



The Church Is Persecuted and the Gospel Spread

Acts 8.1–25



LESSON GOAL

The child will turn over the reign of their lives to King Jesus.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- People in the church were persecuted.
- God gave the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans.
- Simon was jealous of the apostles and needed to repent.

KEY VERSE

“You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.” —Acts 8:21

APPLICATION

- Rejoice that the Gospel continues to spread.
- Love your enemy and pray for a chance to share the Gospel with them.
- Examine your heart see whether you have submitted to Christ.

NEXT WEEK

Philip Shares the Gospel with the Ethiopian
Acts 8:26–40

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children.” —Deuteronomy 11:18–19

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Introduction

Perhaps Satan believed he had secured a great victory against the Son of Man when the angry mob stoned Stephen. But Stephen’s death was not a defeat for the Kingdom of God. Jesus, who has all authority under heaven, used Stephen’s death and the following persecution to spread the good news of Himself throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8:1–25 records the Kingdom’s advance into Samaria. While many Samaritans repented and entered God’s kingdom, one Samaritan named Simon faked obedience in order to advance his own kingdom. While the record of the Samaritans’ conversion and reception of the Spirit is primarily a testimony to the unstoppable advance of God’s Kingdom, Peter’s judgment of Simon’s bogus repentance is a warning to any who resent the coming of the King.

The Persecution of the Church (Acts 8:1–3)

Although the apostles had already suffered for preaching the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40), the murder of Stephen marked the beginning of widespread persecution of the church. One of those who persecuted the church was named Saul. Luke describes how Saul, a Pharisee who had consented to the death of Stephen (8:1), tried to destroy the church. Saul was so zealous for the church’s obliteration that he went house to house searching for believers. When he found them, whether they were men or women, he put them in prison (8:3). Later in Acts, Paul tells how before his conversion he had voted for saints be put to death, he had “punished them often in every synagogue,” and he had “persecuted them even to foreign cities” (26:11).

Before persecution broke out against the church, the church had remained centered in Jerusalem, but after the death of Stephen, the church was “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (8:1). Even though many believers fled Jerusalem for the surrounding areas, the apostles remained to care for those who remained (8:2). It is likely that the majority of the believers who left were among the Hellenist while those who remained were largely Hebrews. Little did persecutors like Saul realize that forcing the believers to flee Jerusalem would only lead to the name of Jesus being proclaimed elsewhere.

The Proclamation of Christ (Acts 8:4–13)

The Gospel spread rapidly when “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). One of those who proclaimed the Gospel after leaving Jerusalem was Philip (8:5). Philip was one of the seven men who had been appointed to oversee the distribution of food in Acts 6:5. Philip went to the north of Jerusalem to the city of Samaria, the ancient capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Following the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C., the Assyrians forced the Israelites into exile and repopulated the land with Gentiles. The Samaritans were the descendants of Gentiles who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. Because of their mixed lineage, the Jews denigrated the Samaritans as half-breeds. The Samaritans' sacred writings were based on the first five books of the Old Testament. Like the Jews, the Samaritans waited for a messiah but unlike the Jews, they refused to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for centuries and each considered the other heretical.

Although most Jews hated the Samaritans, Philip followed his Lord's example (John 4:1–42) and preached the Gospel to them. Luke summarizes Philip's message succinctly: Philip "preached Christ to them" (Acts 8:5). Just as the apostles had done in Jerusalem, Philip preached the death, resurrection, and crucifixion of Christ and called on the Samaritans to repent. No doubt Philip took advantage of the Samaritans' expectation of a messiah and proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah whom they were waiting for (John 8:25–26).

Philip had a successful ministry among the Samaritans who "with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip" (Acts 8:6). The Samaritans rejoiced not only when they heard Philip's message but also when they saw the miraculous signs that Philip was doing (8:6–8). God demonstrated the authenticity of Philip's message by allowing him to do miracles such as casting out demons and healing the lame and paralyzed (8:7). Between hearing Philip's preaching about the "kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" and seeing the miracles that Philip performed, the Samaritans believed and were baptized (8:12). Just as Jesus had promised, the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to Samaria (Acts 1:8).

