

READ THE SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:1-25 (NIV)

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.

⁴ 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.

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.

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Last week we saw Stephen confront the Sanhedrin for rejecting their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Their response was to kill him. Up until now the church had been thought of as an offshoot of the Jewish faith. But after the events of chapters 8-11 the

church and the Jewish religion would be polarized and become more Greek than Jewish.

PREACHING THE TEXT

Acts 8 (NIV)

1 And Saul approved of their killing him. 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.

Saul approved of their killing. Saul was a student of Gamaliel the Pharisee that prevented the council from killing Peter and John. The Pharisees were not as political and quick to violence as the Sadducees. They did not have as much political power or interest as the Sadducees whom were the second religious party on the Sanhedrin Council.

The violence that was visited on Stephen was like a starting gun that signaled the beginning of violence and persecution against the whole church. This is more than a persecution. This is called a "great persecution." It is intense and it is wide spread. The church members scattered and most left the city of Jerusalem when Saul and the temple militia begin to jail its'

members.

Saul had warrants from the Sanhedrin giving him permission to jail member of the church. The church fled South to Judea or North to Samaria. This would be like us running to EauClaire or Taylor counties until the heat died down around here. In the mean time...

4 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.

THE GREAT COMMISSION BY PERSECUTION

Those who scattered did not just run and hide their faith. They ran and shared their faith. They were scattered to Judea and Samaria and in the heat of the persecution some of them saw this as an opportunity to witness to those who had not heard the gospel.

We can face the hardships of life and think of ourselves as victims helplessly blown around by a fallen world and demonic powers. Or we can look for the hand of God in every circumstance.

When you are fresh out of ideas and answers we can pray that God would lead us into His good and perfect will in Christ Jesus. God always has a plan. The scattered church suddenly became missionaries to Judea and Samaria. Judea and Samaria

were the 2nd phase of the great commission which was restated by Jesus in Acts 1:8.

Acts 1:8

New International Version (NIV)

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

First of all, do you think God is going to continue to give the church power if they stayed home and ignored 2/3rds of the great commission? No!

God will give you power as you obey him in Jerusalem and then go to Judea and Samaria. And we can expect that if we continue to always hang around the same people because it is the most comfortable for us we are also leaving 2/3rds of the great commission on the table. We might even be leaving the whole great commission on the table if we are not living in the power of the Spirit where God has first placed us.

The church received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. And they were witnesses in Jerusalem. The great first harvest was complete in Jerusalem. But there was no harvest of souls in Judea and Samaria until now.

I am sure everyone really enjoyed listening to Peter's sermons in Jerusalem. And they really enjoyed watching the

miracles and people's lives transformed. But this was no time to get comfortable in Jerusalem. Sometimes God has to push us toward Judea Samaria and the ends of the earth when we get too comfortable in Jerusalem. Judea and Samaria could be people in this area that we are overlooking and don't see with the eyes of faith and love of Christ. But God has a way of moving us either where we are or to locations of our choosing.

God used a broken neck to get me to Chippewa. And God used something even goofier to get us from Chippewa to Stanley. We were not naive nor immune to the struggle and turmoil. We were never helpless victims. No matter what is going on in your life you can always bank on the fact that God has a plan. You might have to take a look at that plan with eternity in view.

God took Stephen. Stephen had the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. But even as he was dying for the faith he had the great privilege of seeing straight into heaven. He was given the faith to face his circumstances. And Phillip got to die at an old age. But they both thought of themselves as temporary visitors to earth. As citizens of heaven first. As citizens visiting a foreign land with an urgent mission beginning in Jerusalem.

HALEY - SLIDE: INSERT MAP HIGHLIGHTING SAMARIA,

WHAT'S UP WITH SAMARIA

- Northern Kingdom of Israel conquered by Assyrians
- Assyrians take wealthy educated citizen to Assyria (like Daniel)
- Assyrians give the land of Israel to Assyrian settlers
- Assyrian settlers intermarry with the few Jew left in Israel
- Their offspring were half breeds / Samaritans / unclean /

MOUNT GERIZIM in New Testament Times.

Phillip was one who fled with the crowds to Mount Gerizim in Samaria.

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.

Philip who was named along with Stephen in Acts 6 was a disciple mentored by the apostles. This is the first time the gospel came to Samaria. So each time the gospel first arrives to an area it is accompanied by miraculous signs to authenticate the message.

