

Snapshots of the Early Church – Acts 8:1-25

Introduction:

Chapter 7 ends with an introduction to a man named Saul, who stood by while Stephen was being stoned. Chapter 8 opens up with a picture of Saul that shows he is no longer a bystander, but an active opponent of the church. But as Saul tries to stamp out the fire of the Gospel, the flames just spread out further. We will read how Samaria also receives the truth of salvation through Jesus. But things do not go smoothly, and we meet Simon who thinks the Holy Spirit can be bought and sold! How will the church respond to the new challenges and situations? What will the Holy Spirit do to guide these new believers? This is the direction of this week's study.

Raging Saul – Acts 8:1-3

1. What is the first thing we learn about Saul in chapter 8? Why might Luke add this to his story?
2. Verse 1 goes on to tell about the situation in Jerusalem in regards to the church. What is happening? Who do you think might be behind this? Why? How does the church respond?
3. Luke, the human author of the book of Acts, adds the note about the burial of Stephen. Why might he include this (v. 2)?
4. In contrast to the "devout men," what was Saul doing? He gives further commentary on his actions in Acts 22:4 and Galatians 1:13. What else do we learn?

The Church's Response to Adversity – Acts 8:4-8

5. The persecution was meant to stop the advance of the church. What actually happened according to verse 4? What lesson might we learn from this when we face adversity (ie. COVID-19)?

6. What is interesting about where Philip goes to preach Jesus in verse 5? What is this revealing?
7. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit was at work through Philip's ministry. What were some of the indications that this was the work of God? (what "signs" were given by God)
8. As God was working in their midst, how do the people of Samaria respond (v. 8)?

8. great joy in that city—over the change wrought on it by the Gospel, as well as the cures which attested its divine character.¹

Newfound Faith: Simon's Story – Acts 8:9-13

9. What do we learn about Simon in verse 9?
10. What was the response of the people according to verse 9? What god did he get his power from?
11. Verse 12 starts with that wonderful word "but" which means something changed. What happened to the people that changed them from a follower of Simon to a follower of Jesus? How was the switch evidenced?
12. The highlight of the passage is verse 13. What happens? What seems to have caught Simon's attention?

A Deeper Work: Receiving the Holy Spirit – Acts 8:14-17

13. Who heard about the revival in Samaria? (v. 14) What is their response? Why?
14. What was the prayer of the apostles for the people? Why? (v. 15-16)

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 181). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

15. Describe the way the apostles ministered to the people of Samaria (cf. v. 17). How would these actions change the lives of the new believers?

Misguided Believer – Acts 8:18 – 24

16. What did Simon want according to verse 18-19? Thinking back to Simon's former life, what might he be thinking?
17. How does Peter respond to this request by Simon (v. 20)? What do we learn in verse 20 about the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
18. In verse 21 Peter declares that Simon's heart is not right before God. What does he mean?

18. offered them money—Hence the term *simony*, to denote trafficking in sacred things, but chiefly the purchase of ecclesiastical offices.²

19. Verse 22 starts with the word “repent.” What does this mean? What should he repent of? One commentator responds to this scene this way: “A profession of faith without repentance is invalid.” Explain.
20. It has been suggested that in verse 23 Peter is thinking of Deuteronomy 29:18: “¹⁸ Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.”³ What false god might Simon still be pursuing?
21. What might be your response to Simon's request in verse 24?

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 182). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Dt 29:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And on the Way Home... - Acts 8:25

22. We are likely reading about the actions of Peter and John, who had started in Jerusalem. What things did they do on the way home? Again, what has happened in the hearts of the apostles that was so wonderful? (cf. v. 25)

Conclusion:

This chapter starts with a sombre note: the church is under threat and as a new entity, the question that would have been on the lips of the people was, "Will she survive?"

But the church not only survives, she thrives! As believers scatter because of the persecution they take Jesus with them. And wherever Jesus is proclaimed the Holy Spirit adds new believers to the church. As promise in Acts 1:8 the message first went out to Jerusalem, then Judea and now to Samaria. We know it will continue to spread to the "ends of the earth" (in fact Acts 8 ends with that theme).

In our day of challenge and adversity, we know the Holy Spirit has something special in mind. In fact many Christian leaders believe the church will be stronger and will impact many lives through this crisis.

So as we find ways to stay safe, may we also pray a prayer like this: "Holy Spirit, how are we to minister your love and grace to our community today?"
Ready for an adventure???