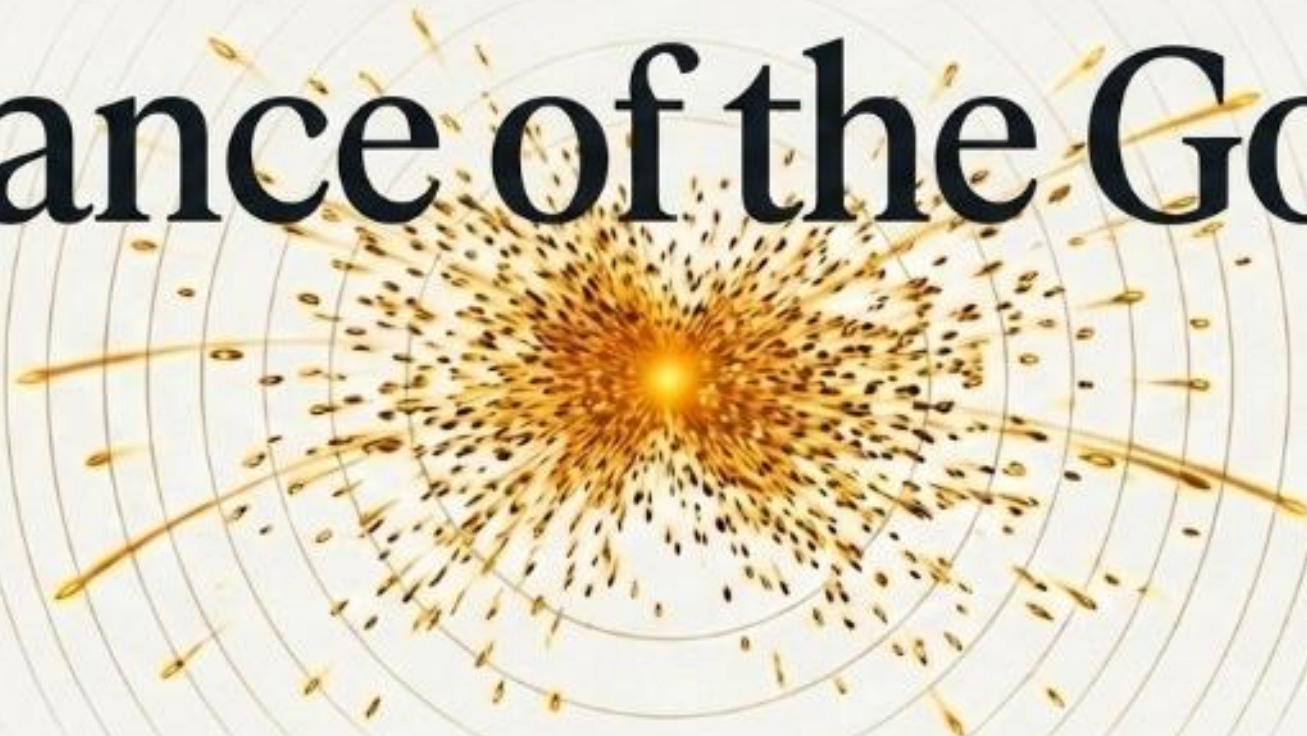


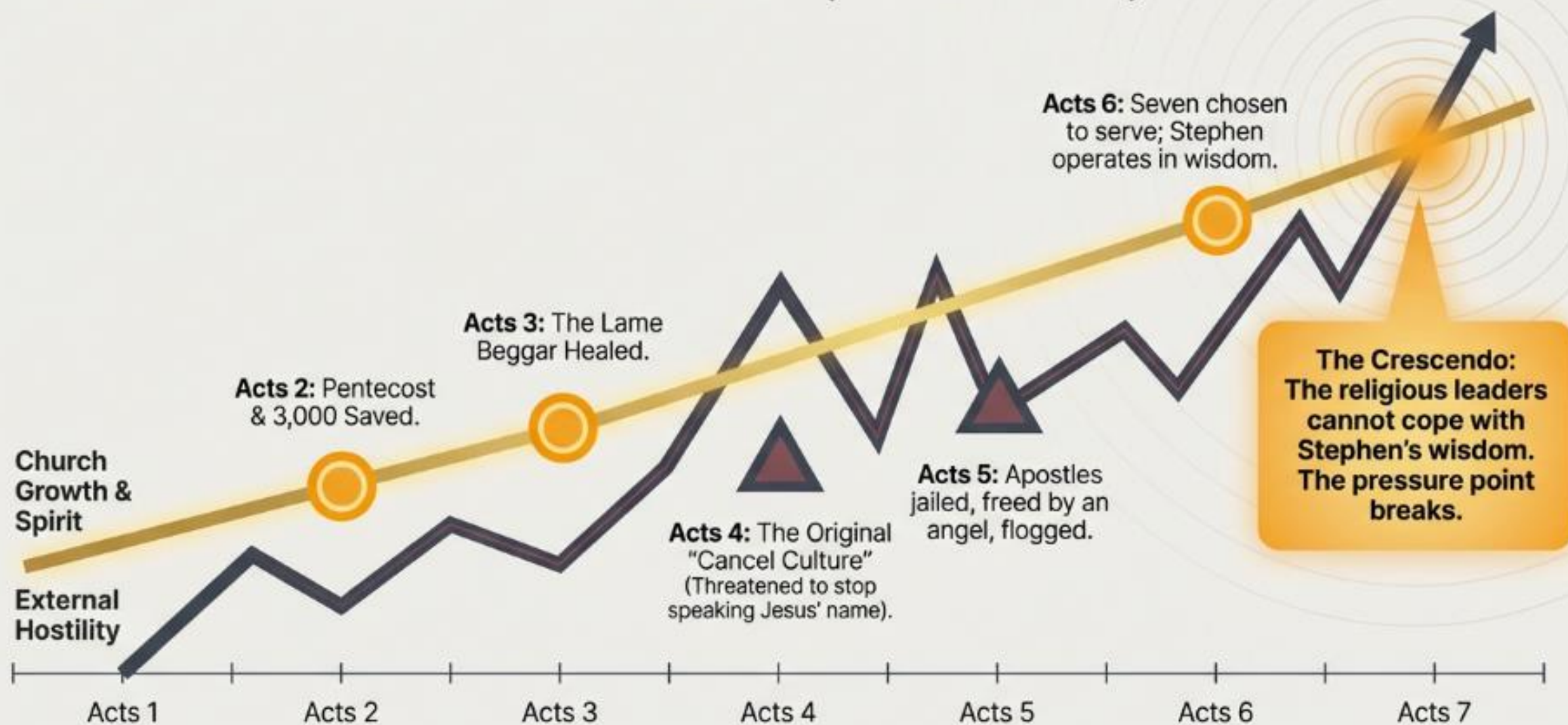
Persecution & The Advance of the Gospel

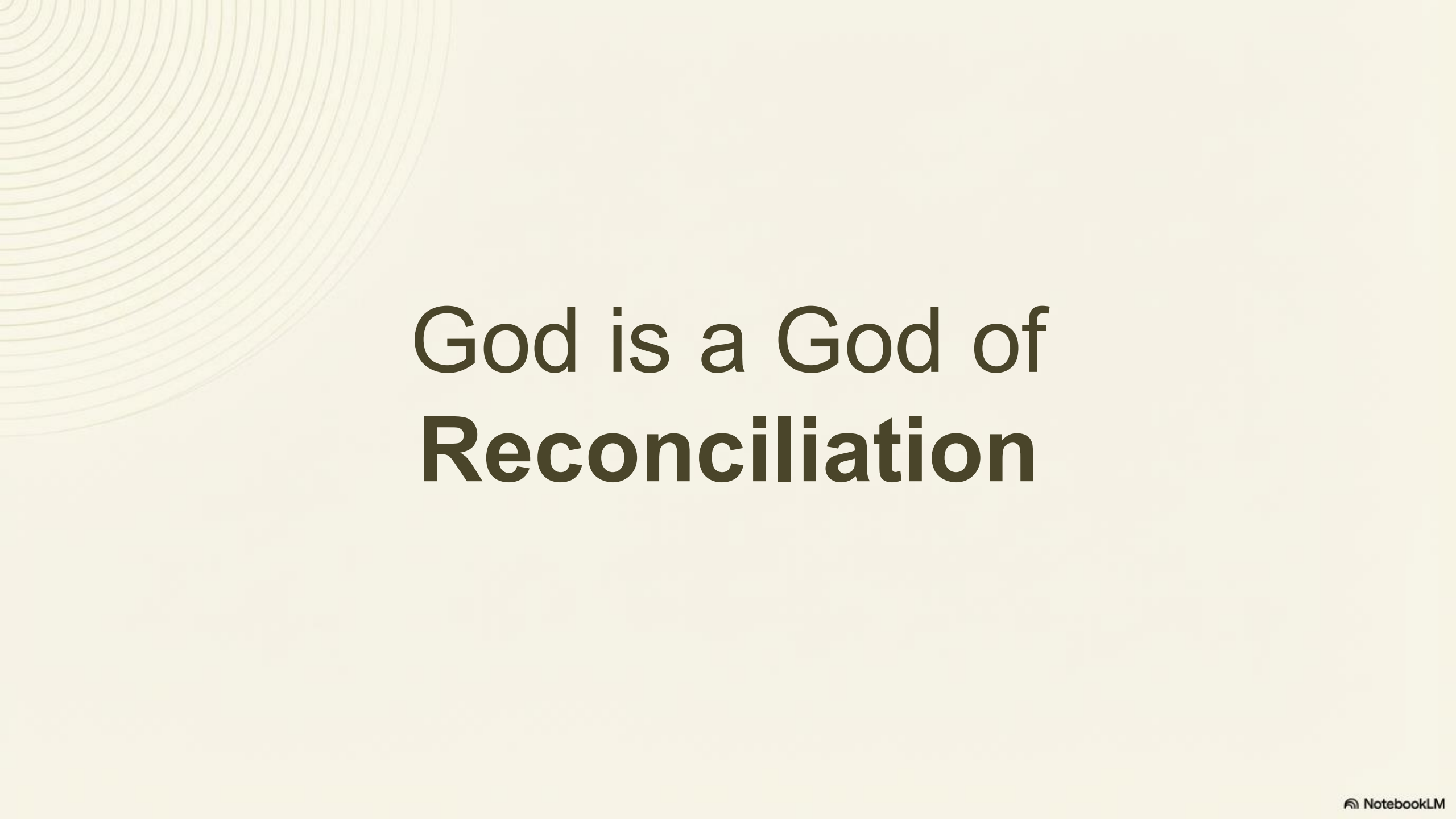


How the Greatest Threat to the Early Church
Became the Catalyst for its Global Expansion

An analysis of Acts 6:1–8
and the Providence of God.

