

Acts Chapter 8

Verses 1-4: The earlier persecutions of chapters 4 and 5 involved persecutions of the Christian leaders, the apostles, by the Jewish leaders, primarily the priests. This persecution is much more severe, since it involves the laypeople and since it comes from the unrelenting hands of Saul. Yet God's work prospers in that the gospel is widely spread outside Jerusalem.

Acts 8:1 "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

“Was consenting”: Paul’s murderous hatred of all believers was manifested here in his attitude toward Stephen (1 Tim. 1:13-15).

“Scattered”: Led by a Jew named Saul of Tarsus, the persecution scattered the Jerusalem fellowship and led to the first missionary outreach of the church. Not all members of the Jerusalem church were forced to flee. The Hellenists, because Stephen was likely one, bore the brunt of the persecution (11:19-20).

“Except the apostles”: They remained because of their devotion to Christ, to care for those at Jerusalem, and to continue evangelizing the region (9:26-27).

This persecution seemed to be vented against the followers of Jesus at Jerusalem. The thousands who had joined the church were a threat to the rulers of the temple. So many, even devout Hebrews had joined this great Christian movement.

These leaders of the temple thought they must stamp out this Christian movement, before it overthrew the worship in the temple. One thing they feared so much was the great miracles that were done by the apostles in the name of Jesus. This persecution served its purpose in scattering the people for fear they would lose their lives.

Acts 8:2 "And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him."

“Devout men”: Probably pious Jews (2:5; Luke 2:25), who publicly protested Stephen’s death.

When a cruel, selfish man dies hardly anyone notices. Stephen was the opposite; he was a faithful, just, hardworking man. He loved others more than himself. He even asked God to forgive the men who killed him. He was a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ with signs and wonders following. Stephen would be sorely missed. This is the reason for the lamentation.

Acts 8:3 "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed [them] to prison."

“Havoc of the church” meaning “Ravaging”, used in extrabiblical writings to refer to the destruction of a city or mangling by a wild animal.

Saul was a Pharisee. He felt that he was doing God a favor by rounding up all these Christians and punishing them. He had no regard for their lives at all, whether they were men or women. He even went into their homes, and drug them out, and imprisoned them.

Acts 8:4 "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."

“Went everywhere”: This Greek word is used frequently in Acts for missionary efforts (verse 40; 9:32; 13:6; 14:24; 15:3, 41; 16:6; 18:23; 19:1, 21; 20:2).

No one understands why, but the greatest move of Christianity is always during the greatest persecution. The fact that Saul was hunting them down and arresting them just made them more determined to spread the good news of the gospel.

Acts 8:5 "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them."

“Philip” (6:5). The first missionary named in Scripture and the first to be given the title “evangelist” (21:8).

Philip was one of the seven chosen by the Jerusalem church to assist the apostles in the administration of daily affairs. Like Stephen, Philip was far more than an assistant helping with physical needs. He was a Spirit-filled evangelist (21:8).

“The city of Samaria”: The ancient capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, which eventually fell to the Assyrians (722 B.C.), after over 200 years of idolatry and rebellion against God. After resettling many of the people in other lands, the Assyrians located Gentiles from other areas into the region, resulting in a mix of Jews and Gentiles who became known as Samaritans (see notes on John 4:4, 20).

When the Christians were scattered beyond Jerusalem due to the intense persecution by Saul, Philip was the first to take the gospel to non-Jewish people. God confirmed his message with miracles (verses 6-7), so that many believed. God also sent Philip to a Gentile from Ethiopia (verse 27), and so used Philip to expand the work into North Africa.

Philip had a brief itinerant ministry throughout Judea and Samaria which ended at Caesarea (verse 40). He apparently settled there, for Caesarea is described as his home when he is introduced over 20 years later (21:8). Philip the evangelist must not be confused with Philip the apostle (John 1:43; Acts 1:13).

We see that Philip took the message of Christ to what had been thought of by the Jews as a heathen nation. If he couldn't preach Christ one place, then he would just go to another place and preach. Perhaps, had it not been for the great persecution, the gospel would not have been spread so widely.

Acts 8:6 "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

Just as many followed Jesus because of the miracles He did, we see here, that many believed because of the miracles which God did through Philip. We read in John what Jesus said about this very thing,

John 14:11 "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." You see, it takes a miracle for some to believe.

Acts 8:7 "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed [with them]: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed."

“Unclean spirits” (see note on 5:16).

The spirit of Satan or demon spirits cannot stay where the Spirit of God is, because the Light (Spirit of God), does away with darkness. The way to get rid of darkness is just apply the Light. These miraculous healings were for a sign to these unbelievers.

Acts 8:8 "And there was great joy in that city."

You can certainly understand the joy. The lame could walk, the sick of palsy were healed, and people were set free to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole city was touched by this revival.

Acts 8:9 "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:"

“Sorcery”: (also called magic). This word originally referred to the practices of the Medo-Persians: A mixture of science and superstition, including astrology, divination, and the occult (see notes on Deut. 18:9-12; Rev. 9:21).

Simon was a magician who practiced controlling other people's minds. He had a great number of these people believing he was Messiah, because he hypnotized them and told them this. Once he had them under his spell, he could tell them anything and they would believe it.

Verses 10-11 “The Great Power of God”: Simon claimed to be united to God The early church Fathers claimed he was one of the founders of Gnosticism, which asserted there were a series of divine emanations reaching up to God. They were called “Powers,” and the people believed he was at the top of the ladder.

Acts 8:10 "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God."

Their great regard for him was because he had control of their mind and will. Many young people today all over the world have been tricked by Satan's crowd and are blindly following, because they have turned over their mind and will to these evil people.

Acts 8:11 "And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries."

