

THE ACTS OF JESUS

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 8:1-9:31

Scattering of the church

Introduction

Persecution serves many purposes. It may be an irrational, vindictive backlash against people who are different in their ethnicity or their ideas. Or it may be a calculated effort to destroy a race or stamp out a religion. But when the members of the movement are conscientious people who are firmly rooted in their convictions, persecution can have exactly the opposite effect.

So it was with the Christians. The persecution that was intended to stamp out followers of the Way actually caused the movement to spread. Faithful Christians were compelled to flee Jerusalem to escape from persecution, but they took their faith with them and shared the good news of Jesus wherever they went. Thus the Word of the Lord grew and spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and into the lands of the Gentiles.

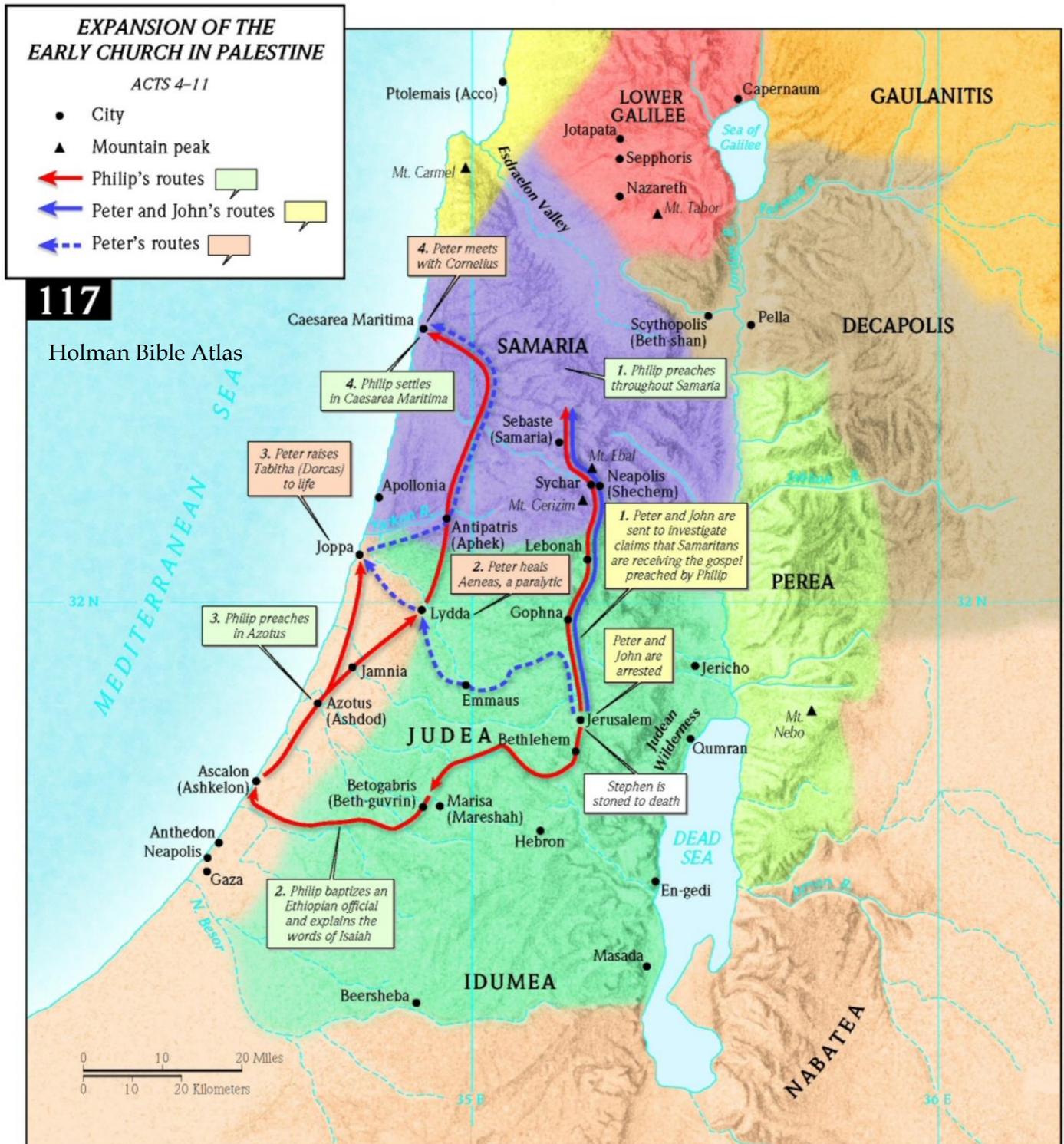
From a human perspective persecution is traumatic, but in God's master plan he works it out for the good of those who love him. Among Christians it has been said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Summary of 8:1-8. The Pharisee Saul stood with approval on the stoning of Stephen. On the same day that Stephen was stoned, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem. The effect was counterproductive for the persecutors, however, because the persecution scattered Christians throughout the surrounding region. Those who were scattered did not keep their faith quiet. Among them was a Christian named Philip, not the apostle (cf. Acts 6:5), who shared the message of Christ in a Samaritan city. (See map on the next page.) The preaching of the gospel brought joy to the city (v 8).

