



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Persecution With A Purpose– (ACTS Chapter 8)

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*Many ask “why” when seemingly good and evil events happen in their life. Our Sovereign God has a much greater purpose than we can imagine. He promises that all things work out for good to those that love God (Romans 8:28). He may share some plans with you (Genesis 18:10,17-21). Though He wants us to trust Him (1Timothy 4:10). **Are you glancing backward and noticing how God has “set up” your life for His eternal purpose?***

INTRODUCTION

The supreme court in Jerusalem tried and convicted Jesus (Luke 22:66), Peter and John (Acts 4:5), Peter and the group of Apostles (Acts 5:27), and finally Stephen (Acts 7:1). They were found guilty of teaching others to seek grace through a spiritual relationship with Jesus, The Christ, rather than to merely follow the rules of religion. The climax of Stephen’s trial was his indictment of his accusers. The courtroom erupted into mob action as Stephen was driven out of the city and stoned to death. In his dying breath, Stephen cried out in a loud voice, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”** (Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34). A young man named Saul held the religious robes of those doing the stoning! **Have you observed some in leadership stand on the sidelines, silent while evil is being done?**

SCATTERED

Acts 8:1 At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (NKJV)

As devout men buried Stephen, Saul began ravaging the church. He and others went house to house, dragging off men and women, putting them in prison, confiscating their possessions (Acts 8:1-3). Religious persecution has continued over the past 2000 years. In response, our Founding Fathers placed the 1st amendment in our Constitution, protecting the free exercise of religion. Many other nations do not have this freedom. Some ignore, even sanction persecution. **Can you cite recent examples of religious persecution in Kansas, in America, and abroad?**

EVANGELISTS

Acts 8:5-6 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (NKJV)

The disciple Philip fled to the capital city of Samaria. His teaching of the freedom of Christ brought great joy to the city (Acts 8:8). God sent Peter and John to baptize these new believers with the Holy Spirit. A city leader, a sorcerer named Simon, had amazed the people with magic arts. Intrigued by the Holy Spirit’s power, Simon offered to pay for this gift. Philip rebuked Simon and cautioned him to repent before God judged him for his wickedness. Satan is the great deceiver, giving false authority. (Revelation 12:9). **Have you discerned leaders, thinking themselves good or great in their own power?**

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

Acts 8:26-31 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. He arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians...was riding in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. (NKJV)

This leader from the royal court of Ethiopia (Africa) had come to Jerusalem to worship. He had purchased a scroll, the book of Isaiah. God had him reading the very verse speaking of the suffering servant Jesus and His sacrifice for our sin. Philip provided the interpretation. The official, seeing a pool of water, asked to be baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. **Has God empowered you to touch the life of one, perhaps many with encouragement, even new life?**

A PRAYER

Father God: Please help me to grasp Your eternal perspective and to see opportunities open for me to be a part of Your grand plan for me and for humanity! I pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen!