

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 30

The Church is persecuted and the gospel spreads

Acts 8:1-25



DAY 1

Persecution spread the gospel to different places • Acts 8:1-4

READ 

Acts 8:1-4

EXPLAIN 

The truth of Acts 8:1-4

So far, the Holy Spirit had given the disciples incredible success sharing the gospel in Jerusalem. But now it was time for the next step (Acts 1:8). God used persecution to move the believers out from Jerusalem. This began the day Stephen was murdered. Jesus had told His disciples to expect to be treated badly for being a Christian (John 15:20; 16:2), but now it began at a furious pace. Saul was the fiercest of the persecutors. He really thought he was serving God by tearing the church apart (Acts 22:3-4). Ironically, God did use Saul's persecution! He used it to get Christians to do their job of spreading the gospel, the good news. It's not surprising they spread, but it is surprising they had "good news" to tell. They had lost friendships, possessions, and homes, and some lost mothers and fathers too. If that happened to you right now, would you go around saying you had good news? That is what the believers were doing, since "preaching the word" literally means "evangelizing" or "speaking good news." They knew it is good to have Jesus even if that means losing everything else.

ASK 

1. Why did Christians leave Jerusalem?
Because they were being persecuted.
2. When did the persecution begin?
The day Stephen was murdered.
3. Who was the fiercest persecutor of the Jerusalem church?
Saul.
4. How did God use persecution?
To spread Christians and their message out from Jerusalem.

DISCUSS 

1. How is "the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church"?
2. How good is the news of Jesus to you? What have you had to give up to have Jesus?

DAY 2

Philip spread the gospel to a different group of people • Acts 8:5–13

READ

Acts 8:5–13

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:5–13

One of the evangelizing believers was Philip. He went to Samaria, north of Judea. Since the Samaritans already looked forward to the Messiah (John 4:25), Philip announced that Jesus was the one. He proclaimed the “name of Jesus Christ,” teaching all about who Jesus is. He also preached about the kingdom of God, describing the blessing of God’s rule over saved people, both in this world and even more in the world to come. The Samaritans listened because Philip miraculously healed and cast out demons, confirming his message and his love for the Samaritans. The Samaritans received the message with joy, and through baptism they affirmed their loyal allegiance to Jesus. But Stephen wasn’t the only one doing signs in Samaria. Simon the sorcerer had already gained a reputation as “the Great Power of God,” a unique agent of divine power. Yet both Simon and the people realized that Philip’s power was greater. For some, this led them to fully receive Philip’s message. But it was also possible to interpret the gospel’s power as nothing more than an upgrade to Samaria’s traditional superstition. Time would tell what kind of belief each Samaritan had.

ASK

1. Who preached the gospel in Samaria?
Philip.
2. Why did the Samaritans listen to Philip?
Philip miraculously healed and cast out demons, confirming his message and his love for the Samaritans.
3. Who else was doing signs in Samaria?
Simon the sorcerer.
4. Whose power was greater?
Philip’s.

DISCUSS

1. Why must our gospel proclamations must be accompanied by genuine love?
2. How should Christians deal with Satan and demons today (Eph 6:10–18; Jas 4:6–10)?

DAY 3

There is one gospel for all kinds of people • Acts 8:14–17, 25

READ

Acts 8:14–25

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 8:14–17, 25

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the gospel, they sent Peter and John to investigate. It’s a good thing Peter and John came to help sort this out. They had two issues to deal with. First, they had to confirm that the gospel really is available to all people, even to strange and hostile people. They made this clear by visibly putting their

hands on the Samaritans so that they received the Spirit. Normally, believers receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believe (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). But this situation was unique: for the first time in history, people were welcomed into God’s family without having to become Jews. By delaying the Spirit, God showed that the Samaritans had the same Spirit and were under the same leadership of the apostles. Despite their differences, they were now “one body” sharing “one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4–5). When the apostles saw this, they also evangelized in Samaria.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Who did the apostles send to Samaria?
Peter and John.
2. What did the Samaritans receive when the apostles came?
The Holy Spirit.
3. Why didn't the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit right when they believed?
To make it clear that the Samaritans were part of the same church as Jewish believers without first becoming Jews.

DISCUSS 

1. Are you willing to talk about Jesus to people you are not comfortable around?
2. Has the gospel message changed over time (Gen 15:6)?

DAY 4*The apostles guarded against a different gospel • Acts 8:18–24***READ** 

Acts 8:14–25

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 8:18–24**

The apostle's second job in Samaria was to guard the purity of the gospel. By trying to buy the power of conferring the Spirit, Simon twisted the gospel in three ways. First, Simon wanted to use the Holy Spirit for his own glory, not be used by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God (Eph 5:18). Second, Simon thought the gospel was something he could just add to his old way of life. Simon really did believe in the power of God, but like the demons, that faith did not include trust and submission to God's will (Jas 2:19). He did not want God to radically change the direction of his life (Isa 55:6; 1 Cor 6:11) or transform him from the inside out (2 Cor 5:17). Third, Simon thought the gospel was compatible with his sin. Because Simon was seeking his own glory, he was full of bitterness whenever anyone or anything overshadowed him. Because he was still committed to his old way of life, he was still a slave of his own sin. Even his request for prayer was detestable. He only asked to get rid of the consequences of his sin, not the sin itself

ASK 

1. Who tried to get the Spirit's power to use for himself?
Simon.
2. What was Simon's belief like?
It was factual: he believed that there was real power in the gospel. However, it was not trusting: he did not want to submit to the control of the gospel.
3. Why did Simon want the Holy Spirit?
To use for his own glory. To make himself a more powerful sorcerer.
4. What did Simon think about his sin?
He didn't mind his sin, so long as he could avoid sin's consequences.

DISCUSS 

1. How did Simon treat the Holy Spirit's power like a genie in a bottle?
2. Is it ok to change the gospel to make it more acceptable to different people or cultures? Why or why not?

DAY 5

One body, Spirit, hope, faith, baptism, and God and Father •
Ephesians 4:4–6

READ

Ephesians 4:1–6

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ephesians 4:4–6

As the Holy Spirit demonstrated by coming on the Samaritans, there is one, unified body of believers. There is no division and no requirement other than the gospel to enter Christ's body. This is because there is one Spirit, who unites all Christians in the "bond of peace," which is love (Eph 4:3; Col 3:14). Having been bound together by God's Spirit, Christians are united in at least seven different ways. They share "one body," the church, made up of every believer since the church was born on Pentecost. This body was formed by "one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:11–13) and shares "one hope," the believer's eternal inheritance in Christ (Eph 1:11–14). It follows "one Lord," Jesus (Acts 4:12; Rom 10:12), and obeys "one faith," the Scriptures (Jude 3). It practices "one baptism," which probably refers to water baptism when Christians declare their allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Finally, this one body submits to "one God," who is "over all and through all and in all." All this has been made possible through the "one Lord," Jesus, who "has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14).

ASK

1. What's the one requirement for entrance into Christ's body, the church?
The gospel.
2. Who unites all Christians?
The Holy Spirit.
3. What are the seven ways Christians are united?
See explanation paragraph for answers.
3. Who made unity possible?
Jesus.

DISCUSS

1. Does "one body" mean every Christian is exactly alike (1 Cor 12:12–27)?
2. It is not uncommon for Christians to enjoy sweet fellowship with another Christian they just met. How is this possible?

NEXT WEEK

Philip shares the gospel with the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26–40

