

Acts 8a

1 Stephen had clearly laid down the essence of the Christian faith. The Sanhedrin could not accept his interpretation of the Old Testament culminating in Jesus. They would have had to admit the conviction and execution was an act of murder that they committed. They see the church as trying to turn Jewish people into heretics, misinterpreting the law, and turning them against Jewish authorities. Ignoring Gamaliel's earlier advice, they began to persecute the Christian community. What they meant for evil, God meant for the fulfilling of Jesus' command in Acts 1:8. The Apostles stayed to try to continue to win the Jewish people even in the face of death.

2 We rejoice that our loved ones are with the Lord, but we mourn the loss of their fellowship and ministry. Ecclesiastes 7:2

3 Saul was one of the leaders of the persecution. Never underestimate the power of God to transform the hardest of hearts. Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6 The word for "destroy" in this verse is used of wild animals tearing their victims apart.

4 – 5 This was what Jesus had asked them to do. Sometimes what seems to be a hardship turns out to be God's instrument to help us obey. Jesus had taught in Samaria. Now Philip (one of the seven) was preaching in that region that Jesus is the Messiah. Remember that the Jews and Samaritans have a prejudice against one the other. This is a big step forward in breaking down the barriers that separate people. Samaritans only accepted the first five books of Moses. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim. That temple was destroyed by a Jewish leader John Hyrcanus. They rejected the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews so despised them that they would not allow them to convert to Judaism. The Jewish leaders wouldn't like these people coming under what they saw as a blasphemous form of Judaism! John 4:9 It may have been in the city of Gitta that Philip ministered. Justin Martyr wrote that Simon the Sorcerer came from that city.

6-7 Philip is one of the three outside of the 12 that God used to perform miraculous signs. The fruit from those signs (healing and casting out demons), was that the people listened to his message.

8 Imagine the joy if the incurable in this town were healed!

9 At that time, magic was not the practice of illusion, but the manipulation or coercion of spiritual powers. Simon apparently had the ability to actually do something through the spiritual forces. However, he recognized that the power

Philip wielded was much greater than his own. There are papyrus records from that time period of magical spells and incantations. Some of the early church fathers believed that he started gnosticism, but there is no evidence to support their beliefs.

10-11 The Great Power was the equivalent of saying "a great angel", similar to what our local Gabriel claims.

12 –13 Once completely at odds with each other, Jew and Samaritan now find equal standing at the foot of the cross. Baptism was the final initiation into Judaism. Jews refused to baptize Samaritans. Jesus was breaking down walls that had separated them through Philip's ministry.

Did Simon truly give his life to Jesus or was he intellectually believing with motives other than knowing Jesus as Lord? Notice his focus on the miracles.

14-17 This is a passage that poses some theological difficulties. Is the baptism of the Spirit something that happens separate from conversion? Charismatics would say, "Yes!" and fundamentalists would say "No!". There is no doubt that we receive the Spirit when we are saved. We cannot have Jesus in our heart without the presence of the Holy Spirit. There may come a crisis in a life, when one yields their whole being to the power of the Holy Spirit. You have all the Spirit when you are saved, but He may not have all of you.

Perhaps we can look upon this passage as a turning point for Christianity. Since there was serious doubt that Samaritans could be converted, the apostles needed a sign to assure themselves. This was a whole new direction for the church. Luke 9:52-56 They may have need to see evidence of the presence of the Spirit to be convinced that this was God's leading.

18-23 Simon thought he could buy the gift of healing just as he purchased magical spells. Then you can resell the spell to others and be paid to use it. It was request based on financial gain. Peter urged him to repent. He said he was full of bitterness. A better translation may be "bitter poison". Using the gifts of God for greed is the inspiration of Satan. The selling of church offices later became known as simony.

24 Simon was fearful of impending judgment. He knew the true God was at work, and now he knows the true God does not work in the way that his old gods worked. We go through the same transformation process. So, is he saved or isn't he? I don't think we can really answer until we're in heaven.

25 Now that they know the Lord accepts Samaritan converts, they go on preaching in other Samaritan villages. Surely what Jesus did in John 4 paved the way in their hearts and minds to follow his command. This is step 2 in Acts 1:8.