



**Leaders Note**

Acts 8: 1-25 When it all kicks off!

**Thought**

“Open your eyes and take a good look at what's right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It's harvest time! The Harvester isn't waiting. He's taking his pay, gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to harvest a field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others." John 4:35-38 (Message)

Was this Samaritan move part of a carefully devised plan? Divine, certainly, but on a human level, I think not. In his final commission to the apostles he had told them to be his witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.” The Jerusalem part of the equation had worked out fine, and there was no doubt some filtering out of the Message to the surrounding Judean countryside. But there's no evidence of outward movement. Then Stephen happened...and Saul's fury. Now the community scatters. Note that the apostles still hang around Jerusalem — why is a good question to ponder. At any rate, out Philip goes. No more tables to serve in Jerusalem, but just north of Judea he finds himself in Samaritan fields Jesus formerly visited and described as ripe for harvest. Following his Lord's former lead, he simply breaks a centuries' old taboo and preaches the Message of the kingdom. When Jesus had his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, her entire town was won over first by her witness then by his word. No demands for miracles or signs or wonders. They stand in open contrast with the Jewish non-reception of their own Messiah with their constant demands for proofs and signs. But now the Samaritans get not only the Word, but the full display of signs and wonders and kingdom reality. It's the first major socio-religious-cultural boundary that the Gospel crosses. And when it seems to come to a screeching halt in the apparent absence of the Holy Spirit in the personal experience of the Samaritans, the apostles wisely dive in right after Philip confirming the Samaritans and their conversion — and reminding us to never try to control the Spirit but to keep being blown along by that rushing mighty wind.

**Context**

**He dragged off men and women:** Some see in this an indication of Saul's brutal rage; others see in it an indication of the active role women had in this fledgling community of believers. The reason for this thinking is that, generally, women were left out of religious matters.

**A city of Samaria:** Philip headed north to an unidentified city in the region of Samaria, which many scholars believe to have been ancient Samaria (1 Kings 20:1), in Luke's day called Sebaste (or Neapolis; today it is known as Nablus). Others point to Gitta or to Sychar, where Jesus visited.

**A man named Simon:** Early Christian writings present Simon the Sorcerer (or Simon Magus) as the first or arch heretic of the church and the “father” of the Gnostic heresy. As such he was a direct adversary of the Apostle John in later life. If this is that same Simon, as seems likely, Luke is revealing his true origins and exposing his real nature through Peter’s rebuke. For the record, these same early writings say that he claimed the ability to levitate and fly, and that his death occurred during a flying exhibition when Peter prayed for God to bring him down to the earth. And down he came. Please note, these early writings do not carry the same reliability of the biblical passages, but you never know, stranger things have happened.

**The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them:** “With,” “in,” “upon.” These are the three key prepositions when it comes to the Holy Spirit and the believer. Jesus said the Spirit is “with you and will be in you.” “With” denotes a superintending presence, “in” intimate relationship and connection, “upon” dynamic empowering for service. The Spirit was with and in these new believers but the manifestation of his presence upon them was still lacking. With the 12 and their company this initial manifestation came after 10 days of waiting; with the first Gentile believers in Acts 10 it came before the sermon was over; with the first Samaritan believers the manifestation waited for an apostolic laying on of hands. Which reminds us all that there is no set formula for this — the wind really does blow where and when and how it wills.

**The Samaritans:** The Samaritans believed themselves to be the descendants of the northern tribes, who had been exiled in 722 BC by Assyria. In 2 Kings 17, however, the Samaritans are described as a mixed group, composed at least partly of pagans whom the king of Assyria had brought into the land from other nations. In Ezra 4 the Samaritans appear as troublemakers for the Jews who are seeking to re-establish themselves and their temple in the land following their return from exile. This group did not identify itself with Samaria so much as with Mount Gerizim, near Shechem, which it’s members claimed was the place God had chosen for his sanctuary. They believed that Israel had become apostate as soon as the sanctuary had been moved away from Shechem during the time of Eli the priest. The Samaritans rejected Jerusalem’s special place in God’s plans, and the ongoing tension regarding the proper place for the sanctuary of God is evident in John 4:20 (when the Samaritan woman tells Jesus, “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”) Samaritans believed in the God of Israel, acknowledged Moses as his prophet the Pentateuch as his revelation, and looked forward to the day when he would send “the prophet like [Moses],” as he had promised. The Jewish high priest and ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan sanctuary on Mount Gerizim in 128 BC and tensions between Jews and Samaritans remained high throughout the first century AD. Samaritans were considered apostates and idolaters by the Jews and were viewed as more likely than Jews to be demonized. Archaeological Study Bible



## Learning Session

Read the passage above and begin with this question for open discussion. How do you typically get into a pool? Careful toe-dipping followed by incremental immersion, need a push or do you just dive in?

After taking some comments, split up into smaller groups to discuss the following questions:

- What drove Saul to so savagely persecute and hound this new body of believers? Why do you think the apostle's stayed on in Jerusalem?
- Is there an up side?
- What is your take on Simon? What seems to be his focus after his conversion experience?
- Is God doing something in your life to get you moving? What character flaws do you have that might be standing in your way?

Gather again for feedback. The following may be helpful to highlight.

- This is a classic example of how God can bring good results out of bad occurrences. Many believe that the Gospel would have stayed in Judea had this persecution not broken out. The same could be said for the strength of Christianity in the USA, many of the early settlers were Christians who had fled persecution in Europe.
- There is also another significant twist here. Most acknowledge that one of Paul's driving factors in being so willing to suffer was because of the suffering he caused. Maybe (and it is a maybe) God didn't stop him sooner because Paul needed this sort of motivation for **his** Christian walk and ultimately for his drive to get the Gospel to you.
- The fact is, sometimes God allows real hardship to come into our lives so that he can move us into being part of something that is really significant. Our job is to be willing to change and to move.
- It may also be that God didn't pour out the power of the Spirit because He wanted the apostles to move out beyond Jerusalem.
- How have you been challenged?

### **Discussion Questions**

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