

Philip's Evangelistic Efforts at Samaria

Acts 8:1-25

I. Stephen's martyrdom ignites persecution (8:1-3).

Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of his [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried

Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Explanation:

- Saul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3), a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (see 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil.

- 3:5), the “son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6), and a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25–28).
- He was educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and became a devoted Pharisee (Acts 26:4–5; Phil. 3:5).
- He was one of the most promising young Pharisees in Jerusalem, well on his way to becoming a great

- leader for the Jewish faith (Gal. 1:14).
- As he understood the Law, he felt his life was blameless (Phil. 3:6). He felt he was doing the work of God to stamp out the heresy that taught Jesus was the Messiah and Savior sent from God.
- By his own testimony, he persecuted the church of God violently (Gal. 1:13) with raging fury (Acts 26:11)

- and tried to destroy it.
- Yet, again by His own testimony, He obeyed the light he had, and when God gave him more light, he obeyed that light and became a Christian!

II. Persecution causes the spread of the Gospel (8:4).

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Explanation:

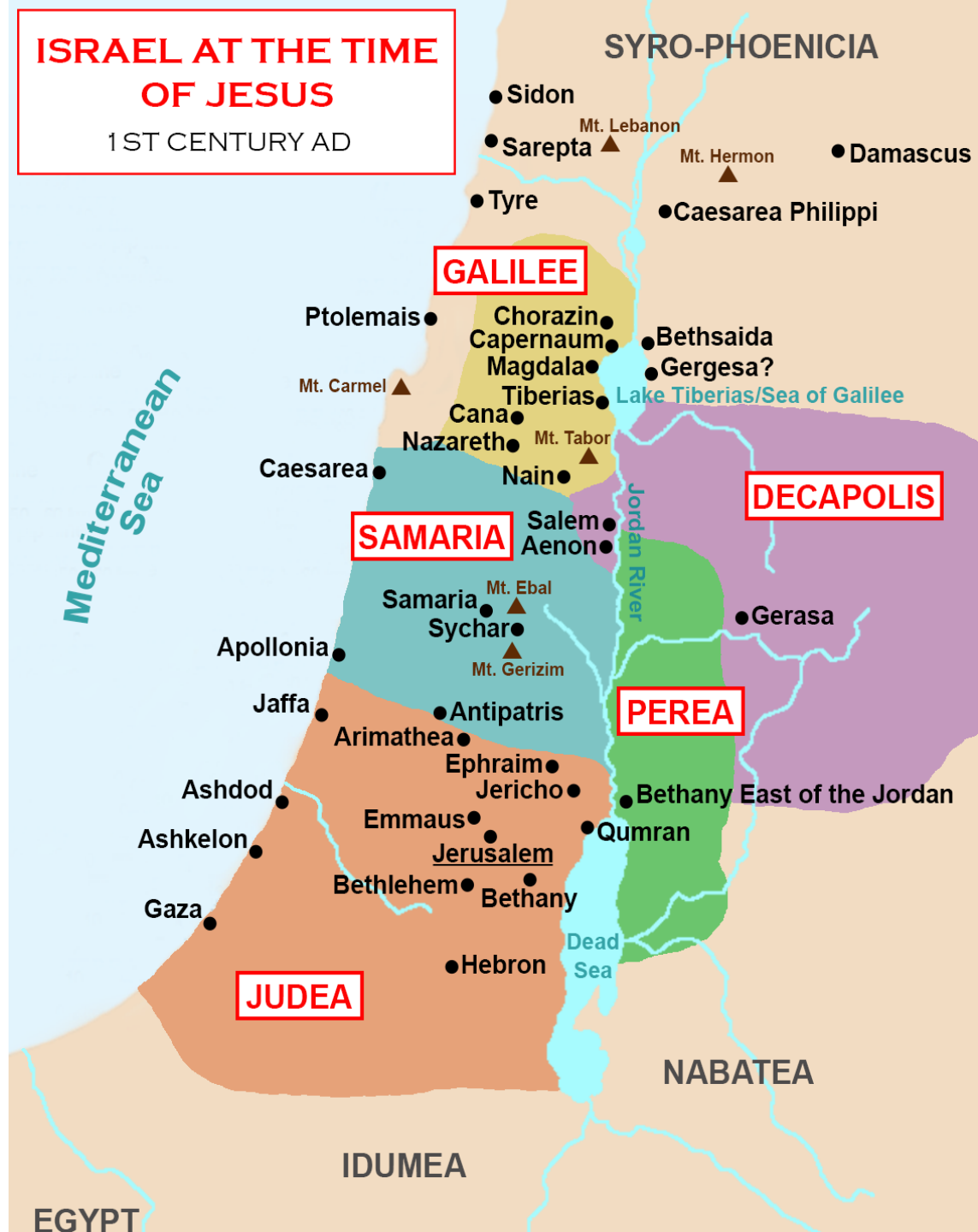
- Persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: it scatters it and only produces a greater harvest. The

