

# God's Word on the Move: Samaria

Acts 8:4-25

Steven was one of the Seven Servants chosen to oversee the disbursements of resources to those within the church that had needs. This allowed the Apostles to continue in their calling of the ministry of the Word and prayer. When Stephen was martyred, it led to a rise of persecution to the Church in Jerusalem. As the Church suffered under rising persecution many left Jerusalem, traveling and relocating over the region far and wide. As a matter of fact chapter 8, verse 1 tells us

*“...they (the Church) were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...”*

Then down in verse 4 we realize that what was harsh persecution and difficult trials for the Church, ended up being a blessing for the Kingdom of God because (as it says in verse 4)

*<sup>4</sup> ...those who were scattered went **everywhere preaching the Word.***

As I shared with you last time, “*What the enemy intended for evil, **once again** God intended it for good!*” The message of the Gospel was being spread. The Church was becoming witnesses of Jesus Christ from *Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world.* This was Jesus’ prophecy in Acts 1:8 being fulfilled right before their very eyes.

Luke now writes to give us a narrative of the action of another one of the Seven Servants, **Philip**. Look with me in Acts 8, beginning in verse 4 and following

Acts 8

*<sup>4</sup> Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Then **Philip** went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city.*

You have to see this from a couple of vantage points here.

## 1. Philip had been a part of the Church in Jerusalem suffering under persecution

Jerusalem had been great. The power of God was evident in the number of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, the Church was growing rapidly, there were miracles of healing on a regular basis, people were being delivered from demonic possession... and Philip was a part of what was going on... **he was actively involved in the work of ministry. What an awesome opportunity for an individual to have before him – actively involved in what God is doing in your Church and area.**

Philip had **not been a bystander**, watching the work of God from the sidelines; **no, he was using his gifts and talents for the Lord**. Of course his ministry was a **humble ministry** – waiting on tables, disbursing necessary resources to the widows and others within the Church that had needs – it was a **servant's ministry**. Yet Philip had been faithful to the call. And God saw his simple faithfulness to serve others within the Body of Christ.

## 2. Then the Lord moved him north to the region of SAMARIA.

Now, as the persecution intensified, Philip like many others within the Church was forced to move out of the area of Jerusalem. It probably didn't seem like a very good thing at the time: *"God's moving here, in THIS place... and I have to go **there**, to **THAT place!**"*

Sometimes it's easy to get bummed out when **you're not sure what God is doing...** But even in the move and the adjustments that had to be made, **Philip shows himself to be faithful to the Lord and the witness of his life**. Look what it said there in verse 5

*<sup>5</sup> Then **Philip** went down to the city of Samaria and **preached Christ to them.***

Although Samaria was north of Jerusalem, Philip went **"down"** to Samaria. There's two reasons for this: 1) Samaria is lower in elevation than Jerusalem, but secondly and most importantly, 2) anywhere you go in Israel **from Jerusalem** has a **spiritual significance** of going down **from Jerusalem**. If you are going **to Jerusalem**, you are going **UP to Jerusalem**. Elevation really doesn't matter.

And Philip went “on mission”, he was faithful to **preach Christ to them**. The results of Philip’s faithfulness was quickly evident –

*<sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord **heeded the things spoken by Philip**, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city.*

When Luke writes “*the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip,*” I feel it’s very clear that many were **coming to faith in Jesus Christ**. The people heeded the words of his message as Philip was “*preaching the word.*”

Yes, miracles were happening, *the possessed were set free; the paralyzed and lame were healed;*

And as they were coming to faith in Jesus, they followed the Lord in Believer’s Baptism.

**The very fact that Philip went to Samaria is interesting.** Throughout the New Testament Samaria has had some interesting times. An area that was despised by the Jews because the people were a mixture of **half Jew and half Gentile**. Back in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah while most of the people of Israel were in Babylonian captivity, many of the Jews who remained had mixed marriages with the Gentiles of the area. This had brought about a class of people who were rejected by the “**true or pure**” Jews who could trace both sides of their family roots back generations to the sons of Jacob.

Yet we find that during the ministry of Jesus, His love for all people led Him on a few occasions to go to or through Samaria. We find in Luke 9 that there was one time when **He was the One rejected by the Samaritans**. Luke 9:52-56 tells us that as Jesus and the disciples were traveling through the area –

*<sup>52</sup> ...they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. <sup>53</sup> But they (the Samaritans) did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"*

Wow, aren’t those the guys you would love to have on your ministry team?

