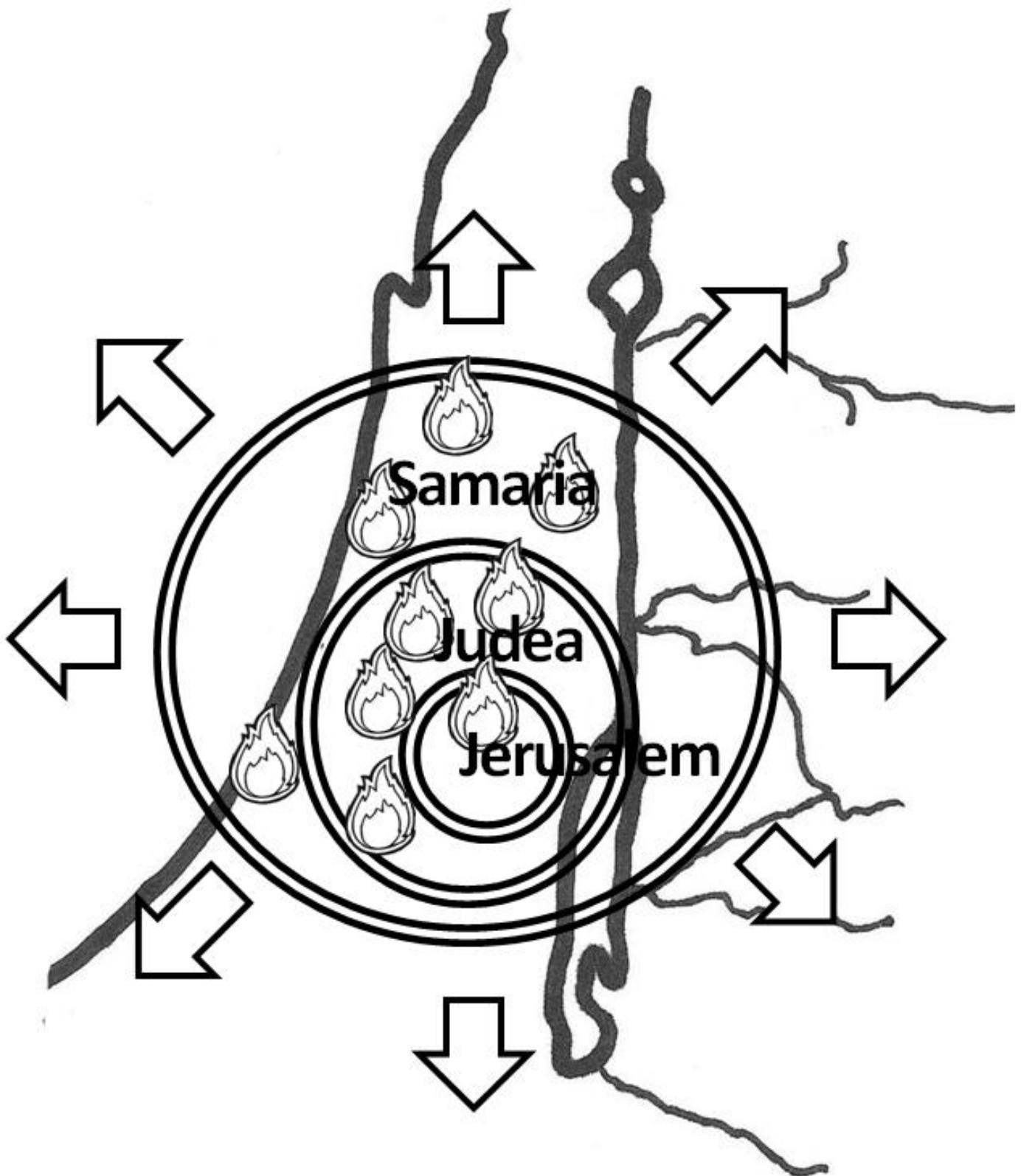


The Persecuted Church SPREAD



But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus.
(Acts. 7:55)



Bible Study:



Last week, we learned how the filling of the Holy made Peter and the apostles bold in their preaching, even in the face of adversity. This week, the adversity grows – Stephen is murdered (Acts 6:1-8:3). As Joseph said to his brothers when they were reunited in Egypt “what you meant for evil, God meant for good,” the same is true in this instance. The persecution that began, largely under the leadership of Saul, caused the church to scatter from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria!



The Gospel is about redemption – restoring a broken world back to God. Jesus’ work on the cross accomplished this, and the story of Jesus’ church (his redeemed people) bore that fact out as the persecution attempted to squelch the growth!

The Good news of Jesus *is* Good News to those who open their hearts to Him. For those who don’t, it is offensive. Jesus said you are either for me or against me; there is no in-between. However, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to take the sinners’ places. When we realize we were haters of the Good News before coming to Christ, we can understand persecution from a different perspective. That of compassion and desire to share the Good News even with toxic, hostile people in our lives

Application:

Head: **What did we learn?**

Q: Why were the religious leaders angry with Stephen? A: Because of his devotion to Jesus.

Q: What did Stephen tell the Leaders? A: They were rejecting God, just like leaders in the past who rejected Joseph, Moses and the prophets.

Q: What was the end result of persecution? A: The people boldly proclaimed the gospel and the good news spread!

Heart: **Memory verse.**

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus. (Acts. 7:55)

Hands: **How does this affect the way I live?**

Ultimately, people either Love Jesus, repent, and follow Him, or they join Satan in hating Him. Choose this day whom you will serve. Will you be like Stephen holding fast to Jesus even in adversity, and see God’s glory, or like the blind leaders who spread corruption and death?