

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-14 Philip's Powerful Ministry in Samaria

Have you ever stamped your foot on a fire that was not out yet? What happened? Most likely the embers scattered in all directions. If you were not careful, they could even have started other fires. This is a picture of what happened to the church in Jerusalem. Using Saul of Tarsus and others, the devil tried to stamp out the quickly growing group. The Bible says, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem." However, the devil's plan did not work. The persecution only scattered the flame of the gospel into new areas.

This scattering by persecution was not in the Early Church's plan, yet God used it to advance his plan. You will remember that Jesus said that his disciples were to be his Spirit-empowered witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Until now, the church had been proclaiming the message of Christ only in and around the city of Jerusalem. The time had come, however, for the church to move out into Judea and Samaria.

On the same day Stephen was stoned, more persecution came against the church in Jerusalem. This violence was led by Saul of Tarsus. He began moving from house to house, arresting Christians and throwing them into prison. He consented to others being put to death. As a result of this persecution, many believers fled for their lives into the nearby regions of Judea and Samaria. Amazingly, everywhere they went, they preached the gospel. The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem, enduring the full brunt of the persecution.

Philip, one of the seven Spirit-filled brothers chosen to care for the widows, went to a city in nearby Samaria. He began telling everyone about Christ. His preaching was accompanied by miraculous signs. Through the power of the Spirit, the paralyzed and lame were healed and with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many. Great crowds of people gathered to see the miracles and listen to what Philip had to say. Many believed Philip's message about the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus. They were all baptized in water. As a result of this revival, great joy came to the city.

One of those who were baptized was a sorcerer by the name of Simon. For a long time he had amazed the people with his magical powers, so much so that they called him the "Great Power of God." Simon was astonished at the signs and miracles that followed Philip's preaching, so he began to follow the evangelist everywhere he went (Acts 8:1-13).

This scattering of believers from Jerusalem represents a major step forward in the church's developing from a regional Jewish sect into a universal body of believers. It launched the church's first venture into non-Jewish outreach. It thus challenged the long-held prejudices that Jewish Christians had brought into the church from their religious and cultural past. We learn three important lessons from this story.

First, we learn that everywhere we go, no matter what the circumstances, we should witness for Christ. Luke said of the scattered Christians, they "preached the word wherever they

went.” What gave these persecuted Christians such zeal and boldness? The answer is, they were filled with the Spirit and fully committed to God’s mission. They had seen Christ and the Twelve performing miracles in the power of the Spirit. Now the Spirit was using them as well!

Although we do not welcome persecution, sometimes it will come, especially if we are faithful to boldly proclaim the message of Christ. When persecution does come, we must be ready. We can do this, if we will stay focused on Christ’s mission and remain full of the Holy Spirit.

The second lesson we learn from this story is that if we will go, and if we will faithfully preach the gospel, we can expect God to confirm his word with miraculous signs. After commanding us to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation, Jesus promised, “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mark 16:17). This is what happened with Philip. His Spirit-inspired proclamation was accompanied by powerful Spirit-generated signs. After seeing these signs the crowds listened more closely to what Philip said.

Thus, true gospel preaching always involves *both* powerful proclamation of the gospel (known as ‘truth encounters’) and mighty demonstrations of kingdom power (known as ‘power encounters’). We must always be faithful to preach the message in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we will do this, we can expect God to confirm his word through miraculous signs and wonders.

The third lesson we learn from this story is that soon after new believers commit their lives to Christ, we should baptize them in water. Luke wrote, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Philip was following the instructions of Jesus to his disciples. In the Great Commission he commanded them to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

When individuals come to Christ, very soon we should baptize them in water. This is an essential part of their following him. It is a testimony to the world that they have died with Christ and have been raised with him to new life. It is also a testimony that they have committed themselves to his mission of redeeming the nations. The biblical method of baptism is by immersion in water.

This lesson is **important** because we can see that God sometimes uses persecution to scatter believers and give them responsibility to spread the gospel into new areas.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that, in order to be faithful witnesses to Christ, we must remain full of the Holy Spirit and committed to Christ’s mission.

Let’s now **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What did Philip do when he fled into Samaria, and what gave him such zeal and power?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Philip boldly proclaimed Christ and performed signs and wonders, and that he did it all in the power of the Holy Spirit, you answered correctly.

2. What is the Christian's responsibility when, for whatever reason, they travel into new areas?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Wherever a Christian goes, he or she should witness for Christ," you answered correctly.

3. According to our lesson, what can we expect God to do if we will faithfully go and proclaim the gospel to the lost?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered that we can expect God to confirm his word by performing miraculous signs and wonders, you are correct.

4. When new believers come to Christ, what should we do with them?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We should baptize them in water soon after their conversion to Christ," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several times until you can accurately tell the story and you can teach its lessons to others. Then gather a group of people together and teach them. Invite them to become Christ's followers and to be baptized in water as the Scriptures direct.