

Acts 8:1-25 ~ Teacher's Lesson
Philip's Preaching, Simon's Sorcery

Overview: The key verse to Acts is 1:8 (read loud in unison). Acts has 28 chapters can be divided into three sections:

Jerusalem	Judea & Samaria	End of the Earth
Chapters 1-7	Chapters 8-12	Chapters 13-28
2 years	13 years	14 years

Review: Last week we studied the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Today we start into the second section of Acts, which concerns the spread of the Gospel into Judea and Samaria.

******Starting with Stephen, what happened to the Jerusalem church (8:1-3)?** There arose a great persecution, and the church was scattered.

1. Comparing 8:1 to 1:8, what do you notice? God used the persecution to cause the early church to begin to carry out phase two of Jesus' command.

ESV **Acts 1:8** . . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

2. Why did the apostles remain behind (8:1)? Like the captain that goes down with the ship, perhaps they felt duty bound to stay to minister to any remaining Christians.

According to 8:1, what was Saul's attitude toward the stoning of Stephen? See Acts 22:20. Saul approved and became a leading persecutor the church (8:3).

In contrast with Saul (8:1), how did the church feel about Stephen's death (8:2)? Great lamination was made over him.¹

Application: It is normal to be sad when a loved one dies, even if we know he is in a better place. Writing about Epaphroditus' near death, Paul said:

ESV **Philippians 2:27** . . . he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

How did Luke describe what Saul did to the church (8:3)? Saul ravaged the church, forcibly² imprisoning both men and women.

¹ His burial probably occurred that same day and before the general persecution started.

² "Dragged" (8:3) is from *suro*, not *helko*!

3. When you think of the word “ravage”, what do you think of? What does ravaging mean (8:3)? The NIV says he began to “destroy” the church. The Greek suggests both physical harm and insult or indignity.³ In English it means to cause severe and extensive damage. Hurricanes ravage coastal areas (imagine Irma or Harvey).

******What did the Jerusalem believers do as they scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:4-8)?** They went about evangelizing! It was not the apostles who were doing this, but “ordinary” believers.

Word Study: “Preaching” (8:4) is from *euaggelizo* (which transliterates into evangelize); *eu* means good (as in eulogy) and *aggelizo* (as in angel, a messenger) means to spread a message.

Application: There is no reason each of us could not evangelize wherever we are during the week, scattered about the metropolitan area. Don’t envision that you have to stand up on a soap box at an intersection and preach. Rather, evangelize any way that seems best to you: one on one conversation, by e-mail, over the phone, etc.

Where have we previously encountered Philip (8:5)? See 6:5. Philip, along with Stephen, was one of the seven deacons chosen.

4. Philip went to Samaria (8:5). What and where was that? Samaria had been the name of the capital of city of the apostate northern kingdom of Israel. After Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the general area around the capital city took on the name Samaria. Alexander the Great destroyed the city again in 331 B.C. The Romans later rebuilt it and renamed it Sebaste.⁴ The Greek manuscripts vary as to whether Philip went to “the” city of Samaria or “a” city in Samaria.⁵

5. In Acts 6 we studied the difference between Hebrew Jews and Hellenistic Jews. How were Samaritans different from Jews (8:4-8)? See 2 Kings 17:24ff, John 4:9. When Assyria defeated Israel in 722 B.C., most of the surviving Israelites were deported. Foreigners were brought in to resettle the area. Pagans at that time thought the various local gods were tied to the land and so they freely adopted the worship of what they saw as the local deity (Jehovah). In time, these foreigners intermarried with the surviving Israelites in the area. Thus the Samaritans were partly Hebrew and had adopted a form of Israelite religion. The “pure” Jews of the Southern kingdom considered the Samaritans’ blood line and worship to be corrupted and so avoided them as much as possible.

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

³ Jonson, 142.

⁴ JD Douglas, editor, *New Bible Dictionary, 2nd Ed.* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982), 161.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, 2096.

6. How did Philip get the Samaritans to pay close attention to what he said (8:6-7)? They paid attention when they saw the signs that he did. Miracles sure a handy for effective evangelism!

What are unclean spirits (8:7)? They are demons. The Bible uses the terms “demons”, “unclean spirits”, and “evil spirits” interchangeably.⁶

******Despite having been impressed by a magician named Simon, how did the people respond when Philip preached the Gospel (8:9-13)?** Although the people were wowed by Simon, when they heard Philip, they abandoned Simon, believed the Gospel, and were baptized, 8:12.

7. What do you think Luke’s literary purpose in writing this paragraph (8:9-13)? Luke’s purpose in writing this may have been to show how the Gospel triumphed over the sway of a local magician (as people believed the Gospel) and even won his endorsement. It shows the advance of the Gospel.

8. How can Simon’s magic be accounted for (8:9-13)? See *Exodus 7:11, 22, 2 Thessalonians 2:9*. It was done either sleight of hand, like modern magicians, or it was supernaturally demonic, the result of witchcraft or sorcery. Either way, he was a false teacher of the occult, claiming to be someone who represented God.

Those who believed were baptized (8:12). What does baptized mean? A transliterated rather than translated word (from *baptizo*), it means to dip or immerse.

Application: The New Testament method of baptism was by immersion. The New Testament candidates for baptism were believers, not babies. As it states in 8:12, the Samaritans believed and then were baptized. This is called credobaptism (credo means “I believe”) as opposed to paedobaptism (paedo means child).

