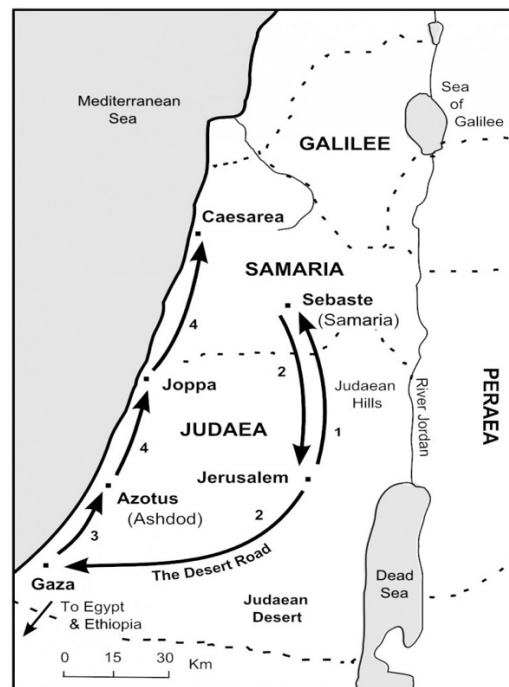


Week 12—Acts 8:1-25 (for Sunday, March 22)

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Read Acts 8:1-8. Look at the map below to get a better picture of Acts 8. What is the immediate result of the persecution of the church in Jerusalem? *Why* is that important? Who is Philip and why do you think Luke focuses on him here?



2. Before reading the note below, what do you know about Samaria? Now read John 4:4-9 *and* read the note below. As you do, make any further observations you may have about Philip going there and how it relates to the overall theme of Acts (see 1:8).

Samaria—The animosity between Jews and Samaritans dates all the way back to 930 BC when Solomon died and the kingdom of Israel was split in two because of a poor decision by his son, Rehoboam. The northern tribes of Israel rejected southern Judah. As the *LifeChange* study on Acts explains, “The northerners chose the city of Samaria as their capital, and then set up a temple and a cult to rival those in Jerusalem. The two nations were at war off and on until Assyria overran Israel in 722 BC, destroyed Samaria, and deported most of the Israelite population. Thereafter, the whole territory of Israel was known as Samaria. The Assyrians settled pagans from other parts of their empire in Samaria. Some Samaritans remained loyal to the God of Israel, but most worshipped Him alongside other gods with mixed pagan and Israelite customs. The Samaritan version of the Law of Moses differed slightly from the Jewish version, and as the centuries passed, Samaritan and Jewish approaches to the ancestral faith diverged more and more...Thus, Jews regarded Samaritans not as Gentiles but as heretics, a deplorable quasi-Jewish cult...Samaritans and Jews generally despised and avoided each other.” (Acts, p. 86).

3. Where is *your* Samaria? How might this passage be pushing you outward into those places?

Day 2

1. Read Acts 8:4-12. What was Philip’s pattern of witnessing (see especially vv. 6-8, 12)? Where else do we see this pattern? Is this pattern evident in your life? Why or why not?

2. How does Luke describe Simon? Do you think his powers were real or fake? How might this compare to Exodus 7:11-12, 22, and 8:6-7?

Simon—The Roman world was full of men like Simon: astrologers, prophets, philosophers, cult priests and sorcerers would often travel throughout the Empire offering their services to predict destiny, make love potions, or influence the gods for money (John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, 179-189). In later history it is believed, though not proven, that Simon became known as a great opponent of Christianity and became known as the father of the heresy called Gnosticism.

Great Power of God—Simon either proclaimed to be, or was acclaimed by others to be God, a god, or a chief representative of God.

3. Do “Simons” still exist today? How can we be aware of them? What signs would you look for?

Day 3

1. Read Acts 8:9-17. If yesterday’s note about Simon is true, what does that teach us about his “belief” and baptism in v. 13? How does James 2:14-19 speak about this?

2. Why do you think it was important for the church in Jerusalem to send Peter and John to minister to the new believers in Samaria? Why wasn’t Philip’s confirmation enough in this case in your opinion?

3. Why did the Holy Spirit not fall on the Samaritans before Peter and John laid hands on them? In your opinion, is this a pattern of salvation or an exception? Explain. Why must we be careful to make something like this a pattern?

They received the Holy Spirit—Because this is an issue that has been debated, and even divided the church, I wanted to include this longer explanation by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart of Acts 8:14-17 to help us better understand: “Romans 8:1-17 asserts that no one who does not have the Holy Spirit is a Christian. Hence, Acts 8:14-17 has just three explanations: (1) The Samaritans were not yet real believers. (But would Philip have baptized them if he had any doubt about their faith? Luke casts no doubt on either their faith or Philip’s judgment in; the apostles [also] added no teaching to what Philip had given.). (2) A person can receive the Spirit only when an apostle (or his successor?) lays hands on him. (3) God withheld the Spirit in this unique case so that the apostles could confirm that Samaritans were part of the church.

Explanation 2 assumes that 8:14-17 is normative for all time, while explanation 3 states that the Samaritans’ case differed from most others. We test these alternatives by *examining what happens elsewhere in Acts*. We find that: (a) In 19:1-7, the men at Ephesus have not yet been baptized into Jesus or received the Spirit; they receive both at once, with laying on of hands by an apostle. (b) In 10:44-48, the Spirit comes on people *before* baptism, without laying on of hands, and after only hearing the gospel. (c) In 2:38, the Spirit comes without laying on of hands but after hearing the gospel. (d) In 9:1-7, Saul receives the Spirit; when Ananias, not an apostle lays hands on him.

This variety suggests that neither the order “water baptism then Spirit reception” nor the order “apostolic laying on hands then Spirit reception” is a rule or norm. Instead, the experience varies according to what God wants to do in the particular situation. The principle illustrated is that when Acts records variety, none of the patterns is probably a norm; when Acts records uniformity, the pattern is more probably a norm. Baptism and Spirit reception are norms for Christians; the manner and order of these events is not.” (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 94-102.

Day 4

1. Read Acts 8:18-25. What was wrong with Simon’s request in vv. 18-19? Are there ways we might do this in our own lives? If so, how?

2. What does Peter’s response to Simon teach us about the Holy Spirit? Compare Peter’s response to what we learn about the Holy Spirit in the following verses:

Acts 2:38—

Acts 10:45—

Acts 11:17—

3. What does Peter's response to Simon teach about following Jesus?

Day 5

1. Read Acts 9:8-25. What is the result of this episode in the lives of Peter and John (v. 25)? How do you think they felt about this?

2. Why do you think Luke recorded this episode with Simon? What does it add to the story of Acts?

3. What encouragement do you take from this story? What warning?

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Acts 8:1-25 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?

2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!