

# THE KINGDOM SPREADS TO SAMARIA

Acts 8:1-25 (ESV)

Acts chapter 7 concludes with the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Jesus movement.

## Acts 8:1-3 Persecution Breaks Out in Jerusalem

The rage and bloodlust of the Sanhedrin against Stephen quickly morphed into a genocidal campaign to wipe-out the Jesus movement. Luke records it started the day Stephen was murdered. Thousands of distraught believers surrounded the Sanhedrin members as they hurled rocks at their beloved Stephen. The Temple Guard kept the believers back and when the deed was done, at the command of the High Priest, the guards turned on the stricken believers pummeling them with their swords and shields. By nightfall Jerusalem's jails were overflowing with believers. The night air was filled with shouts and screams as believers were dragged out of their houses to holding areas. It was no longer safe for believers to be in Jerusalem.

With satanic enthusiasm, Saul gladly took the lead to wipe out the followers of Jesus.

But as we've learned, you can't stop God when He's on the move.

## Acts 8:4-25 Salvation Comes to Samaria

### Acts 8:4-8 Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria

When Jesus commissioned the Apostles, He told them they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Luke follows this outline. Philip was one of the men chosen to be a deacon (6:5). Samaria is about 50 miles north of Jerusalem. The Jews and Samaritans had a strained relationship. The Samaritans were the product of Jews intermarrying Gentiles during the time of the Exile. They followed a distorted form of Judaism. But one belief they held in common with the Jews was the expectation of a Messiah.

Philip brought joy to the city of Samaria. He could have brought bitterness and hatred for the Jews which would have found a receptive audience. But Philip accepted persecution and stayed focus on serving the Kingdom. Like Stephen, the Holy Spirit empowered Philip to do miraculous signs; signs that validated the message that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and Savior.

Philip's ministry directly challenged the reputation of a man named Simon.

### Acts 8:9-13 Simon, the Magician, Believes

Did Simon practice slight of hand or was his magic empowered by satanic forces? Luke doesn't specify. Simon cast himself as being from God, perhaps the Messiah. But there must have been something fundamentally different about Philip's supernatural deeds versus the magic of Simon.

The "but" in verse 12 indicates the people made a complete break with Simon by both believing in the name of Jesus and being baptized. In baptism they declared their union with Jesus. They were not going to pay attention to Simon any longer.

Simon himself came to faith and was baptized. But as we will see, a brand, new Christian can still be in bondage to lifelong sinful patterns. The fact that Simon remained so fixated on Philip's signs and miracles was an indicator things were not right in Simon's heart and mind.

### **Acts 8:14-17 The Holy Spirit Indwells Samaritan Believers After Apostolic Confirmation**

Why might God have delayed giving the Holy Spirit to the Samaritan believers until the Apostles came? In validating the Samaritans' faith, the Apostles paved the way for the Samaritans to be fully accepted by Jewish believers. Second, the validation of the Apostles conveyed to the Samaritans their equal status in Jesus with the Jewish believers.

### **Acts 8:18-24 Peter Rebukes Simon**

Philip's ministry, or rather, the truth of Jesus the Messiah, brought an end to Simon's influence and status. Simon was bitter over the loss of his popularity as Peter points out. If Simon could gain the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit, he could then regain his status and influence after Philip and the Apostles left the community. Simon manifested no understanding of the relationship between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and faith in Jesus. Simon had no understanding of the purpose of the Holy Spirit to empower the new life of the Kingdom. Simon wanted the power in order to regain his status and influence.

Even when confronted by Peter, Simon did not repent and confess his sin; he asked Peter to pray that he, Simon, not suffer any consequences for his sin!

For this reason, some commentators teach that Simon was not truly born-again; that Simon did not possess justification salvation through faith in Jesus. But Luke clearly states in verse 13 that Simon believed Philip's message that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and Savior Who shed His blood on the cross to pay the penalty for all our sins and then rose from the grave on the third day to give us eternal life.

Simon illustrates the fact that new believers need to be disciplined and set free from their former worldview and character shaped by the world, the flesh and the devil. This is the second aspect of our salvation – sanctification salvation. It is being delivered from the power and practice of sinful beliefs and behaviors to live the righteous life of God in Christ. It is a lifelong process guided by the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Hopefully, someone came alongside Simon and disciplined him to follow Jesus!

Philip, Peter and John stayed in Samaria for a while as Luke tells us in verse 25.

### **Acts 8:25 The Gospel Spreads Throughout Samaria**

In this episode we see the mystery form of the Kingdom spreading beyond the Jewish community to Samaria. In this, we see the fulfillment of Jesus' commission that His followers will tell His story not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but Samaria and to the end of the earth.

In this episode we see the redemptive power of God. It was violent persecution that brought Philip to Samaria. God redeemed the Jerusalem persecution to bring salvation and joy to Samaria.

In this episode we see why we do not base doctrine on historical literature. When Jews put their faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, they immediately received the indwelling Holy Spirit without lay on of hands by

the Apostles. Yet, initially, when Samaritans put their faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, they did not immediately receive the indwelling Holy Spirit; it required laying on of hands by the Apostles. And that seems only to be the case initially; thereafter, Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit when they put their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. So, what is normative? Do we need now to lay hands on new believers in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit? We would answer no based on the doctrinal books of the New Testament that clearly teach every believer receives the Holy Spirit the moment they trust in Christ (Romans 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). Acts is a historical book that records what happened. Things did not always happen the same way, because of extenuating circumstances and specific needs. Therefore, we need to be careful not to establish doctrine and practice on Acts alone without confirmation from the doctrinal books of the New Testament such as the writings of the Apostle Paul.

In this episode we begin to see that Jesus came to save all people, not just the Jews.

In this episode we see that it is sin to attempt to use the gospel ministry as a means of personal promotion.

In this episode we see that new believers need to be disciplined to follow Jesus.

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## **Voice of the Martyrs Needs for August:**

Nerf Balls / Dental Floss / Gauze for Bandaging