

## Acts 8

**What do we see happening right after Stephen's death (v. 1)?** Stephen's execution served as a trip wire to ignite the first mass persecution of Christian Jews – persecution by the unbelieving Jews living in Jerusalem. There was a Jewish civil war going on in Jerusalem.

**What was the result of the persecution?** Jewish Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

**What was the significance of the scattering?** It was the initiation of God's plan to spread the gospel. The Jewish Christians were taken out of their comfort zones and used to plant churches in all Judea as well as in Samaria. Without this scattering, the New Testament church becomes a Jerusalem church and doesn't include Gentiles. The church expanded both geographically and culturally (John 10:16).

Application: When going through persecution, we sometimes don't have the big picture. Our view of what's happening in our lives is the small picture. God has a purpose to adversity. Sometimes what appears to be very bad turns out to be very good (Genesis 50:20). Following after God is a walk of faith not a walk of sight.

**Why were the twelve apostles not scattered like the others?** Persecution centered mainly on Greek Jews like Stephen. They were "foreigners." Hebraic Jews, who were Jerusalem natives/locals were not as threatening.

**What do we see Saul doing (v. 3)?** He was on a self-appointed mission -- Ravaging the church. Evidently Stephen's execution fueled Saul's hatred for the Christians. He went from house to house arresting Christians. Similar perhaps to the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

**What did the scattered Jewish Christians do (v. 4)?** Preached the word....Shared the gospel....Performed miracles. They were fearless. They looked much like the Apostles.

**Now we're introduced to Phillip. What do we know about Philip (v. 5)?** He was a (Hellenistic) Greek Jew. Like Stephen, he was a member of the Seven chosen to wait on tables (6:5). He was one those who were scattered (v. 1).

**Where did Philip go (v. 5)?** He travelled north from Jerusalem to Samaria. **What did Philip do (vv. 6-7)?** Following Jesus' example, he took the gospel to the Samaritans. He proclaimed Christ and did miracles.

**What do we know about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans?** The Jews despised the Samaritans and had no dealings with them (John 4:9). They regarded them as racial and religious half-breeds. The way the Jews and the Samaritans felt about one another is similar to the Israeli/Palestinian relationship today.

**Why was it important that Phillip be able to perform miracles?** Because he was in hostile country where credibility required more than words. Note.....When they saw, they listened (v. 6).

Application: **Who are our Samaritans? Like the Jews, do we find ourselves increasingly distant from certain components of the surrounding culture? Those who are different in ethnicity, race, religion, etc.?**

**Now we're introduced to Simon. What do we know about Simon (v. 9)?** The magic that he did was not sleight of hand deception but sorcery; the ability to control people and or nature by demonic power.<sup>1</sup> Witchcraft-like.

**How was he regarded by the people?** They were amazed. This ability had made him very popular, and he had encouraged people to think that he was a great power whom God had sent. He used his power to elevate himself.

**Phillip preached the Gospel. He told them the truth about Jesus Christ. How did the Samaritans respond to Phillip (v. 12)?** They accepted the word, believed the message, and were baptized. The power of the gospel is on display here (Romans 1:16). He didn't debate with them, amaze them with his wisdom, or give them polished answers to their difficult questions. We don't have to be Bible scholars to witness to the lost. Simply present the good news of the Gospel and let it have its way in their hearts (Hebrews 4:12).

**Why did the church in Jerusalem need to send Peter & John to Samaria (v. 14)?** This was the first evangelical work outside of Jerusalem. These Samaritans needed Jewish Christian leaders to officially welcome them into the church especially because of the hostility that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Peter and John needed to carry a message of legitimacy back to Jerusalem to validate the conversion experience for both Samaritans and Jews alike. The new community can't have a Samaritan church and a Jerusalem church. There must be unity in the church at all costs. The challenge for church leadership was to be inclusive – how to include the Gentiles and win the approval of the Jews at the same time.

**How did the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 15-17)?** This baptism of the Spirit occurred somewhat differently than it had in Jerusalem (2:2-4). There it happened spontaneously, but here it came in answer to the apostles' prayer and with the laying on of their hands. In Jerusalem the sound of a mighty wind, visible flames of fire, and speaking in tongues accompanied baptism of the Spirit. Here there is no mention that these phenomena were present.<sup>2</sup> But clearly some external sign accompanied the baptism of the Spirit, because the people present perceived it as happening. Note: There was no need to speak in different languages because the Jews and the Samaritans spoke the same language - Aramaic.

**How did Peter respond to Simon's request to be able to give the Holy Spirit to people (v. 20)?** By his request Simon revealed that he hoped he could buy God's gifts, namely, the Holy Spirit and the ability to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Peter corrected him harshly. Peter told Simon that God would not grant the ability he sought because his heart was not right with God. Simon wanted to be able to bring glory to himself rather than to God.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between the true and the false, between religion and spiritualism, had to be sharply drawn once for all for the health of this new church.

**Who are the "Simon's" of today?** Mystics, palm readers, fortune tellers, Tarot card readers, witches, etc.

Bottom line: A whole new people-group (Samaritans), previously despised by the Jews, came to faith in Christ and was welcomed into the church. A historic event! Church expanding not by adding new Jews but by adding the enemy - those who previously have been hostile to Judaism.

**What do we know about the Ethiopian (vv. 27-28)?** Gentile...God-fearer...Important...Wealthy. The Ethiopian eunuch had visited Jerusalem to worship, was studying the Old Testament, and was open to instruction by a Jew.. This man appears to have been the first full-fledged Gentile that Luke recorded being evangelized in Acts.<sup>4</sup>

**What lessons can we learn from the way Phillip handled this encounter? What does Phillip do that is a model for us?** Phillip was listening (alert), ready to hear, obedient to God's leading. He was prepared. Knew the scriptures. Took the initiative. Philip felt compelled by the Holy Spirit's leading to approach the chariot (v. 26). He didn't question or second-guess God.

Application: The Spirit's leading is essential in evangelism; He oftentimes directs us to people whom He has prepared to trust in Jesus Christ. God had prepared the hearts of both Philip (v. 29) and the eunuch (v. 30) for their especially important conversation. Theirs was a divine appointment (John 6:44).

**What was the significance of the Ethiopian conversion?** According to early Christian tradition, the Ethiopian returned home and became one of the earliest Gentile witnesses and missionaries in Africa. One more barrier was broken down. Another people group was added to the church. Now we have Samaritans and Gentiles (African) admitted to the church along with Jews.

Just look at the way the church is expanding culturally and geographically.....all because of what looked like a terrible catastrophe....the death of Stephen.

**Who is God sending you to talk to? Ask God to give you a divine appointment with an "Ethiopian".**

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>) p. 139

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 142

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 144