- word translated “scattered” (*diaspeiro*, Acts 8:1, 4) means “to scatter seed.”
- The believers in Jerusalem were God’s seed and the persecution was used of God to plant them in new soil so they could bear fruit (Matt. 13:37–38).
- Some went throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 1:8), and others

- went to more distant fields (Acts 11:19ff).

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III. Philip's evangelistic efforts at Samaria (8:5-8).

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a

loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Explanation:

- The Samaritans were a people of mixed racial and religious background. The nation originated when the Assyrians captured the ten

- northern tribes in 722 B.C., deported many of the people, and then imported others (non-Jewish) who intermarried with the Jews.
- The Samaritans had their own temple and priesthood and openly opposed fraternization with the Jews (John 4:9). The Jews and the Samaritans disliked each other greatly.

- Philip, who like Stephen, was one of the Hellenistic Jews was led to go to Samaria to share the good news about Jesus. He not only declared God's Word, but he also demonstrated God's power by performing miracles.
- It was the Apostles who had majored on miracles (Acts 2:43; 5:12), yet

- both Stephen and Philip did signs and wonders by the power of God (Acts 6:8).
- However, the emphasis here is on the Word of God: the people gave heed to the Word because they saw the miracles, and by believing the Word, they were saved.

- The people of Samaria who heard the Gospel and believed were delivered from physical affliction, demonic control, and, most important, from their sins. No wonder there was great joy!
- The Gospel had now moved from “Jewish territory” into Samaria where the people were part Jew and part

- Gentile. God in His grace had built a bridge between two estranged peoples and made the believers one in Christ.

IV. The account of Simon the Sorcerer (8:9-19).

1. Simon the Sorcerer was a self-promoting magician motivated by pride (8:9-11).

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was

somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

Explanation:

- Luke introduces Simon as a

practitioner of magic arts in the city of Samaria.

- We should not think that Simon performed some tricks by sleight of hand (a form of deceiving the mind because the eye fails to observe correctly).
- We should see the magic arts as a serious threat to the Christian faith, because they represent witchcraft

and sorcery which is empowered by Satan.

- The people were amazed at the things that Simon did and, therefore, they believed the things that he said.
- They considered him “the great power of God,” (and for this reason post-biblical writers often referred to him as Simon “Magus”). Simon’s

sorcery was energized by Satan (2 Thes. 2:1–12) and was used to magnify himself.

- Among the vices Paul lists as acts of sin is witchcraft (Gal. 5:20).

According to Rev. 21:8 & 22:15, those who practice magic arts are excluded from the Holy City and are cast into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

- Simon the sorcerer had been able to astound the people for a long time with his magic.

2. Simon the Sorcerer makes a profession of faith and is baptized (8:12-13)

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized,

- both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Explanation:

- Philip came into a city which was under a fascination of power, with most Samaritans probably not even realizing that the power to which they were subject was the power of

- Satan.
- Probably the only kind of message that could possibly have impressed these people was a message involving not only preaching the truth about Jesus, but also a demonstration of power.
- Missiologists call situations like this a “power encounter.”

