



## BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

**A2079 ~ Saul Persecutes the Church.**

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*Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.*

Have you ever noticed that the course of history has been changed at times by one single act by just one person? Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a lone man from a terrorist group fired his gun at the heir to the throne of a European country and killed him. This event triggered the start of World War I and death of more than 38 million people. That one single event changed forever the course of history, brought down empires and freed the Holy Land from centuries of Islamic rule.

A single act by a single person on a single day basically created modern history. Who could have predicted such a thing? Yet had this event not happened, the world as we know it now wouldn't exist. The Holocaust of World War II ultimately resulted in the restoration of Israel in 1948. And Israel's declaration of statehood has driven the course of modern history ever since.

Logic shows that in every generation, from Jesus' time to this present day, someone has shaped events for the next generation. And every single person had to do exactly what they did, for Jesus' predictions of His Second Coming given 2,000 years ago, to come true. Only God can predict the future and only He knows every secret. All the tiny details in people's lives had to fit together exactly to meet the future events predicted in the Bible. What a difference a single change could make to the Big Picture as it exists today!

The death of Stephen was a changing history event for the young church. When Saul saw how pleased the chief priests and rulers were about the death of Stephen, Saul was encouraged to go from house to house, dragging Christians out and putting them in prison or having them killed.

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DRAMA - [The Bible In Living Sound](#).

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Saul was so extreme in his actions against Christians that many of the new church community had to move to other areas to live. In Matthew, Chapter 10, Jesus had told the disciples, “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.” He didn’t tell them to fight back with whatever weapons they had. Some people think that if people under attack had had some guns, they wouldn’t have been treated so badly.

What drove Saul to such lengths as to go into people’s homes to find out if they were followers of Jesus Christ or not? Saul realised from Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin that the new Christian religion was completely against the Jewish traditions. He understood that if this Christian religion continued to spread, the power and influence of the Jewish leaders would be greatly undermined. Saul could see that things in the future might not be the same as in the past, and he wanted to oppose such changes as much as he could.

Had those Christians thrown into jail done anything to harm anyone or commit any crime? Of course not, but Saul wasn’t prepared to follow the wise advice of his former teacher Gamaliel, and leave these new followers of Christ alone. To hear about the miracles Stephen had performed seemed to send Saul into a rage. Soon, the very name of ‘Saul’ cast terror into all the new Christians living in Jerusalem.

Saul didn't believe and accept Stephen's witness about the history of the Israelite people. Saul had been raised in the city of Tarsus, 10 miles from the Mediterranean Sea in present-day Turkey. He was a Roman citizen because he was born in a Roman province, but he was also a Jew, and brought up as a very strict Jew indeed. As soon as Saul could understand anything, he was taught lessons from the Old Testament. As he grew older, there were many other and more difficult things he had to learn. By the time Saul was a man and under the teaching of the top Pharisee, Gamaliel, he knew all that a strict Pharisee should know.

But why didn't Saul or the other scribes and rulers believe the Gospel that the apostles were teaching? Aside from a loss of money, position and power, these learned men thought that they were above the average person and had no need to be saved from their sin through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They officially denied that the resurrection of Jesus happened although it was and is a historical fact. God's holiness and our sin make the Gospel applicable for everyone of every generation, for we must all face Jesus as our Judge one day.

The Lord Jesus gave two reasons why the Jewish rulers rejected Him. He said in John, Chapter 5: "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." They weren't prepared to surrender their will to the will of God. God longs for everyone to come to Him through Jesus so they can be saved. God doesn't take any pleasure in the death of the wicked but He desires that the wicked turn from all wrongdoing and live. Love of the world and the things of the world hold many back from following Christ.

The second reason Jesus gave for His rejection by the Jewish rulers was given in Verse 44. The rulers loved to receive praise from one another but didn't try to win praise from God. They preferred to receive temporary, public honour from each other rather than secret lasting honour from God Himself. Those who love God seek to honour God. Those people who, like the rulers, don't love God, seek only their own honour. It's impossible to seek one's own honour and God's honour at the same time.

As Saul of Tarsus isn't mentioned in the Scriptures during the time of Jesus' ministry, it seems that he may have been back living with his family in Turkey. No mention is made of him before Acts, Chapter 7. No doubt even in far-off Tarsus, stories about the new prophet in Israel would have been told. Some claimed Him to be the long-awaited Messiah. Unbelievable stories about blind people being made to see and deaf people being made to hear would have travelled widely into far-off lands.

