

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 25 | ACTS 8:1-13

ACTS 8:1-4 | PERSECUTION COMES ON THE ASSEMBLY BY SAUL

- Verse 1 –
 - In the parable of the nobleman, the citizens of the kingdom **sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man reign over us** (Lk. 19:14). In the death of Saul, it appears that this aspect of the parable is fulfilled.
 - In the death of Stephen, we are introduced to Saul, who is still an unbeliever. Saul's ministry will come later (due to the fact, it seems, that Stephen ask that the Jewish nation be forgiven).
 - Saul is introduced as **consenting unto his death**. The word used is a *voting* word. While the text does not specifically say so, this particular word gives indication that Saul may have "voted with" them to put him to death, which would mean that Saul was a young member of the Sanhedrin. If this is true, then Galatians 1:14 is especially true, **above many my equals**. Notice that in Acts 26:10 Saul said **I gave my voice against them**, again giving indication he was a young member of the Sanhedrin.
 - It must be remembered that **the church which was at Jerusalem** was living under the Law, within the Old Testament system. It was certainly a sect of its own, but it was not the church which we know today. The nature of this sect brought persecution (as we have repeatedly seen), and the members of the sect **were all scattered abroad**, that is, **except the apostles**, who remained in Jerusalem.
 - Note that it is often taught that God used persecution because the "early church" didn't want to go to the ends of the world. However, with such a scenario the apostles would have been the most disobedient.
- Verse 2 –
 - The **devout men** who buried Stephen and **made great lamentation over him** were clearly not running away and were not scared of the consequences.
 - Using the rule of *Scripture interprets Scripture*, the **devout men** are *devoted to the Law*, as in Acts 2:5, the only other passage in which the phrase was used. It would be unreasonable to assume that the men of Acts 8 were devoted to something different than the men of Acts 2.
- Verse 3 –
 - Saul persecuted the **church** (which was an *assembly* under the direction of Peter and well within the confines of Judaism).
 - He went *house by house* (a literal translation) and **haling** (dragging) them he **committed them to prison** (further evidence he was of the Sanhedrin).
- Verse 4 –
 - The "members" of the "church" are **preaching the word**. However, in the modern sense they are not "members of the church preaching the word" in any sense of the use of the terms today.
 - The "word" which "the church" preaches today is that *anyone* can receive eternal life *by grace through faith*. This has not been the message of this "church" and will not be for some time. At this point such a "word" remains a mystery.

- Verse 5 –
 - Philip went *north* which was **down** geographically to **the city of Samaria**. He did *not* go to gentiles, but to Samaritans, who were *Jews* (see Acts 11:19).
 - The words **preached Christ unto them** are literally “announced to them the Messiah.” We should not “backfill” our proclamation of Christ into Philip’s mouth.
- Verses 6-8 –
 - The result of **hearing and seeing the miracles** caused the people to respond to the message, which was (as we shall see in v. 12), the message of the **kingdom of God**.
 - That this was a kingdom message has been thus far indicated, including the fact that “by grace through faith” has not been taught, miracles were being performed, and Jesus is being proclaimed as national Messiah rather than personal Savior.
- Verses 9-11 –
 - Simon is introduced as **giving out that himself was some great one**, and, sadly, **they all gave heed** to him because he had (it appeared) **the great power of God**.
 - However, this power was actually **sorceries** and **he had bewitched them**.
 - It is no mark of great character to be persuaded by “the miraculous.”
 - The word **sorceries** is μαγεύω [mageuo] from which we get *magic*.
 - The word **bewitched** is ἐξίστημι [existemi] which is *ex* -out of, and *histemi* -to stand, thus “out of standing” or “to be beside oneself.”
- Verse 12 –
 - The message **concerning the kingdom of God** and Jesus as the King required the response of *belief* and *baptism*.
 - Philip’s success in Samaria is evident.
- Verse 13 –
 - Later Simon will show his bad side, but we must go with what the text says and trust the text.
 - However, we do NOT have to give Simon a place in heaven, not because his belief was not REAL, but because his belief was NOT during the time in which “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” is the message.
 - Under the Law (the dispensation in which this took place), perseverance to the end and obedience to the Law’s demands was required.
 - It is not only unnecessary but also unfounded to build a “true belief” vs “spurious belief” doctrine from this example.