To demonstrate how powerful God's Gospel is, Luke described the Samaritans before their conversion. Before the Samaritans had obeyed Jesus, they heeded a man named Simon. Simon "practiced sorcery...and astonished the people of Samaria" (Acts 8:9). Sorcery was a mix of science and superstition, including astrology, divination and the occult (MSB, 1648). Because Simon performed impressive and mysterious deeds (whether through trickery or demonic enablement), the Samaritans listened to his claim that "he was someone great" (8:9). They were so deceived by Simon that they said "This man is the great power of God" (8:10). The Samaritans believed that Simon was somehow united with God and a manifestation of His power in bodily form. For a long time, the people "heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries" (8:12). Although the Samaritans had been deceived, the light of the Gospel dawned in their hearts when they heard about Jesus, the Man who really is God, and when they saw the miracles Philip performed.

The Samaritans were not the only ones convinced of Jesus' supremacy. Even Simon was convinced by Philip's message and miracles. Although Simon did not repent (Acts 8:21–22), he pretended to be a disciple, submitted to baptism and followed Philip (8:13). Once he had exalted himself as the "great power" but now Simon could not deny that Jesus was the greater power. He followed Philip around, continually amazed at the miracles Philip did (8:13). Simon would eventually reveal the jealousy in his heart, but for now, Luke uses him as dramatic proof that the most wicked blasphemers cannot deny the power of the exalted Christ.

The Prayer for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17)

Even though the Samaritans had believed the Gospel and had been baptized in demonstration of their obedience to Christ, the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:16). Both in the early church and the church today, people

receive the Holy Spirit when they are first saved (1 Corinthians 12:13). Although this is God's normal pattern, God delayed sending the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans in order to emphasize that a new group of believers was about to be added into the church.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans "had received the word of God" (Acts 8:14), the apostles Peter and John went to Samaria. After the apostles prayed for the Samaritans (8:15) and laid their hands on them (8:17), the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. (Perhaps the reception of the Holy Spirit was followed by a miraculous display like speaking in tongues which allowed all present to know that the Samaritans had received the Spirit.) Because the Samaritans did not receive the Spirit until the apostles came and prayed, the apostles were certain that the Samaritans had been included in the church. The event would also reveal to the Samaritans that they were under the apostles' authority since they did not receive the Spirit until Peter and John prayed and laid their hands on them. The outpouring of God's Spirit upon the Samaritans was testimony to the fact that God's kingdom was spreading to the ends of the earth. Those who had previously hated each other were now unified in one body.

The Presumption of Simon (8:18–25)

Not all the Samaritans rejoiced that God's kingdom had advanced with such force. Even though Simon had professed belief in Christ and had been baptized, he resented the power that God had given the apostles over the Samaritans. Before he had been praised as the great power by the Samaritans who heeded him, but now the Samaritans were obeying Jesus and his representatives the apostles. Desperate to regain control of his own little kingdom, Simon foolishly offered Peter and John money for the ability to impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands (8:19). Simon thought that the apostles had power in the fingertips to give God to whom they chose. He did not understand that the apostles' laying on of hands was simply a symbolic gesture that the apostles approved of the Samaritan's salvation.

Peter's pronouncement against Simon is one of the strongest in Scripture. Peter told Simon that he was currently going to hell (along with his money) since he thought the "gift of God could be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). Because his heart was not "right in the sight of God", Simon had no real part with the church, even though he had mentally assented to the truth of Philip's claims and had been publicly baptized (8:21). Even though Peter revealed that Simon was going to hell, he still told Simon that he would be forgiven if he repented (8:22). But until Simon repented, he would remain "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (8:23). Neither a profession of faith nor baptism could transfer Simon from Satan's kingdom to God's as long as he remained a slave to sin. The only antidote to his poisoned heart was repentance and faith. Unwilling to submit himself to the Gospel's requirements, Simon asked Peter to pray that he would escape judgment. Simon knew that Peter represented the true God but showed no evidence of wanting to submit himself to the Lordship of Christ.

