

Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

Lesson Eleven | Acts 8

Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

Context

The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7) was the beginning of persecution by non-believing Jews that would push Christianity from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and beyond. The character of Saul, who will later become the apostle Paul, is introduced in Acts 8 as one of the chief persecutors. Acts 8 records two episodes in Philip's ministry that illustrate how the scattered Christians took the gospel where they went.

Bible Study Tip

Beware theological commitments that would prevent you from seeing what the Text really states.

The Ministry of Philip

1. **“Ministry” of Paul:** Saul approved of the murder of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and took part in the severe persecution that broke out against the church in Jerusalem, scattering the Christians into Judea and Samaria. (8:1-3)
2. **Who Were the Evangelizers?:** It is critical that we not fail to miss that it was **all** of those Christians who were scattered that were evangelizers. (8:4)
3. **Who was Philip?** He was introduced along with Stephen as one of the 7 men selected to assist with the daily provisions to the widows in Acts 6. By Acts 21:8, he is known as “Philip the evangelist,” likely indicating the continued faithfulness of his ministry. The word “evangelist” is only used in two other places, Ephesians 4:11 and 2 Timothy 4:5.
4. We may see Philip's ministry in Acts 8 outlined as follows:
 - The gospel success in Samaria introduced (8:5-8)
 - The gospel success exemplified in the life of Simon the sorcerer (8:9-25)
 - The gospel success in Africa (the “ends of the earth”) (8:26-39)
5. **Philip and Simon:** Was Simon a “fake” Christian? The episode is here to show the success of the gospel, not its failure.
 - The Text says many Samaritans “believed Philip, as he preached the good news” (8:12) and “then even Simon himself believed” (8:13)
 - The implication of 8:17-18 is that Simon also received the Holy Spirit
 - Peter's statement in 8:20 is “may your silver be **destroyed** with you,” which speaks to ruin not going to hell (money doesn't go to hell)
 - Peter calls upon Simon to repent and he does (8:22-24)
6. **Philip and the Ethiopian:** The gospel goes to Africa. We can evangelize like Philip:
 - God directs Philip
 - No script or program
 - Philip assesses the situation and has a natural conversation about Jesus in response to the eunuch's question