

Acts 8



Persecution & Revival Spreads

Life Group Leaders should read through this material and choose a few questions to talk over in your group. Your group will not have time to cover all the material. The guide is for personal study and for choosing a few questions that you and your life group would like to discuss.

Read Aloud Acts 8:1-3

Before we break down this section of Scripture, describe what is happening in your own words. (Being able to summarize Scripture is a great way to see if we are comprehending what we have just read.)

Acts 8:1-3

Persecution did not stop with Stephen but began to impact the entire church in Jerusalem. As Acts continues, we will see that this did not slow the growth of the church but actually spurred it on.

- A** Most Bible scholars agree that Acts 8 occurs somewhere between 4-5 years after the birth of the church at Pentecost. It can appear that everything we have studied so far in Acts happened within a few months, but rather it has now been around five years.
- B** Note: where did the church go after they were persecuted? To Judea and Samaria. Does this sound familiar? In Acts 1, Jesus commanded the Apostles to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, yet for the first 4-5 years had not left Jerusalem and had not even thought about going to the Gentiles (ends of the earth).
- !** Persecution led the people of God to fulfill the mission of God by multiplying and scattering. Perhaps this was on God's timing, and perhaps God used the persecution to move the church past their comfort zone to enter His mission.

? **Question: Trials and especially persecution can be uncomfortable, but sometimes they are the catalyst in fulfilling God's purposes. Is there a time that you can remember when a hardship helped you get out of a spiritual rut and into God's will?**

Read Aloud Acts 8:4-25

Describe what is happening in your own words.

Acts 8:4-8

What happened due to the persecution?

- The believers who were scattered preached the Word
- Philip went to the Samaritans, an overlooked and undervalued group of people who did not have direct access to the Gospel
- The unlikely and "unclean" people were hungry for Philip's message
- Signs and wonders were done through Philip
- There was much joy in Samaria

Look at all of the eternal fruit and reward that came from the church being scattered!

Question: It is easy to become comfortable in our day-to-day Christian routine, but what happens when God asks you to make a radical change? What happens when God forces a major change in your life? What are the things that could hold you back from making radical steps of faith or change in your life? Do not miss out on the eternal reward that awaits obedience.

Acts 8:9-13

1 Philip's message reached a broad audience. It was already an audience that was naturally skeptical of Philip as the church had not made an effort to reach the nearby Samaritans yet. Philip also reached both men and women. Finally, Philip reached the least likely in Simon the Magician.

A It is interesting to note that Simon had gained a following in Samaria. There is a good chance that Simon was not a fraud but was rather empowered by demonic/satanic powers. It is important to note that Satan does not have power over believers, and his demons cannot possess a believer. However, non-believers can be possessed by demons and even be used by them to accomplish miraculous feats.

- Exodus 7 - The Egyptian magi appear to be able to recreate some of the signs that Moses performs.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:9 - Satan's power of false signs and wonders
- Matthew 24:24 - People deceived by signs and wonders from false teachers
- Acts 16:16-18 - A demon who tells the future

B The Gospel has the greatest power, but it is important to remember that Satan is the god of this age and has the power to deceive, even through signs and wonders. We must cling to the truth so that we may discern what is and is not true so that we may walk in the power of God.

2 Each person has something that draws them to Christ. For Simon it seems that the power of the Gospel made following Jesus appealing. This is both bad and good. The initial draw to Christ is what gives us the opportunity to dive into knowing Him and following Him. However, if we do not get a good foundation, we may be making an idol. This could be true of miraculous power, church community, social reform, political view, or a framework to process grief and pain. All of these things can be fringe benefits of following Christ, but they are not the substance. We will find that Simon is easily deceived due to his eyes being on the power of God and not the Person of God Himself.

Question: Is there anything in your Christian life that you can tend to idolize? Something that is "good" but becomes more about you or even other people than it is about God's glory? This could be as simple as knowing information about the Bible, needing friends, or finding a sense of purpose/self-fulfillment.

Acts 8:14-17

1 The Apostles were the appointed men of God to establish the church of Jesus Christ. There are a few times in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit is given through the Apostles laying their hands on people. This was an act of confirmation from God that bore witness to the authority that He had given the Apostles. This miraculous act typically happened in periods of transition. In this case, there was a transition from the Gospel in Jerusalem to the Gospel being advanced in Samaria. In other Scriptures this happens in the transition of the Gospel going to the Gentiles by the ministry of Peter and in the confirmation of Paul's ministry as an Apostle to the Gentiles.

