

The Book of Acts  
Chapter 8 – Part 1

*Acts 8:3-4*

*3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

*4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

I. Review of Chapter 7

1. The bulk of Acts 7 was Stephen's defense before the Jewish elders for the accusation made against him of blaspheming the law of Moses and the temple.
2. But Stephen did not defend himself. He presented a fine historical backdrop to Jesus' death and His heavenly exaltation.
3. He reviewed Israel's history from Abraham and the promise of the land they were living in, to Moses, the tabernacle, and the promise of another prophet coming like Moses.
4. He spoke of conquests of King David and the building of the temple under Solomon.
5. Then he turned to the topic that enraged the crowd. He said the temple was only temporary because God could not be confined in a manmade structure.
6. But Jesus, whom they had murdered, was that Just One, that prophet that Moses had foretold.
7. Without a verdict being officially pronounced by the High Priest, the mob drug Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death.
8. But not before Stephen reported that he saw Jesus exalted in heaven, and prayed for mercy on his murderers—including Saul of Tarsus who had witnessed, consented, and likely caused the whole event.
9. Next we move on to the aftermath of this persecution, and will cover it in two parts. First the revival in Samaria, and next time, revival from Gaza, to Ethiopia, to Caesarea.

II. Saul's Campaign of Persecution (Verses 1-3)

1. **[1] What caused the Christians to be scattered from Jerusalem?**

2. *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 Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*
3. After the death of Stephen, Saul persecuted the church with greater fury than ever. He became a ringleader in a wave of persecution that drove many Christians out of Jerusalem.
4. He went from house to house, arrested the saints and had them thrown into prison.  
*Acts 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*
5. He had not thrown the stones that killed Stephen, but by holding the cloaks of those who stoned him, he gave full consent to his martyrdom, and was as guilty of his murder as those who killed him.
6. Saul was zealous for the Law of Moses, and no doubt he knew of the charges against Stephen that he had blasphemed the temple and the law.
7. And we don't have to guess what Saul thinking at this time since he wrote about half of the New Testament and scattered pieces of his biography through his letters are. Like

this:

*Phil 3:5-6*

*5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;*

*6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

8. And like this:

*1 Tim 1:12-13*

*12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;*

*13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

9. In his ignorance, he fought against not only the gospel message he heard Stephen preach, but very likely against the conviction he felt during Stephen's last sermon.

10. No doubt the memory of the glory of God that shone in the face of Stephen never left him, and perhaps his conscience kept replaying his prayer over and over: ...*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge (Acts 7:60)*

11. And perhaps the fact that devout men made great lamentation over Stephen as they carried him to his burial, added to his agitation:

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

III. The Gospel Spread By Persecution (Verse 4)

1. Saul's campaign of persecution was intended to stamp out the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but instead it was the means of spreading it to many other parts of the world.

2. **[3] How did Saul's campaign of persecution become the means of spreading the gospel of Jesus?**

3. Those who left Jerusalem because of intense persecution went everywhere preaching Jesus.

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

4. Jesus had admonished His disciples:

*Matt 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

5. And you will remember from Acts 4 and 5 how the Apostles boldly told the Jewish council that they must obey God rather than men

6. And later Saul would write his famous Romans 8 chapter where he said that neither tribulation, distress, persecution or death could separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:35-39).

7. The saints who fled Jerusalem saw the persecution as God's sign that it was time to carry His gospel to other parts of the world as Jesus had commissioned them in Acts 1:8:

*Acts 1:8 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.*

8. **[map of Palestine in time of Christ]**

9. And so far, they had been reluctant to leave the fellowship of the saints in Jerusalem and their heaven-like atmosphere of close community, shared wealth, and shared meals was disrupted by persecution.
10. Jesus had told them that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another:  
*Matt 10:23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*
11. And this was the sign that seemed to set the pattern for their evangelization. Paul left almost every field of labor under heavy persecution (Acts 13:44-52; 14:19, 20; 20:1).
12. But this only served to intensify his efforts in the next place, until the whole Gentile world, as well as the land of Israel, felt the impact of his ministry.
13. **[2] Why did not the Apostles leave Jerusalem?**
14. *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 Judaea and Samaria, **except the apostles.***
15. I find it an interesting coincidence between Acts 1:8 and Acts 8:1. \
16. Acts 1:8 is where Jesus commanded the apostles to preach in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.
17. And in Acts 8:1, they finally moved out of stage one into stage two, Judaea and Samaria.
18. But the Apostles kept a base in Jerusalem as Jerusalem continued to be the administrative center of the church for the next 40 years until 70AD when the source of the persecution changed from the Jews to the Romans.
19. So the apostles continued their work in Jerusalem and superintended the work of the church abroad as well as looked after those who were unable to leave the city.

#### IV. The Gospel Preached in Samaria (Verses 5-25)

##### A. Joy in Samaria

1. In verse 5, we see a transition of focus away from Jerusalem to the second stage of the gospel spread, Judaea and Samaria. **[maps: Judaea and Samaria]**
2. Judaea was the geographical province (like county or state) that the city of Jerusalem was in, and Samaria was the next province to the northeast.
3. Philip was the second one of the seven deacons to become an evangelist. We don't have a record of him preaching in Jerusalem as Stephen did, but when the persecution forced him to leave Jerusalem, he went to Samaria and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ with great success.
4. **[4] What were the results of deacon Philip's preaching in Samaria?**
5. *Acts 8:5-8*  
*5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and **preached Christ unto them.** [we will see what is meant by "preached Christ" in a moment]*  
*6 And the **people with one accord gave heed** unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*  
*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.*  
*8 And there was **great joy in that city.***

