

## THE CHRISTIANS IN JERUSALEM WERE SCATTERED ABROAD

### TEXT: ACTS 8:1-25

#### INTRODUCTION:

1. Stephen was buried and a great lamentation was made over him (8:2).
2. Stephen's death marked a new beginning for the apostolic church. Before He ascended into heaven, our Lord told His disciples, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
3. Up to this point, they did not leave Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was growing rapidly (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7), but they did not do any preaching or soulwinning outside the city limits of Jerusalem.
4. Their persecutors said, "Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (5:28). Now it was time to "turn the world upside down" (17:6).
5. The disciples did not immediately take the Great Commission beyond the borders of Jerusalem, but now they were forced to leave Jerusalem on account of "great persecution" (8:1).
6. The Lord had said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria..." (1:8), and Philip, one of the first deacons, went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them (8:5; cf. 6:5).
7. Samaria is north of Jerusalem, but Acts 8:5 says, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria," because in the Bible people are always said to go "down" from Jerusalem regardless if they are traveling north or south.
8. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, our Lord said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves..." (Luke 10:30; cf. Acts 8:26; 25:7).
9. In the Great Commission, our Lord told His disciples to go, and the means He used to get them to go was persecution. Acts 11:19 says they "travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word."

### **I. PERSECUTION IN JERUSALEM**

1. At the head of Acts chapter 8, the *Scotfield Bible* says, "The fourth persecution: Saul chief persecutor."

2. The first persecution is recorded in Acts 4, where we see that the Sadducees were grieved that the apostles "taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2).
3. The second persecution is recorded in Acts 5, where we see that the Sadducees "were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (5:17, 18).
4. The third persecution is recorded in Acts 6, where we see "there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. This "dispute" led to Stephen being falsely accused and then stoned to death.
5. This brings us to Acts 8:1, where we read, "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 Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."
6. The chief persecutor at this time was a young man named Saul (7:58; 8:1, 3). Saul even went into the homes of Christians and dragged and both men and women, and had them committed to prison (8:3).
7. W. Graham Scroggie said, "The Jerusalem Christians were scattered abroad, and the scattering was as seed which was to produce a great and golden harvest. It ever has been so. The devil's breath has fanned the flames of the Gospel. The bruised tree has filled the air with perfume" (*The Acts of the Apostles*).

## II. PREACHING IN SAMARIA

1. The word "evangelist" is only found twice in the Bible. The first time is in Acts 21:8, where Luke says, "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him."
2. The only other mention is in II Timothy 4:5, where Paul tells Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist."
3. In Acts 21:8, Philip is called, "Philip the evangelist" and "one of the seven," that is, one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:3-6).
4. When the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (8:5).
5. God blessed Philip's preaching (8:6). Undoubtedly the fallow ground in Samaria had been broken up by the woman at the well and her neighbors (cf. John 4:39-42).

6. "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:6).
7. Devils were cast out, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed (8:7).
8. "And there was great joy in that city. But..." (8:8, 9a).

### III. PROBLEMS WITH SIMON THE SORCERER

1. Simon is often referred to as Simon Magus. Magus means "worker of magic." He was a Samaritan, a half-breed people who were descended from both Jews and heathen.
2. From Simon the sorcerer we get the word *simony*, which means to buy a religious office with money (Acts 8:18-20).
3. Over the years there have been many things written about Simon the sorcerer, but all we know for certain is what is written in Acts 8.
4. Simon the sorcerer has been credited with being the founder of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a heretical cult very popular in the early days of Christianity. It is refuted often in the New Testament epistles.
5. Sorcery was very popular in Samaria at that time, and Simon the sorcerer was considered "some great one" (8:9) and "the great power of God" (8:10). Apparently he was a popish-type figure with a large following.
6. Verse 11 says, "that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries."
7. Sorcery is still popular today and it is on the rise here in America as people get further away from the Bible. For example, I have noticed more and more botanicas popping up in the Elmont area.
8. Revelation 21:8 tells us that "sorcerers...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."
9. Sorcery today would include the new age movement, astrology, charms, spells, magic potions, voodoo, Santeria, crystal balls, tarot cards, ouija boards, horoscopes, reincarnation, transcendental meditation, yoga, witchcraft, etc.
10. Some have thought that Simon was genuinely converted because Acts 8:13 says, "Then Simon himself believed also..." However, a man can believe certain facts about Jesus and still not be saved.
11. James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