We know from Scripture that every believer upon salvation receives the Holy Spirit, but the filling and empowering of the Spirit can come at various times and in various ways.

Ephesians 1:11-14, Romans 8:11, Titus 3:1-7

2 It is important to be reminded from our first lesson that the book of Acts at times is “descriptive” not “prescriptive.” God can and does work in mysterious ways, but it will always be in alignment with His Word. It is important to use the Word as our foundation, also recognizing that the book of Acts, in particular, is not an equation of how God works in every season of life.


Acts 8:18-25

1 Simon's desire for power is revealed in this Scripture. He had left his life of sorcery, but perhaps he had mixed motives in surrendering to Christ. He had not left his power-hungry life behind. What was wrong with Simon's response?

- He desired personal power and gain from God
- He did not seek God for His power source
- He thought the Apostles could give him the authority to give away the Holy Spirit as he saw fit
- He did not seek this gift for the glory of Christ

2 How does Peter address Simon's evil desire? He is pretty blunt! Simon was a new believer, yet Peter knew that this deadly sin of greed and deception would shipwreck Simon in the long run.

Read: Ephesians 5:11-21 - This Scripture talks about the process of leaving darkness for light. The first command is to not fellowship with darkness, but rather to expose it.

 **Question: What is difficult for you about “exposing darkness” or holding others accountable in a Christ-like way?**

3 Peter does not just confront him, but he teaches him and gives him steps towards restoration.

- The low view of God's gift
- Repent
- Intent of the heart
- Bond of iniquity
- It is a matter of the heart
- Pray to the Lord
- Bitterness


4 In the midst of any great work of God, there will be challenges. A prominent new believer made a big mistake, but there was an opportunity for restoration. As the church pressed forward the Word of God was preached and the revival grew throughout the villages of the Samaritans.

Read Aloud Acts 8:26-40

Describe what is happening in your own words.

Acts 8:26-28

Eunuchs were often employed for confidential work by high-ranking officials. In this case, he was the eunuch to the Queen of the Ethiopians and in charge of her treasury. This man was of high standing.

 Philip had just ministered to the outcasts in Samaria, and now he is ministering to a Gentile who is of the “upper class.” This eunuch came to worship at Jerusalem, meaning that he was either a scattered Jew from the exile a Gentile proselyte. Through Philip, God was reaching the “ends of the earth” by touching every demographic of society.

Acts 8:29-40

1 Philip's journey to preaching the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch began by being led by the Spirit of God. Only God can prepare the heart of man to receive the Gospel. We do not want to miss the opportunities God has prepared for us.

2 Timothy 2:22-26 - It is God alone who opens blind eyes, we simply must be ready!

2 We must recognize that Old Testament Scriptures were written by God for the purpose of pointing us to Christ. In some ways, the “Old Testament” name can skew us to what the Old Testament is really about. The Old Testament foretells of and provides the foundation to the New Covenant.

The eunuch was reading the scroll of Isaiah, specifically Isaiah 53. Philip begins with this Scripture to preach the Gospel and lead the eunuch to Christ.

Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament. In addition to this, the Scripture is full of “types of Christ” and prophecies pointing to the New Covenant.



Question: Take a moment to read Isaiah 53. How would you share that Jesus is the Christ from this Scripture? What other Old Testament Scriptures could you use to share the Gospel and point to Christ?

3

After believing on the Lord Jesus, the eunuch desired to be baptized.

A very common pattern we will see in the book of Acts is that people heard the Gospel, repented, believed, and then were baptized. Baptism always went with salvation. It is not what saved the people in Acts, but it was always a step of obedience, and typically immediate obedience, to receiving the Gospel.

Read Romans 6:1-14 for the purpose of baptism.

4

Once the eunuch was baptized, the Spirit of God “teleported” Philip to another town. This as a miraculous event that placed Philip where God desired him to continue to preach the Gospel. Being caught up by the Lord or transported is an event that happens a few times in Scripture and is similar to what will happen in the rapture.

A good reminder that God is not bound to the laws of nature. God is sovereign and will accomplish His will by whatever means are required. However, He often calls us to practical steps of obedience to fulfill His will. Either way, our role is to trust God and allow Him to do the heavy lifting.

Weekly Challenge

It is easy to be caught up in the everyday flow of life. We can begin to rely on our own schedules, strengths, and resources to accomplish God’s plan. Yet God’s plan is only accomplished by His power and grace. What are some ways you can create margin in your schedule to have the time to listen to God’s voice? To ensure that He is leading us and not our own plans and desires.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:31 ESV

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

