WHY DID THE APOSTLES NOT FLEE JERUSALEM?

Posted on May 11, 2022 by Eddie

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scatteredÂ throughout Judea and Samaria.
Category: Observations

At the start of Acts 8, following on from the martyrdom of Stephen we read:

> *On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scatteredÂ throughout Judea and Samaria.*
>
> *Acts 8:1*

I've often wondered why it was that the Apostles stayed in the city in the face of persecution, while the others had to flee. After all, you would assume that the leaders of the church would be in more danger than the rest of the believers. If people like Philip had to rush off to Samaria, how come Peter and the rest were able to stay safely in Jerusalem.

One suggestion that I have read is that the Apostles stayed in the city to care for the church, though if all of the church had fled, that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense.

I have recently come up with a suggestion that may explain why the disciples were able to stay in Jerusalem. It is speculative, but it fits in with the broader narrative of Acts. It's also probable that lots of people have come up with this idea in the past, so I won't claim that it is original.

By the time we get to Acts chapters 6-8, the majority of the believers were drawn from the Jewish diaspora community. The disciples and the first believers were predominantly Hebraic Jews, but on the day of Pentecost, thousands from the diaspora - Hellenistic Jews - were converted. That led to disputes within the church over the way in which widows were cared for. This dispute was solved by appointing a group of people - all of them Hellenistic Jews - to take care of feeding the needy in the community.

Stephen, whose martyrdom started off the whole persecution, was one of these Hellenistic "deacons". During his defence before the Sanhedrin, Stephen condemned the Jewish leaders and went so far as to say that God did not live in the Temple. This would have been offensive to the Sanhedrin coming from anyone, but that a diaspora Jew, one who didn't grow up in Israel speaking Aramaic and Hebrew to come up with these things would be doubly offensive.

My suggestion is that the ensuing persecution, was directed primarily at the believers from a diaspora/Hellenistic background (who were in the majority). Thus Philip had to flee for his life, but

Peter was relative safe and could stay in Jerusalem (and even return there after a trip to Samaria later in chapter 8).

This is further complicated by the fact that the persecution was masterminded by Saul (later, Paul) who was, himself, a diaspora Jew. However, Paul had moved to Jerusalem at an early age and studied under a leading Rabbi. It would be entirely consistent with human nature for a member of the diaspora, who had moved to the capital to be prejudiced against others from the diaspora - especially if they had strange ideas.

As I say, this is speculative, but given the key role that believers from the diaspora play in the early life of the church, I think it is an idea worth musing on.

I apologise for the long silence. Over the past few weeks, I've had two bouts of a bad virus. One was definitely Covid and the other was just nasty. I've got a massive backlog of stuff to do, but I'll try and get back to posting regularly.