Read Acts 8:9-25. We are introduced to Simon the Sorcerer, also known as Simon Magus.

1. What is the difference between a miracle and magic (sorcery)?
2. What happened to Simon when he heard Philip preaching the Name of Jesus?
3. What does Luke mean when he says of the people of Samaria, "the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus"? Why make this comment?
4. What did Simon want from Peter and John? Why did he desire this?
5. Note Peter's response to Simon and consider the following:
 - a. What did Peter tell Simon Magus to do?
 - b. What did Peter say was the condition of Simon's heart?
 - c. Why did Peter say, "*Perhaps* [the Lord] will forgive you"?

Skim Acts 8:26-40. Philip had been in *Samaria* preaching the gospel. The Spirit called Philip to go and meet the Ethiopian eunuch on his journey home (From *Jerusalem* toward *Gaza*). After his baptism Philip is brought to *Azotus* and he preaches his way all the way up to *Caesarea*.



6. *Discuss:* We've seen repeatedly how the Word of the Lord and the sacrament of Baptism fill people with great joy, and here we see another example in the Ethiopian eunuch. You have heard the Word and been baptized. How is the transformational joy of salvation reflected in your life as you:
- Get up to greet each new day?

- b. Interact with your spouse, family, friends and coworkers?
 - c. Meet life's challenges and adversities?
7. The Spirit took Philip away. The eunuch did not see him again. But Luke tells us that he went on his way rejoicing. Defend this statement: A Christian may not always be happy, but a Christian can always be joyful.

Read Acts 9:1-19.

8. Why was Saul on his way to Damascus? (Look at the map on the next page.)
9. What surprises or impresses you about Jesus' words to Saul?
10. Describe Saul's condition during that three-day period when he first arrived in Damascus.
11. Put yourself in Ananias' shoes and consider the following:
- a. What would be your initial reaction if you were sent to someone like Saul?
 - b. If you could be alone in a room with him, what would you say to him?
 - c. How are we able to do as Ananias did when we approach someone who has sinned against us?

Read Acts 9:19-31.

12. How did certain groups and individuals react to news about Saul after his conversion? What does this teach us about one's reputation?
13. Who vouched for Saul when he came to Jerusalem?
14. Paul later pointed back to this eye-opening experience in Acts 26 when he is on trial before King Agrippa. Why would Paul refer back to this event consistently throughout his life?

**PAUL'S CONVERSION
AND EARLY MINISTRY**

ACTS 9:1-30; 11:19-30; 12:24-25
GAL. 1:11-24

- City
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ⌋ Pass
- ← Paul sent to Damascus
- ←···· Paul spends time in Arabia
- ←- Paul returns to Jerusalem
- ←· Paul flees from Hellenists
- ←· Paul and Barnabas travel to Antioch
- ←· Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem
- ← Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch
- Kingdom of Agrippa I

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