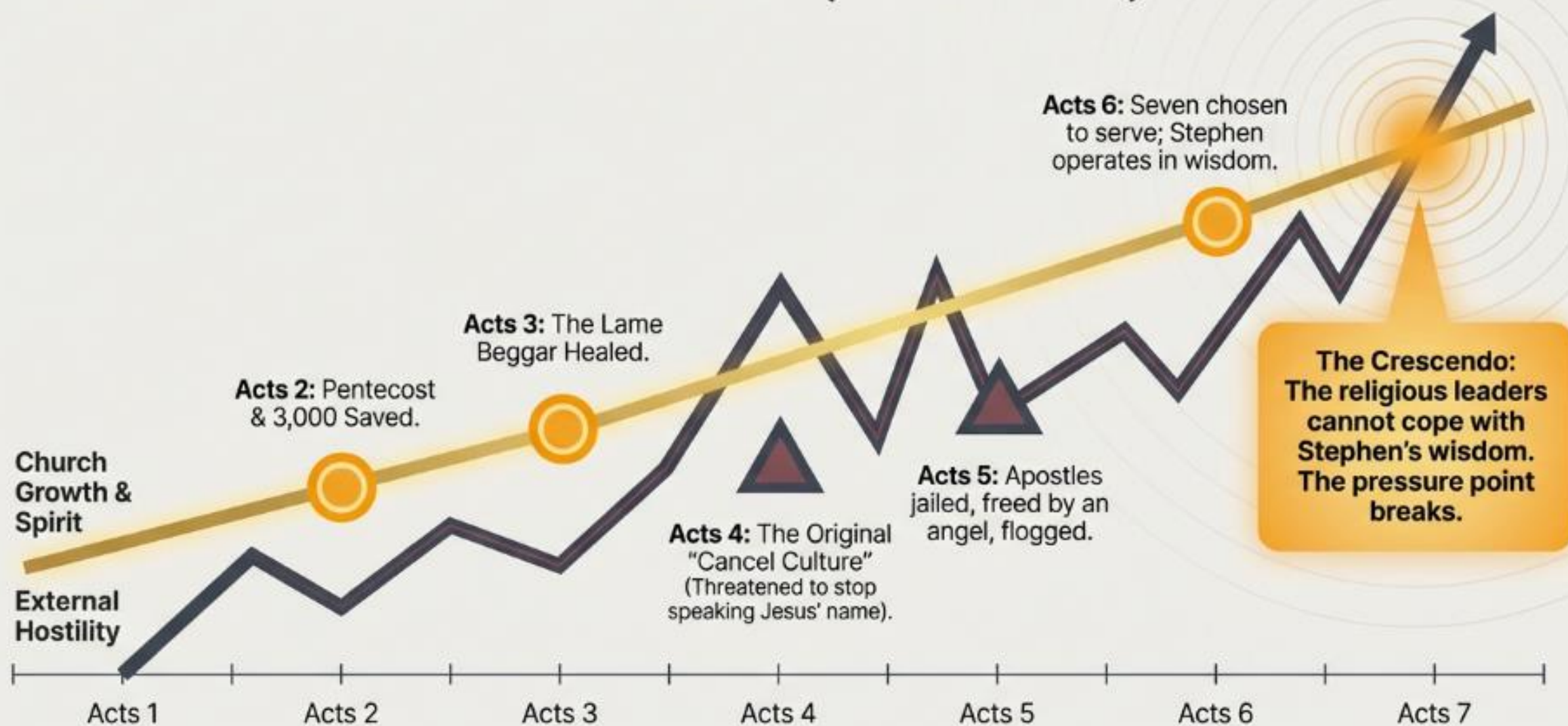
The Pressure Cooker (Acts 1–7)





God is a God of **Reconciliation**

The Pressure Cooker (Acts 1–7)



58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Acts 7:58

NASB95

The First Martyr and the Architect of Persecution



The Faithful Sacrifice: Stephen

Lord, do not hold this sin against them!
(Acts 7:60)

Stephen fulfills Matthew 5:44, praying for his enemies as he is stoned outside the city.