But despite doing these miracles and many others, Jesus was killed on a Roman cross. His followers claimed He had risen from the dead and that they'd seen and talked with Him. Saul looked for a Messiah king, not a carpenter from Nazareth. Saul returned to Jerusalem before the trial of Stephen. Saul hated the people who called themselves Christ followers and who said Jesus was the great Saviour from sin. Those people seemed to have a boldness to tell their story and nothing was stopping them. Even when the Christian leaders were severely beaten, they went away rejoicing!

Saul decided that it was time to put an end to this new religion and the large Christian community meeting in the Temple of all places. With the help of the high priest Caiaphas, Saul presided over the killing of Stephen, but even after Stephen's witness to Jesus standing on the right side of God, Saul stubbornly held to his own opinion that the man deserved to die. Saul was so hard-hearted and merciless.

But why? Maybe in remembering the shining face of Stephen before his death, Saul was troubled more than he understood. He started acting like a madman, hunting down Christians wherever they were hiding and breaking into homes to drag out Christians as though he had a perfect right to do so. His actions proved that he wasn't interested in what the Ten Commandments said. If he was, he wouldn't have accepted the false witnesses giving testimony at Stephen's trial.

With Saul's name becoming known as a feared persecutor against the new church community, the new believers looked for other places to live while the apostles remained in Jerusalem. Some found refuge in the city of Damascus, a 5-day journey from Jerusalem,

What do modern day Christians say about their persecution? A pastor of a church in an area surrounded by armed terrorists explained it this way: "First I fast," he said. "Then I find." When that pastor found a person open to the Gospel, he would become friends and soon he could eat in their house and tell them about Jesus. As it was too dangerous to bring such a person to church, the pastor took his evangelism to different places.

That same pastor started holding devotionals 5-days-a-week for city employees. One day, a man from another religion challenged him. "If your god is true, he will heal me." The challenger had a kidney stone. The pastor took the prayer request back to all the pastors he knew and that Sunday, about 35 church congregations prayed for that sick man. The pastor was able to tell that the Lord delivered the man from his kidney stone that very week. And while smiling broadly, the pastor could also say, "The healed man is now a Christian."

Over 20 years ago, an Egyptian girl converted from her family's religion to Christianity. Firstly, the girl talked with a Christian girl at school about Jesus when she was 13. She unwisely then asked her father for a Bible and he beat her severely for it. But when she was 19, the girl began to work for a Christian and was able to read all his Christian books. She converted to Christianity when she was 21 despite her family's opposition and had to move to another city to live.

When the young lady approached churches to try to get some help, they refused to do so at first. After living on the streets for two months, somebody did start helping her. But during that time the Egyptian lady saw the needs of other young Christian women like herself. Families were tracking down their daughters and making trouble for them. When asked why today she carries on a ministry to help Christian woman and takes the big risks she does, the lady will reply: “Jesus Christ is worth doing this for. We have to. It’s the gift of suffering for Him.”

A pastor living in an area of widespread persecution was asked how he prepared the believers to face the persecution. He answered, ‘Build them up in the Word of God.’

In another country, a pastor displeased an armed mob by insisting that a dead Christian man wanted a Christian burial rather than a ritual religious cremation. The pastor was attacked and beaten. He was saved from the mob and taken back to a Christian widow’s house; but he couldn’t sleep for a week after the attack.

The pastor read his Bible and understood that he must forgive his attackers, because the Lord says that if we don’t forgive others, we won’t be forgiven by Him. God helped the pastor to forgive them by reminding him of the free forgiveness he himself had received.

Even though it’s beyond our understanding, we must trust that God will work for His own good purposes even in times of persecution. Such trials may be the means of strengthening our own faith and our Christian witness, especially while we pray and care for our persecuted brethren in other parts of the world.

In Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verse 3, it says: “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them. Remember those who are suffering, as though you were suffering as they are.”

We're to remember in our prayers all believers in Christ worldwide who are in prison for no other reason than that they refuse to turn away from their faith in Christ. Where possible, we're to do acts of kindness for them, for we are united with them in the church body under Christ. Some will even send postcards to the prisoners to encourage them. We are to sympathise with these brethren because we don't know when our own time of suffering will come. Let us care for one another, as God cares for us.

*The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.*

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