

ACTS 8: SPREADING IT AROUND!

INTRO: Dandelions – the scattering of seeds. Have you ever tried to wipe wet paint off of glass?

In Acts, we have seen the church persecuted from the outset. We have seen them weather the storm that blew up inside the body. But now we will see the church persecuted in a much harsher way; namely that Stephen was stoned to death because of his message. Last week we saw him defend the charges against him, though not in the way most of us would have expected. Acts 8 picks up just after his death. It is clear that in both the spiritual world as well as the physical, this message isn't to spread. But if we only look at things from the negative standpoint, then we miss something. We will only see it as a struggle and we can fail to see the positive side, the side that shows both from the physical and spiritual standpoints, that God's plan is working. The Gospel is spreading. And it is spreading according to how God said it should. Take note of the place-names as we continue through the book. God is reclaiming land given over to nations at the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis.

Acts 1:8

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Romans 1:16

The Just Live by Faith

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

The term, “Greek” refers to Gentiles, Greeks being how most Jews referred to gentiles since Hellenism and the Greek language were the pervading descriptors of gentiles of the day. As we get into chapter 8, we will see the main “problem” of this section of the text. Due to the spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem, and the fact that people from abroad are believing and then taking the Word back to their homeland, the religious authorities in Jerusalem, led by Saul, soon to be the Apostle Paul, are doing all they can to quash this burgeoning movement.

But we need to see that what they mean for evil, God uses for the good of all in order to have His plan succeed.

1 Cor. 2:7,8 **But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

Had the spiritual and physical powers of that day known that the crucifixion of Jesus would lead to their downfall, they would not have had Him crucified. What looked like a victory for the powers of darkness, both in this world and the spiritual world, was actually their un-doing. And the same thing is happening here. The persecution makes things worse – from their standpoint at least. (Have you ever tried to wipe paint off of glass?)

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

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

4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

Stephen is buried and the people mourned for him, as is to be expected.

On the heels of his death, Saul begins to go from house to house, with the authority of the Sanhedrin, pulling out believers and having them put in prison. (Not Roman prison but being held by the Temple authorities.)

Because of this persecution, some of the people scatter, but they don't just run for the hills, they carry the Gospel with them. And wherever it goes, people come to faith. Phillip, one of those chosen with Stephen to administer help to the widows, is also a preacher and evangelist. He goes about preaching, casting out demons and healing the sick. He went to the city of Samaria, in the land of Samaria.

City of Samaria:

Israelite Shomron (lit. "watch-tower"; also written "Shomeron") was located in the heart of the mountains of [Samaria](#), a few miles northwest of [Shechem](#). The ruins of the Israelite town, as well the ruins of towns built at this same location later in history, are all adjacent or within the modern [Palestinian](#) village of [Sebastia](#).

Remember Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

So now, due to the persecution in Jerusalem, the Gospel has gone out to Samaria, just as it was supposed to do.

History of Samaria:

Northern tribes, their apostasy and deportation to Assyria. Some were left behind and inter-married with foreigners brought in by the Assyrians. Because of their apostasy and intermarriage, they were seen as unclean half-breeds by Jews both in Jerusalem and Galilee. This is why Galileans going to Jerusalem for pilgrimage avoided this land. (See Jesus' route to Jerusalem in Mt. 19:1; Mk 10:1. Also the story of the Good Samaritan, that was an irony.)

This is land God is retaking, letting Israelites know that He hasn't forgotten them. (The reason for all the place-names.) Due to the message and the healings, etc., there is great joy in the land.

Now we will run into an issue within the revival taking place in the city.

9 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, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 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. 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.

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, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Simon the sorcerer – a man of great power and influence in the community was seen as a powerfully spiritual man – “The great power of God.” In the Samaritan Targums, (translation of the OT scriptures in Samaritan, (a Semitic script) into Aramaic, the language of the common person of

the day. This phrase, in the Samaritan was used to speak of God and angels. So this man was thought of, at least to some extent, as God or at the very least, as someone endowed with the power of God.

