



Study Guide: Acts – Chapter 8

Study Guide: Acts – Chapter 8

This study guide provides an educational overview of Acts Chapter 8 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Acts chapter 8 marks a pivotal transition in the early church's mission, moving from a Jerusalem-centered community to a broader, more diverse outreach. This chapter highlights the scattering of believers due to persecution and the resulting spread of the gospel beyond Jewish boundaries. Readers should watch for the dynamic interplay between divine guidance, human response, and the expansion of the church through both preaching and baptism. The chapter also introduces significant figures and events that demonstrate the Spirit's work in evangelism and the breaking down of cultural barriers.

Context

Acts 8 follows the martyrdom of Stephen in chapter 7, which triggers intense persecution against the early Christian community in Jerusalem. This persecution, led by Saul before his conversion, causes believers to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria. The chapter is set in the immediate aftermath of these events, capturing the church's response and the Spirit's empowerment for mission. Key figures include Philip, one of the original seven deacons, who becomes a prominent evangelist. The historical context reflects the early church's struggle to maintain unity and faithfulness amid external threats, while theologically emphasizing the fulfillment of Jesus' command to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth."

Outline

The chapter begins with the persecution and scattering of the Jerusalem church, which paradoxically advances the gospel as believers preach in new regions. Philip's ministry in Samaria follows, marked by miraculous signs and the conversion of many, including the notable encounter with Simon the sorcerer. The narrative then shifts to Philip's divinely guided journey to meet the Ethiopian eunuch, a significant Gentile figure, culminating in the eunuch's baptism. The chapter closes with Philip's relocation to Azotus and continued



evangelistic work. This progression highlights the gospel's movement from Jewish to Samaritan to Gentile audiences, illustrating the expanding scope of the early church's mission.

Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1–3: The chapter opens with Saul's approval of Stephen's death and the ensuing persecution that scatters the Jerusalem church. This scattering, though painful, serves God's purpose by spreading believers into new regions where they continue to proclaim the word.

Verses 4–8: Philip goes to Samaria and preaches Christ, accompanied by signs such as healings and exorcisms. The response is remarkable, with many receiving the Holy Spirit and great joy filling the city, demonstrating the gospel's power to transform even historically hostile communities.

Verses 9–13: Simon the sorcerer, a local magician who amazed the people, believes and is baptized. His conversion introduces a complex character whose later actions reveal tensions about the nature of faith and the Spirit's gifts.

Verses 14–17: Peter and John come from Jerusalem to Samaria to pray for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the apostolic authority and the Spirit's role in authenticating the gospel's spread.

Verses 18–24: Simon offers money to buy the power to impart the Holy Spirit, leading to Peter's stern rebuke. This episode underscores the incompatibility of spiritual gifts with selfish motives and highlights the need for genuine repentance.

Verses 25–40: An angel directs Philip to the desert road where he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch, a high official reading Isaiah. Philip explains the Scriptures, shares the gospel, and baptizes the eunuch, who then rejoices and continues on his way. This event symbolizes the gospel's reach to the nations and the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all peoples.

Key Themes

One key theme is the paradox of persecution as a catalyst for mission, illustrating how suffering can advance God's kingdom. Another theme is the Spirit's central role in empowering believers for witness and authenticating new converts. The chapter also explores the breaking down of ethnic and cultural barriers, as seen in the gospel's



reception by Samaritans and an Ethiopian Gentile. Additionally, the narrative warns against the commodification of spiritual gifts, emphasizing sincerity and humility in faith. Lastly, divine guidance and obedience emerge as vital for effective evangelism, demonstrated through Philip's responsiveness to the Spirit's leading.

Cross-References

The scattering of believers echoes Jesus' command in Acts 1:8 to be witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," showing the unfolding of this mission strategy. The encounter with Simon the sorcerer parallels warnings in 2 Timothy 3:5 about those who have a form of godliness but deny its power. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch connects to Isaiah 53, which Philip explains, highlighting the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. Peter and John's impartation of the Spirit recalls Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, emphasizing the Spirit's role in empowering the church. Finally, the theme of divine guidance aligns with the Spirit's leading in Acts 13 and beyond, underscoring the early church's dependence on God's direction.

Application

Modern disciples can learn from Acts 8 the importance of embracing God's purposes even in hardship, recognizing that challenges may open new doors for gospel witness. The chapter encourages believers to rely on the Holy Spirit for boldness and discernment in sharing their faith. It also calls the church to break down barriers of ethnicity, culture, and social status, reflecting the inclusive nature of the gospel. The story of Simon warns against seeking spiritual power for selfish gain, urging sincerity and humility in spiritual pursuits. Finally, the example of Philip's obedience to divine prompting challenges believers to be attentive and responsive to God's guidance in everyday ministry opportunities.

Summary

Acts chapter 8 reveals how persecution, rather than hindering the early church, propels the gospel into new regions and among diverse peoples. Through Philip's evangelistic efforts in Samaria and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the chapter illustrates the Spirit's empowering presence and the expanding reach of the Christian message beyond Jewish boundaries. The narrative balances divine sovereignty and human responsibility, highlighting the necessity of genuine faith and obedience. This chapter sets the stage for



the church's mission to the Gentiles, emphasizing that the gospel is for all who seek God with an open heart.