



Walking Through the Scripture Together

April 20 - 26, 2008

Acts 8:1-25

Making Ripples: Plunging into your Samaria

Text Acts 8:1-25 (TNIV)

¹ And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a

thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

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**

I like the image of Philip running and doing a "cannonball" on the Samaritan side of the pool.

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 mention of 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.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

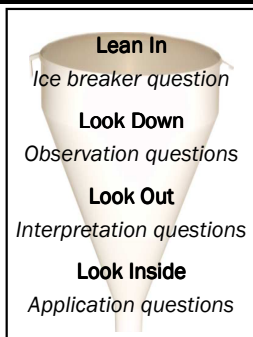
- How do you typically get into a pool? Careful toe-dipping followed by incremental immersion or do you just dive in?

Look Down / Look Out

- What drove Saul to so savagely persecute and hound this new body of believers? How did the church respond? Why do you think the apostle's stayed on in Jerusalem?
- What is the significance of the message of Jesus coming to Samaria? What cultural boundaries is Philip crossing as he does this?
- Summarize Philip's ministry in Samaria. What did it look like? How was it received? What do you learn from Philip about kingdom ministry?
- What do you think the hold up was in the Samaritans receiving the empowering of the Spirit? Why did it have to be through the apostles' hands in this case? Why didn't they have a Pentecost experience like the Jewish believers in Acts 2?
- What is your take on Simon? What would you say "made him tick" before he met Philip and heard and saw his message? What seems to be making him tick after his conversion experience?

Look Inside

- What cultural/social/religious boundaries might the Lord be calling you to cross right now with the message of Jesus? How will you get started?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 8:1-4; also Acts 22:1-5; 26:4-11

Why was Saul so mad at Christians? How do you usually handle it when someone is very angry at you — especially if you didn't do anything wrong to cause it? Is it okay for Christians to be angry? How can we keep from sinning when we're mad?

Day Two Acts 8:5-8 John 4:1-42

Have you ever seen God do a miracle? If so, what happened? Do you believe that God still does miracles today? Do you think he could use you to do a miracle like he used Philip?

Day Three Acts 8:9-13

In what specific ways has Jesus made a difference in your life? Where in yourself would you like to see more change?

Day Four Acts 8:14-17

What has your experience been like with the Holy Spirit? Like the Samaritans, are you still waiting for something to happen? Do you think everyone who really has the Holy Spirit has to speak in tongues? Why or why not?

Day Five Acts 8:18-25

What was wrong with what Simon asked? Why is Peter so hard on him? How hard is it for you to tell someone else that what they are doing is wrong? What are some good ways — and some bad ways — to correct someone? How well do you listen to correction when it comes to you?

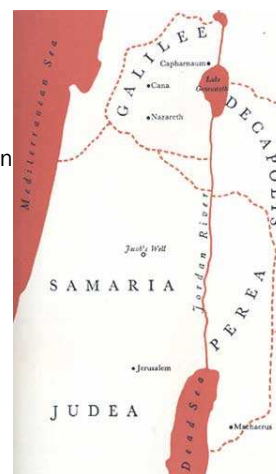
Bible Life & Times

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 reestablish 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 worshiped 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

details, details...

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.

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.

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.