He hears the words of Peter and believes. That is clear from the verse, but then we see an issue come to the fore.

Simon continued on with Phillip, but when he sees the power of the Holy Spirit manifest, he wants in on it. Nothing wrong with that, but the problem is how he goes about asking for it. Peter rebukes him harshly and we could very easily have another Ananias and Saphira episode, but things don't go that way. Why not? The answer is in verse 24, Simon repented, and he was spared.

So what do we do with this? With this guy Simon? He was bringing baggage over from his life prior to knowing Jesus. That was all he knew. But he repented. We can't expect new believers to act with the maturity of mature believers. Many times we don't see mature believers behaving the way they should. He repented, Ananias and Saphira didn't. He was sincere, just immature and uninformed. God's grace moved once again.

If we go back to verse 15, we see that Peter went to Samaria in order that the believers could receive the Holy Spirit. This can cause some angst with some people. The deal was that the people had received the Gospel, but had not yet heard of the baptism of the Spirit, which is the power of God to embolden people as well as the giftings of the Holy Spirit. They simply hadn't heard of this and Peter made sure they did. They willingly received the Spirit, we aren't told of the manifestations, though I would imagine things were similar to that of Pentecost. But the important thing here is that when the Samaritans received the Spirit, and that was seen by others, that they, the Samaritans, who were previously thought to be something less than true Jews, were "legitimized" as believers. And if we go forward in Acts, we

will see this worked out among the Gentiles as well. This confirmed to everyone that God accepted them and that there was no difference between them and the believing Jews in Jerusalem. Everyone was/ is on equal ground at the cross.

The area of Samaria has now been reclaimed for God. The scattering of believers in Jerusalem has now backfired on those who wanted to quash the church. (Verse 25)

26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

***"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.***

***33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?***

For His life is taken from the earth."

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch

said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

37 Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

An angel tells Phillip to go south, (Southwest) towards Gaza, and there he sees an Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot. Phillip is told to catch up with the chariot and does so, asking the man, who is reading from Isaiah 53, if he understands what he is reading. He essentially asks Phillip to explain it to him. Phillip does, “Beginning at chapter 53 and onward.”

53 is Messianic, 54 – new covenant, 55 – a new creation, 56 – inclusion of Gentiles and blessing and promises to eunuchs. No wonder the guy went on his rejoicing!

Though there was a substantial Jewish population in Ethiopia, we aren’t sure that he was a Jew. As a eunuch, he would have been an outcast in Jewish society.

Candace is not a proper name, it a transcription of an Ethiopian word that means “queen.”

This man went home and through his evangelization, the land of Ethiopia was reclaimed for God. (Southern arm of the reclamation map)

Phillip was then caught up and taken away.

Acts 8:40

40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Phillip is taken to Azotus, Ashdod in the OT. Gaza and Ashdod were two major Philistine cities in the OT. As Phillip makes his way through that region and moves north to Caesarea, he is reclaiming the coast. The theological messaging is saying that even the Philistine territories, part of the Promised Land, are now being reclaimed.

So, we have the scattering of believers in Jerusalem which results in them being scattered, which then results in the Word moving into Samaria, as verse 1:8 said. In Samaria, we see the Gospel reaching and moving even the hardest of pagans. We see God move in the heart of a man, who like the rest of us, brought some of his baggage, false beliefs into his Christian life. He sinned but repented and God heard him.

We also see God moving a man to reach an individual who was seeking Him by reading His Word. He believed and was baptized. This took place in the area of Southern Judea – so the Gospel is moving out just as it was supposed to according to Acts 1:8. Sacred space, the nations are being reclaimed for God. People are being saved and healed. The church was growing as people saw their persecution as an opportunity not to complain, but to tell others about Jesus.

We have this same mission, as we serve the same God. Once again, church is not a time or place – it is a life, lifestyle and a vocation.