



# Acts 8

An OCF Bible Study

## Acts 8

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**What do we see happening right after Stephen's death (v. 1)?** The execution of Stephen incited the first major episode of persecution—persecution of Christian Jews by unbelieving Jews. There was a Jewish civil war going on in Jerusalem.

**What was the result of the persecution?** Jewish Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. They were taken out of their comfort zones and used to plant churches in all Judea as well as in Samaria. We see here the initiation of God's plan to spread the gospel. Otherwise the New Testament church becomes a Jerusalem church and doesn't include Gentiles. The church expanded both geographically and culturally.

**Application: When going through persecution, we sometimes don't have the big picture. Our view of what's happening in our lives is the small picture. God has a purpose to adversity. Sometimes what appears to be very bad turns out to be very good (Genesis 50:20). Following after God is a walk of faith, not a walk of sight.**

**Why were the twelve apostles not scattered like the others?** Persecution centered mainly on Greek Jews like Stephen. Hebraic Jews, who were Jerusalem natives/locals, were not as threatening.

**What do we see Saul doing (v. 3)?** He was on a self-appointed mission—ravaging the church. Apparently watching the execution of Stephen drove Saul's loathing of the Christian community to new heights as he now embarked on a campaign to arrest as many Christians as possible.

**What did the scattered Jewish Christians do (v. 4)?** Preached the word. Shared the gospel. Performed miracles.

**Now we're introduced to Phillip. What do we know about Philip (v. 5)?** Not to be confused with the apostle Phillip, this Philip was a (Hellenistic) Greek Jew. Like Stephen, he was a member of the seven chosen to wait on tables (6:5). He was one of the Jews who were scattered in v. 1.

**Where did Philip go (v. 5)?** He traveled north from Jerusalem to Samaria. **What did Philip do (vv. 6-7)?** He shared the gospel with the hostile Samaritans and did miracles just as Jesus had done.

**What do we know about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans?** The Jews despised the Samaritans and had no dealings with them (John 4:9). They regarded them as racial and religious half-breeds. The sentiment between Israelis and Palestinians even today mirrors the feelings of that day.

**Application: Who are our Samaritans? Like the Jews, do we find ourselves increasingly distant from certain components of the surrounding culture? If we are not careful, we may end up treating outsiders the way the Jews treated the Samaritans—as distasteful, dangerous, hard-to-figure-out folks we would do well to avoid.**

**Now we're introduced to Simon. What do we know about Simon (v. 9)?** The magic that he did was not sleight of hand deception, but sorcery: the ability to control people and or nature by demonic power. People were amazed at Simon. This ability had made him popular among the masses and he exploited his power to win the loyalty of the people and to elevate himself.

**Phillip preached the Gospel. He told them the truth about Jesus Christ. How did the people respond to Phillip (v. 12)?** They accepted the word, believed the message, and were baptized. He didn't debate with them, amaze them with his wisdom, or give them polished answers to their difficult questions. We don't have to be Bible scholars to witness to the lost. Simply present the good news of the Gospel and let it have its way in their hearts (Hebrews 4:12). God honors ministry in the hands of anyone who will tell the truth.

**Why did the church in Jerusalem need to send Peter and John to Samaria (v. 14)?** This was the first evangelical work outside of Jerusalem. Peter and John needed to validate the conversion experience for both Samaritans and Jews alike. The Samaritans needed Jewish Christian leaders to officially welcome them into the church especially because of the hostility that

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existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The new community couldn't have both a Samaritan church and a Jerusalem church. There must be unity in the church at all costs. The challenge for church leadership was to be inclusive—how to include the Gentiles and win the approval of the Jews at the same time.

**How did the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 15-17)?** This Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred somewhat differently than it had in Jerusalem. There it happened spontaneously, but here it came in answer to the apostles' prayer and with the laying on of their hands. There the sound of a mighty wind, visible flames of fire, and speaking in tongues had accompanied it. Here there is no mention that these phenomena were present. But there must have been some outward evidence that they had received the baptism of the Spirit because the people recognized they had witnessed the supernatural. Note: There was no need to speak in different languages because the Jews and the Samaritans spoke the same language—Aramaic.

**How did Peter respond to Simon's request to be able to give the Holy Spirit to people (v. 20)?** Simon revealed by his request that he hoped he could buy God's gifts, namely, the Holy Spirit and the ability to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Peter corrected him harshly. Peter told Simon that God would not grant the ability he sought because his heart was not right with God. Simon wanted to be able to bring glory to himself rather than to God.

**Why was the encounter with Simon so important?** As the counterfeit of the true, these false prophets were among the most dangerous enemies of Christianity. The distinction between the true and the false, between religion and spiritualism, had to be sharply drawn once for all for the health of this new church. Who are the "Simons" of today. Mystics, palm readers, fortune tellers, Tarot card readers, witches, etc.

Bottom line: A whole new people-group (Samaritans), previously despised by the Jews, came to faith in Christ and was welcomed into the church. A historic event! The church was expanding not by adding new Jews but by adding "the enemy"—those who previously had been hostile to Judaism.

**What do we know about the Ethiopian (vv. 27-28)?** Gentile, God-fearer, important, wealthy. The Ethiopian eunuch had visited Jerusalem to worship, was studying the Old Testament, and was open to instruction by a Jew. He was probably much more sympathetic to the Christians' gospel than the average Gentile. This man appears to have been the first full-fledged Gentile that Luke recorded being evangelized in Acts.

**What lessons can we learn from the way Phillip handled this encounter? What did Phillip do that is a model for us?** Phillip was listening (alert), ready to hear, obedient to God's leading. God had a divine appointment for him. He was prepared. Knew the Scriptures. Took the initiative. The Holy Spirit clearly led Phillip to draw near to the Ethiopian. He didn't question or second-guess God.

**Application: When it comes to evangelism, it is critical that the Holy Spirit leads; the people we meet must have had their hearts prepared to hear the message. God had prepared both Philip (v. 29) and the eunuch (v. 30) for their especially important conversation. Theirs was a divine appointment.**

**What was the significance of the Ethiopian conversion?** Apparently, the Ethiopian (a Gentile) carried the gospel to his homeland as a missionary. The gospel was thus taken to Africa. One more barrier was broken down. Another people group was added to the church. Now we have Samaritans and Gentiles (African) admitted to the church along with Jews. Who is God sending you to talk to? Ask God to give you a divine appointment with an "Ethiopian."

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