

THE BOOK OF ACTS



Acts 8:1-3

8 And Saul approved of their killing him.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

- ❖ What happened to the church, who was the main instigator and why is this important?
- Saul approved of Stephen's execution. Stephen's death had tremendous consequences for the newly formed church in Jerusalem.
- Throughout Acts, Luke uses summary statements or transitions to wrap up one section and alert us that the story is moving in a different direction. Luke made sure to include a brief mention of Stephen's burial and the lamentation for him.
- It was important for the believers to honor him regardless of the danger they faced. The persecution of the church sent believers from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria.
- Despite Saul's evil attempts to eradicate these followers of Jesus, God's plan continued to prevail.

Acts 8:4-8- Philip in Samaria

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Review 8:4-8.

- Philip, who worked closely with Stephens in Acts 6, made quick use of the time in a new city and preached to the Samaritans. This was revolutionary as the Jews considered the Samaritans unclean because of their genetic heritage.
- Yet they welcomed Philip with open arms and open ears. Notice the radical difference between the response of the Samaritans and that of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

❖ **Why did the Samaritans listen to Philip? What was their response?**

Acts 8:9-25- Simon the Sorcerer

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. ¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” ²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” ²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

- The disciples who were scattered because of the great persecution that started following Stephen's martyrdom go about preaching the word. Luke then spends a lot of time telling us about one man - *Simon*. He is described as "great" (a Greek word from which we get the word megalomaniac). He was self-absorbed and loved the praise of men.
- Simon was a prominent magician (sorcerer) in Samaria who used his "magic arts" to astonish people, leading them to believe he was the "Great Power of God." He had a large following before Philip arrived.
- This practice of sorcery was an abomination to God, forbidden in the Law (**Deuteronomy 18:10-12**) and listed as a work of the flesh). (**Galatians 5:19-21**).
- ❖ We see in **8:13** that Simon believed and was baptized as a believer.
 1. What kind of "belief" did Simon have? Was it intellectual assent (he saw Philip's power was real, unlike his own tricks) or saving faith?
 2. How does his later desire to buy the Spirit (**v. 18**) reveal the nature of his initial belief?
 3. How does Simon's fascination with miracles (**v. 13**) differ from the faith of the Samaritans who rejoiced?
 4. How can we examine our own hearts to ensure our faith isn't just about feelings, experiences, or worldly gain?