- B. Simon the magician
1. **[5] Who was Simon? Was he really converted?**
  2. It is important to note that prior to Philip's arrival, there was a popular preacher/magician, known as Simon the sorcerer, whom the people of Samaria had been deceived into believing was some kind of a powerful holy man:  
*Acts 8:9-11*  
*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:*  
*10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.*  
*11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*
  3. But when Philip demonstrated the **real** power of God, they readily accepted **the real** message as truth.
  4. No doubt the Samaritans remembered the ministry of Jesus at Jacob's well, and Philip had come preaching the gospel of Jesus. Do you remember the phrase, "he must needs go through Samaria." **[map of Palestine]**  
*John 4:3-4*  
*3 He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.*  
*4 And he must needs go through Samaria.*
- C. Baptism in Jesus' name in Samaria
1. So building on Jesus' preaching, great numbers of both men and women were baptized and were filled with great joy for the many benefits and blessings of the Holy Ghost upon their lives.  
*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.*
  2. And in case you are wondering how Philip baptized these men and women, verse 16 shows how:  
*Acts 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)*
  3. Simon the sorcerer was deeply impressed by the demonstration of the power of the Holy Ghost in miracles and healings. And, since he was losing his followers to Philip, he decided to follow the crowd, and was baptized also.  
*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.*
  4. It may be that Simon believed more in the miracles he saw more than he actually believed in Jesus.
  5. We can say that because his desire seemed to be to find the secret of Philip's power rather than the Jesus Philip was preaching.
  6. Here is a case where it is possible that Philip baptized Simon before he was actually ready, because we learn later that Simon had not really whole-heartedly repented.
- D. Apostolic authority comes to Samaria
1. **[6] Why did the Apostles send Peter and John to Samaria?**

2. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard of Philip's ministry in Samaria, they immediately sent Peter and John to investigate the work that was being done there.
3. Jesus had given the Apostle Peter the keys to the kingdom, so it was in following his commission to help establish this new field of ministry.
4. So the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they saw many miracles of healing and casting out devils, and many were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
5. However, so far, none had been filled with the Holy Ghost.
6. **[7] What ministry did they perform in Samaria?**
7. Peter and John laid their hands on the people in the name and in the power of Jesus Christ, they received the Holy Ghost.  
*Acts 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

E. Observations

1. Important observations to make here: **First**, for these new believers, having expressed faith in the gospel and being baptized, was not the conclusion of the matter of the salvation of their souls.
2. While believing and being baptized are part of salvation:  
*Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*
3. The end result of saving faith includes not only being baptized, but also being filled with the Holy Ghost.
4. So the work of the ministry was not complete until there was faith (includes repentance), baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost.
5. It is not enough to die with Christ by repentance, to be buried with Him by baptism, but we must receive His Spirit by which we may walk in His new life (Rom 6:3, 4).
6. For we are not in the body, the church, until we receive the Holy Ghost:  
*1 Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*
7. A **second** observation we see in the revival in Samaria, is, at least in this instance, people can receive the Holy Ghost when someone armed with faith and authority lays hands on them. But as always, it is God who gives the Spirit, not man.
8. And although Philip had faith to preach, faith to cast out devils, and faith to pray for healing, in this instance, it was up to the Apostle with the keys to the kingdom, to initiate the kingdom among a new people group, the Samaritans.
9. And in Acts 10, we will see the same thing occurred when it was time for the opening of the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles. God called Peter to open that door.
10. A **third** observation is that when someone receives the Holy Ghost, there is obvious evidence that demonstrates to onlookers that the Holy Ghost has filled them.  
*Acts 8:18-19*  
*18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,*  
*19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

11. We will see in Acts 10, that that obvious evidence is when someone speaks with other tongues. We will cover that when we get to chapter 10.
- F. Simon wants to merchandize the Holy Ghost
1. Back to Simon's odd request. He had been genuinely impressed with the miracles of Philip's ministry, and especially now when he saw the demonstration of the people receiving the Holy Ghost as Peter and John laid their hands on them, he wanted that power.
  2. However, he wanted to make merchandise of the power of the Holy Ghost, and imagined he could buy the power to bestow it on others without meeting the requirement of the gospel.
  3. Peter rightly called it when he told Simon he would perish with his money because he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money.
  4. There is no record of his ever coming to the Lord.
- G. Wrap up Samaritan revival
1. When Peter and John had confirmed the word of the Lord, and finished their mission in Samaria, they returned to Jerusalem, but they took advantage of this tour to preach the gospel in every village of the Samaritans which they passed through.  
*Acts 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.*
  2. Their vision was being extended, and the Spirit was reminding them that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost of all people groups, even the Samaritans upon whom John had wanted to send fire from heaven.
- V. Conclusion
1. There is a common theme that arises over and over in Acts. That is the revival sandwich: **revival is followed by persecution that is followed by revival.**
  2. In Acts 2 & 3, thousands were saved.
  3. Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested and threatened to stop preaching Jesus, and the chapter ended with a Holy Ghost shaking prayer meeting and great fellowship and sacrificial giving.
  4. In chapter 5, an internal kind of persecution arose when a couple of church members tried to deceive the church and lie to the Holy Ghost. They were died, but that was followed by a multiplication of new believers.
  5. But in that same chapter, Peter and the apostles were arrested again for continuing to preach, God miraculously delivered them from prison and they went back to preaching, they got re-arrested, threatened again, and were beaten.
  6. Chapter 6 started off telling of the church getting multiplied again, which caused some contention among members, the apostles organized things, and revival expanded the church further.
  7. Then Chapter 7 tells of Stephen being arrested, tried, and stoned.
  8. Chapter 8 begins with an even worse persecution that sent the church out preaching the gospel to other places and revival spread!
  9. God takes what the enemy meant for evil and turns it for good!