Many Samaritans were demonized probably as a result of their involvement in the occult. Philip cast out demons and healed the lame. This was similar to what Peter did right after Pentecost when he healed the lame man just before he spoke the gospel in

the temple courts. There was great joy in Samaria. God did not reject the Samaritans! They were on equal footing with everyone through Christ. There is no such thing as 2nd class anything in God's kingdom. There is no C team in God's kingdom.

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.

Those in sorcery boast about their powers. The greatest in the kingdom of God are humble and defer glory to Christ. Simon won people over by doing amazing magic tricks. But God won people over by serving the poor and demonized and lame by healing them and setting them free. Simon called himself the great power. But the greatest in God's kingdom call themselves the chief of sinners, saved by God's grace.

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.

They believed Jesus Christ was the Messiah, Lord and Savior and it was credited to them as righteousness. What was proclaimed to them? The good news of the kingdom of God.

We don't know how many responded to the message of the kingdom of Jesus Christ but it had to be many including Simon the sorcerer. They immediately wanted to be identified with Jesus publicly through baptism. Only the Holy Spirit can convict people of sin and cause them to believe. However, they did not receive the Holy Spirit in the same way that the people in the upper room experienced it. This was the second major advance of the great commission but there was not the major sign of the Holy Spirit as was seen in Pentecost to authenticate the fulfillment of Scripture.

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.

Why do we see salvation by faith in Christ along with water baptism. But then Peter has to come lay hands on them in order to give them the holy Spirit? Do we get the Holy Spirit sometime after salvation? This is confusing for many people. So let's spend some time here.

First, let's understand that Acts is a narrative written as a true story. It records what did happen. But it does not ALWAYS set the pattern for what must ALWAYS happen. Are there reasons found in other parts of the bible that show us a different pattern for receiving the Holy Spirit today? The answer is yes.

1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that every Christian is baptized into the Holy Spirit the moment they believe. If you are saved you have the Holy Spirit. This is in Paul's teaching and is directly addressed.

There were special circumstances going on in Jerusalem, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Many people still understood the church as only belonging to the Jewish people. The Samaritans were always thought of as half breeds and were thought of as unclean people. They could be visitors to Israel but they were not thought of as being on equal footing with Jews of pure blood lines. So how could we know for sure that the Samaritans were on equal footing and had a full share of the Jewish Messiah? They had to have that fact

confirmed by the highest authority in the church, the Apostles.

As the Holy Spirit fell on the Samaritans Peter and John needed to be witnesses so they could testify that the Samaritans are just as much the people of God as are Jews of pure blood lines. The Holy Spirit fell in Samaria the same way He did in Jerusalem. God was not limited to Jerusalem and the temple courts. Jesus was the savior of the world and His Spirit would fall anywhere the gospel message went.

In the letters to the churches you do not see the initial presence of The Holy Spirit coming to a person sometime after baptism. But we do see the command to be continually filled and seeking God's power for life and holiness and witnessing.

HS BAPTISM VERSES HS FILLING

This text said that they only had the baptism of John. That means that they received Jesus Christ and Lord and Savior and they repented of their sin. The confession of sin is what always came before John's baptism. And the confession of sin is what comes before salvation. If we do not understand that we are sinners in need of forgiveness then how will our sins be forgiven? So we need to confess our sins and agree to live our lives to God if we are to come to faith in Christ.

As soon as we are given the faith to believe Jesus Christ will forgive our sins and we turn our lives over to the control of the

Lord our lives change forever. Then our lives belong to God and The Holy Spirit comes to us as a seal of ownership and a sign of the new life. Those who have the Spirit belong to Jesus Christ. According to **1 Corinthians 12:13**, this is the pattern for believers. We get the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. However, we cannot be content with the one experience. The bible tells us in Ephesians 4 to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. This is to be a daily thing. And that means it is possible for a Christian to have the Holy Spirit but to live as if they do not have the Holy Spirit. That solution is to be filled with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

When we lead others to Christ sometimes the evangelical church as a whole is very weak about teaching new Christians about the dynamics of being filled with the Holy Spirit as an ongoing part of the Christian walk. We are good at talking about the initial salvation prayer but we are not so good at talking about the overcoming power of the Holy Spirit that will give us the power and desire to continue to live like Jesus.

And so we have Christians walking around saved from sin but many of them not walking in the power and victory that comes through the filling of the Holy Spirit. We need to be aware of and teach new Christians how to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit every day. If we don't we will be like sports cars sitting in the

driveway with no important direction to head and no gas in the tank.