The Chilling Approval: Saul

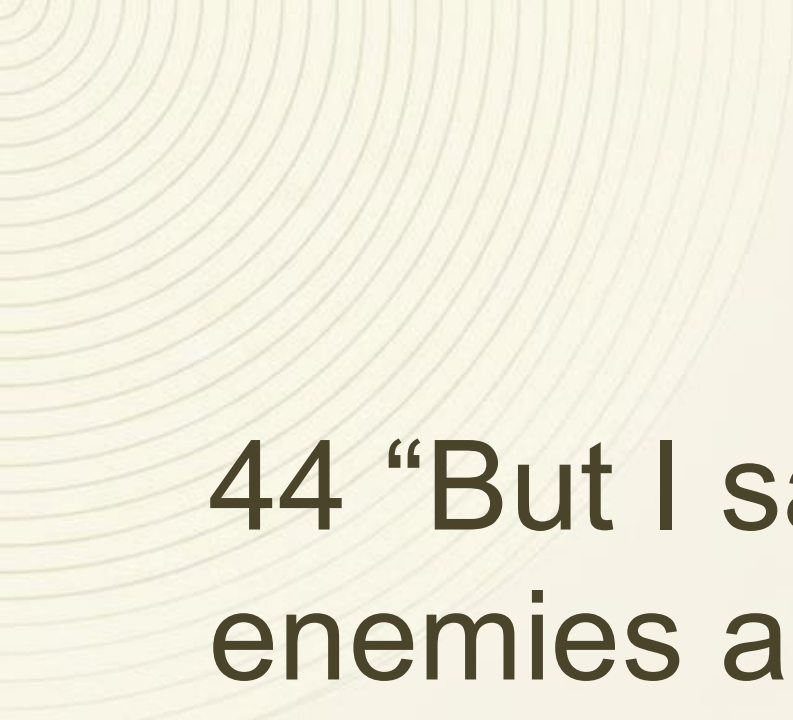
"...coolly applauding the murder of Stephen,
a heinous sin. — Archibald Robertson

The witnesses lay their coats at the feet of a young Pharisee named Saul. He is in "hearty agreement" (Acts 8:1) with the execution.

60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7:60

NASB95



44 “But I say to you, love your
enemies and pray for those who
persecute you,

Matthew 5:44

NASB95

1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:1–8

NASB95

2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

Acts 8:1–8

NASB95

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. 6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Acts 8:1–8

NASB95

7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Acts 8:1–8

NASB95

1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death...

Acts 8:1

NASB95

Paul himself will later confess that he felt so (Acts 22:20), coolly applauding the murder of Stephen, a heinous sin (Rom. 1:32). It is a gruesome picture.

-Archibald Robertson

20 'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

Acts 22:20

NASB95

32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1:32

NASB95

The Concentric Expansion Model

Once the prerequisite is met, the text establishes a trajectory that mimics a stone dropping into a pond—an epicenter radiating outward in progressively larger, unstoppable waves.



And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:1b

NASB95

The Great Persecution Begins



For the first time, historic religious rivals unite with a single, common goal: the utter destruction of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. Saul begins ravaging (*lymainō*: *causing extensive destruction*) the church, dragging men and women to prison.

21 yet he has no firm root in himself,
but is only temporary, and when
affliction or *persecution* arises
because of the word, immediately he
falls away.

Matthew 13:21

NASB95

It was at first persecution from the Sadducees, but this attack on Stephen was from the Pharisees so that both parties are now united in a general persecution that deserves the adjective “great.

-Archibald Robertson

The Great Persecution Begins



For the first time, historic religious rivals unite with a single, common goal: the utter destruction of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. Saul begins ravaging (*lymainō*: *causing extensive destruction*) the church, dragging men and women to prison.

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or *persecution*, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:35

NASB95

18 I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18

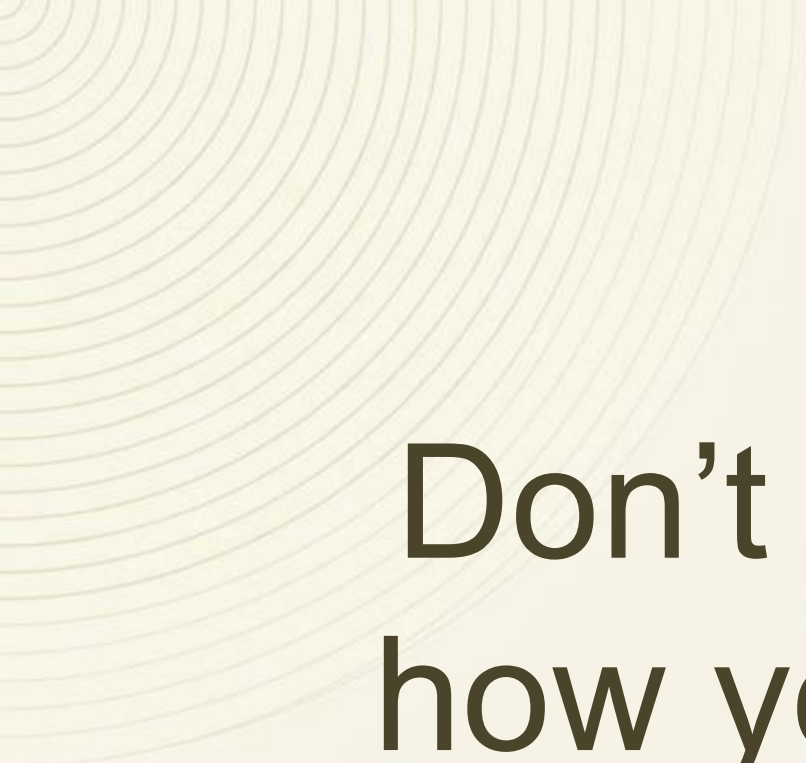
NKJV

Providence of God

20 “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Genesis 50:20

NASB95



Don't let your past define
how you think God can or
cannot use you.

15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:15–16

NASB95

2 Some devout men buried Stephen,
and made loud lamentation over him.

Acts 8:2

NASB95

3 But Saul began ravaging the church,
entering house after house, and
dragging off men and women, he
would put them in prison.

Acts 8:3

NASB95

4 “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Acts 22:4–5

NASB95

4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

Acts 8:4

NASB95

Not a Retreat, But a Sowing

diasparentes

(from *diaspeirō*)

Root of the term *diaspora*.

