

## "The Gospel in Samaria, Part 1"

- **Christ is building his Church to witness the good news of His salvation to the world: Everyone, without exception, who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**

*In today's reading, two Paradoxes illustrate how His plans for the church never unfold the way anyone anticipates.*

1. The Paradox of Persecution: Mistreatment of the witnesses causes the gospel not only to survive, but to thrive (Acts 8:1-4).
2. The Paradox of Penitence: Response to the good news is strongest among those to whom the chosen witnesses are least enthusiastic to bring it (Acts 8:5-8).

**Next Week: "The Gospel in Samaria, Part 2" – Acts 8:9-25**

# Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of November 19th-25th

## 1. Context

1. The main character in Acts 8 is Philip, but there are three men named Philip mentioned in the New Testament. Is this Philip the apostle (Acts 1:13)? Philip the deacon (Acts 6:5)? Or Philip the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1)? How do you know?
2. Do you see a connection between the commission of Christ to the apostles and the work of Philip here? (See Acts 1:6-8)
3. The Samaritans were not highly regarded by the Jews (Jn 4:9), and were excluded from the ministry of the disciples in Matt 10:5, but they are presented favorably in Luke's writings (Luke 9:52; 10:33; 17:16) and this chapter. What is the place of these people in the narrative of Acts?

## 2. Observation

4. Saul is mentioned in verses 1 and 3, but he is not mentioned in the rest of the chapter. What is the connection between Saul and the preaching of the gospel in Samaria?
5. Compare Acts 7:58, 8:1, and 8:3. Do you see escalation here? If so, what is driving the escalation?
6. Philip performs signs in Samaria and it gets the attention of the crowds (Acts 6:8). There are 12 other mentions of signs in the book of Acts (Acts 2:19,22,43; 4:16, 22,30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:13; 14:3, and 15:12). To what are the signs pointing and what do they imply?

### **3. Meaning**

7. The second century church father, Tertullian, said that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” The word, *martyr*, is derived from the Greek term for witness. How did the death of Stephen serve to scatter the witness of the Gospel? (See Acts 8:1, 8:4, 11:19; 13:1-3)
  
8. In verse 2, we read that the devout men who buried Stephen made great lamentation over him. The term, *devout* means that they were committed to religion and religious duties (see Luke 2:25, Acts 2:5, 22:12). Do you think these devout men were followers of Jesus? Could they have been devout Jews? Was Saul devout? What light does the behavior of these devout men shed on the charges against Stephen?
  
9. The people of Samaria responded with joy to Philip's evangelistic efforts. Do you think that this was because of the signs or because of his message?

### **4. Application**

10. Compare the methods of Saul in persecution (Acts 8:3) with his method of evangelism (Acts 20:20). Does Saul / Paul's effectiveness as a persecutor / evangelist have anything to do with his methodology? His zeal? What might that imply for our own efforts at evangelism?