
Helpful Resources

Map of Palestine (p.47)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

When an object is set in motion and its speed of movement increases (particularly as it moves down a slope), it is often described as gaining momentum (mass x velocity). The more momentum an object gains, the more force it accumulates. The more momentum or force an object has, the harder it is to slow down or stop (requiring an equal or greater force).

Momentum is a great description of the early church and the spread of the gospel. Their movement began at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said believers would “receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them,” and they would be “His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8*). With the power of the Holy Spirit and the exhilarating gift of the gospel, the church was set in motion (*Acts 2*). Once in motion, the church quickly gained momentum. Immediately, three thousand people were saved in Jerusalem (*2:41*), and “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (*2:47*).

This gospel momentum greatly concerned Satan, of course, and he immediately deployed his minions to stop this movement with discouragement, distractions, false teachers, even persecution. But, Jesus said, “I will build My church, and even the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (*Matt. 16:18*). There was nothing Satan could do to stop the church’s momentum, and every time he tried, he only added fuel to the fire. The Pharisee Gamaliel recognized this truth when he said, “If this plan is of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it” (*Acts 5:38, 39*). In this review, we will consider the momentum of the early church and the ineffective attempts of the enemy to thwart it.

- The Church in Motion

1. **The Movement Begins** (*Acts 2*): As we read last week, the church’s launch officially began in Jerusalem with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, Peter’s bold preaching, the translation of his message into various languages, and the saving of 3000 souls.

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? People mocked this event with discouraging words (*2:13*).

2. **Peter’s Temple Sermon** (*Acts 3:1-4:31*): After healing a lame man at the gate of the Temple, Peter and John shared the gospel to onlookers. Roughly 2000 more people believed in Christ for salvation (*4:4*).

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? The priests arrested Peter and John and put them in jail (*4:3*). The next day, Peter and John were questioned by the Sanhedrin (*v.5-7*). The Jewish leaders commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (*v.18*).

3. **Unity and Charity** (*Acts 4:32-5:11; 6:1-7*): The church experienced great unity and charity. Not only were they of one heart and mind, but they also took care of each other (2:41-47; 4:32-35). As a result, “there was not a needy person among them” (4:34).

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? He attempted to divide and discourage the Church through the deception of Ananias and Sapphira. His plan failed, and the church advanced. Even when widows complained about being neglected, the choosing of the seven servants (deacons) dissolved the conflict, and the church continued to grow (6:7).

4. **Healing and High Esteem** (5:12-42): The Apostles performed many signs and wonders. They were highly respected, and great numbers of people were believing in Christ.

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? Once again, Satan used the jealous priests (Sadducees) to arrest and imprison the Apostles. The priests threatened and flogged the Apostles, but they only rejoiced in their suffering and continued to share the gospel (5:40-42).

5. **Standing Up for Jesus** (*Acts 6:8-8:1a*): Stephen was an exceptional evangelist in the early church, “full of grace and power and wisdom, performing great wonders” (6:8, 10).

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? He stirred up the people against Stephen and had him arrested. After sharing Christ with the Jewish leaders (Sanhedrin) during his trial, Stephen was murdered by an angry mob (7:54-58). This event began a wave of persecution.

6. **No Boundaries** (*Acts 8:1b-40*): Because of the persecution of the church, followers of Christ spread from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip took the gospel to Samaria, and even shared Christ with an Ethiopian. Africa received the gospel!

Satan’s Obstruction Strategy? Even though Christians were being persecuted, the persecution caused the gospel to spread to other regions. But Satan would not quit. He raised up a Pharisee named Saul to chase Christians as far away as Antioch (9:1, 2).

- Prophetic Passages

1. **Gospel Momentum** (*Acts 1:8*): Jesus foretold of His witnesses taking the gospel to Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea, and the ends of the earth. The book of *Acts* tells the story, and that story included both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). The gospel is for all people!
2. **You Will Not Overthrow It** (*Acts 5:38, 39*): Though Satan will try every way he can to impede the gospel, he will fail. Christ will build His church, and it will be victorious.

The Bottom Line

The church has only gained momentum over time, and nothing can stop it from succeeding.

Questions to Consider

1. What is your favorite story about the early church? Explain why.
2. Why does Satan hate the church so much?
3. How has Satan tried to derail the church in your city, state, or country?
4. Where does persecution exist in the world today? What about in your life?
5. Is persecution good or bad? Explain.
6. Even though persecution continues to this day, how can you be encouraged?