

THE BOOK OF ACTS

ACTS 8:1-25 | LESSON SUMMARY

Heresy

ACTS 8:3, "But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." (ESV)

- Saul is working hard to stop the spread of Christianity
 - To him, it looks heretical
 - Though it sounds extreme, historically speaking, this is the type of response echoed by the Christian church in later centuries
 - "Devout men" mentioned in verse 2 are a poignant reminder that many of the Jewish Christians were caught as if between sides

Samaria

ACTS 8:5, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ." (ESV)

- In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus tells his followers to bring the gospel to "Judea, Samaria, and the whole world," but up until this verse there is no mention of them leaving Jerusalem
 - Samaria is well-known as controversial



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- When the Assyrians conquered Northern Israel approximately 750 years earlier (time of Jeremiah), they took the wealthy and middle-class Jews captive, and basically left those who were seen as helpless or worthless
- The Assyrians then moved “pagans” into Samaria, and they intermarried with the Jewish population, which led to them being viewed as “half-breeds”
- Here Phillip meets Simon

ACTS 8:9, “But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.” (ESV)

- Magic was common throughout the ancient world
 - Divination, necromancy, and other forms of witchcraft were often used in tangent with illusions and tricks
- “Somebody great” likely implies at least partial deity—supernatural powers
 - Simon appears to recognize that his power is nothing compared to the authority Phillip has, “Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.” (Acts 8:13, ESV)



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ACTS 8:14, "Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit..." (ESV)

- Phillip baptized as a profession of faith, Peter and John laid hands on new converts for them to receive the Holy Spirit
 - Simon takes note of the seeming hierarchy and wants a promotion
 - "...he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (8:19, ESV)
- Annanias and Sapphira
 - Peter rebukes harshly, but then says that Simon must "repent"
 - Simon does not drop dead
 - In fact he requests that they, "Pray for me to the Lord."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Mark A. Noll, *Turning Point; Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, C. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Randall Price, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archeology*, *The Holman Bible Atlas*

