

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 25- The Gospel Preached in Samaria

Today we begin a chapter 8 of the book of Acts, but not only is this a new chapter, but it's a new section in our outline through our study of the book of Acts. If you remember, our Lord laid out the marching orders for the expansion of the Gospel just before He ascended back to heaven, **Acts 1:8**. And He told His Apostles that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be His witnesses starting in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. So far in our study through chapter 7, the Gospel has been focused in Jerusalem and we saw it expand to the outskirts of Judea in Acts 5:14-16, 28. But now in chapter 8 we see the Gospel spread up to Samaria. But I would suspect that this expansion has not happened in a way that the Apostles would have envisioned. This expansion has come as a result of persecution against the Church starting with the martyrdom of Stephen. And it is through Stephen's death that then launches an all-out assault on Christianity and creates a dispersion throughout the world as Saul begins arresting and killing those who believe in Jesus. But what the enemy meant for evil, God turned it for good because this persecution, actually becomes a catalyst to bring the Gospel to the ends of the world. And we see this progression beginning in chapter 8.

Today we will be looking at the first 17 verses of chapter 8 and these 17 verses can be separated into three sections: 1) the dispersion, Acts 8:1-4; 2) the gospel preached in Samaria, Acts 8:5-13; 3) the validation of the Gospel being received in Samaria through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:14-17. And along the way we will see some examples of true and false converts. Let's begin by reading the first section, **verses 1-4...**

Last week we ended with Stephen's death after he stood boldly in the face of persecution and preached the Word to the Sanhedrin Council. And as we said last week, on the surface, Stephen's death may have looked like it was all for nothing, but as we will see, these Words planted a seed that brought the Gospel to the world. Because these Words began working in Saul's heart, convicting him of his rebellion against God. These Words cut to his heart and it was these Words that Jesus may have been speaking of when He said on the road to Damascus, "*It is hard to kick against the goads.*" Acts 9:5. These Words Stephen spoke that day were the goads continually pricking Saul's heart until finally Saul repented and humbled himself to the will of God. But until then, his life was hard because he was fighting against God, and he in turn made life hard for others around him which resulted in this great persecution of the Church.

**1) Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**

Saul was certainly there that day hearing the Words of Stephen as they were cutting him to the heart, but his immediate reaction was to harden his heart and consent to Stephen's death. This word consent is *συνευδοκέω*, literally, to think well of with... to be in approval with. Saul was the driving force in this persecution, not only with Stephen, but for the Church in general. We see examples from his personal testimonies against the Church, **Acts 22:3-5; 26:9-11**. Saul had a tenacious personality, which, as Saul of Tarsus, he persecuted the Church, but then as the Apostle Paul, God used this strong will for His glory to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is why Jesus said to Ananias, "*He is a chosen vessel of mine.*" Acts 9:15. God chose the Apostle Paul to bring the Gospel to the world, and there has not been and probably will never be again anyone like the Apostle Paul.

The winds of persecution scattered the Seed of the Word throughout Judea and Samaria, and the Church, which had probably around 20,000 members at this point, was dispersed away from Jerusalem, except for the twelve Apostles. These original twelve stayed in Jerusalem and endured the persecution, no doubt preaching the Word and making more disciples even among this intense oppression, Acts 8:25. Notice

that nobody is hiding. They are being dispersed, but they are not hiding in caves. They're still out in the open proclaiming the Gospel just as Jesus commanded them.

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

Luke mentions this to make note of the people's response to the ill treatment of Stephen. Devout men, men who feared God more than man, **made great lamentation over him**. I am sure these were heart felt tears of sorrow, but this lamentation was also an act of defiance and disagreement to Stephen's stoning because they didn't hold back their lamenting. According to the Mishnah, which expanded by now into the Talmud, the oral tradition of Jewish law, forbade honorary funeral observances and mourning rites for a condemned criminal. *Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:5-6* Therefore, because Stephen was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, he was judged as a condemned criminal, and there was to be no noise or lamentations made for him. But here, devout men **made great lamentation over him** in defiance of this stoning.

