

Acts Chapter 8

Without a doubt, chapter 8 of Acts is the beginning of one of the most important sections in all of scripture. Here we see the introduction and conversion of possibly the most influential person in Christian history (other than Christ himself). We also get a small inkling of the saving, life changing power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

At the start of the chapter, we find a man named Saul, looking approvingly over the stoning of the faithful follower Stephen. Then, persecution, largely brought about by Saul, begins on a large scale against the Church. From the text, we can imagine groups of men breaking down doors, large numbers of people being led away in chains, not to mention occasional brutal acts, which the text here does not speak of specifically, but can certainly be inferred. Because of this, the church is scattered, causing the Gospel to be scattered with it.

Ironically, this persecution and attempt at destroying the early Church, is actually the cause of its quick growth. Notice verse 4: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word”. It is in fact, not too much to say, I think, that God allowed the imprisonment and harm of his people for exactly this reason. Christ, in Mark 16:15 had commanded that his followers go into all the world and spread the gospel. Later, he qualified that they should wait until they received the Holy Spirit. This having been accomplished, they are scattered throughout the countryside, to fulfill this order.

This is often the case with God and his chosen vessels. He *will* accomplish his purpose. Disobedience does not mean that we get to thwart God’s plan. Rather, it means that his accomplishing that goal will be much harder on us. In addition, we are robbed of the joy we receive from obedience.

Continuing on, we see Phillip going forth to Samaria, only to meet one “Simon the Sorcerer”. Scripture says that he believes the Gospel when it is preached, but we later discover that his belief is more than likely false, due to a later incident with Peter and John, where Simon tries to “buy” the Holy Spirit. How different the view of salvation was at this time, compared to the more popular views today. It seems that during this period, salvation was expected to make a difference in a person’s actions/attitudes. Pondering this passage, we would do well to consider what Peter would say about overused terms such as “legalism” in the church today. Holiness is something God calls us to. He takes it seriously. We should too.

It is also in these passages that the laying on of hands seems to be shown to be limited to the apostles. Phillip did not bestow the Holy Ghost. Only Peter and John do.

Furthermore, we see the importance of unquestioned obedience. Following the command of the Lord, Phillip meets an Ethiopian eunuch reading the book of Isaiah. Here Phillip ties the passage into a messianic passage about Jesus. He then baptizes the eunuch, and is “carried away by the spirit”. It is interesting to consider what might have happened, had Phillip simply delayed his departure, when the Lord instructed him to go. It has been well said that delayed obedience, in truth, is not obedience at all.

From this passage, we also get a small glimpse of the importance of baptism in the early church. Upon professing his belief, the eunuch is immediately baptized. Although not specifically stated here, it definitely shows the importance and pressing attitude toward this sacrament.

The entire narrative of Chapter 8, demonstrates a model for loyal, faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Although they are persecuted, and many are imprisoned, ripped from their lives, they continue to faithfully serve the Lord. Through all times, trials, and circumstances, Gods people carry on his work.