Used in Acts 8:4: "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."



This verb **does not imply a chaotic, fearful retreat**.
It literally means to **disperse**, to sow in separate or scattered places.
The blood of the martyr became the seed of the church.

The Will of God Demystified

We often paralyze ourselves asking for a spoken word (special revelation) while ignoring the **written word** we already possess.

The Obstacle



When the door to Jerusalem closed, the scattered believers didn't assume the Great Commission was cancelled. They didn't wait for a new special revelation.

The Path Forward



Takeaway: **The will of God is the advance of the Gospel.** If one door closes, you continue fulfilling the calling “as you are going” in whatever new place you find yourself.

Don't seek a *spoken word*
from God if you aren't
devouring His *Written Word*.

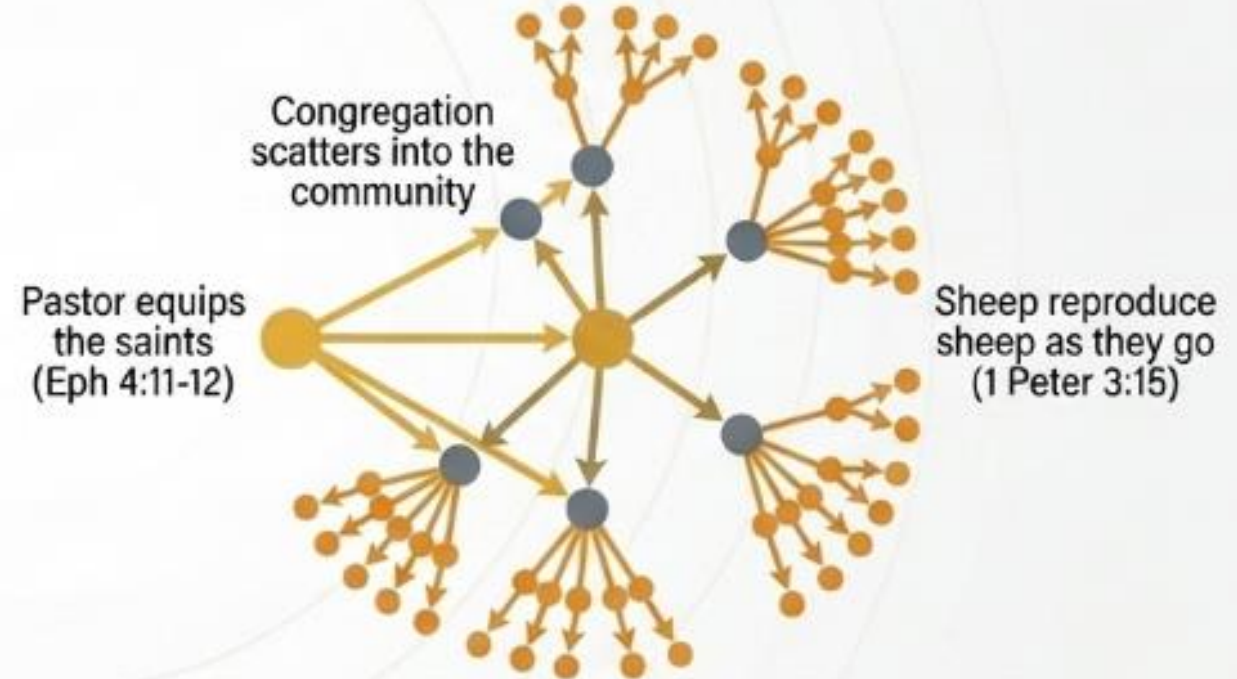
The Everyday Evangelist Model

The Cultural View (The Bottleneck)



Status: Clergy-dependent.

The Biblical View (The Network)



Status: Every believer is a herald (*euangelion*). The men and women driven from Jerusalem did not wait for apostles; they preached the word themselves.