12. Sometimes, unsaved people get baptized and join the church. And sometimes they even “continue” for a while (Acts 8:13).
13. Judas Iscariot even “continued for a while.” None of the apostles realized that Judas Iscariot was a traitor. Our Lord said in John 13:21, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake” (13:22).
14. Simon was interested in Christianity on the basis of miracles and signs (Acts 8:13). This should not surprise us considering his background in the occult.
15. There is a big emphasis on the miraculous in some circles. But there is a danger in coming to Christ on the basis of miracles. When you study the life of Christ you see many people gathering around Him because of His mighty miracles. But soon they would drift away (cf. John 2:23-25).
16. I once knew a woman who belonged to a church that put great emphasis on healing. She had a friend stricken with AIDS. She brought this friend to her church and the members laid hands on him, and assured him that he was healed. But soon he died and this woman stopped going to church. The last I heard she gave up her faith.
17. Many Bible expositors teach that Simon was a deceiver from the very beginning. They say that he deceived Philip and the other Christians in Samaria.
18. They teach that it was Simon’s plan to use his affiliation with the Christian church (which was growing rapidly at that time – cf. Acts 8:5-8, 25) to promote himself and make money.
19. The great Scottish preacher and author, Alexander Whyte, calls Simon the sorcerer an “arch-imposter.”
20. W. Graham Scroggie says he was a "humbug."
21. Perhaps they were right, considering the strong rebuke from Peter (8:21-23). Certainly there are people who come to church with the wrong motives.
22. There are people that come to church looking to make business contacts. They are looking for customers. They are selling insurance or are involved in direct marketing. They have no real interest in the Gospel. I have had to stop people from doing this in our church.
23. We cannot say for sure why Simon was baptized and joined the church. Acts 8:13 says, he “believed.” Perhaps he was sincere but he was confused. There are many like that!

24. Simon was certainly confused about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He thought the power of the Holy Spirit could be purchased with money (8:18, 19).
25. The power of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. Salvation is a gift from God. Anyone who thinks that he can obtain salvation or receive the power of the Holy Spirit by money is badly confused.
26. Peter said, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (8:20).
27. Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).
28. Peter also refers to “the gift of the Holy Ghost” in Acts 10:45 and 11:17.
29. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”
30. Romans 6:23 says, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
31. The woman at the well (in Samaria) was confused about the free gift of salvation. That is why our Lord said to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God...” (John 4:10).
32. Simon the sorcerer was confused about this. He thought the power of the Holy Spirit could be purchased with money.
33. Simon the sorcerer was confused about the Holy Spirit, and today there is much confusion regarding the Holy Spirit.
34. Most people who think Simon was not saved base their opinion on this strong rebuke from Peter. Peter told Simon to repent (8:22).
35. To repent means to “turn around.” It means to change one’s mind. Unsaved need to repent, and I should add that sometimes believers need to repent.
36. Whether Simon ever did get right with God, we do not know and we will not know till we get to heaven.

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. Note the word “heart” twice – in Acts 8:21 and 22.
2. The first time we see the word “heart” in the Bible is in Genesis 6:5, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
3. Oftentimes when I am witnessing to people, they tell me, “I know I am going to heaven because I have a good heart.” I then quote the

- prophet Jeremiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).
4. Our Lord said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23).
  5. There are hundreds of Scriptures like this. The Bible says the heart of man is “desperately wicked.” Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, “Thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21).