

Acts Chapter 8 vs. 1-3:

Theme: Before he was Paul, he was Saul.

Historical notes

Saul was born a **Jew** circa 5 A.D. in Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia on the southeast coast of Asia Minor (present day Turkey). Tarsus was one of the world's largest commerce centers. It was also a renown center of culture and education and a city with many Jewish settlements dating back to the 2nd century B.C. For a more complete history of Tarsus, read the book of **2 Maccabees**. Focus on **2 Macc 4:30-38** which concern the Jews in Tarsus.

- After his miraculous conversion, Saul spent about 3 years in Arabia, in and around Damascus, **before** making his first trip to Jerusalem as a Christian. Once he arrived there, he faced immediate danger.
- Not only was the Jewish "establishment" plotting Saul's death, but also **the Hellenists** (the same Greek-speaking Jews who had argued fervently with Stephen) were particularly intent on killing him. (**Acts 9:29**)
- So, when the "brethren" (i.e., the apostles) became aware of Saul's eminent danger they moved him quickly from Jerusalem to Caesarea (a principal seaport on the Mediterranean) & then sent him (via ship) back to Tarsus. (**Acts 9:30**)

Biblical notes & reflection (Acts Ch. 8 vs. 1-3)

Saul consented to (**sanctioned**) Stephen's death by stoning. (**Acts 8:1**)

- Saul was a young man around 30 years old at the time and he had a widespread reputation as a merciless persecutor of Christians.

Persecution pushed Christianity out of Jerusalem into Judea & Samaria and as far away as Phoenicia, Syria, and Cyprus.

- Was it possible for this persecution to be used by God? If so, for what reason?
See Note on bottom of Page 220 in the Study Bible. Also, note Acts 8:4 for a hint.

Verse 1 concludes with the phrase, **"except for the apostles"**.

- Why do you think the apostles remained in Jerusalem? **Again, see Note on bottom of Page 220 in the Study Bible.**

Reflect on Verse 4: **"Saul laid waste the church entering house after house, he dragged off men & women and committed them to prison"**.

- With respect to having the early Christians **committed to prison**, what are the obvious questions here?
- What else was so ruthless about this act by Saul?