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

1 Peter 3:15

NASB95

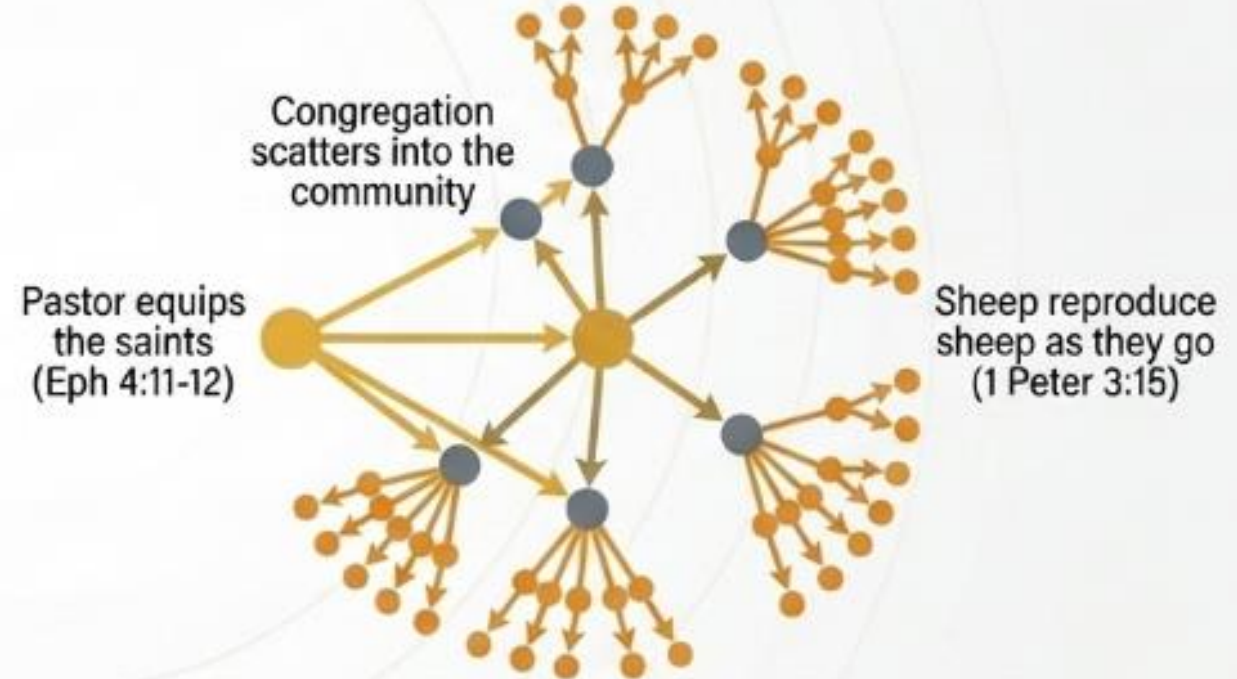
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11 And He gave some as apostles,
and some as prophets, and some as
evangelists, and some as pastors and
teachers, 12 for the equipping of the
saints for the work of service, to the
building up of the body of Christ;

Ephesians 4:11–12

NASB95

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:15–16

NASB95

35 “... Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

John 4:35

NASB95

5 Philip went down to the city of
Samaria and began proclaiming Christ
to them.

Acts 8:5

NASB95

8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

Acts 21:8

NASB95

9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

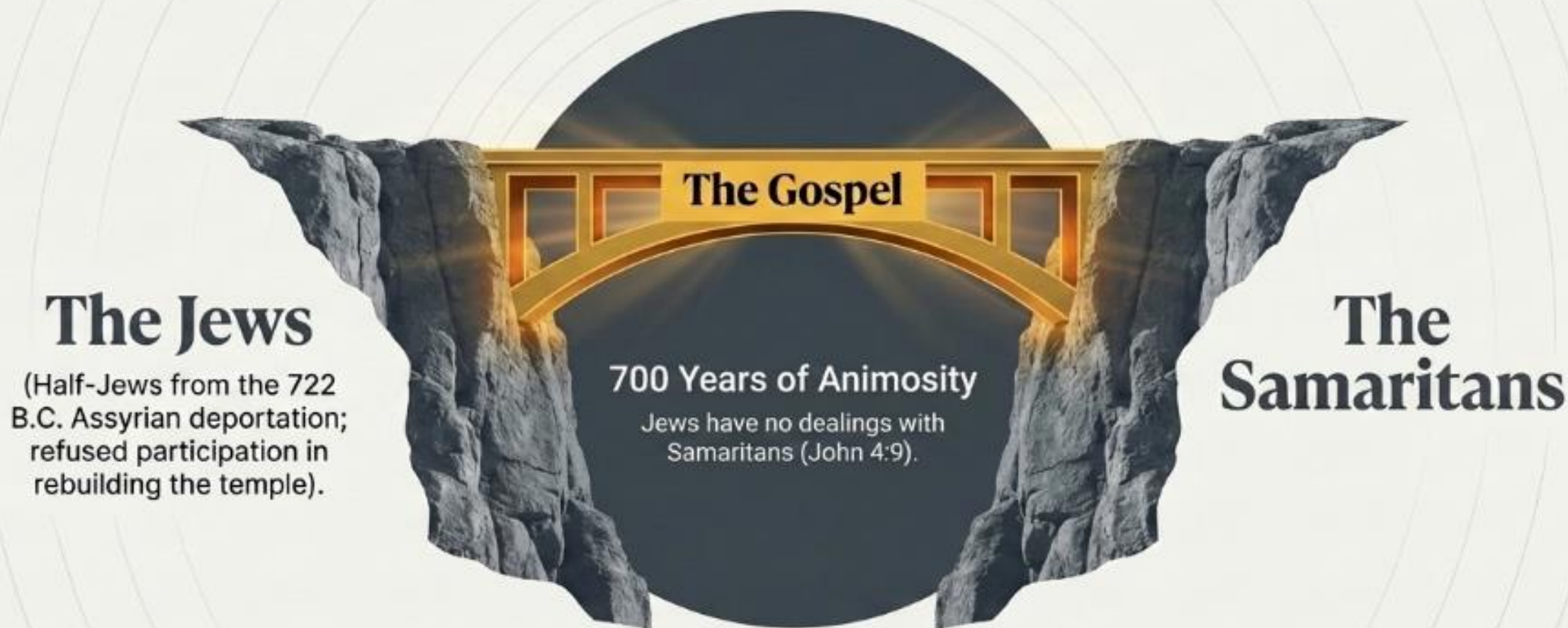
John 4:9

NASB95

The Samaritans were half-Jews who had come into existence as a result of the intermarriage between peoples brought in during the deportation by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. with those that remained. Later, during the return from exile by Jews to rebuild the temple (Ezra 4:1–5), the Samaritans were refused a part in the reconstruction, and this began the long-standing animosity that is reflected in several New Testament texts (e.g., John 4:9).

