

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 8:1-8 - A SURPRISING WAY TO ADVANCE

KEY TERMS

Saul (Paul) - Saul, who later goes by Paul, was first mentioned in the book of Acts to end chapter 7 as overseeing Stephen's execution, and is now responsible for *ravaging the church* and imprisoning many men and women (v. 3). Paul later goes on to become a Christian, help spread the gospel around the known world, and write 13 New Testament books.

Preaching the Word - Though the Church leaders stayed in Jerusalem, others continued preaching the word and the Church grew. Preaching the word in Acts 8 doesn't appear to refer to formal preaching, but instead to telling people about Jesus through normal relationships and conversations.

Unclean Spirits - Can also be translated as *evil spirits*; these are spiritual beings opposed to God and his will for his creation.

DID YOU KNOW?

The persecution the Church encountered after Stephen's stoning drove them even beyond Judea and Samaria. Acts 11:19 says that as a direct result of persecution, the Church spread into Phoenicia (modern day Lebanon), Antioch (modern day Syria), and Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea.

BACKGROUND

Following the execution of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), the Church faces *great persecution* (8:1) led by Saul (later called Paul) resulting in many Christians, not just the Church leaders, being imprisoned. The persecution *scatters* (v. 1 & 4; from the Greek word *speirō*, literally meaning "seeded") much of the Church out of Jerusalem into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria. This is significant for the story of Acts and of the Church because Jesus promised that they would be his witnesses *in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8), and now, because of persecution, the Church has an opportunity to be a witness for Jesus in Judea and Samaria. Though now outside of Jerusalem, the characteristics that marked the Church inside Jerusalem: joy, boldness, unity, signs and wonders, are still present (vv. 4-8).

GOING DEEPER

Read John 15:19-20, Matthew 5:10-12, 1 Peter 4:12-14, and 2 Timothy 3:10-15. What do these verses teach you about persecution and the Christian life? What do they teach you about persecution and the mission of God? How can you apply these verses to your daily life?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

Review of Acts 1-7

1. Review Acts 1:1-8. As you reflect on these verses, how would you describe the mission that Jesus' gives his followers and how it will be fulfilled?
2. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descends upon God's people, Peter preaches to all who observe what happens, 3,000 new believers trust Christ, and a new day begins for the people of God. In Acts 2:42-47, what kinds of things characterize the day-to-day life of this new community?

Study of Acts 8

3. Read Acts 8:1-8. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What stands out to you?
4. How does the persecution of the church escalate and intensify over time?
See Acts 4:21, 5:40, 7:57-60, 8:1-4.
5. How does God use the persecution described in Acts 8:1-8 to contribute to the fulfillment of the church's commission in Acts 1:1-8? Notice the different regions listed in both passages.

LIVING THE WORD

6. Consider how you would respond to a persecution and scattering of the church such as this one. What emotions would you feel? What biblical truths or promises would you cling to?
7. Acts 8:8 says that "there was much joy in that city," which is a return to a theme in the book of Acts. We also see joyful or glad hearts mentioned in Acts 2:25-26, Acts 2:28, and Acts 2:46-47. Why is this kind of joy so essential in healthy church?
8. What is one way you want to foster a glad heart and a bold church this year?