Conclusion

Following their time in the ancient capital of Samaria, the apostles returned to Jerusalem. On their way home, the apostles preached in many of the villages of Samaria (Acts 8:25). God's kingdom continued to spread as more and more of the Samaritans responded in faith to the Gospel. Neither persecution, false prophets, or racial hatred could stop God's kingdom from advancing. Even though the victory of God's kingdom is certain, each person must examine their heart to see whether they have embraced King Jesus. Neither a vague belief in God's power, a

confession of faith, nor an act of baptism will rescue someone from their own wickedness. Claiming submission to Christ does not release one from being “bound by iniquity” (8:23). Like Simon, many have welcomed God’s kingdom with their mouths but have resented it in their hearts.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”
—Psalm 78:1*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

What were some characteristics of Stephen?

He was a man of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and faith.

Who did Stephen preach to?

Stephen preached to those in Greek-speaking synagogues.

Who did Stephen speak to?

Stephen spoke to the Sanhedrin.

What did Stephen tell the Sanhedrin?

Stephen told them of God’s plan for Israel and how the Jews were rejecting the true Messiah.

What did the Jews think of Stephen’s message?

They were very angry at Stephen. They gnashed their teeth in anger at him, covered their ears, and cried out in a loud voice.

What did the Jews do to Stephen?

They picked up stones and hit Stephen with them to kill him.



Traveling

Philip was traveling to Samaria. Once he arrived he shared the gospel with the people there. To illustrate to the students the idea of traveling to another place give them a suitcase and clothes. Ask the students what they would take on a trip. Explain that because of the persecution that was happening many of the believers had to pack their things and leave quickly to escape the persecution.



Black and White Hearts

Materials: black and white clay

Directions: Give the students both black and white clay. Discuss with them how every person is born with a black heart. Help them to make a heart with the black clay. Talk about the bad attitudes and actions that go along with a black heart. Next have them create a white heart. Explain that the only people who can have a white heart are those who tell God that they were wrong and who trust in Him



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to pay for their sins. In today's lesson we will learn about a man named Simon who would not tell God that he was wrong. He had a black heart. We will also learn about a group of people who trusted God and told God that their sins were wrong. These people were given white hearts by God.

Charades

Have the children act like something they are not. Prepare several ideas a head of time. Have a student act like an animal such as a cat, purring and meowing, or like an object, such as pretending to be a tree or a train. Go on to explain that in today's lesson Simon acts like something he was not. He was pretending.



3

Spreading Game

Crumple up a piece of paper for each student. Have the students spread them wherever they want all around the classroom. Transition to a discussion of how the Gospel spread all over the country.

4

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done." —Psalm 78:4

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

The church had begun to get a lot of attention from the Jewish leaders, not because they believed in Jesus as their Messiah, but because they were angry with the number of people who were following the apostles and becoming Christians. They had reprimanded the apostles, and even jailed them a few times, but things were about to get a lot worse for the Christians. Beginning with the violent killing of Stephen because he preached the gospel to the Jewish leaders, the persecution of the church began. But the death of Stephen was not a defeat for the Kingdom of God. Jesus, who has all authority under heaven, used Stephen's death and the following persecution to spread the good news of Himself throughout Judea and Samaria.