- Missiologist Paul Pierson says, “The message was authenticated by clashes between the healing power of God and the destructive forces of evil.... Such ‘power encounters’ would often accompany new breakthroughs in the book of Acts and all through Christian history.”

- Philip's miracles and signs, done under the guiding and authentic power of God, were clearly recognized as superior to the counterfeit power of the devil.
- Even Simon the Sorcerer was amazed, "seeing the miracles and signs which were done.
- Notice the focus of Philip's preaching: "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name

- of Jesus Christ.” Jesus is the King in the kingdom of God, and “the name of Jesus Christ” includes both his earthly ministry and His deity (“Jesus” – emphasizing His humanity, and “Christ” indicating His divine office).
- The Samaritan believers sealed their commitment to Jesus through public baptism, and the Church of Jesus

- Christ was firmly planted in their midst.
- When Simon the sorcerer saw the miraculous signs Philip did through the power of the Spirit of God, he acknowledged that someone greater and more powerful than he had appeared in Samaria.
- When the people leave him and follow Philip, he joins the crowd and

- accepts the presence of a superior power.
- Philip's dramatic exorcisms and healings of the paralyzed and lame gave incontrovertible proof of Satan's subjugation, and hence of the certainty of the Kingdom of God with Christ as Lord.
- Philip accepts Simon's testimony of faith in Christ and baptized him.

3. Peter and John are sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate the Samaritan revival (8:14-17).

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they

might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Explanation:

- The fact that the apostolic leadership of the church at Jerusalem immediately sent two of their top leaders, Peter and John, to investigate, indicates that the conversion of large numbers of Samaritans must have been seen as extraordinarily significant.

- **Acts 8:14–17** is a favorite text for those who teach that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a work of God's grace subsequent to salvation.
- The Samaritans had been saved and baptized in water but had not as yet received the Holy Spirit.
- Subsequent to their salvation, through prayer and the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came upon them.

4. Simon the Sorcerer seeks to purchase the ability to mediate the power of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (8:18-19)

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Explanation:

- Perhaps in earlier days, Simon had obtained magical formulas from other practitioners by paying them certain amounts of money.
- Simon is a new convert and evidently he does not understand that the power to work miracles did not reside with man, but was a working of God through man according to God's will.

5. Peter's spiritual discernment and rebuke of Simon the Sorcerer (8:20-24).

²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."
²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Explanation:

- The Holy Spirit must have revealed to Peter the actual motivation behind Simon's request.
- Is it possible, as a new Christian, that Simon did not know any better than to think he could purchase the power he saw Peter utilize?

- Luke, however, makes his point. Christianity has nothing to do with magic; magic is powerless before the genuine power of the Holy Spirit. The power of God's Spirit can neither be manipulated nor bought.
- Notice that Peter told Simon to “repent” and “pray to the Lord” for forgiveness. Simon's response was, “Pray for me to the Lord.” Is there

- significance in this difference?
- Simon's response is viewed in various ways: 1) Some think Simon deliberately ignored the command to "repent." 2) Other think Simon simply was responding the best he knew how to the rebuke. He had seen Peter pray for others and his prayers were answered. Perhaps Simon was simply asking Peter to

- pray for him that God would forgive him.

6. Peter and John return to Jerusalem (8:25)

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Conclusion

- Peter's rebuke of Simon teaches us that God's power is not available for human manipulation. It cannot be bought nor is it subject to human whim or will.
- Teaching or preaching that suggests that if you have enough faith you will

- see healings take place, or you will be able to get your prayers answered, is another form of placing the power of God in human control. Such teaching or preaching is wrong.
- Peter's rebuke of Simon also teaches us that saved people may have problems in their heart that they are not aware of and that the Holy Spirit may reveal through another person's rebuke. How we

- respond to that rebuke will reveal whether we are wise or foolish.

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