

Acts 8:1-24 “Saul, Phillip the Evangelist, and Simon the Sorcerer” June 9, 2024

Intro:

Concerning the overall narrative of Acts, chapter 8 starts part 2. Part 1 was about the initial work of God’s Spirit coming down and the testimony in Jerusalem. Peter and John were arrested a couple of times, beaten and threatened and told not to preach Jesus anymore. That did not stop them. Then, as the people were experiencing the outpouring of God’s Spirit and many men and women were being converted, the apostles commissioned deacons to handle the everyday affairs of the distribution of food. These were most likely Gentiles and were mighty men of the faith of whom Stephen (chapter 7) seems to have been preeminent. The Spirit was doing signs and wonders through Stephen so as to authenticate the message of Jesus as the King. He has a run in with the Sanhedrin and instead of just beating him and releasing him, as they had previously done, they are enraged and proceed to stone Stephen making him the first martyr in the New Testament. A zealous and brilliant young man named Saul was “giving hearty approval” to their actions. So, the gospel has gone to Jerusalem. The people largely receive it while the Jewish authorities reject it. God moves the focus to Samaria, hence section two of the book of Acts.

The three major characters in this narrative are v1-3 Saul; v4-8 Phillip; v 9-24 Simon the Sorcerer or Simon Magus.

But the focus of the story will be another mighty man, a gentile deacon named Phillip.

Concerning the structure of the text, vs1-3 are introductory and concern the effects of Saul’s persecution.

What we mean by this is that Saul was invading people’s homes and dragging them to prison (see v3). This fact will become more relevant in a couple of weeks when we get to chapter 9. It sets the backdrop for his zeal.

Verses 4-24 are about Phillip in Samaria with a deeper dive into the episode with Simon the Sorcerer in v9-24.

Notice that it took a persecution to get the Christians to go. The text does not condemn them for staying and not going. But, they were, as Jesus said in 1:8, to be his witnesses in more places than just Jerusalem. So, a persecution breaks out. That said, God does not mean for everyone to stay in a place of persecution willingly. Jesus said in Matt 24:16 that those who see what’s happening in Jerusalem should flee and that’s exactly what the Christians did in 70AD when the Romans assaulted the city. Lest we think less of the early believers, notice that as they were scattered (perhaps providentially), they “went about proclaiming the good news of

the word.” (v4). They did not shrink back from their boldness. They continued to preach Jesus as the ascended King and commanded that everyone repent.

Verse 5 introduces a new scene: Samaria.

Samaritans are half breeds. were members of the northern tribes that were conquered in 722BC by the Assyrians. They ended up intermarrying with them. Therefore, they were mixed race being part Jew and part gentile. The Jews treated them with revulsion. When Jesus “had to go through the towns of Samaria” (John 4:4) He is going out of His way to reach the gentiles, that is the whole world (3:16), not just Jews. That is why the episode of Jesus interacting with the Samaritan woman at the well is so shocking. Additionally, Jesus’ story of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:29-37) and His healing of the 10 Samaritan lepers is equally unusual and was considered outrageous.

As alluded to earlier, this is also a fulfillment of Acts 1:8... “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit come on you and you will be My witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the outermost part of the world.”

Phillip, you will recall from chapter 6, is one of the deacons appointed to help with the distribution of food to the Greek or Hellenistic widows.

Phillip goes to the city of Samaria and preaches Christ to them (v5). The Spirit of God was performing signs and wonders, people were being delivered from “unclean” or demonic spirits. There were also healings. All of this was done, of course, to authenticate the message Phillip was preaching. And, according to verse 8, there was great joy.

Now, in verse 9, we are introduced to a new character named Simon. He had been performing “magic” and astounding the people, claiming that he was big stuff.

Verse 12... but they seemed to change their minds about things when Phillip shows up and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God.

V13 says that Simon “believed and was baptized... and was constantly astounded.” Before, the people were astounded by Simon, now, Simon is astonished by the signs and miracles performed by Phillip.