Now look at the contrast in verse 3...

**3) As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.**

Devout men **made great lamentation** while Saul **made havoc of the Church**. This word havoc, λυμᾶίνω, is only used here in the NT. It is translated as destruction in the LXX, Isaiah 65:8, 25, and in ancient Greek literature it is used to indicate devastation by a wild beast, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, R.H Lenski*. Saul's zeal went beyond what others were willing to do. He had a tenacious and driven personality going house to house, searching for Christians to persecute, **Philippians 3:6**. Notice the contrast between Saul the persecutor and Paul the Apostle. Saul the persecutor went from house to house **dragging off men and women, committing them to prison**. Acts 20:20-21 says Paul the Apostle went from house to house proclaiming the Gospel...*testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul never lost his zeal, it was just redirected for Jesus Christ. But now before his conversion, he is making havoc on the Church, but even this intense persecution from Saul could not stop the spreading of the Gospel...

**4) Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.**

This word preaching is εὐαγγελίζω, evangelizing, proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News of the Logos, the Word of God. Now we see the Gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea and move up to Samaria. Let's read our next section from **verses 5-13**. In this section we are introduced to Philip the deacon again. And just like Stephen, we see another non-Apostle performing signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit with the sole purpose of bearing witness of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5...

**5) Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.**

This is Philip the deacon, not Philip the Apostle because we know that the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem, Acts 8:1. Philip was one of the seven deacons chosen to serve tables, but just like Stephen, his ministry went far beyond just serving tables. We know Philip was of a good witnessing character, filled with the Spirit, and full of wisdom because this was the criteria to be chosen as one of the seven deacons in Acts 6:3. Just like Stephen he did miracles and signs, and later in the book of Acts Luke describes Philip as Philip the Evangelist, Acts 21:8. And that is what Philip is doing in Samaria, he is preaching the Word. Verse 4 says *those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word*. Now verse 5 says Philip was preaching Christ, who is the Word, the Logos who became flesh, John 1:14.

Notice Philip goes down to Samaria. Jerusalem is at a higher elevation than Samaria, so Philip goes **down to the city of Samaria**. Samaria is about 30 miles north of Jerusalem, but it was not a place that Jews liked to go, John 4:9. There was great tension between Jews and Samaritans for several reasons: they worshipped on a different mountain, Mount Gerizim with a different temple, John 4:19. They had their

own unique religious system and they only recognized the Pentateuch as God's Word and did not regard the rest of the Old Testament as Scripture. But probably the biggest cause for contention was Samaritans were not full blood Jews, they were ½ Jew, ½ Gentile which happened as a result of the Assyrian invasion.

Samaria was established when the land of Israel was divided between Northern Israel and Southern Judah after the reign of king Solomon, 1 Kings 11:29-37; 12:20, and Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom. Samaria was founded by king Omri, a king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who reigned about 50 years after Solomon. He was an evil king, as all the kings of the north were, and he established the city of Samaria around 920BC, 1 Kings 16:23-24. About 200 years later in 717BC, Northern Israel was conquered by the Assyrians because of their rebellion against God, 2 Kings 17:6, and only Southern Judah remained. But only until 586BC when Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon carried Judah away as well, 2 Kings 25:21. But when Northern Israel was carried off to Assyria in 717BC, the Assyrians took over the land, and then later, Assyria brought some of the Jews back to dwell with the Assyrians and come along with them in Northern Israel. At this point, the Jews and Assyrians began marrying each other and having children, ½ Jews and ½ Gentile children, 2 Kings 17:27-41; Ezek 23:2-10. Therefore, true full blood Jews, didn't have anything to do with Samaritans because of the mixed bloodline with Gentiles.

