

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

#### Part V: The Ministry Of The First Local And Universal Church, Acts 3:1-8:3

#### I. Christ's Work Sovereignly To Use Spiritual Opposition To Advance Discipling (Acts 8:1-3, 4-25)

##### I. Introduction

- A. When formidable spiritual opposition arises against individual believers or the Church as a whole, lots of Christians humanly suffer, and the world of spiritual darkness seemingly triumphs over God's people.
- B. In the history of the Church, even such spiritual opposition is only a tool in the hand of our Sovereign God to further His own plans for discipling people, a fact that is evident in Acts 8:1-3, 4 (as follows):

##### II. Christ's Work Sovereignly To Use Spiritual Opposition To Advance Discipling, Acts 8:1-3, 4-25.

- A. Jesus directed His disciples to go into all the world to make disciples with the promise that all authority over the world's entities was under His sovereign control, Matthew 28:18, 19-20a.
- B. Christ added He would be with His people in the process even to the end of the Church era, Mtt. 28:20b.
- C. Now, the **plan** Christ meant to implement was outreach first to Jerusalem, then to Judaea, the region in which the city of Jerusalem was located, then to Samaria and finally to the ends of the earth, Acts 1:8.
- D. Amazingly, even the formidable opposition the Church faced at the martyrdom of Stephen was **used** by Christ as a means to getting this **outreach implemented** (as follows), Acts 8:1-3, 4-25:
  - 1. At **first glance**, the persecution the Church faced at Stephen's death seems only ruinous, Acts 8:1-3:
    - a. Until Stephen's martyrdom, the Church "universal" was also the Church "local," for it met as a unit and ministered well to its own needs and to the discipling of the lost outside the body, Acts 2:42-47.
    - b. However, Stephen's martyrdom painfully changed all of that, Acts 8:1-3: (1) A leader in Stephen's martyrdom, Saul (Acts 7:58), approved of Stephen's death and headed the persecution of the believers, Acts 8:1a, 3 NIV. (2) Thus, believers scattered to Judaea and Samaria, Acts 8:1b,c. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1d), so the main objects of persecution were likely Grecian Jews like Stephen who could be easily identified, (Acts 6:5; Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to Acts 6:5) so that Hebraistic Jewish believers like the Apostles were not as targeted! (Bib. Kno. Com., N. T., p. 372. (3) The persecution made it hard to evangelize Hebraistic Jews, Ibid. (4) That devout men greatly lamented Stephen reveals their sense of great loss, Acts 8:2 with 6:5a, 8-10, 15.
  - 2. However, these events only **furthered** Christ's **discipling plan**, revealing His **sovereignty** over them:
    - a. Acts 8:4 reveals that the scattered Christians went everywhere preaching God's Word. Philip, one of the Grecian Jews chosen to be a deacon with Stephen (Acts 6:5), was one of those who scattered, and he evangelized Samaritans in line with Christ's Acts 1:8 goal, cf. Acts 8:5!
    - b. After Philip preached in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25), the Holy Spirit led him to evangelize a Gentile proselyte to Judaism, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:26-29!
    - c. Next, the Holy Spirit miraculously transported Philip 20 miles over to Azotos, so he preached the Gospel starting there and going north to Caesarea, 55 miles away, a foretaste of reaching the ends of the earth in line with Christ's Acts 1:8 plan! (Acts 8:40; Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Acts 8:40; map 12)
    - d. Saul's persecution to destroy the Church thus became the key to getting believers to evangelize beyond Jerusalem, and later Christ would even sovereignly send the converted Saul, later called the Apostle Paul, to be His Apostle to the Gentiles, cf. Acts 8:1, 3 with Acts 9:1, 3-4, 15-17!
    - e. Besides, Stephen's sermon that led to his death had a great influence on Saul's later ministry: not only was his later address to Jews in Acts 13:46-48 reflective of Stephen's vocabulary in his address (as we noted two lessons ago in this series), his address to the temple crowd in Acts 22:1 as "Brothers and fathers" was identical to Stephen's vocative to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2, showing the great impact of Stephen's address on the influential Apostle Paul's later ministry, Ibid., p. 417.

***Lesson:*** *Though Stephen's martyrdom at first seemed to lead to a tragic loss in the Church's ministry, it ACTUALLY greatly BOOSTED its OUTREACH, making it the Church UNIVERSAL for God's glory!*

***Application:*** *May we trust Christ sovereignly to use what spiritual opposition His people face only to further His plan of discipling mankind to the ends of the earth!*