

**Valley Bible Church**  
**Sermon Notes for April 22, 2012**

**Saul's Depravity Against The Church**  
**Acts 8:1-4**

Acts 7:54-60 records the murder of Stephen, who was falsely charged with blasphemy of God, the Law, and the temple. Acts 8:1-4 records the persecution that resulted from his death, concluding the first section of Acts where the gospel spreads in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 1:8).

**1. Saul's participation (8:1)**

Paul is referred to by his Jewish name, "Saul," until Acts 13:9, when his Roman name is used showing leadership in the mission to the Gentiles.

Saul's participation in the death of Stephen likely extends back to the beginning of the opposition to Stephen since Saul was from Cilicia (Acts 6:9, cf. Acts 21:39).

Saul's hearty agreement with the council confirmed not only his unity with them in Stephen's death, but also with the persecution of his future co-workers (Acts 4-5) and even with their role in the death of Christ (Luke 22:66-71).

**2. Saints persecuted (8:1)**

The "all" who were scattered cannot mean "all believers except the apostles" because (1) the apostles would not have remained after the church departed and (2) Saul continued to imprison believers in Jerusalem and (3) we continue to see the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:26).

The natural conclusion is that the Hellenistic, or Greek speaking Jews who had believed in Christ were the target of this great persecution. Both Stephen and Philip (Acts 8:5) were leaders of this group of believers in Christ.

**3. Stephen's provision (8:2)**

The Jewish Mishnah allowed for the burial of one who was stoned but not for lamenting. This loud lamentation served as an open protest by these men over Stephen's murder.

**4. Saul's pursuit (8:3)**

The word "ravaging" occurs only here in the New Testament, but in the Greek translation of the Old Testament the word is used in Psalm 80:13 to describe wild boars in a

vineyard. Paul often referenced his life of sin against the church (Acts 22:4-5, 19-20; 26:10-11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13, 22-23; Philippians 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 1:13).

Saul expanded the persecution by targeting private locations, by targeting women, and by targeting people for who they were rather than what they were doing. This expansion would ultimately lead to his own imprisonment.

## **5. God's purpose (8:4)**

The irony is that Saul was participating in the spread of the word of God even in his rebellion.

The Greek word that is translated “scattered” (DIESPARESEN) is derived from the root verb used to refer to sowing seed (SPERIO).

The Greek-speaking Jews were equipped to bring the word beyond Jerusalem due to their culture and language.

Throughout history we can see God moving people to sovereignly accomplish His purpose in the spread of His word.

May we by God's grace actively participate in the opportunities that lie before us to communicate God's word.