But you remember Jesus began breaking these barriers down in John chapter 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well. And it was at that time in the land of Samaria that He first revealed Himself as the Christ, John 4:26. The Samaritans were expectant of the Messiah and Jesus told His disciples that they were ripe for the harvest, John 4:35-42. So now fast forward about 3 years and Jesus gives marching orders to preach the Gospel to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, Acts 1:8. So Philip, being led of the Holy Spirit, goes down to Samaria to preach the Word. And there was an amazing response...

**6-8) <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city.**

Philip is preaching the Word, the people are receiving the Word, and just like the Apostles and brother Stephen, great signs and wonders are accompanying him. This was the promise at the Great Commission, Mark 16:15-18. Again, Philip, just like Stephen, non-Apostles, are performing signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit. But this is key... it is as the Spirit wills, and it is to glorify the Name of Jesus. Never for selfish gain as we will see Simon the sorcerer try and do later in chapter 8. In Samaria, the Spirit of God is moving, the Word is being preached and the multitudes in Samaria are being saved. And verse 8 says **and there was great joy in that city**. The Gospel is always accompanied with great joy, even in the midst of persecution. In fact, it is this supernatural joy that gets us through the persecution, Neh 8:10; 1 Thess 1:6; Acts 20:24; Matt 5:11-12; John 16:33; 15:11; 17:13; Hebrews 10:32-34; James 1:2, 12; Rom 5:1-5; 15:13; 1 John 1:4; Luke 2:10; 10:20; 24:52.

Luke then brings a stark contrast in verses 9-11...

**9-11) <sup>9</sup> But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, <sup>10</sup> to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." <sup>11</sup> And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.**

Verse 9 begins exactly the same way as chapter 5 with Ananias and Sapphira... **But there was a certain man**... Unfortunately, there are always "certain men" who try to infiltrate the church, wolves in sheep's clothing. Satan tried it with Ananias and Sapphira and now he is trying it again with Simon the sorcerer, and he has continued this tactic for the last 2,000 years.

This man named Simon, also known as Simon Magus, *Σίμων Μαγός*, Simon the magician. He was using sorcery and witchcraft to deceive the people of Samaria. And notice his entire focus is on himself. He was **claiming that he was someone great**. And he astonished the Samaritans with his sorcery performing miraculous things to the point that the people of Samaria were calling him god saying, **“This man is the great power of God.”** Notice they weren’t saying that Simon had the power of God, but that he **IS** the great power of God. And the people were deceived for a long time. Just because you see someone doing miracles, even if they are claiming it to be from God, this doesn’t necessarily mean it is from God. This is how Satan deceives. Paul says that Satan himself appears as an angel of light, **2 Cor 11:13-15**. This is what the anti-christ will do in the end, deceiving many people, **2 Thess 2:9-10**. The only guard against this deception is the Truth of the Word of God, John 17:17; 1 Pet 1:22.

Notice what happens when the Truth is proclaimed in Samaria...

**12) But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.**

When the Samaritans heard the Gospel, they believed. They heard the *εὐαγγέλιον*, the Good News message concerning the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus. And the result is **both men and women were baptized**. Now we don’t know the hearts of each individual, but the point Luke is making is that the Samaritans were true conversions because they heard the Gospel and they believed the Name of Jesus and were baptized. Yes, they saw the signs and wonders, but it was the Truth of the Gospel that gave them Salvation. Now compare this to Simon the sorcerer in verse 13. I think that Simon’s following diminished because the Truth was being proclaimed by Philip and in desperation to keep his following, he tries to join with Philip...

**13) Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.**

It would seem that Simon the sorcerer has also been converted because it says he **believed**, he was **baptized**, and he **continued** with Philip. On the surface, this seems like a genuine conversion, but we must be careful with this word **“believed,”** because James 2:19 says *even the demons believe and tremble*. Just believing that God exists isn’t having a saving kind of faith. James says the demons believe that God exists. But saving faith is a complete trust and reliance on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is a repentance of the heart to turn away from sin and to turn toward Jesus because He is the only WAY to Eternal Life. And as we will read, it becomes clear that Simon the sorcerer has not surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

The first clue is at the end of verse 13. Luke says Simon believed because he was amazed **seeing the miracles and signs which were done**. In comparison, the other Samaritans in verse 12 believed as he proclaimed the Gospel, and they heard the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ being preached. But Simon believed because he was amazed at the miracles and signs. He is drawn to the power so he can use it for selfish gain. That’s all he wants it for, to elevate himself as the power of God. And we will see more of that next week when we see his response to Peter and John in verses 18-19.

