

ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES

ACTS 8:1-25

THE SHEPHERD GATHERS HIS SCATTERED SHEEP

OPENING QUESTION

- Have you ever experienced a season where something painful or unexpected ultimately became the means by which God accomplished something good?
- Looking back now, can you see God's hand at work in something that initially felt like a setback?

INTRODUCTION

At the end of Acts 7, Stephen is martyred. The church's first martyr has fallen.

- A great persecution breaks out against the church.
- Believers are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
- At first glance, it appears that the enemies of Christ are winning.

But if we stand back and look at the bigger picture, we see something beautiful...

- The same persecution that scattered Christ's followers became the means by which Christ gathered His scattered sheep.
- What looked like defeat was actually the next step in God's redemptive plan.

READ ACTS 8:1-8

"Now Paul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What happens immediately after Stephen's death?

- Who remains in Jerusalem?
- What do the scattered believers do wherever they go?
- Where does Philip go?
- What message does Philip proclaim?
- How do the people respond?
- What is the result in the city?

DISCUSSION

- How does this passage challenge the idea that opposition can stop God's work?
- What does this passage teach us about God's sovereignty?
- How is God's perspective often different from ours?

ACTS 1:8 BEGINS TO UNFOLD

READ ACTS 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- Where has the church remained up to this point in Acts?
- What new region does the Gospel reach in Acts 8?
- Why do you think Jesus specifically mentioned Samaria?

DISCUSSION

- How does Acts 8 demonstrate that Jesus is still directing His mission from heaven?
- What looked like a tragedy at the end of Acts 7?
- How is God already using it to accomplish His purposes?

WHY SAMARIA MATTERS

TEACHING SECTION

(Brief overview of the division of the kingdom after Solomon.)

Study Notes:

- Solomon's death
- Rehoboam's poor leadership
- Division of the kingdom
- Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin)
 - Capital: Jerusalem
 - House of David continues
- Northern Kingdom (Israel)
 - Eventually centered in Samaria
 - Jeroboam's leadership
- Golden calves at Dan and Bethel
- Progressive idolatry:
 - Baal worship
 - Asherah poles
 - Queen of Heaven
 - High places
- Prophets sent by God:
 - Elijah
 - Elisha
 - Amos
 - Hosea
- Assyrian conquest
- Exile of the northern kingdom
- Mixed population develops

- Emergence of the Samaritan people
- Centuries of division, hostility, and distrust between Jews and Samaritans

DISCUSSION

- Why do divisions between closely related people often become some of the deepest divisions?
- Why might the reconciliation of Jews and Samaritans matter so much in God's redemptive plan?

THE PROMISE OF THE SHEPHERD

READ EZEKIEL 34:11-16

"For thus says the Lord God: 'Indeed I myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.'"

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- Who takes responsibility for finding the sheep?
- What condition are the sheep in?
- What does God promise to do for them?
- What words or phrases stand out to you in this passage?

DISCUSSION

- What does this passage teach us about God's heart toward His people?
- How might Philip's ministry in Samaria connect to this promise?
- Who is ultimately fulfilling this promise in Acts 8?

TEACHING THOUGHT

Acts 8 is not a simple missionary story. It is a fulfillment story.

- The Good Shepherd promised through the prophets has come, and He is gathering His scattered sheep.

ONE PEOPLE UNDER ONE KING

READ EZEKIEL 37:15-23

“Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.’ Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. And when the children of your people speak to you saying, ‘Will you not show us what you mean by these?’, say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.’ And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. Then say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people and I will be their God.’”

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What do the two sticks represent?
- What does God promise to do with them?
- How many nations will remain?
- How many kings will rule over them?

DISCUSSION

- Why is this promise significant in light of the division between Jews and Samaritans?
- How might Acts 8 represent the beginning of this promise being fulfilled?

- What does this passage teach us about God's desire for unity among His people?

TEACHING THOUGHT

For centuries there had been division.

- Two kingdoms.
- Two peoples.
- Two identities.

Yet God promised that He would unite what had been divided.

Acts 8 shows us the beginning of that promise being fulfilled through Christ.

JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA UNITED

READ ACTS 8:14-17

“Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What do the apostles do when they hear that Samaria has received the word of God?
- Why do Peter and John travel to Samaria?
- What happens when they arrive?

DISCUSSION

- Why might it have been important for the apostles to witness the inclusion of the Samaritans?
- Why might God have chosen to involve the apostles in this moment?
- What does this event teach us about unity within the church?

TEACHING THOUGHT

God is not building:

- A Jewish church
- A Samaritan church

He is building one Church.

One Gospel... One Spirit... One Shepherd... One people.

The same Spirit who filled believers in Jerusalem now fills believers in Samaria.

The ancient division is beginning to heal.

APPLICATION

1. How does Acts 8 encourage us when life feels difficult or confusing?
2. Can you think of a time when God eventually brought good from something painful?
3. What divisions does the Gospel have the power to heal today?
4. What does it mean for us to live as one people under one King?
5. Are there areas where we are tempted to value our differences more than our unity in Christ?

KEY TRUTH

The persecution that scattered Christ's followers became the means by which Christ gathered His scattered sheep.

The Good Shepherd promised through the prophets is gathering His people.

What looked like defeat was actually the next stage of His victory.

CLOSING SCRIPTURE

JOHN 10:16

"And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

CLOSING THOUGHT

Acts 8 marks the beginning of a new stage in the story.

- The Gospel has moved beyond Jerusalem.
- The Shepherd is gathering His scattered sheep.

The ancient divisions of God's people are beginning to heal, and the circle will continue to widen.

Soon the Gospel will reach an Ethiopian traveler on a desert road.

Soon it will reach Saul of Tarsus.

Soon it will reach a Centurion named Cornelius... then, the Gentile nations.

The Shepherd is still gathering His flock.