**“Easy boys, easy!”**

*And they went to another village.*

I wonder if this is the area Philip went to. Or perhaps it was the village where the **Woman at the Well** lived. We find the event in John 4. After Jesus had revealed Himself to the woman, she went and called the whole city out to see Jesus. As He shared with them, **many believed** –

John 4

*<sup>39</sup> And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans had come to Him, **they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.** <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of His own word.*

We don't know which city it was, but Philip was seeing great results to the preaching of the Gospel. One of those who heard the message and received it was a man by the name of **Simon**, Simon the Magician–

Acts 8

*<sup>9</sup> But there was a certain man called Simon, who **previously practiced sorcery in the city** and astonished the people of Samaria, **claiming that he was someone great,** <sup>10</sup> to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "**This man is the great power of God.**" <sup>11</sup> And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. <sup>13</sup> **Then Simon himself also believed;** and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

**Simon was a man who wanted power.** He craved it so greatly that he had **willingly gone into sorcery**, opening himself **up to and using demonic power** to impress the people around him. We don't know for certain all that Simon did. The Word simply tells us he had –

*<sup>9</sup> ...previously practiced sorcery... astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,*

*<sup>10</sup> ...they all gave heed..., saying, "This man is the **great power of God.**"*

*<sup>11</sup> ...because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time*

Some sort of power, demonic at its core, yet, it seems as though ***the Spirit of God was going to break through***. The unfortunate thing is, we will see that the influence of power and notoriety remained in Simon's heart. But we'll look at that later.

Here Luke simply tells us that once he heard the message of Philip and saw so many people coming to faith in Jesus and being baptized, he "believed also and was baptized"–

*<sup>13</sup> Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

- I have no doubt that Simon was **amazed by the work of the Spirit through Philip's life**.
- I have no doubt that he was astonished to see the people as they came to Christ and were baptized, released and set free, joy filling their lives.
- I have no doubt Simon saw the real power of God at work.

As Simon began to walk with Philip and saw the power of God working through those miracles and signs. **Simon would have quickly seen** that the power of the Holy Spirit in Philip's life was **stronger than anything he had ever had in his demonic/occult practices**. God was moving in that Samaritan village and nothing else could even begin to compare to the power of God. Remember, Simon had had power before and the people were amazed, even to the point of *saying, "This man is the great power of God."*

But now, not only do the people see the real power of God, Simon has seen it too. And within Simon's heart he says, *"I want some of that!"*

And I think that it's very evident that Simon believed and was baptized, simply because he **wanted the power he saw demonstrated** through Philip.

Did he **believe unto Salvation? That's the hard question**. We will look more into that as we move on.

Once the Church leaders in Jerusalem heard that there were Samaritans who were coming to faith in Jesus Christ, they had to come and investigate what was going on.

Acts 8

*<sup>14</sup> Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*

*<sup>16</sup> For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

*<sup>17</sup> Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

You need to understand. This event in Samaria was long before the Apostle Paul's conversion and even longer before Paul's ministry and outreach to the Gentiles.

These Samaritans had been hated for generations...

*"And now you're telling me they've become Christians?"*

This is something the Church had to investigate. So they sent Peter and John to get an account of what was taking place. But before we go too far into this, let me share with you the fullness of the setting.

You and I need to understand that the setting of Acts 1-10 is **a time of the birth of the Church, it's a time of beginnings and transitions**. The message of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God was moving strategically according to God's plan from the Jews, to the Samaritans and then finally to the Gentile world.

We need to see and understand that many of the events and activities that happened in these **times of beginnings** never happened again. Many, but not all of these actions, even the actions of the Holy Spirit were transitional and temporary. We need to be careful if we try to stake our doctrine and Church practices on much of what we find in Acts 1-10.

So, as Peter and John come "down" to Samaria, they come to a people who had been separated from the Jews and as such had been separated from what God was doing in the Church – the Gospel went out first to the Jew. Paul makes it very clear in the book of Romans that the Gospel was **to the Jew first and then to the Gentile**.

As these Samaritans had come to faith in Jesus, the work or the fullness of the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon them. The Spirit had fallen upon the Church first in Jerusalem

and now here as the first converts of the Samaritans come together, Peter and John *laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

These had already been baptized, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. Later in chapter 10 of Acts, Peter is speaking in the house of Cornelius and while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon the whole household. Cornelius was the first of the group of Gentiles coming to salvation and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

For those in Samaria, they had believed and were baptized, then the Holy Spirit fell on them by the laying on of hands of Peter and John.

