

## **Acts Chapter 8**

We usually relate the fullness of the Holy Spirit to some ministry activity such as preaching, healing, or prophesying, or to an ecstatic personal spiritual experience such as speaking in tongues. While that is certainly valid, we must not forget that the Spirit's fullness is also given to prepare us for suffering which is such an important part of the life of obedience.

The death of Stephen gives a new impetus to the anti-Christian forces with which Saul is now prominently associated (8.1a). The fact that the apostles "could stay on in Jerusalem (no doubt along with other Christians) confirms the suspicion that it was mainly Stephen's group which was being attacked or they may have stayed on in Jerusalem, because they (the apostles) felt it was their duty to stay at their post.

Way back in Acts 1:8, we discovered that the risen Christ's mission plan was for the gospel to be preached in Jerusalem, into Judea, Samaria and to the end of the world. Up until now, Acts has been focusing on the Jerusalem stage of the plan. Now in Chapter 8, Jesus' plan moves into its next phase: the gospel spreads from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria (8:1).

### **Read Acts 8: 1-3**

- What were the negative results of Stephen's death?

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- Why do you think the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem?

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- What more do we discover about Saul in these verses? What impression is building of this man?

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### **Read Acts 8: 4-25**

- What positive thing resulted from the death of Stephen? In particular, how are 8:1 and 4 especially significant, given what Jesus had said in 1:8?

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- What do Simon and Phillip have in common (vv 5-11)? How are they different? What did Simon get wrong?

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- What was your primary motivation in first receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour? What is your primary motivation for continuing in the faith?

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- Why do you think the Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria ?

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- In the light of the Jewish-Samaritan division, why would the Father delay pouring out his Spirit until Peter and John were on the scene? Do you think this was more of a lesson for the Samaritans, or for the apostles? Why?
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- Do you think that Simon's words in verse 24 reveal a change in his heart? Why or Why not?
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### **Closing Remarks**

The significance of this moment in Acts is highlighted in two ways. Firstly, the Apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to confirm this development (8:14). Secondly, Luke records the unprecedented way in which the giving of the Holy Spirit is delayed until the Apostles arrive in Samaria. This is very unusual and serves to emphasize that the gospel has now crossed a most significant barrier. It is as if the risen Christ wants to show, beyond doubt, that the step into Samaria has his approval. He waits until the Apostles are there to see for themselves that even the Samaritans (half-caste-Jews) are now receiving the Holy Spirit.

This section powerfully reflects Christ's determination for his gospel to be spread. Even in the midst of persecution, his church still grows. The scattering of the Christians because of the persecution only has the effect of spreading the gospel even more! Christ really is unstoppable; a truth driven home in Chapter 9.

