

# **The Persecuted Church**

**Acts 7:57-8:8**

## **Acts 7:54 - 8:8**

**Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him...**

## **Acts 7:54 - 8:8, cont.**

**And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...**

## **Acts 7:54 - 8:8, cont.**

**Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.**

# Acts: The Story of Us

- **The Prophetic Voice, Acts 2:14-21**
- **The Loving Church, Acts 2:41-47**
- **The Witnessing Church, Acts 4:8-13**
- **The Purified Church, Acts 5:1-16**
- **The United Church, Acts 6:1-7**
- **The Persecuted Church, Acts 7:54 - 8:8**

# The Church and Persecution

- The world has always been against the Church.
- “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- “Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17).

# **1. The Apostolic Message of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**

- **“God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus who you crucified” (Acts 2:36).**
- **“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).**
- **Pilate “knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up” (Matthew 27:18).**

# The Danger of Jealousy

- **“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (James 3:16).**
- **Jealousy is a denial of God’s grace and help to you.**
- **Who are you envious and jealous of?**



# Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

**“Live with a steady superiority over life -don't be afraid of misfortune, and do not yearn for happiness... It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold and if thirst and hunger don't claw at your insides. If your back isn't broken, if your feet can walk, if both arms can bend, if both eyes can see, if both ears hear, then whom should you envy? And why? Our envy of others devours us most of all. Rub your eyes and purify your heart -and prize above all else in the world those who love you and who wish you well. Do not hurt them or scold them, and never part from any of them in anger; after all, you simply do not know: it may be your last act before your arrest, and that will be how you are imprinted on their memory.”**

## 2. The Hammer of Persecution

- Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. (Acts 7:54-57)

## **2. The Hammer of Persecution**

- The Emotional and Angry Crowd**
- The Mastermind and Planner:**
- “Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58), “and Saul approved his execution” (8:1), “he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (8:3).**

## **2. The Hammer of Persecution**

- Persecution fell hard and sudden. The preparatory work was already done.**
- Jesus said, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16).**
- “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).**

# **St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, France, 1572**

- **Targeted assassinations and Catholic mob violence against the French Huguenots.**
- **It began the night of August 23 and continued to the next day.**
- **5,000 killed in two days**
- **It raged through the French countryside for weeks, estimated up to 30,000 killed.**

# **Persecution Today**

## ***(Open Doors International)***

- **11 Christians die for their faith every day**
- **North Korea (Communism) and Afghanistan (Islam), the worst**
- **Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Islam)**
- **Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, India (Hindu), Syria**
- **China rates 27th**

# **We must determine today which side we are on**

- **Do you pray for world peace?**
- **Do you speak up for the persecuted? “Open your mouth for those with no voice, for the justice of all the dispossessed” (Prov 31:8).**
- **Do you speak up when a fellow believer is questioned or threatened?**
- **Do you come to the aid of the one who is experiencing the rejection of the world?**
- **Do you judge the persecuted and side with the persecutor?**

### **3. The Open Door in Samaria**

- **“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5).**
- **“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake... And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:9-14).**



# **The Common Denominator of Fruitful Christians**

**The Common Denominator (gemeinsamer  
Nenner) of fruitful Christians:**

**They have died to sin and self and live to God.**

**They are like seeds planted in the soil, that  
have died to themselves but have risen in the  
grace of God and in the power of God to new  
life in Christ.**