

A SURVEY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

6. PERSECUTED AND SCATTERED Acts 8:1

Adult Sunday School
Gethsemane Baptist Church
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PERSECUTED AND SCATTERED

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As we have been studying through the Book of Acts, we have noted several developments in the birth of the church. In the previous study we noted five things that moved the church toward maturity. These prepared it for what was to come next. Those five things were;

1. The cleansing of the church of Ananias and Sapphira.
2. The power of God on the Apostles
3. The pronouncement of the church “ought to obey God rather than man” (Vs. 5:29b)
4. The Apostles responsibility to the Word and “*seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*” (Vs. 6:3) *are chosen*
5. The death of the first martyr, Stephen.

As chapter eight begins we notice two key words in verse one that express the next development. Those two words are “persecution” and “scattered”.

In chapter one verse eight the Lord Jesus promised His disciples, “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (1:8) The disciples received this power

of the Holy Ghost in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. From there they took the truth of Jesus Christ to all the city of Jerusalem. This was the first city in Jesus' instruction. They stayed in Jerusalem and the surrounding cities. There had been no real effort to be obedient to the rest of the commission, "*in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" The instructions of 1:8 were not carried out until 8:1. Persecution was the means by which God encouraged His people to take the Gospel into all the world.

At the Stoning of Stephen there was a young zealot named Saul. (7:58) "*And Saul was consenting unto his death.*" (8:1) By his own testimony, Saul was part of this "great persecution of the Church". "*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*" (Acts 26:9-11) "*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*" (8:3) Luke then gives us an example of the Word's being preached as a result of this persecution. The deacon, Philip (later known as

“the evangelist” (21:8), went to the city of Samaria and “*preached unto them.*” (vs. 5) There was a great reception of the truth by many people and many people of the city believed. “*And there was great joy in that city.*” (Vs. 8) Jesus, Himself, had been the reason for this reception of the Gospel. He witnessed to the woman by Jacob’s well in Samaria and many “*came out of the city, came unto Him.*” (John 4:30) “*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman,*” (John 4:39) Now comes Philip “*And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake*” (vs. 6) One notable occurrence in the story is the receiving of the Holy Ghost by the converts in Samaria. We know that they were believers already from Jesus’ ministry in John 4. Now there were many more but they were ignorant of the Holy Ghost. Peter and John came to them and prayed for them and as they did the Holy Ghost fell on them to give evidence to their faith in Jesus. We should remember that Acts is a history book and not a book intended to teach doctrine. Sometimes people today try to use this episode to teach how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It should be noted that this occurrence was not accompanied by any supernatural activity by these new converts. This receiving of the Holy Ghost is unique in the Book of Acts. [compare Saul’s infilling (9;17) and Cornelius’ (10:44)] It can be said that this laying on of hands was a means to heal the animosity that the Jews and the

Samarians felt for each other. The Gospel always unites those who despise one another before the Gospel comes. When the Jews saw the Samaritans receive the Holy Ghost, they began to see them as brethren. Those who were despised by each other now were united in the love of Christ by the same Holy Ghost.

Chapter 8 has another example of how the Gospel spread in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. It can be speculated that Philip returned to Jerusalem with Peter and John (vs. 25) because an angel appeared to Philip and told him to go south into Gaza which was a desert region. There he meets the Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip explains the prophecy of Isaiah 53 concerning the death of the Messiah. The Eunuch (an high official of the Ethiopian government) believes and is baptized in the name of Jesus. He then returns home with his new faith to Africa. The Gospel continues to spread.

Afterwards, Philip is “*found is Azotos*” (vs. 40) [This is the Old Testament town of Ashdod.] “Philip then made his way up the coast to Caesarea. He must have settled there, for he next appears in the record at Caesarea more than twenty years later with a house and four daughters. (21:8-9)” Kent. P. 82

God used persecution to propel his Word and the faith of Jesus in to the rest of the region. These examples are just two of many that Luke, no doubt could have given us. As we move on through the

book, we will see how God chooses Saul, the persecutor of the church and uses him to be the churches greatest missionary evangelist. Persecution seems to be an extreme method to move His people. Some have speculated that if the church had begun to carry the truth to the other parts of the earth sooner the pain could have been avoided. Perhaps, but God, who sees all things from an eternal perspective, uses both our pain and out joy to develop His children into the people they can be for Him.

Ideas to consider:

1) Why do you think that there had been no real effort to be obedient to the rest of the commission, *“in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* in the church until chapter 8?

2) Why should we not try to teach doctrine from the book of Acts?

Notes:
