

Power to Witness in Word and Deed

The Book of Acts

Acts 8:1b–25

Read Acts 8:1b–25.

1. What immediately follows the stoning of Stephen? (vv. 1b–2)
2. We last saw Saul approving of Stephen's death (8:1a). What is he doing now? (v. 3; 9:1; 26:10;  * 1 Tim. 1:13)

Such persecution continues even today in other parts of the world. Pray for these suffering believers.

3. Up to now, only the leaders of the church have experienced persecution. Now it extends to all the believers.
 - a. What do the scattered believers do? (v. 4)
 - b. Compare 8:1b with 1:8. What do you notice?

4. Who is this Philip who goes to Samaria and is referred to in Acts 21:8 as “Philip the evangelist”? (6:3–5)
5. What does Philip's ministry look like? (vv. 5–7)

What is the specific content of his preaching? (v. 12)

6. What is the result of Philip's ministry of word and deed? (vv. 6, 8, 12)
7. What do we learn about Simon in verses 9–11?
8. Philip performs astonishing signs and miracles. Why do you think miracles would be an especially significant part of ministry in this particular town? (Consider verses 9–11.)

What vital role do miracles play here and elsewhere in the New Testament? (2:22; 14:3; Heb. 2:3–4)

*The  symbol indicates verses for further study.

Background on the Jews and the Samaritans: About a thousand years prior to this passage, the northern tribes of Israel split off and formed their own kingdom with Samaria as its capital. The inhabitants of the northern kingdom turned away from God and worshiped idols. Most were eventually sent into exile by the Assyrians. Those who remained in the land intermarried with foreigners put there by the Assyrians. Ultimately, the remaining Samaritans rejected all of the Jewish scriptures except the five books of Moses and built their own temple, which the Jews later destroyed. As Bruce Milne writes, “By the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were despised as unfaithful, defecting half-breeds.”¹ Thus, in preaching to the Samaritans, Philip is breaking through a longstanding barrier.

9. Who is now sent to Samaria, and why? (v. 14)
10. In his speech at Pentecost, Peter promises that those who repent and are baptized will receive the Holy Spirit (2:38). Yet although the Samaritans in this passage have believed and been baptized, they have not received the Holy Spirit.
 - a. What unusual step is needed for these particular believers to receive the Holy Spirit? (vv. 15, 17)
 - b. Why do you think it’s significant that it is the apostles from Jerusalem who must lay hands on them? (Consider the following passages, bearing in mind that the Jews regarded the Samaritans as almost worse than Gentiles: 15:7–9;  Eph. 2:11–22; 4:3–6.)
11. Impressed by what Peter and John do, Simon “offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (vv. 18–19, ESV).
 - a. How does Peter respond? (vv. 20–23)
 - b. Why do you think he is so harsh?
 - c. What is Simon’s only hope? (v. 22)
12. How do Peter and John spend their return trip? (v. 25;  9:31)
13. This passage is largely about power. In particular, we see the power of the Holy Spirit defeating the powers of darkness: Philip performs healings and casts out evil spirits, putting the “Great Power” of Simon the Sorcerer to shame (v. 10); the people of Samaria believe the “good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (v. 12); and the “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Samaritans is smashed (Eph. 2:14).
How have you seen this same powerful Holy Spirit at work in your life and in the lives of others around you?

¹ *The Acts of the Apostles: Witnesses to Him...to the Ends of the Earth* (London: Christian Focus, 2010), 183.