One of the Jewish leaders was named Saul, and he was the leader of the persecutors. He went from house to house in Jerusalem looking for Christians, and when he found them, he sent them to prison. The Christians had to leave Jerusalem and move to another city in order to escape. They scattered throughout all of Judea and Samaria, and they preached the Word to their new friends and neighbors. The Jewish people and the Samaritans did not usually get along very well. Long before Jesus had even been born, during the reign of the Assyrians of the Jews and Jerusalem, some of the Jewish men married Gentile women, and some of the Jewish women married Gentile men. They raised their children with a combination of what the Jews believed and what the pagans believed, and they became known as the Samaritans. The other Jews grew to hate the Samaritans because they

did not worship God the way God had commanded and because their children were not fully Jewish. They were part Jewish and part Gentile. The Jews and the Samaritans had hated each other for hundreds of years. But when the Jews who had become Christians moved to Samaria, they did not come showing hatred to the Samaritans, but preached to them that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, and that they must repent and make Him the Lord of their lives. Philip was one of the Christians who preached, and when he preached the Word, great multitudes listened to him, believed the message, and repented. They saw great miracles: Philip healed many who were paralyzed and lame, and many demons came out of the people they had possessed. The city of Samaria rejoiced at their newfound salvation.

One of the men who heard Philip's message was named Simon. Simon was a sorcerer who had a great following of people because he did amazing things either by tricking them or because he had been given power to do supernatural things by a demon. People had believed though, that his power was from God. When Philip came to the city and did miracles even more astonishing than anything Simon had ever done, Simon lost his following, but he himself was amazed at the miracles he saw being done. He heard the message the Philip preached and he believed that Christ was the Messiah, and he was baptized with the other believers.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed that God would the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit, and then began laying their hands on them, and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit right then. When Simon saw that the believers were receiving the Spirit by the apostles, he offered them money to lay their hands on him, that he might receive it himself. Simon revealed that his heart was selfish. He wanted only the power that came with Holy Spirit, not the submission of his life to Christ. Peter judged Simon's heart and made it clear that he was not saved, but rather he and his money would go to hell. Then he urged Simon to repent of his sin and pray that God would forgive his wickedness. Simon, however, did not repent. He showed that He had never truly repented, but only pretended to accept Christ as his Savior. He asked Peter to pray that God would not judge him as Peter had said that he would, but that he would not pray to God himself.

The apostles finished their work in the city and continued on preaching the word in the villages on their way home to Jerusalem. Nothing could stop the spread of the Word of God, not even great persecution. In fact, what Saul had meant for evil, God turned to God by spreading Christians all around that even more people might here the good news. However, as Simon demonstrated, a confession of Christ is not enough. After learning of the good news of Christ, one must repent from their sins and give their hearts to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



Lesson Questions

What is persecution?

Persecution is when people are hurt because of who they are or what they believe.

What happened when the early church was persecuted?

The gospel spread to other places.

What did the man named Simon do?

Simon was what is called a sorcerer or a magician who astonished people with what he did.

What did Simon think when he saw the apostles truly doing miracles?
He was jealous of the apostles and wanted that power for himself.

What did Peter tell Simon?
He told Simon that he could not buy these gifts with money and that he must repent. Simon was not willing to submit himself to God.

Who came to the people of Samaria after they were saved?
The Holy Spirit came to the believers in Samaria after they were saved. This showed that God's gospel was truly spreading to the ends of the earth.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



Freeze Frame

First, dramatize Saul's persecution of the church. This may be done on video to show at the beginning of teaching time; otherwise, dramatize it simply with two characters, one Saul and another believer being "persecuted." The first three verses of the chapter could be read as narration. Then, have the scene "freeze" either by pausing the video or having the characters stand still as statues. Finally, dramatize the remainder of the lesson with the frozen scene in the background, and explain that while persecution was happening, the gospel was spread and more people became Christians.



Map Activity

Place a large "J" and a large "S" on a map of Samaria and Judea. Have a student come point to the "J." Have another student come trace the border of Judea in crayon. Do the same with Samaria. Then have a student draw arrows from Judea to Samaria, illustrating the spread of the Gospel.