In these last four verses of our study today, we see the validation of the Gospel being received in Samaria through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because the gift of the Holy Spirit is now being given to the Samaritans just as He was to the Jews, again breaking down that wall of separation between the Jews and Samaritans. Let’s read these next four verses, **Acts 8:14-17**.

Notice the progression. Philip gets sent to Samaria because of the persecution. The Samaritans received the Word of God, the Apostles in Jerusalem hear about this and send Peter and John to verify things. Because remember, the twelve Apostles had stayed back in Jerusalem during the persecution, but now Peter and John are elected to go to Samaria to check things out.



**14) Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,**

Peter and John were always teamed up together, but this is the last time we see John mentioned in the book of Acts. But remember the last time John was in Samaria? He wanted to rain down fire on them from heaven because they rejected Jesus, Luke 9:51-54. Now they are going to Samaria again, this time fire will rain down from heaven, but it is the fire of the Holy Spirit coming upon them.

**15-16) <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.**

When it says they received the Holy Spirit, this is an example of the baptism of the Holy Spirit coming at a separate occurrence from being born again. Because in verse 14 Luke says these Samaritans had received the Word of God and they were baptized in the Name of Jesus. Now at first glance when you read this, you might think they were baptized in water in the Name of Jesus. And that certainly could be, but the Greek is slightly different here because it says they were baptized into the Name of Jesus. This word “**in**” is the word *εἰς* meaning “into” not necessarily “in the authority” of the Name of Jesus, but rather being immersed into His Name. I believe it is a Spiritual baptism being baptized into the Name of Jesus into one body by the Spirit, **1 Cor 12:13**. So these people had received the Word and were baptized into Jesus. This is Justification, being born of the Spirit, born again.

You remember from previous lessons, the Holy Spirit is involved with all three stages of our Salvation: Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification. When we are born again, we are Justified and born of the Spirit, a new creation in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit is dwelling within us, John 3:5-8; 1 Cor 12:12-13; John 20:22. Then as we yield ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit as Ambassadors for Christ, we are immersed or baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit to do His work in and out through us. This can happen immediately after being born again as we see with Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, or it can be later like with these Samaritans. The infilling of the Spirit is always “AS HE WILLS.” 1 Cor 12:11. And that’s what we see in verse 17...

**17) Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.**

This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is an infilling of the Spirit in addition to our Justification and it always follows our faith in Jesus Christ. I have a theory on why the Samaritans weren’t filled immediately with the power of the Holy Spirit after being born again. I believe it is because God wanted the Holy Spirit to come at the hand of Peter here at the beginning when the Gospel first came to Samaria to affirm that this is the same gift of the Spirit that was given in Jerusalem, Acts 2:33. Because if the Samaritans would have said they received the Holy Spirit and Peter wasn’t there to validate it, they may not have believed them. There was already a division between these groups, so God is confirming through the Apostle Peter that this is the same gift to all who believe in Jesus Christ; that the middle wall of separation has been torn down and is available to everyone who believe just as Paul says in Ephesians 2:14-18.

God did the same thing with the Gentiles in Acts chapter 10, because it was also Peter who was there when the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles, Acts 10:44-46. This was intentional to make sure everyone knew this is the same gift of the Spirit given to all who believe in Jesus Christ. And notice that the giving of the Spirit is the same progression as the mission of the Gospel in Acts 1:8: Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. And that’s not a coincidence because the only way we can be witnesses of Jesus Christ is through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and out through us, empowering us to preach the Gospel.