

Chapter 2

Paul as a Persecutor

Acts 7

A. Stephen's Death

1. The Bible introduces Saul to its readers prior to his becoming a Christian.
2. The very first mention of Paul (Saul) in the Bible is found in connection with Stephen's death. **Acts 7:58** – “And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul”.
3. References to Stephen's death.
 - a. **Acts 2:57 – 8:2** – “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;
58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.
59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’
60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”
Acts 8
1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. 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.
2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”
 - b. **Acts 22:20** – “And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”
4. Although Stephen was the first Christian martyr, he certainly was not to be the last.
5. It is of interest to note that:
 - a. The same Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus, condemned Stephen.
 - b. Neither Saul nor the Sanhedrin could answer the arguments of Stephen.

Acts 8

B. General Persecutions

1. **Acts 8:3-4** – “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”
 - 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.
2. **Acts 22:4-5, 19** – “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,
 - 5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished . . .
 - 19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.'”
3. **Acts 26:9-11** – “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
 - 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.
 - 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”
6. Saul did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah because Jesus often denounced the Pharisees and seemed to oppose all their rules and traditions.
 - a. He had once heard that Jesus taught the people to disobey the rabbis and had caused levels of chaos in the synagogues.
 - b. He felt that all “true” Jews should count Jesus as an enemy of Israel and that anyone who followed Him should be put to death.
 - c. With the above thoughts in mind, Saul returned to Jerusalem and offered his service to the high pries to persecute anyone who is opposed to the way of the synagogue.
 - d. Saul took his job so fiercely that every worshipping assembly feared his name.
 - a. He had a temper and was merciless.
 - b. He was quick to punish.
 - c. Saul literally dragged believers from their homes or worship services, cast them into prison, and sentenced them to death.

C. Paul's Confession in the Epistles

1. **1 Corinthians 15:9** – “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”
2. **Galatians 1:13, 22-23** – “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. . . .
22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.
23 But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.’”
3. **Philippians 3:6** – “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church . . .”
4. **1 Timothy 1:13** – “Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.