They brainwash them and they believe they are doing the right thing. When they are found, they must be deprogrammed to be able to use their own will and function as a normal human being.

Acts 8:12 "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

As we said earlier, the way to do away with darkness is to apply the Light of Jesus. When Philip presented Jesus Christ (the Light of the World), they were freed from this darkness in their life and received the Light freely.

Men and women were baptized. There was no difference then and there is no difference now in God's sight. Women, as well as men, must repent of their sins and receive Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Everyone must do this for himself.

Acts 8:13 "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

“Simon ... believed”: His belief was motivated by purely selfish reasons and could never be considered genuine (John 2:23-24). He saw it as an external act useful to gain the power he believed Philip possessed. By following Philip, he also could maintain contact with his former audience.

This Simon the sorcerer, could not deny the miracles. He was wise enough to know that there was nothing fake about these miracles.

The Light always does away with darkness, and it was no different with Simon. Simon could not resist and he was baptized as well.

Acts 8:14-15 "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:" "Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:"

“Receive the Holy Ghost” (see note on 2:4).

Acts 8:16 "(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)"

“For as yet he was fallen upon none of them”: This verse does not support the false notion that Christians receive the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation. This was a transitional period in

which confirmation by the apostles was necessary to verify the inclusion of a new group of people into the church.

Because of the animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans, it was essential for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit, in the presence of the leaders of the Jerusalem church, for the purpose of maintaining a unified church. The delay also revealed the Samaritans' need to come under apostolic authority. The same transitional event occurred when the Gentiles were added to the church (10:44-46; 15:6-12; 19:6).

It seems as though Philip had stopped with water baptism. None of these people had been baptized with the baptism of fire, the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:17 "Then laid they [their] hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."

"Then laid they their hands on them": This signified apostolic affirmation and solidarity (see note on 6:6).

"Received the Holy Ghost": That this occurred, likely demonstrated that believers also spoke in tongues here. Just as those who received the Spirit did on the Day of Pentecost (see note on 2:4), as the Gentiles did when they received the Spirit (10:46), and as those followers of John did (19:6).

As Samaritans, gentiles and believers from the Old Covenant were added to the church; the unity of the church was established. No longer could one nation (Israel), be God's witness people, but the church was made up of Jews, Gentiles, half-breed Samaritans, and Old Testament saints who became New Testament believers (19:1-7).

To demonstrate the unity, it was imperative that there be some replication in each instance of what had occurred at Pentecost with the believing Jews, such as the presence of the apostles and the coming of the Spirit manifestly indicated through speaking in the languages of Pentecost (2:5-12).

Verses 18-24: "Simon" the sorcerer made an outward profession of faith (verse 13), but his response demonstrates his lack of spiritual life. Early Christian writings substantiate this fact. Simon, like Elisha's servant, Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27), sought to use God's miraculous gift for his own benefit.

Acts 8:18 "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,"

We see here, a real fallacy in many people in the church. So much emphasis is put on money now in the church that it concerns me. The things of God cannot be bought or sold. This power of the Holy Ghost is a gift from God. No one can teach you how to receive it or can get it for you. You must receive it from God.

Acts 8:19 "Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost."

Any Christian can lay hands on you and ask God to fill you, but it is God who fills you, not the person praying for you. This is a terrible mistake that Simon has made.

Acts 8:20 "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

Peter sees right through Simon the sorcerer. He knows that Simon is not truly a Christian, but one in name only.

Acts 8:21 "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

You see, what we are is in our heart. Our heart is either right with God or desperately wicked. Simon's heart is wicked. Simon went through the formality of baptism, but was not truly saved, because his heart was not cleansed and pure. Salvation occurs first in the heart.

Verses 22-24: Although Simon was certainly fearful; he was unwilling to repent and seek forgiveness, wanting only to escape the consequences of his sin.

Acts 8:22 "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

Peter cut no corners for Simon (who had been the sorcerer). Peter told him that he must start all over again and truly repent in his heart. Sins are born in the heart. Peter is saying to Simon, let God cleanse your heart and perhaps, God will forgive you.

Acts 8:23 "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and [in] the bond of iniquity."

Peter tells him that he is a slave to sin. Simon's jealousy of Peter's abilities to bestow the Holy Ghost has made him bitter. All of this is sin. We must never be jealous of the gifts God has given someone else. Rejoice with them to the glory of God.

Acts 8:24 "Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

There is no explanation of what happened to Simon. It does appear from verse 24 that he repented. He even asks Peter to pray for him. It appears to me that it is a little more fear of what might happen to him, than true repentance. We are not his judge however; God is. Leave his fate to God.

Acts Chapter 8 Questions

1. When great persecution came to the church at Jerusalem, what happened?
2. Who was the exception?
3. Who buried Stephen?
4. Why was their great lamentation over Stephen?
5. Who was the one man responsible for much of the persecution?
6. Were just the men persecuted?
7. Those that were scattered abroad went everywhere doing what?
8. Who went down to the city of Samaria and preached?
9. What two things caused the people to believe?
10. In verse 7 it gives specific miracles, what were they?
11. What effect did it have on the city?
12. Who was the man who had before bewitched the city?
13. What kind of control had he used on the people?
14. Who did the people think Simon the sorcerer was?
15. What happened when they believed Philip's preaching?
16. How do you do away with darkness?
17. When Simon believed and was baptized, what did he do?
18. When the apostles at Jerusalem heard about the happenings at Samaria, which two came?
19. What did they do that Philip had not done?
20. What did Simon the sorcerer try to buy?
21. How did they receive the Holy Ghost?
22. Why did Peter say thy money perish with thee?

23. What was not right about Simon?
24. What did Peter tell Simon to do?
25. What is Simon slave to?
26. In verse 24, what moves Simon to ask Peter for help?