

9. Peter and John preach in Samaria along the way.

Acts 8:25 After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.

10. Discussion: (a) How would you compare the early Church with the Church of today? What do you think makes the difference? (b) How do you think we might be able to recover some of the exciting results that the early Church experienced? Would it be worth it, as far as you are personally concerned?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus
Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 11

1. Background: In lesson 10, after having presented a strong defense against the false accusations of the Jewish High Council, in the end Stephen was stoned to death.

2. Persecution Scatters the Believers

Acts 8:1-3 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of **Judea** and **Samaria**.² (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.)³ But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

Before he was taken up to heaven, Jesus had predicted:

Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in **Jerusalem**, throughout **Judea**, in **Samaria**, and to **the ends of the earth**."

3. Discussion: (a) Which predictions of Jesus were beginning to come true as a result of persecution? (b) How important has persecution been in causing the Good News of salvation through Jesus to spread throughout the world?

4. Philip Preaches in Samaria

Acts 8:4-8 But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.⁵ Philip, for

example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah.⁶ Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did.⁷ Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. [Note: *Gospel* means *Good News*. Samaria was a territory north of Judea that also had a city by the same name. Philip was one of the 12 apostles chosen by Jesus.]

5. Discussion: (a) Where did the early Christians go in order to escape persecution from the Jews? How did this contribute to spreading the Gospel? (b) Why were people so eager to hear the message that Philip was bringing? (c) Can you give some examples of how believers still spread the Good News, even today?

6. Simon the sorcerer tries to buy spiritual power.

Acts 8:9-24 A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great.¹⁰ Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.”¹¹ They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

¹² But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized.¹³ Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there.¹⁵ As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then

Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power.¹⁹ “Let me have this power, too,” he exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!”

²⁰ But Peter replied, “May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought!”²¹ You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God.²² Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts,²³ for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.”

²⁴ “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!”

[Note: According to the dictionary, sorcerers seek to use demonic powers in an attempt to control people and events.]

7. Background: It seems the Apostles recognized that being baptized and believing in Jesus was not the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Their own experience included baptism, putting their faith in Jesus as Messiah and following him. Before he departed, Jesus breathed on them saying, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Were they at that time born again?) However, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts Ch. 2) they were anointed in God’s love and given power to prophesy in unlearned languages. This resulted in adding 3000 to the Church.

8. Discussion: (a) How did Simon’s presence in Samaria create a confrontation between the power of Christ and the devil? Why do you think it was important for the people of Samaria to experience this demonstration? (b) What was the result among the people? (c) Why did the apostles send Peter and John to Samaria? What was the result? (d) What do you think Simon saw that made him want to buy the ability to pass on the power of the Holy Spirit?