-Walter Elwell

Superseding the Divide: Philip in Samaria



The Jews

(Half-Jews from the 722 B.C. Assyrian deportation; refused participation in rebuilding the temple).

The Gospel

700 Years of Animosity

Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9).

The Samaritans

Philip (a Hellenistic Jew) goes down to Samaria and proclaims Christ. The Gospel acts as the ultimate force of horizontal and vertical reconciliation. Racial differences did not stop the mission.



Racial differences did not
stop the mission

Trials did not stop the
mission

What is stopping us?

6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Acts 8:6

NASB95

20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

Mark 16:20

NASB95

1 The first account I composed,
Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began*
to do and teach,

Acts 1:1

NASB95

7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:7

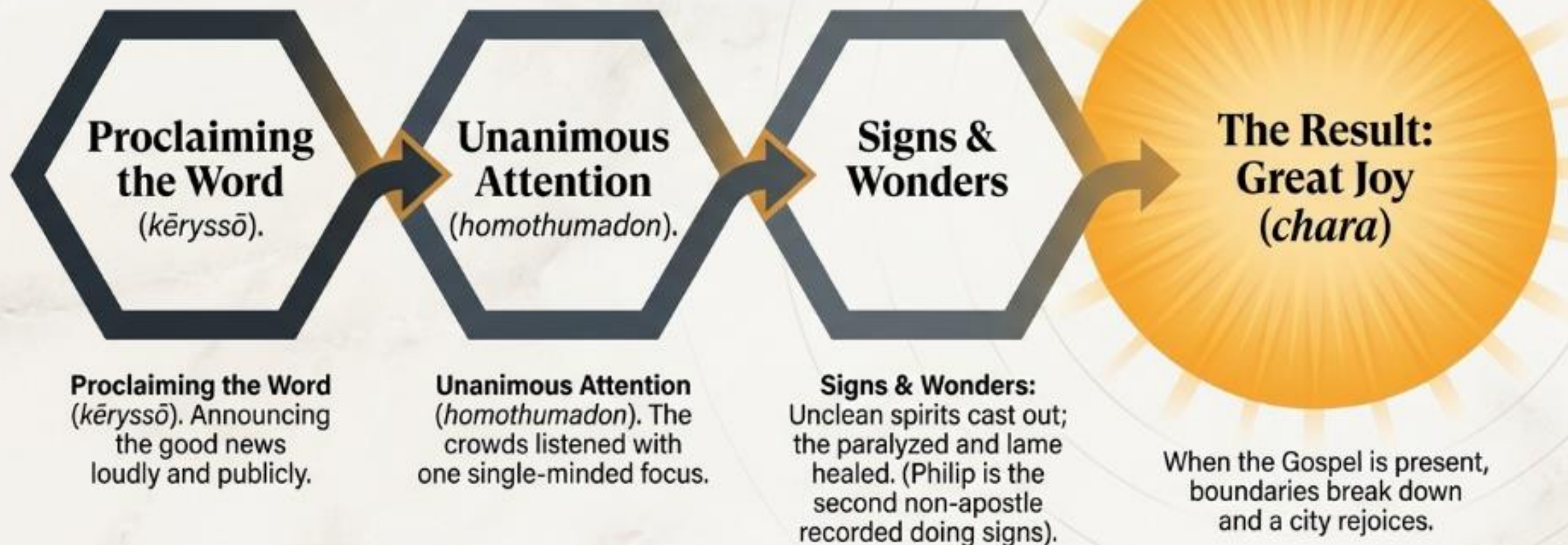
NASB95

8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Acts 8:8

NASB95

The Anatomy of the Advance (Acts 8:5-8)



The Unstoppable Equation

**Persecution + Divine Providence
= Unstoppable Expansion**

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution... in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37)

Persecution is no match for the Church of Jesus Christ. The very friction intended to extinguish the light was the wind God used to scatter the seed to the ends of the earth.

The Paradox of Providence

You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good... (Genesis 50:20)

Action	The Human Intent (Saul / Satan)	The Divine Outcome (Providence)
Persecuting the Believers	Silence the message through fear and imprisonment.	Mobilized an army of emergency preachers.
Driving the Church from Jerusalem	Destroy the epicenter of the movement.	Forced the fulfillment of Acts 1:8—pushing the Gospel into Judea and Samaria.
Empowering Saul of Tarsus	Create the ultimate weapon to ruin the Church.	Position the foremost sinner to receive mercy and become the world's greatest missionary (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