Simon's Heart

Blow out the inside of an egg. The hole can be concealed with wax or a small amount of tape. Show the class a regular egg and the one that has been blown out. Ask if they see any differences. First, break open the regular egg and show them the yolk. Then, crack the hollow egg and show them that it is empty. Discuss how Simon looked the same on the outside, but was missing something inside.

Praise and Worship

Make Me a Servant

Change My Heart, O God

White as Snow

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” —Psalm 78:7

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Share the Good News

Materials: paper or Styrofoam plate, knife or scissors, and verse

Directions: To encourage the students to share the good news with others create a good news Frisbee by cutting out the center of a plate leaving only the outer rim in tact. You may want to try different diameters for the most effective Frisbee. Allow the students to decorate their Frisbee with the gospel message.



What's in the Heart

Materials: copies of “What's in the Heart” craft pages, scissors, glue, crayons, or other decorations

Directions: Give each child a copy of the craft pages. Have him or her cut out the the rectangle on the first page and then fold the sides along the dotted lines so they cover the hearts. This should make two doors that can open and reveal the hearts inside. Next, have them cut out the three hearts from the second page and then glue the right side of each heart to the right door in the correct order. When the students open the doors they will be able to read (or have someone else read to them) what kind of heart a true believer has, what kind of heart Simon the sorcerer had, and then discuss what kind of heart they have.



Salvation for Sale?

Ask the students what Simon the sorcerer did and why it was wrong. Ask them if salvation can be bought today? Are there people today that claim that they have the power of the Holy Spirit and that can do miracles? What do they usually want to do?

Coloring Pages

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets from the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.

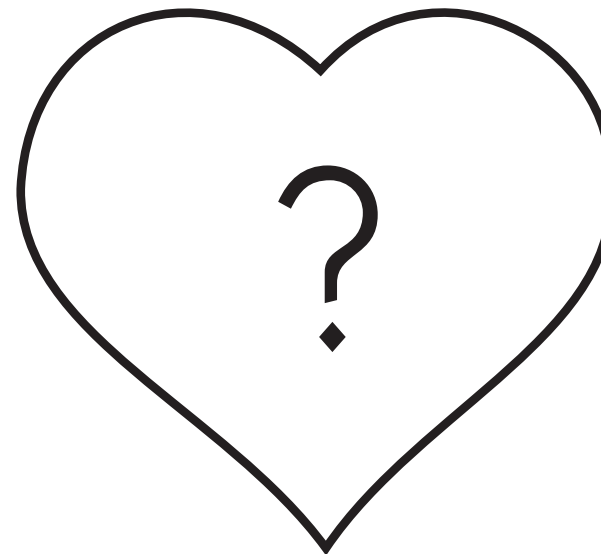


MEMORY VERSE

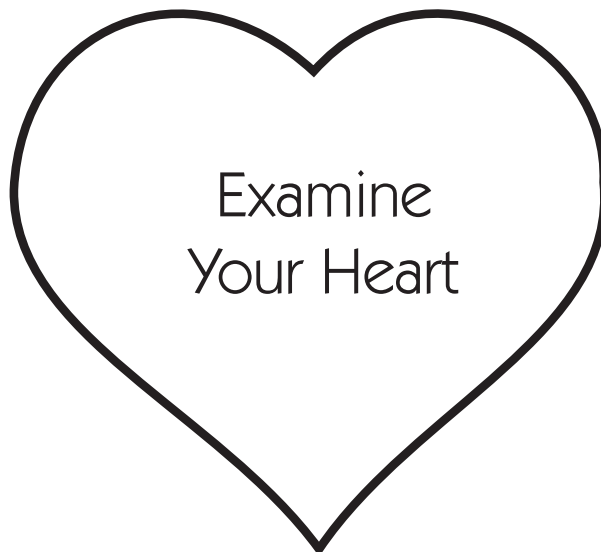
“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

— Acts 8:4

What's in the Heart



What's in the Heart







"Then [Peter and John] laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

—Acts 8:17

