

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

From our last lesson we saw that the Church has begun to grow large within Jerusalem. Coming with this growth were ministry responsibilities that began to go beyond the gifts and talents of the Apostles. This led them to ask for help in meeting those needs so that they could continue attending to the study and spread of God's Holy Word and in attending to prayer. From this came a group of Hellenistic servants that today many churches will refer to as Deacons.

Prominent among that group will be two men, Stephen and Philip. In our lesson last week we looked at how God provided these servants with the abilities and gifts they needed to carry out the ministry responsibilities that they had been given. We also noted how this example reflected the role of the congregation in selecting from among themselves those who would serve within the local body, and giving them the authority and responsibility to carry out that service rather than being dependent on the Apostles to do everything.

We also saw Stephen's boldness in standing before the Sanhedrin and, we studied about the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus, who would stand and watch as Stephen was stoned to death.

This week we will observe the growth of the Church outside of Jerusalem and witness how God uses great adversity once again to spread the gospel and begin the process of taking the great saving message of Christ to the world.

What happened following that stoning will amaze you, as we look at it more closely this week – and its relevance to events in our own lives will become more apparent as we study the impact of adversity and the great victory God provides us through His Son Jesus the Christ.

This week's lesson focuses on the period when the evangelical movement of the Church began, and where the great mission emphasis it has today gets its roots.

For this week then, let's read Acts Chapter 8 then answer the following:

1. Who approved of Stephen's death?
 - a. ANSWER: Saul
2. Read the beginning phrase in Chapter 8 verse 2 and compare it with the beginning of verse 3. What point is Luke making in this comparison/contrast?
 - a. ANSWER: "Godly men" are contrasted with Saul by using the word "but" to link the two verses.
3. How did Saul, who would later become Paul, help to spread the gospel outside of Jerusalem? (Acts 8:1 and 8:4)
 - a. ANSWER 1: He was instrumental in scattering Christians throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.
 - b. ANSWER 2: As they went, they went "preaching the word".
4. Who did NOT scatter when the church scattered?
 - a. ANSWER: The Apostles; they did not run nor feel led to leave.
5. What did Saul do that caused so many to scatter?
 - a. ANSWER: He went house to house, hunting down every Christian and arresting them.
6. Did Saul want to destroy the church ... or just persecute it?
 - a. ANSWER: he wanted to destroy it completely

7. What was Saul's self-confessed approach to find people who were followers of Christ and arrest them? Read the following and note everything that you discover in each passage:
 - a. Acts 22:4-5
 - i. ANSWER 1: "I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."
 - ii. ANSWER 2: "I even obtained letters from Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished."
 - b. Acts 26:10-11
 - i. ANSWER 1: "And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them."
 - ii. ANSWER 2: "Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme."
 - iii. ANSWER 3: "In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them."
8. What happened as the church was scattered? (Acts 8:4).
 - a. ANSWER: They went abroad preaching the word as they went.
9. Do you suppose the Apostles feared that all was lost, that the church had failed? Or do you suppose they saw God's will being accomplished even in the midst of this persecution? Would persecution have been something they were familiar with?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Most definitely they viewed this as the furtherance of God's plan.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The Apostles were all very familiar with persecution and imprisonment, and they rejoiced in being counted "worthy" of persecution. (Acts 5:41)
10. Have you ever had a time in your life when it appeared that God had abandoned you, or that all hope was lost, that you saw no light at the end of the struggle only to have God give you a great blessing? What can we learn by looking at the reaction of the Apostles and the activities of the Church as it scattered?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Always trust in God no matter what.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Nothing surprises God.
 - c. ANSWER 3: Be encouraged when you are persecuted for the Church and joyfully continue to praise God and spread the Good News about Christ.
11. Philip was one of the seven original servants chosen by the Church in Jerusalem along with Stephen. How did he react to stoning of Stephen and the persecution of the Church?
 - a. ANSWER 1: He went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He also performed miracles.
12. Who were the Samaritans? Why would Philip be led to go there and preach Christ as the Messiah? Wasn't this a Jewish man with a Jewish message? Who were these people, and what connection would they have with Philip?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Samaritans were Jews who cross-bred with Assyrians beginning in 722 BC following the capture of the ten northern tribes.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Thus they still held their commitment to the Pentateuch and to the hope of the coming of the Messiah.
13. After reading Acts 8:7-11, what supernatural influences were at play in Samaria, and what was Simon's role in all this?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Evil spirits were present and were being cast out by Philip.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Sorcery was being practiced, in particular by Simon.
14. How did Simon refer to himself, how did others refer to him?
 - a. ANSWER: They called him the "great power of God", and he also claimed to be "great".
15. Why did people believe he either was God or represented God?
 - a. ANSWER: They were easily fooled by his tricks and cleverness.

16. Does the Church have any "Simon"s today to confront? List some examples.

- a. ANSWER: The televangelist scandals of yesteryear would be one obvious example, but today's headlines are full of examples for which "Christians" have embezzled money or otherwise taken advantage of their position of authority.

17. Was Simon saved? (Acts 8:13-25)

- a. ANSWER: Clearly no, based on his behavior and conversation with the Apostles.

18. Find a definition for the word "simony", write it down and note why it applies to this lesson.

- a. ANSWER: As documented in [Wikipedia](#), Simony is "is the ecclesiastical crime of paying for holy offices or positions in the hierarchy of a church, named after Simon Magus, who appears in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:18-24). Simon Magus offers the disciples of Jesus, Peter and John, payment so that anyone he would place his hands on would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the origin of the term simony but it also extends to other forms of trafficking for money in 'spiritual things'".

19. What do Simon's "salvation" and his request of Peter tell us that we should be aware of today?

- a. ANSWER 1: The presence and influence of phony Christians.
- b. ANSWER 2: There are many people who are simply looking for ways to gain influence and power over people, even those within the church; they are charlatans and not true believers. We need to be watching for these types of people within our midst, and be on guard that we not follow them nor allow them to lead others down the wrong path.

20. What happened in Samaria as a result of Philip's preaching and miraculous healings? (see verse 8)

- a. ANSWER: Great JOY broke out - in spite of the persecution in Jerusalem and other places - JOY! The Gospel Message brings joy to everyone who hears and believes.

This week we began to see the spreading of the Gospel outside the city of Jerusalem, and the spread of the Church through the efforts of evangelical congregational members, including Philip, while the Apostles were still in Jerusalem.

Clearly we observed several things from this study. As members of a local congregation we are to spread the word of Christ, we are to rejoice during times of persecution, since our joy and persecution will help spread the Good News or Gospel Message about Christ. God is always in control, and His sovereign will is always accomplished.

We are also to be on guard for those who seek power and influence and who wish to make gain from their association with Christ and the followers of Christ. We are to be especially careful, as these are clever, smooth-talking people who can easily mislead.

I think too, that as we reflect on this lesson, we find that the Church has enemies both outside and inside its body, and that they can take the form of religious authority and attract people of great wealth and influence who do not have true advancement of the Kingdom of God at heart.

Finally, the strongest lesson that we can take away is the need for us, as Christ's Church today, is that of continuing to reach out to the lost, the hurting, and the needy; to both preach the Good News and to meet the physical and spiritual needs of those God places in our path. In the next lesson, we will encounter another such example as Philip meets the Eunuch from Ethiopia.

May God use our study to empower and embolden us to want to share the Good News with others and to seek out those in need; so that, through us, Christ might meet their physical and spiritual needs.

Yours in Christ,

Wes