (and thus save) his murderers (60). The only way the Lord will “not hold this sin against them” would be for them to receive Christ and repent of their sins.

Was Stephen’s prayer answered? Some of these very people became Christians—including the instigator of the persecution.

Note also that Stephen “fell asleep”—peacefully in Jesus, awaiting the resurrection of His body; his spirit was going immediately into Jesus’ presence.

Please notice also the significant place that Saul has in all of these circumstances:

- In 7:58 we see that the witnesses (who had to throw the first stones—put your action where your mouth is!) laid their garments at the feet of “a young man named Saul.”
- This apparently shows that Saul was an integral part of this martyrdom—in fact he may have been the leader of it.
- Verse 1 of chapter 8 shows us that “Saul was in **hearty agreement** with putting Stephen to death.
- Stephen’s testimony toward Jesus, and his calm and peaceful demeanor during his murder, obviously had a profound effect upon Saul of Tarsus. In 22:20 Paul specifically mentions the details here given by Luke of Saul’s involvement in Stephen’s death.

- Note that enemies of the gospel may kill a believer, but they cannot kill his testimony, nor can they rid themselves of the guilt of their deeds and of the remembrance of the calm confidence of the believer in the face of the horrible persecution and death.
- Saul was “kicking against the pricks” for some time after this event.

In this passage we see the Persecutor of believers (1-3), the Preacher of the Word of God (4-8), and the Practitioner of Magic.

I. THE PERSECUTOR OF BELIEVERS (1-3): **Saul**

A. A “Great Persecution” arose against the church in Jerusalem.

Other references to this persecution led by Saul: 22:4, 19-20; 26:10-11; Gal. 1:13; I Cor. 15:9; I Tim. 1:13; and maybe Heb 10:32-34.

B. The church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria—except the apostles.

The apostles were not Hellenists, like Stephen, and were fearless of persecution as evidenced in ch. 4 & 5, and they needed to stay for the stability and growth of the church.

C. Devout men buried and mourned over Stephen (2)

D. Saul was “ravaging” the church—like an army or a lion (only here in NT).

- Entering one house after another—believers met in homes! Also, they are the “church” even when not all assembled!
- He would “drag off” both men and women.
- He would put them in prison.
- In other passages mention is made of putting some to death—whether this primarily refers to Stephen or also to others we cannot be certain.

*Note that all of this persecution resulted in the **growth of the church** and its spreading beyond Jerusalem. GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING!*

II. THE PREACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD (4-8): **Stephen**

A. The ministry of those scattered (4)

Note that the text does not read: “*Therefore those who had been scattered went into hiding because of their great fear.*” It does say that “*they went about bringing the good tidings of the word.*”

B. The ministry of Philip (5-7)

1. Preaching Christ (Messiah) in Samaria—a place of outcasts and enemies of Jews in Jerusalem.
2. Performing signs—miracles that teach truth (6)
 - Casting out demons—power over the enemy! Satan is “unclean”.

- Note in v. 7 that the subject of the verb changes to the demons—identifying the person cured with the demon coming out of him since their own self consciousness had become identified with the demon.
- The loud shouting shows the resistance and the protest of the demon, and the pain of the possessed person.
- Luke carefully distinguishes actual sickness—here paralysis and lameness—from demonic possession.

C. The Amazement of the people (6-7)

1. They were giving close attention to Philip’s teaching and healing (“heard and saw”) “with one accord.” (6)
2. They were rejoicing greatly (8)—over healing of both soul and body.

Not only was Saul persecuting, Stephen preaching, there was also another man in Samaria practicing Sorcery and magic.

III. THE PRACTITIONER OF MAGIC (9-13): **Simon**

Note the clear condemnation of sorcery and magic in the OT Scriptures: Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Dt. 18:9-12.

A. Why people followed Simon

Note the references to “**giving attention**” in this passage: v. 6 (to Philip), v. 10, v. 11 (to Simon), v. 13 (to Philip by Simon)—“observing signs and great miracles taking place.”

Also note the references to the **astonishment** and **amazement** of the people (vv. 9, 11) and of Simon (v. 13). Verse 13 states that Simon was “constantly amazed” by the miracles of Philip.

It is obvious here that much of this is pure emotionalism and superficiality.

1. Simon claimed to “be someone great.” (v. 9). In fact, the people said of him: “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” (10). Simon himself must have claimed to be some kind of messenger (angel?) from God—not God Himself. He was **the great power** of God.
 - In later years the Simon tradition led to full blown Gnostic beliefs in a series of emanations from God.
 - Simon went on to cause much trouble and damage in Christianity in the years to follow.
2. Simon must have had great charisma and certainly manifested powerful “gifts” of signs and wonders (pretended and satanic). Note the reference to his “magic arts” in v. 11.

B. Why people followed Philip

1. Message about a **Great Savior**

- “Good news about the Kingdom of God”
- “Good news about the name of Jesus Christ”

2. Manifestation of genuine “signs and **great miracles**” (v. 13)

3. Belief and Baptism (12, 13)

- Both men and women believed and were baptized (12)
- Even “Simon himself believed” and was “baptized” and “continued on with Philip” (13).
- The “belief” here was undoubtedly mere academic faith—not saving faith that resulted in conversion.
- He was trying to increase his personal powers and influence by latching onto a “good thing”—something even better than he had previously known.

CONCLUSION

The **persecutor** could not stop the spread of the Gospel—in fact, he would soon become a preacher of that very Gospel.

The **preacher** went forth with the power and blessing of God—despite opposition from both Saul and Simon—the sorcerer.

The **sorcerer** was helpless in view of the genuine power of God, and made an alliance with the **preacher**—claiming to be a Christian.

Note that there are two kinds of opposition that we believers face: from those outside the church—in this case Saul—and from those inside the church—in this case Simon.

Satan will attack us openly at times; at other times he will attack craftily through those who are apparently our friends.

We must accept what God gives us—hard times and easy times—and watch Him grow our church despite opposition. JUST DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY!