

Introduction:

Have you ever tried to kill some type of plant but the more you do the more it grows? **Acts 7** Stephen is killed while preaching the Gospel. This ramps up the efforts of the Jewish leaders. We have gone from intimidation, to imprisonment, to threats, and now to persecution, including death.

I) The Book of Acts Shows the Growth of The Church

Acts 8:1 NKJV 1 *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.*

A) Jesus spoke of this in Acts 1.8.

Acts 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

1. The church at Jerusalem

- a. Centered on the Gospel of Christ from the Day of Pentecost onward.

Acts 2:42 *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

- b. Was a worshipping church
- c. Was a prayerful church which we will see later on in Acts.
- d. Was a giving and caring church as those with funds gave so as to help needy saints.

Acts 4:34 *Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, **35** and laid*

them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

- e. Was a joyful church

Acts 5:41 *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

- f. Faced trials but triumphed over them- Ananias & Sapphira, Grecian Widows.

- 2. Who wouldn't want to be a member there?

B) After the death of Stephen? What's next?

- 1. Time of testing.

- a. Were they there because it was convenient or conviction?
- b. Family or faith
- c. Food and healings or heaven
- d. Fellowship aimed at man or God

- 2. How would you have responded?

- a. In Afghanistan there are Christians facing possible death, beheadings, stoning, hangings, etc.
- b. Would you worship God today there?
- c. Today we face none of these things but some do not worship God today.

II) Acts 8 Events

A) The church scatters

Acts 8:1 *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.

1. Apparently some stayed but many left and went back home. Acts 2 gives a list of different countries they came from.
2. While not specifically mentioned in **Acts 8**, the Apostles remained at Jerusalem.

B) Stephen is buried

Acts 8:2 *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

1. These devout men risked their lives to bury Stephen.
2. One can only imagine the way they felt, seeing one so respected and loved, being killed.

C) Saul continues on with the persecution

Acts 8:3 *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.*

1. Interesting the phrase “house to house” mentioned in **Acts**.

Acts 2:46 *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,*

Acts 20:20 *"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,*

2. Christians were meeting in their houses and Saul knew where to find them.

III) What Would Christians Do?

Acts 8:4 *Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*

A) See the growth of the church

1. They didn't just scatter.
2. They didn't just preach
3. They went everywhere preaching the word.

B) How did the church grow so fast and in so many places.

1. Think of their hindrances
 - a. Not a lot of money for material things like handouts, advertising, Gospel Meetings.
 - b. No mass media- radio, television, social media, etc.
 - c. No big "personal work" program
2. They simply went everywhere preaching the Gospel.
 - a. The Gospel is not caught – not like some virus, or something which suddenly comes upon you. One minute you are just living your life and the next you are a Christian.
 - b. The Gospel is not bought – can't buy your way into heaven, either can you convert people with money and give a ways.
 - c. The Gospel is not fought – threats with knives and guns.
 - d. The Gospel is taught—"preach" used 6 times in **Acts**; "preaching" 10 times in **Acts**, "teach" 5 times in **Acts**; "teaching" 6 times in **Acts**. Twenty-seven times in **Acts** there was instruction given.
3. This got me to thinking about our advantages and disadvantages in preaching the word.
 - a. They had miraculous gifts, we don't.
 - b. Some had direction inspiration; we don't.
 - c. They did not have the written word; we do.

- d. They had persecution; we don't.
- e. Both have something the world needs, the Gospel.

IV) "Personal Work"

A) Term "personal work" has taken on the idea of some type of organized program.

- 1. Going up to a total stranger and talking to them about the Gospel.
- 2. The problem with that, it really isn't personal.

B) Personal example

- 1. Young man came to my house wanting to "give me" something.
- 2. He explained why I needed it, what it was, and was really nice, I liked him and admired his presentation. But I didn't sign up for his product. Why?
 - a. Skeptical
 - b. I didn't know him
 - c. He was intruding on my time and came to my house.
 - d. I just found it hard to trust him.
- 3. My point- most people are not approachable unless there is some personal relationship.
- 4. Look for opportunities in your personal relationships to talk about the Bible, invite to services, build your relationship by being an example of Christ.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

- 5. Our job is to sow the word; their job is to believe and obey.

Conclusion:

The Gospel makes Christians, nothing more or less. Allen Malone went to Vietnam in order to spread the Gospel. Did not know a single person, but in a public square he held up his Bible. Eventually a man approached him asking Allen if he believed the Bible to be the word of God; If Allen believes Jesus to be the Son of God; if one must repent of their sins and confess Jesus as the Son of God and be baptized for the remission of their sins; If one is added to the body of Christ, His church when one is baptized. This man was a member of that church. He had been taught by a U.S. soldier during the war and been waiting for someone to come back and teach him more.