******How did Simon eventually prove himself to be a false believer (8:14-24)?** Simon’s attempt to buy the ability to dispense the Holy Spirit revealed that he did not truly understand the Gospel of grace. He did believe, but it was not a saving faith.

ESV James 2:19b Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Application: There always have been and always will be false professors in the church who are not true possessors, tares among the wheat, hidden reefs in our love feasts. *Which are you? How can you tell?* (Rhetorical). Peter offered this help:

⁶ Douglas, 358.

ESV 2 Peter 1:5-10 . . . make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love . . . be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

How and when did the Holy Spirit come upon the Samaritans (8:14-17)? The Spirit did not come upon the Samaritans when they believed nor when they were water baptized, but only when the apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them.

9. From a literary perspective, what was Luke’s purpose in recording that the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans when the apostles laid hands on them (8:14-17)? See 8:18. Luke recorded this to explain what Simon saw that led to him to try to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit.

10. How did Philip know the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them (8:16), and how did Simon know when He did fall on them (8:18)? There evidently was some visible manifestation, perhaps speaking in tongues as at Pentecost.

11. Why the delay between faith and receiving the Holy Spirit (8:14-17)? See John 4:9. Since the Jews has historically looked down upon Samaritans, some of them would have had a hard time believing Samaritans could be equal members of the new covenant community. It is likely that God delayed sending the Spirit until the apostles arrived in order to show everyone that both God and the apostles had accepted the Samaritans.

12. When do believers today receive the Holy Spirit? See 1 Corinthians 12:13. Everyone today receives the Spirit as soon as he believes. It is not necessary for someone to lay hands on him first. Neither is the pattern in Acts that someone has to lay hands on another person for him to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 states regarding the Holy Spirit, “At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ.”⁷

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:13 . . . in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

13. You’ve heard of “Simon Says”; this is Simon Sins! Simon’s sin (8:18-19) is the basis for something called “Simony”. What is Simony? See 8:30. Simony is the buying or selling of a church office or spiritual benefit (for example pardons). Thomas Aquinas defined it as “a deliberate design of selling or buying something spiritual . . .”⁸

⁷ Article 2 (God), sub point C (God the Holy Spirit)

⁸“Simony And Biblical Counseling”, psychoheresy-aware.org. Accessed September 15, 2017.

Spiritual Sodomy: Some have defined simony as spiritual sodomy. John Wycliffe wrote, “just as in carnal sodomy contrary to nature the seed is lost by which an individual human being would be formed, so in this sodomy the seed of God’s word is cast aside with which a spiritual generation in Christ Jesus would be created. And just as sodomy . . . was one of the most serious sins against nature, so simony . . . is one of the most serious sins against grace.”⁹

Application: Although pastors are worthy of the church’s support, they are not to charge a fee for their services. Similarly, Christian counselors should think twice about charging a fee for their services. Those who teach Bible seminars should also beware of committing simony should they require payment for attending a Bible class.

ESV **2 Corinthians 2:18** For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word . . .

NAS **Matthew 10:8b** . . . freely you received, freely give.

What Peter foresee in Simon’s future (8:20)? Peter foresaw that Simon would “perish”.

14. What did Peter mean by perish (8:20)? *See John 3:16, 10:28.* It means more than to simply die physically. It means to die spiritually. It is the opposite of eternal life.

ESV **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

ESV **John 10:28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

In essence, Peter said, “To hell with you and your money.”¹⁰

What did the Holy Spirit reveal to Peter about Simon’s heart condition (8:21, 23)? Simon’s heart was not right before God. He was full of bitterness and enslaved to iniquity

Prophecy in Church Meetings: Peter functioned as a prophet in identifying Simon’s sin. Paul wanted prophecy to function in church meetings in order to convict unbelievers of their sin:

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** . . . if all prophesy, and an unbeliever . . . enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

15. What hope Peter offer Simon in 8:22? Peter told him to repent of his wickedness and ask God to forgive him.

What does repent (8:22) mean? It means a change of thinking that leads to a change of action.

16. Why did Peter add the words, “if possible” in 8:22? The words “if possible” express doubt. We must never presume upon God’s grace. God does give people over to sin.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marshall, 168.

Application: Some people claim to believe the Gospel is true, but they refuse to accept it because they still have some wild oats to sew, or because they love their sin too much to give it up. Their plan is to accept Christ later, after they've had their fun. However, things might not turn out as they plan. They might die early. God may harden them in their sin.

ESV **Hebrews 3:8a** . . . Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts . . .

What was Simon's response to Peter's rebuke (8:24)? Simon asked Peter to pray for him.

******17. What the apostles do as they returned to Jerusalem (8:25)?** They went home preaching the Gospel to the villages of Samaria.

What is the message of the gospel (8:25)? The good news is that Jesus is the Christ, He died for our sins, He rose from the dead on the third day, and that forgiveness by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone (*sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria*¹¹).

So What?

18. What truths about baptism can we glean from Acts 8? Baptism was for believers and by immersion.

19. What truths about evangelism can we glean from Acts 8?

- a) God sometimes uses persecution to spread the Gospel.
- b) God uses ordinary Christians to spread the Gospel.
- c) We can expect some people to be ripe for the Gospel (like the Samaritans)
- d) We can expect some false conversions (like Simon).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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¹¹ The fifth sola of the Reformation is *sola scriptura*.