

Acts 8: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA

Introduction

The death of Stephen (in Acts chapter 7) is an inflection point in the life of the early church. In spite of the fact that Jesus gave the disciples a clear instruction to *be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,"* for four years, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem and preached the gospel only to their Jewish brethren. No one ventured out of their comfort zone neither did we see any major plans by the church to do so. It wasn't until the death of Stephen that things changed. Here in Chapter 8, we see that the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed led to the preaching of the gospel outside of Jerusalem and especially in Samaria for the first time. It sure appears that God used hardship and persecution to force the disciples to do what they would not do willingly. This is a great lesson for us as the modern-day Church.

Chapter 8 opens with the verse, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." Notice that the first place Luke mentioned is Samaria (compare to Acts 1:8). Philip went to Samaria, and revival broke out. Eventually, the work in Samaria caught the attention of the Apostles, and they sent Peter and John to join forces with Philip to strengthen and establish the work. It was as if God was already waiting for someone to go to Samaria in fulfillment of His word.

From then on, the rest of chapter 8 was devoted to the ministry of Philip, his work in Samaria, and then his ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Study the Scriptures: Read the Passage Acts 8:1-40

Note your thoughts as you read:

Write down any questions that come to mind as you read:

Think Through the Following Questions

1. What more can we learn about Saul from this passage? He graduated from holding the clothes of Stephen's killers to consenting to his death and then all-out full persecution of the church.
2. What does it say about the disciples that those who were scattered still found time to preach the word wherever they went in spite of the stressful circumstances they must have found themselves in?
3. Remember, Philip (and Stephen) had been chosen to serve tables (Acts 6:5). How do you think he got into evangelism?
4. How significant was Philip going to Samaria to preach the word, especially in light of Acts 1:8?
5. Verse 18 says, "Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands." What do you think Simon saw as the evidence of the giving of the Holy Spirit?
6. What does the account in verses 9 through 24 say about Simon? Do you think his conversion was genuine, or did something happen to him afterward?
7. Who was the Ethiopian eunuch? What was the significance of his encounter with Philip?
8. What can we, as modern-day Christians and Church, learn from the experience of the early church here, especially if we, like them, refuse to obey the Great Commission willingly?

Lesson Learned: Are there any new things you learned from this passage today?

Application: How do you think this will impact your thinking and/or actions going forward?