

The Answer; Acts 8:1-3

I. The Question

A. How do we respond to the attacks we receive as Christians today?

1. A bakery just had to close it's doors
2. Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton
3. "We repeat, however, that the State does have an important and legitimate interest in preserving and protecting the health of the pregnant woman, whether she be a resident of the State or a non-resident who seeks medical consultation and treatment there, and that it has still another important and legitimate interest in protecting the **potentiality** of human life." ¹

B. I disagree with both of these things; but how am I going to respond to them?

C. I want to look at the early church's response to persecution and attacks

D. Maybe we should take a page out of their playbook

II. Culture

A. The Christians in the first century were under persecution for the majority of the 1st Century

B. From the Jews

1. Acts 12:1–5 (ESV); ¹ About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.
2. Acts 13:44–46 (ESV); ⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.
3. Acts 14:1–7 (ESV); ¹ Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.
4. Acts 14:19–22 (ESV); ¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the

¹ Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113, 162

disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

5. The jealous Jews in Thessalonica broke into Jason's home looking for Paul and then dragged him before the courts when they couldn't find Paul. Then they followed Paul to Berea and caused more problems for Paul. Acts 17:1-13
6. There are many other texts we can go to that show us how the Jews persecuted the Christians
7. I'm sure that a baker had more to fear than just losing his business

C. From Rome

1. Acts 18:1-2 (ESV); ¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them,
2. "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome." ²
3. Some scholars say that "Chrestus" is Christ (This was the original spelling but the 'e' was changed to an 'i' in some of the earlier manuscripts)
4. The riot at Ephesus; the people of the city shouted for two hours, "great is Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:23-28)
5. "Nero fiddled while Rome burned" in AD 64 and he blamed it on the Christians
6. John was exiled to Patmos under the persecution of Domitian

D. Christians were under attack from both the Jews and the Romans

E. But we (Christians) have experienced decades of peace here in the US

F. We even claim (and rightly so) that our country was founded on Christian principles

G. Many of our founding fathers practiced Christianity in some form

H. So, we find ourselves at a loss for words and actions now that we have come under persecution from our own government

I. Many of our persecutors are now emboldened against us because of our government

III. The Answer

A. What do we do?

B. How do we act?

C. What do we say?

1. We become very vocal about our mistreatment
2. We demand that things return to the way they used to be and invoke the religious freedom that we once enjoyed
3. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"
4. But our freedom of religion, while enjoyable, may have been a hinderance to God's purpose of all people being saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4)
5. With this in mind, let's look at the 1st Century church's response to their persecution

D. The early church flourished under persecution

1. Jesus is crucified; 12 people speak 53 days later and 3000 people are saved (Acts 2)
2. Peter and John are preaching in Solomon's Portico; they are arrested for preaching the Gospel; 2000 more people are saved (a total of 5000)
3. God deals with Ananias and Sapphira

² The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (Translated by J.C.Rolfe), Divus Claudias 25

4. Acts 5:12–14 (ESV); ¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,
 5. The Lord **added** multitudes of men and women (remember, we are at 5000)
 6. There is a complaint about how the Greek speaking Jewish widows are treated; the church chooses 7 men to take care of it (Deacons)
 7. Acts 6:7 (ESV); And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
 8. Up to now, the Lord has been adding people to the church
 9. Now He starts **multiplying**
 10. Acts 9:29–31 (ESV); ²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. ³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it **multiplied**.
 11. The people call Herod a god and God had him eaten by worms
 12. Acts 12:24 (ESV); But the word of God increased and **multiplied**.
 13. Acts 12:24 (NVI); Pero la palabra de Dios seguía extendiéndose y difundiéndose.
 14. 5000 + multitudes = 10,000 (just a guess here)
 15. 10,000 x 2 = 20,000 (multiplied)
 16. 20,000 x 2 = 40,000 (multiplied)
 17. 40,000 x 2 = 80,000 (multiplied)
 18. People were preaching the Gospel regardless of the threat of Jail or death
- E. The Church's Answer
1. Prayer
 - a) Acts 4:23-29
 - b) Acts 16:23–25 (ESV); ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,
 2. Preaching
 - a) Acts 5:17-21
 - b) Acts 5:40-42
 - c) Acts 8:4 (ESV); Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.
 - d) Acts 28:30–31 (ESV); ³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.
- IV. Right or Duty
- A. It is time for us to stop complaining about the government taking away our freedom of religion
 1. There was no First Amendment to the US Constitution when the apostles were spreading the Gospel
 2. They did so in constant fear of incarceration and death
 3. Their answer to that fear? Prayer and preaching!
 - B. We may fear that we will no longer be able to worship unhindered

- C. We may fear that the United States government is slowly taking away are religious freedoms
- D. It is time for us to pray!
- E. It is time for us to preach!