For Cornelius, Peter was sharing the Word with his household and they believed and suddenly the Holy Spirit fell upon them... no one laid hands on them and none of them had been baptized yet.

Remember, be careful about setting doctrine and practice based on Acts 1-10, there are too many times when the Spirit of God is working in a different order and direction than what we might expect.

So now, let's get back to Acts 8.

*<sup>17</sup> Then (Peter and John) laid hands on (the new Believers in Samaria), and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

You don't have to have the **gift of discernment** to know right away that **Simon's heart was out of bounds and off the track.**

He was **still looking for power and prestige.** He saw the power being demonstrated and felt that he could attain it the **same way he undoubtedly obtained his sorcery – paying someone to train him in the Black Arts.** Now he thought he could pay the Apostles to be trained in the power of God!!

He, himself used to be hailed by the people of the town as **"The Great Power of God"**. But now, as they had received the Gospel, the people turned from Black Magic, Sorcery and the Occult to worship and honor the One and Only, True God of the Universe. They

had surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ and they were no longer impressed by parlor tricks or these demonic deeds empowered by darkness.

**Simon missed that attention.** We quickly understand **Simon's heart was not humbled** before God. He might have said a few words and been baptized by water, but now, by his words and actions he shows **there is something darker and deeper that is still controlling his life.**

When he saw lives changed by the power of the Gospel, **he didn't ask how he could share the message of salvation.** But when he saw the power of the Holy Spirit come into people's lives, yeah, he wanted some of that. **Not to change lives, but to make himself out to be something that he definitely wasn't.**

Isn't that the problem that Ananias and Sapphira had? **They made themselves out to something that they weren't... and God took their lives.**

Once again it is Peter who sees his heart and his motivation right away –

*<sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. <sup>22</sup> Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."*

Simon's response speaks volumes. He was told to repent... but, we don't read that he ever repented. Even at the first we read, he *believed and was baptized and was amazed by the signs and wonders.*

There's no confession of his walking in *bitterness*; no admittance of the *iniquity* in his life. He was caught in his schemes and his sin **red handed.** **He wanted to buy the power of God for his own purposes and for his own glory and God will share His glory with no man!**

His request to the Apostles seems half-hearted, empty, and totally self-centered –

*<sup>24</sup> Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."*

Yeah!

It's like Simon is saying, *"Hey, I don't want to go to Hell, but I'm not ready to repent yet, so, could you pray for me?"*

The weird thing is, we don't know what happened to Simon. Here in Acts Luke simply tells us –

*<sup>25</sup> So when (the Apostles) had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.*

*Many traditions revolve around **Simon** the sorcerer. It is alleged: (a) that he was the founder of the Gnostic heresies, or (b) that he went to Rome and perverted Christian doctrine there.<sup>1</sup>*

But here in the Bible there's nothing else about Simon. Absolutely nothing about his repentance and restoration.

**Repentance and restoration**, those are **the stories we want to hear**. AMEN?

Those are the stories that make us feel good. We want to know that **when we blow it**, there is **always an opportunity for repentance and reconciliation**.

And I tell you today on the authority of God's Word, there is **opportunity for reconciliation, but not without repentance**. The holiness of our God demands that we walk humbly before Him. His Word continually tells us that if sin is found in our lives, we need to **confess it, repent of it, and purge it from our lives**.

The seriousness of this comes from the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ found a couple of places in the Gospels –

Matthew 18

*<sup>8</sup> "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."*

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "[Acts](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 372.

Those are the hard things. Those are the things people don't want to hear, but the reality of it is, that if we are not ready to **confess and repent**, we're not ready to receive the salvation of our God.

And some, perhaps some of you hearing this message, you felt you could simply walk into the Kingdom of God because you **liked what you heard** or **what you saw in the lives of others**. You wanted to have that **same kind of "experience"**, but you've **never really come to a point in your life of confession and repentance**.

How about you personally. Has there ever been that time where you said,

*"God, I'm a desperate sinner, bound by my own choices and the deceitfulness that I've accepted into my life. I cannot simply 'become good'. I know I could never be good enough to measure up to Your great holiness. I want to turn from my old life and my old choices. I want You to rule my life. I want to die to self in order that Jesus might live through me.*

*Come into my life and make me a new creation. Bring me new life and help me to walk humbly before you and the world. Fill me with your Spirit and transform me into Your desire."*