V14-17 Peter & John get wind of this and come to Samaria and pray for the people to receive the Spirit, and after laying hands on them, they do.

V18-19 Simon sees this, and tries to buy the ability to do the same.

V20-23 Peter rebukes Simon and tells him to repent and pray that if possible, the intent of his heart would be forgiven. But in v24, Simon rejects that admonition and tells Peter to pray for him.

I think what we have here is an example of false conversion. Yes, v13 says that he believed and was baptized but it seems clear from the text that his heart is not changed. This has always been the case. There are people who are, for whatever reason, attracted to the faith. Perhaps because of its results, but they don't love God. They are not regenerate.

You will recall Jesus' parable about the soils in Luke 8. It is in many ways a striking parallel to what happens here. Let's look at it and see what it says. READ LUKE 8:1-15.

I want to point out a few things:

- 1) The language used to describe what Jesus does "preaching the good news of the kingdom" in Luke 8:1 is same language in Acts 8:12.
- 2) There were signs and wonders accompanied by an interested audience, just like in Acts.
- 3) Jesus gives a parable describing the different kinds of responders who apparently receive what He has to say. Of the three soils or responders, only one is good. The other three are only temporary.
- 4) He explains the parable citing the sovereignty of God and the perseverance of the truly converted.

In our text, it does not seem that Simon is truly converted. At least that was the majority opinion of the early church fathers. Simon is mentioned in their writings quite extensively and there is even some tradition about further miraculous show downs between him and Peter. Nonetheless, the point is that simply not wanting to go to hell and falling in with the bandwagon of conversion is not enough.

Paul's description of false conversion and false repentance. There are actually two kinds of repentance, one worldly and one godly. Turn with me to 2Corinthians 7:10-11.

In addition to all of this, the book of Hebrews gives several strong warnings against apostasy, which is false conversion.

In addition to this, I want to give a few additional warnings.

Warning against witchcraft, occult or mystery religions. Next week, if you have the chance, you may ask Jared Chrestman about some of his experience with the occult as he is very knowledgeable about such matters.

Warning against naiveté. Don't be naïve. Jesus says to be as shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt 10:10). Be wise. We've started publishing not only these notes but also the

notes from our Monday Morning Men's Bible Study. Last week, we started Proverbs, the book of wisdom. Be wise. Read and heed Proverbs.

Warning against the love of money. Simon seemed to make a lot of money off his schemes.

Encouragements:

Preach the gospel (read report from Al Baker). Invest in the kingdom. Take risks for the kingdom. At the same time be wise. Only seek the God of the Bible. Don't be naïve or get snookered into schemes, tricks or outright demonic phonies of the power of God.

Closing Prayer:

Our great God and Father in heaven, thank you for this passage and the example of these godly men who risked and even gave their lives for what matters most. Would you give us a keen understanding of Your ways as described and prescribed in the Bible? Would you move us by your Spirit to boldly proclaim the good news to everyone you would send us to at work and home? Would that your Spirit make us wise in this present evil age and at the same time as innocent as doves as Jesus commanded us. Bring us near now as we remember the sacrifice of Christ and make us whole and complete for every good work. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions:

1. Who are the three major characters in this narrative? v1-3 Saul; v4-8 Phillip; v 9-24 Simon the Sorcerer (Magus).
2. What was Phillip's background (see ch. 6)? He was a gentile deacon. He is called an - evangelist in Acts 21:8-9.
3. Who were the Samaritans? They were _____. What cross-references in Acts (1:8; 6:5; 21:8-9), the Gospels (Matt 24:16; John 4:4ff) and the OT (are helpful in understanding this?
4. What is one of Luke's unique features in his writing? He highlights women and gentiles. Both of which are addressed in this passage (v5 & 12).
5. In v12, what was Phillip's message about the good news? Kingdom of God
6. Who was Simon?
7. In v21, what was Simon's sin?

8. What are the three warnings implied in this passage from the life of Simon?

9. What are the encouragements?