



BETTER

Advancing In Power

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 434–436.

Acts 8:1–12 (NKJV)

1 Now Saul 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.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”

11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

A People On The Move

- There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world,” wrote Victor Hugo, “and that is an idea whose time has come.”
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is much more than an idea.
- The Gospel is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (*Rom. 1:16, NKJV*).

A People On The Move

- It is God's "dynamite" for breaking down sin's barriers and setting the prisoners free. Its time had come and the church was on the move.
- The "salt" was now leaving the "Jerusalem saltshaker" to be spread over all Judea and Samaria, just as the Lord had commanded (*Acts 1:8*).

The Events In Acts 8 Center Around Four Different Men

- A Zealous Persecutor—Saul (*Acts 8:1–3*)
- A Faithful Preacher—Philip (*Acts 8:4–8*)
- A Clever Deceiver—Simon the Sorcerer (*Acts 8:9–25*)
- A Concerned Seeker—an Ethiopian (*Acts 8:26–40*)

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- The Book of Acts and the epistles give sufficient data for a sketch of Saul's early life.
- He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (*Acts 22:3*), a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"
- The "son of a Pharisee" (*Acts 23:6*), and a Roman citizen (*Acts 16:37; 22:25–28*).

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- He was educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel (*Acts 22:3*) and became a devoted Pharisee (*Acts 26:4–5; Phil. 3:5*).
- Measured by the Law, his life was blameless (*Phil. 3:6*).
- He was one of the most promising young Pharisees in Jerusalem, well on his way to becoming a great leader for the Jewish faith (*Gal. 1:14*).

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- Saul's zeal for the Law was displayed most vividly in his persecution of the church (*Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6*).
- He really thought that persecuting the believers was one way of serving God, so he did it with a clear conscience (*2 Tim. 1:3*).
- He obeyed the light that he had and, when God gave him more light, he obeyed that and became a Christian!

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

In what ways did Saul persecute the church?

- He “made havoc of the church,” and the verb here describes a wild animal mangling its prey.
- When Christ spoke to Saul on the Damascus road, He compared him to a beast! *(Acts 9:5)*

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- The stoning of Stephen, which Saul approved, shows the lengths to which he would go to achieve his purpose. People are mourning Stephen, and he going to persecute the church.
- He persecuted both men and women “unto the death” (*Acts 22:4*), entering both houses and synagogues (*Acts 22:19*).

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- He had the believers imprisoned and beaten (*Acts 22:19; 26:9–11*).
- If they renounced their faith in Jesus Christ (*“compelling them to blaspheme”—Acts 26:11*), they were set free; if they did not recant, they could be killed.
- Men were persecuted because of who they were as well as their confession and belief in Jesus Christ, and not for what they did.

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- In later years, Paul described himself as “exceedingly mad against them” (*Acts 26:11*), “a blasphemer [he denounced Jesus Christ], and a persecutor, and injurious [violent]” (*1 Tim. 1:13*).

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

Acts 26:11 (NKJV)

And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

1 Timothy 1:13 (NKJV)

although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

- He was a man with great authority whose devotion to Moses completely controlled his life, and almost destroyed his life.
- He did it “ignorantly in unbelief”, and God showed him mercy and saved him.

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul

(Acts 8:1–3)

1 Timothy 1:13 (NKJV)

though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; **but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

- Saul of Tarsus is the last person in Jerusalem you would have chosen to be the great apostle to the Gentiles!

Acts 8:4–8 (NKJV)

4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- Persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: it scatters it and only produces a greater harvest.
- The word translated “scattered” (*diaspeiro*, Acts 8:1, 4) means “to scatter seed.”

- The believers in Jerusalem were God's seed and the persecution was used of God to plant them in new soil so they could bear fruit.

Matthew 13:37–38 (NKJV)

37 He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

38 The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.

- Some went throughout Judea and Samaria, and others went to more distant fields.

Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 11:19 (NKJV)

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The Samaritans were a “half-breed” people, a mixture of Jew and Gentile.
- The nation originated when the Assyrians captured the ten northern tribes in 732 b.c., deported many of the people, and then imported others who intermarried with the Jews.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The Samaritans had their own temple and priesthood and openly opposed fraternization with the Jews (*John 4:9*), but they needed Jesus.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The fact that Saul persecuted believers “even unto strange [foreign] cities” (*Acts 26:11*) would suggest that their witness was bearing fruit even beyond Jerusalem.
- Some Apostles did remain in the city.
- They should be commended for their courage and devotion to duty. After all, somebody had to remain there to care for the church.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- Philip was chosen as a deacon (*Acts 6:5*) but, like Stephen, he grew in his ministry and became an effective evangelist (*see Acts 21:8*).
- God directed him to evangelize in Samaria, an area that had been prohibited to the Apostles (*Matt. 10:5–6*).
- Both John the Baptist and Jesus had ministered there (*John 3:23; 4:1ff*), so Philip entered into their labors (*John 4:36–38*).

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The word for preaching in Acts 8:4 means “to preach the Gospel, to evangelize”; while the word in Acts 8:5 means “to announce as a herald.”
- Philip was God’s commissioned herald to deliver His message to the people of Samaria.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

2 Timothy 4:5 (NKJV)

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Never Fear Rejection!

- To reject the messenger would mean to reject the message and rebel against the authority behind the herald, Almighty God.

Luke 10:16 (NKJV)

He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

- How people respond to God’s messenger and God’s message is serious business

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- Philip not only declared God's Word, but he also demonstrated God's power by performing miracles.
- However, the emphasis here is on the Word of God: the people gave heed to the Word because they saw the miracles, and by believing the Word, they were saved.
- Nobody was ever saved simply because of miracles (*John 2:23–25; 12:37–41*).

John 2:23–25 (NKJV)

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

John 12:37–41 (NKJV)

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, **they did not believe in Him,**

38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.”

41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- Great persecution plus the preaching of the Gospel resulted in great joy!

Acts 8:8 (NKJV)

And there was great joy in that city.

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The people of Samaria who heard the Gospel and believed were delivered from physical affliction, demonic control, and, most important, from their sins.
- No wonder there was great joy!

A Faithful Preacher—Philip

(Acts 8:4–8)

- The Gospel had now moved from “Jewish territory” into Samaria where the people were part Jew and part Gentile.
- God in His grace had built a bridge between two estranged peoples and made the believers one in Christ, and soon He would extend that bridge to the Gentiles and include them as well.

Ephesians 2:14–16 (NKJV)

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

- Even today, we need “bridge builders” like Philip, men and women who will carry the Gospel into pioneer territory and dare to challenge ancient prejudices. “Into all the world

... the Gospel to every creature” is still God’s commission to us.