



Acts study #2 - Acts 8:2-40

Introduction

Throughout chapters 8-11 of Acts which are covered by our three next Growth Group studies Luke recounts a series of wonderful historical events and so invites us to praise God for all that Jesus is doing in this part of Acts as he rules and reigns from heaven.

In our Growth Groups, through the study of his life-giving word, we're seeking to know God - know him personally and know how He acts in the world. We want to live for Jesus as disciples in trust and obedience. Let's be ever conscious of his undeserving grace towards every one of us. These chapters from Acts help us to see how glorious He is as His plans for the world unfold. May this lead us to praise and thank Him. This section also reminds us that although glorious, the gospel goes forwards in the face of suffering.

In 8:4-8 wonderful things are taking place as the gospel advances. However at the same time Jesus' disciples are facing very difficult challenges.

How terrifying a picture Acts 8:1-3 paints. Can you imagine the fear in the believer's hearts - as they saw their loved ones being dragged off for no other reason than for being Jesus' followers?

Acts 8:1-8 highlight twin themes we'll see throughout the book of Acts - the powerful advance of the gospel in the face of severe opposition.

1. Why do you think the apostles stayed put in Jerusalem in contrast with those who were scattered? (see 8:1)

2. What was the positive outcome that resulted from the scattering of Jesus' disciples into the regions?

Depending on the time available for your study, choose one of the two sections below. Alternatively, divide your group in half, work through one section each and ask them to report back to the whole group at the end.

Simon the magician - 8:9-25

3. Luke introduces Simon the magician and then contrasts him with Philip. Notice how the content of Philip's preaching is described in verse 12. How does this contrast with the name and reputation of Simon the magician?

We'll soon learn as the narrative unfolds that Simon's belief and baptism are anything but genuine. Where is this most evident?

4. Acts 8:19 in the original language translates, "give me this authority also...". What difference does this make?
5. What is going on in Simon's heart? Can you think of a modern day equivalent?

The particular case of the Samaritans

6. Why do you think the Samaritans failed to receive the HS the moment they believed in Jesus? vv 15-17. This seems to be something of an anomaly.

Phillip Jensen writes, The coming of the Holy Spirit p159

The apostles did not always go to oversee the conversion of people. So why did they send Peter and John to visit Samaria? When Peter and John came down from Jerusalem, they prayed specifically for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit - the missing element thus far in the Samaritans' experience.

To be members of the new age, everyone had to receive the Spirit, without the regeneration of the Spirit, without the new life of the Spirit, a person was still in the old age of the flesh and death. But when the apostles laid their hands on them, the Samaritans indeed received the Spirit (8:17). But why did the apostles have to come from Jerusalem for the Spirit to come to the Samaritans?

He goes on to ask the question, "Are the Samaritans normative or unique?" Here the background to Acts 8:5-25 is indispensable for our understanding.

There was a huge gulf between the Samaritans - the descendants of the northern kingdom prior to the Exile, and the tribe of Judah and the royal house of David. Jews saw Samaritans as spiritual half-breeds. With the gospel coming to the

Samaritans, this was an extraordinary moment in the history of God's people. And with that epochal change came a new leadership as the apostles were appointed by Jesus himself to be his witness.

Jensen asks, "What will the apostles do about the Samaritans?", but also "What will the Samaritans make of the apostles?" Given that right throughout their history they have rejected Jerusalem and the Davidic temple. Will they now accept the leadership of these Jewish believers from Jerusalem? Their receiving of the Holy Spirit the moment that Peter and John pray for them is a sign of their true repentance and their belonging to the new age of the Spirit. For further reading on this wonderful moment reuniting God's people read Ezekiel 37:15-28.

Philip and the Ethiopian - 8:26-40

Here we read of a wonderful and timely rendez-vous.

7. What does Luke tell us concerning the identity of this man? Once he has introduced him, how does Luke refer to him in the remainder of the chapter? Why do you think this is the case?
8. How does Isaiah 56:3-8 help us appreciate the importance of this moment?

The scattered people of Israel and, as, Isaiah anticipated, the scattered people of Israel and those excluded from the assembly of Israel are united through the message of the good news of the forgiveness brought about through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Alan Thompson, [The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus](#). p118

9. The man is reading from Isaiah 53. What is he finding difficult? How does Philip help him?
10. Notice the different language Luke uses to describe Philip's preaching of the gospel in chapter 8 verses 5, 12, 35 & 40. Compare and contrast them. Why the differences?

Conclusion

What a joyous description of the wonderful way in which the risen Lord Jesus is at work in the world fulfilling his purposes!

Fuel for your concluding prayers

Like Philip meeting the Ethiopian eunuch, in a multicultural society like Australia, we often meet people from other cultures that are foreign to us. Like the eunuch, they may have a lot of questions about Jesus and Christianity.

- Pray for people from other cultures you meet at school, uni or work. Please pray for opportunities to explain the gospel with them. " "On 20 February, Jesus on Life series will commence for four weeks. In the past, participants heard about the series from friends' invitations, chatting to a stranger on the bus, Google search, etc.
- Pray for the harvest, ask God to have mercy on those who seek him by attending this series. Please also pray for wisdom and clarity for those who volunteer to lead the discussions.