The means to be filled with the Spirit is fairly straightforward. It begins with God's word. In the book *Liberating Prayer* Neil Anderson compares the bible to the flight manual. As we learn the flight manual we know how to fly the plane. Imagine if we had to fly into cloudy weather and had to trust our instruments to land. And we could not see a thing. It was stormy and scary. But then the voice of the air traffic controller comes on over the radio and guides us using our instruments to a safe landing.

If we did not know the flight manual we would not know where the various switches and levers are. The air traffic controller would tell us to check our horizon and pressure gauges and flap controls and we would not be able to know what he was telling us to do.

So also, the Bible is our flight manual. It is the first step in being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in God's power. When we are quiet and still, our minds and hearts begin to dwell on the presence of God and praise God. That is the beginning of our daily filling of the Spirit. To think of God and dwell on Him and imagine how great He is as creator and lover of our soul. And then the voice of the Spirit speaks into our heart. And we obey what he says and we are filled in order to obey Him.

But what if another voice comes into our mind? We might take the wrong direction. We could be miles off course. The way to know if we really heard from the Spirit of God is to check the manual. If what we hear is not in the manual, The word of God, then we did not hear from God. And then we pray and claim that we are children of God and the devil cannot touch us. And we ask God to take away any thoughts that are not from the Lord and we seek Him again for answers, and we who are His saved Sheep, will hear the Shepherd's voice speaking as a quiet and constant voice deep into our spirit and mind.

Dwell on God! If you love God be still in His presence and quiet your mind and think on God and meditate on the word of God. Imagine the greatness of God. Praise Him and as he is elevated to His rightful place as Lord of the universe, God will inhabit our praises and fill us with His Spirit.

And where the Spirit of God is there is liberty! We can overcome sin. We can walk in the power and in the mind and wisdom of our great God and King! We can lead others to Christ or love those who we would not normally love and they will see Him in us. Be filled with the Spirit and teach new Christians the same. Otherwise we are giving only the baptism of John and not teaching about all the benefits of salvation.

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."

Simon was used to astonishing people with his magic. And now he saw this miracle of the Holy Spirit given through the laying on of hands. And my guess is that Simon reverted back to his old way of thinking when you could purchase magic tricks from other magicians. But God is not for sale. It is not about building the reputation of the person that God uses. God and His gift and overcoming power of the Spirit are free to everyone that loves Him and obeys Him and lives for Him.

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."

Simon has not had a mentor. He does not know what the word of God says about such things. Peter does not mince words when he corrects Simon. Verse 23 says that Simon is full of bitterness and captive to sin. His bitterness could be that he is no

longer on center stage. He is jealous and bitter that he is no longer called the great power. The thoughts of Simon's heart are betrayed by the Holy Spirit. Simon could not own the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that wanted to own Simon for the glory of Jesus.

24 Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

Sometimes the way that God chooses to humble a Christian is through a sharp and very accurate rebuke that is spoken under the power of the Spirit. Some will bristle with pride when they are corrected. And those who are willing to submit to God will respond to a word of correction.

Never put someone in charge of anything if they are unwilling to respond to correction and if they demonstrate an unteachable spirit. Simon responded to correction with humility.

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.

Peter and John saw where God was at work and they joined the work. God was at work in Samaria, so they joined the work of God where it was occurring. That is a great pattern for us. Look for what God is blessing and then join him in that ministry or support that person who is on fire for God.

SUMMARY

God works through persecution. We may react with self pity when we suffer or come under persecution. Or we can look for the purposes of God even in the middle of the pain.

And we learned that often people get stuck in Jerusalem, even when God's Spirit is leading us to Judea, Samaria and the outer ends of the earth.

We also learned that there is a daily filling of the Holy Spirit available to those who want it. We can live just barely saved. Or we can live under the power and guidance of the Spirit of God. That choice is yours. The Spirit is available. Are you thirsty for God's presence?

And we learned that we must teach our new Christians about the basics of salvation. We must continue in that. But we must do a better job of following up with new believers and our young people about how to walk in God's power and walk in God's Spirit. Otherwise we will have generations of people who are barely saved but who bare little fruit and passion for winning the lost and overcoming the world.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are you looking for the ways that God is working even in the middle or persecution and pain? Suffering without cause is hopelessness.

2. How is God leading you in your heart right now to move from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria? How is God leading you to move from a consumer and observer to a witness and servant?
3. Are you taking the time to be filled? Or are you content with the baptism of John?
4. Will you commit to learning more about the daily filling of the Spirit and will you include that in your instruction to those who are younger in the faith. If we have that direction and that spiritual power in this church there is no limits to how far God will take us.

**CLOSING WITH TESTIMONIES OR LIBERATING PRAYER OR
CELL GROUP STUFF**