

Acts

Part 21 – “The Scattered Word”

Acts 8:1-8

This passage may be divided into two sections: The growing persecution against the church (vv. 1-3) and the beginning of the mission to the Gentiles (vv. 4-8). These two sections are connected in Luke’s narrative by the fact that it was the increasing persecution which was the mechanism for the advance of the Word beyond Jerusalem.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. Philip’s Mission in Samaria (8:1-25)
 - A. The church in Jerusalem is persecuted (8:1-3)
 - B. Summary of the church’s missionary work (8:4)
 - C. Philip Proclaims the Gospel to the Samaritans (8:5-11)
 1. Philip’s arrival in Samaria (8:5a)
 2. Philip’s proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah (8:5b-c)
 3. The crowds listen (8:6)
 4. Philip’s performs miracles and the people respond with joy (8:7-9)
 5. Simon the Magician (8:9-11)

Main Idea: Philip’s mission demonstrates that the church must be willing to go into hostile territory to proclaim the Gospel.

1. Persecution is inevitable and God is sovereign (8:1-3).

- Jesus’ words that his followers would “be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8) began their fulfillment through the ordeal of persecution. Paul launches a systematic persecution of the church by going from home-to-home and carting men and women off to prison.

- “Scattered” – *diasporao* – An agricultural term referring to a farmer scattering seed. In the Old Testament it was a sign of God’s judgment to scatter His people. Now God scatters His people in order to bless. He scatters His people in fulfillment of His promise to make them a light to the nations.

2. Proclaiming the Word is essential (8:4).

- “Preaching the word” – *euangelizomenoi ton logon* – The word translated “preaching” may be more helpfully translated “telling” or “speaking forth.” This is the responsibility of all Christians.



“Most of the missionary work of the church in the first century was not carried out by the apostles, the apostles who went out and preached as we think of preaching, who offered the proclamation of the Gospel; most of the missionary work was not carried out by them, but rather by the countless and nameless Christians who, for different reasons, from persecution to business, traveled from place to place taking the good news of the Gospel with them.”

Justo Gonzales from The Story of Christianity Vol. 1

3. Taking the gospel to everyone is the mission (8:5).

- A common theme in Luke/Acts is the gospel’s power to break through barriers. Luke seemed to have a particular fondness for showing that the gospel was for all those who had previously been considered unclean. However, this was not a new innovation in the New Testament. This world-wide gospel mission was prescribed in God’s covenant with Abraham whereby the Lord promised to make a nation made up of people from among all the peoples of the world.

a. The mission is risky.

- With the execution of Stephen it became clear to the believers that proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah was a dangerous activity.

b. The mission is humbling.

- Philip’s preaching to the Samaritans was the first step of the church’s Gentile mission. Samaritans were considered ethnic and religious half-breeds. They were neither Jewish nor Gentile. Samaria was located within the Northern region (Israel) of the divided kingdom. They claimed Abraham as their father and accepted the first five books of Moses. But they rejected the rest of the Old Testament and anticipated a very different Messiah.
- In going to the Samaritans Philip crosses a significant ethnic and religious boundary. It requires humility to love and serve those who had been considered enemies and unclean.

c. The mission is liberating.

- Philip is described as performing miraculous signs such as healing and the casting out of demons. As in the ministry of the apostles those powerful signs were granted in order to establish the authority of the message. But they also serve to illustrate the liberating reality of the gospel.

For Further Reading:

Let The Nations Be Glad by John Piper

Marks of the Messenger by Mack Stiles

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer

Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians by Marshall, Gilbert, & Shea