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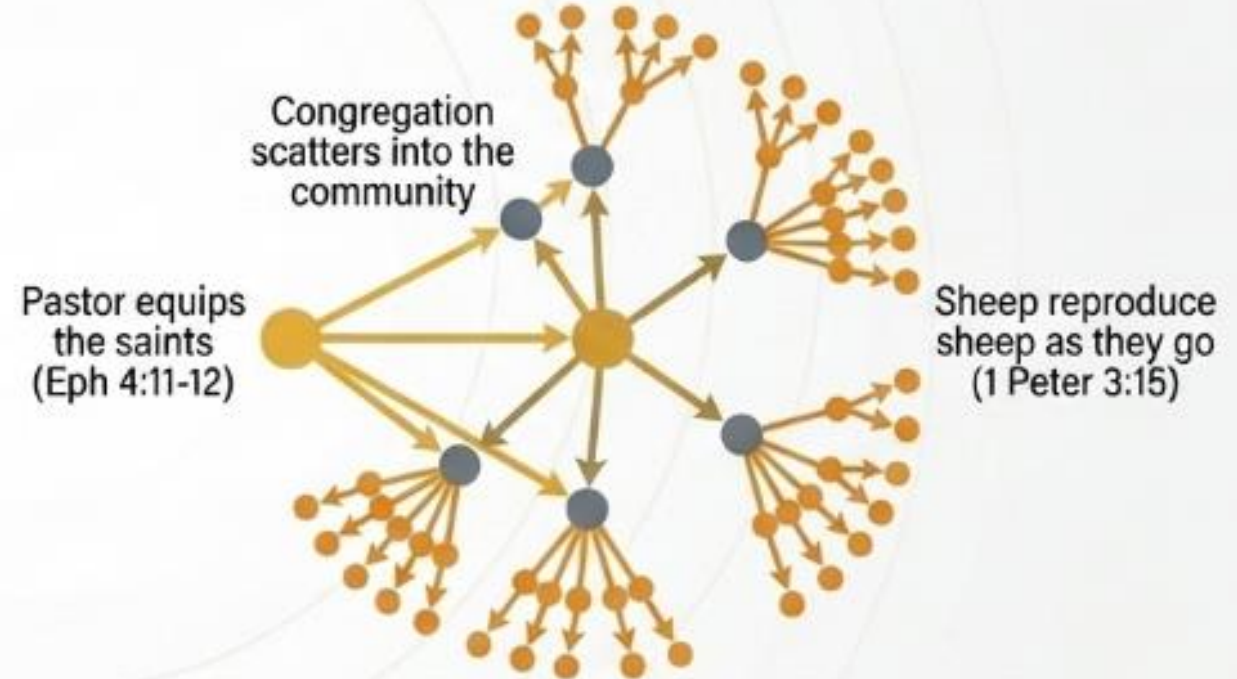
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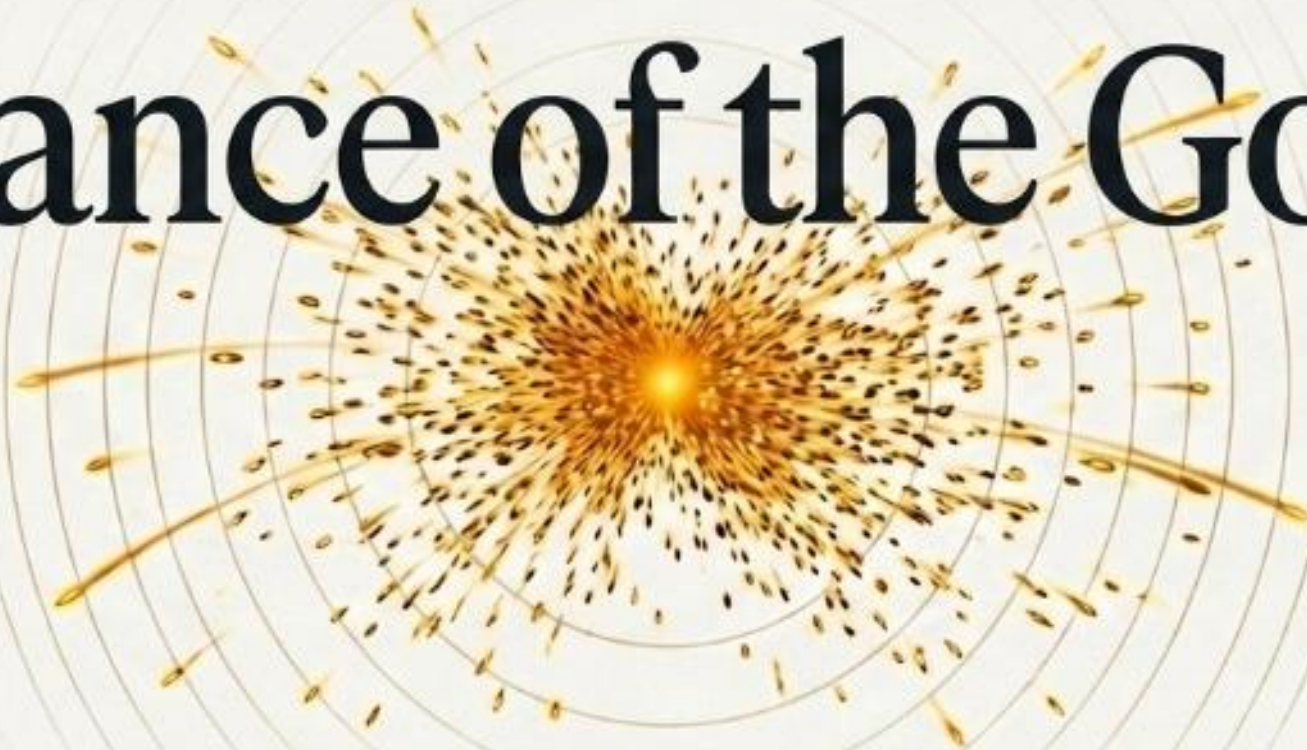
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***Please have music ready to
play at the end of service***