

Acts 8:1b-40 Bible Study

1. Do you ever wish you could do more than just **tell** someone about Jesus? Do you ever wish you could also show them a miraculous sign? What difference would it make?

2. a. Read Acts 8:1b-8. How do you see the boldness of Christians expressed here?

Godly people bury Stephen and mourn – probably at risk to themselves for associating with Stephen. People flee persecution and yet continue to spread the gospel – the very thing they are persecuted for! Philip, one of the seven of Acts 6:1-7, does the same thing another of those seven, Stephen has just been murdered for.

b. Where did they get this boldness?

Read again Acts 4:29-31

3. Read Acts 8:9-13. What are the similarities between Simon and Philip? What are the differences?

Similarities: Performed great acts, both speak about the things they do as having something to do with God /god, people are amazed (the crowds are 'amazed' by Simon, Simon is 'amazed' by Philip), people give them their "attention".

Differences: Philip proclaimed Christ and direct people's attention to him, Simon boasted in himself; Christ is exalted as divine, whereas Simon exalts himself as divine; Joy results from Philip's work, only amazement from Simon's; Philip's great acts are clearly for the people's benefit, Simon is only said to 'practice sorcery';

NB Philip "preached the good news of the Kingdom of God", v.12 – the Samaritans were all that remained of the "Northern Kingdom" of Israel. It had separated itself from the 'Southern Kingdom' about 1000 years earlier, rejecting King David's successors and the right worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722BC and the remnants formed the Samaritans of Jesus' day. God had promised to reunite the North and South as part of his kingdom (eg read Jer 31:1-9 where "Ephraim" refers to the Northern Kingdom). Acts 8 begins the fulfilling of this promise.

4. Read Acts 8:14-17. This is seen by some as showing that the Holy Spirit is only given as a separate experience **after** someone has become a Christian. Discuss this view referring to what you've read so far in Acts (and other parts of the New testament that might be helpful).

Acts 2:38-39 offers the normal experience – conversion means receiving the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost, there have been no other descriptions of Christians receiving the Spirit yet it is assumed that all who have been converted since then have the Spirit eg Acts 4:29-31, Acts 5:3, 9. See also (perhaps look up one each) Rom 8:9-10; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, 12:13; 2 Cor 13:14. The situation in Acts 8 is unique in the New Testament, highlighting that the Samaritans really are full members of the same body, equal members of Christ with the Jews who first believed.

5. Read Acts 8:18-24. What is missing for Simon? What do you think he thinks about God?

Simon's heart is not changed. He has believed that Philip had power, but it seems he's read that with his own worldly understanding. The power is in his control, so in a sense, God is in his control. Peter and John rebuke Simon for such idolatrous thinking. Peter shows that he has no control over God at all – see the use of the word "perhaps" in what he says to Simon. Perhaps see Ps 115:1,3.

6. Read Acts 8:25-40. What are the similarities and differences between Philip's work here and that in Samaria? What can we learn from this?

Similarities: Preaches the word, belief and baptism is the result (cf 2:38), the Holy Spirit is involved.

Differences: In Samaria it is about crowds and towns, here it is about one person, In Samaria Philip performed miracles, here it is an explanation of the Scriptures, the Samaritan ministry seemed to be Philip's choice, here it is clear direction of the Spirit.

The Spirit will do as he pleases in whatever way he pleases, but his main work will always be bringing men and women to believe in Jesus as a result of having heard the gospel.

7. Look back to your answers to Question 1. Can we expect the Holy Spirit to perform miraculous signs now as he did in Samaria through Philip? What **can** we expect? What is there in this chapter that encourages you in sharing the good news about Jesus? Discuss & pray.