

Today's Message

GETTING OUR ACTS TOGETHER

GCF Sermon Series on the Acts of the Apostles

#13: "Scattered As Planned"

Acts 8:1-25

When God is in control, opposition can afford opportunities, persecution can fulfill a purpose, and indeed even tragedy can turn into triumph. Opposition led to Stephen's death, which in turn intensified persecution which then led to the scattering of believers from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. But that was exactly how God planned it. Acts 8:1 is best viewed with Acts 1:8 lenses. The gospel reached Judea and Samaria but Jesus did not say that persecution will be the catalyst to spread the message. He did not reveal the process, only the result; not the cause, only the effect.

Because the word for "seed" is included in the word "scatter", it seems to imply a purposeful sense of "sowing seed". Thus, the negative idea of scattering due to persecution turned into God's positive way of sowing the seed of the gospel in Samaria (vv. 1-5, 24) and we see the results in Philip's ministry.

1. Conversion: Many Samaritans believed and were baptized, vv. 6-13.

- a. Philip "preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ", vv. 6, 12.
- b. The kingdoms of darkness were exposed and defeated and "there was great joy in that city", vv. 7-8.
- c. Simon, the acknowledged sorcerer and magician "believed and was baptized", vv. 9-13.

- When the kingdom of God is preached, the kingdoms of darkness are threatened. Jesus promised to be with us and we go on his authority knowing that he has established his victory.
- Regardless of what we may think based on vv. 18-24, Luke simply stated that Simon the sorcerer believed and was baptized. Only God knows with absolute certainty those who belong to him.

2. Confirmation: Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to confirm the converts, vv. 14-17.

- a. The Jerusalem church deemed it necessary to confirm the results of Philip's ministry, v. 14.
- b. For the Samaritans, the initial experience of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit came when Peter and John laid their hands on them, vv. 15-17.

- As it happened initially to the Jews (Acts 2), and now to the Samaritans (Acts 8), then to the Gentiles in Cornelius' household (Acts 10) and John's disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19), the Holy Spirit came after conversion. Subsequently, the Spirit came to dwell in believers at conversion.

3. Confrontation: Simon, the converted sorcerer was confronted and rebuked, vv. 18-24.

- a. Like some people, Simon's conversion is clouded by the cultural and experiential baggage ingrained in his total person by his former life, vv. 18-20.
- b. His desire to "minister" to others through acts of power like the apostles was driven by money and motivated by bitterness and bondage to sin, vv. 20-21.
- c. Challenged to repent, he requested prayer for the lifting of the potential curse, vv. 22-23.

- Discipleship is a process of unlearning and renouncing the past in pursuit of the new life in Christ. Learning to live as a Christian involves a major struggle for some more than it is for others.