

## Acts 8:1-25 ACTS-[20]-REVIVAL & SIMON SORCERER

PRELIMS. Stephen has just been martyred – for his faith in Jesus Christ. He has given a wonderful history of the people of God suffering for Christ. Mention is made of a young man named Saul who kept watch over the clothes which the stone-throwers threw down at his feet! \*The 2 main subjects of these verses is **Christian Revival** and **Simon's Faith!**

### CHRISTIAN REVIVAL

No one, but no one, can **destroy** the Church of Jesus Christ! “*Saul began to destroy the church*”[2] – but he could not! In fact, when you try to do so, you are being **counter-productive** – the reverse happens, the Church grows! NT testifies and **history!** Even in the past 100yrs! Stott reminds us in 1949 in China, the **Communists** defeated the National Government. 637 China Inland Missionaries had to leave. It seemed a disaster. Within 4yrs 286 of them were redeployed in South-East Asia and Japan, while the national Christians in China who were under severer persecutions began to multiply and now total 30 or 40 times the original number who left! From 637 to 25,480!! That's only CIM!

So, “*a great persecution broke out against the church*”[2] is actually **great news!** The problem today in the West is, do the authorities consider we Xns enough of a **threat** to their present way of life? Are Xns turning heads, as Stephen did! Are we living lives that are **challenging?**

A time comes when it is **right to move out!** “*When they persecute you in one place flee to another*” [Mat 10:23] is the **command** of our Lord! And so they did here, there were “*those who had been scattered*”[4]! God never intends us to stand still and be killed - all for nothing! But note the one thing they did – in the midst of their **dilemma** (no home, no income, unsettled) the one thing that consumed them was the **gospel** “*they preached the Word*”[4] The original is the root for **evangelising!** Lloyd-Jones translates as **'gossiping** the gospel! This was done by the **public**, not the apostles for they stayed in Jerusalem [1]!

That is **when** you **know** there is **revival** – when it is on the people's lips, when people, the public, can't help **talking** about Jesus “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*”[Mat 12:34]! Bunyan was converted by hearing 'fisher-women' talking in the alley-ways about Christ! It was the **subject** of their conversations! **APP!**

Now we are told that “*Philip went down to a city in Samaria*”[4]. Did God tell him to go? In [v26] and angel told Philip to 'go south to Gaza'! **APP** Sometimes God gives clear guidance, sometimes he leaves us to 'work things out' thru the general principles of the Word and to act on **faith** more than obedience to a specific command!

He took a **risk** by going there! The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans! There was **hostility** between them for centuries. The Sams only accepted the first 5 books of Moses! But they did believe in a 'Great One' to come (**Messiah**)? So they would have had some **knowledge** of **Jesus** thru the **Wom** of **Samaria!** It was **Christ** that Philip **proclaimed** (kerusso)! He focussed on the Person of Christ – and they **believed** him!

But here again we are **challenged** “*When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said*”[6]! Many “*were healed. So there was great joy in that city*”[8] **APP** there was joy because people were **helped!** Everyone needs help! Interest in people **welfare** (physical and spiritual) will always **attract!** There **was** a true spiritual revival in Samaria as a result

There is an **important principle** here: As in the Ephesus revival [Actsa 19:23cf], so here in Samaria: You cannot force people to believe what they are not personally convicted of! The Jewish **authorities** here tried to **force** the people to believe that Jesus was an **impostor!** But they could not. Despite the fact that the authorities “*dragged off men and women and put them in prison*”[3] did **not** change the minds of the people. Yet when Philip “*proclaimed the Christ*” **without** any **pressure**, the people believed! When Philip preached, the people were changed in **heart!** People were convicted in their **consciences** and minds!

The **world's method** to bring about obedience to the State is: first demand it; then intimidate/threaten, then persecute, then destroy! Ie, **top down pressure** - as in Communism, the **government**, those at the top, **force** the people to believe in their philosophy telling them it is good and best for them! It is the **false** shepherd who comes and steals your liberty your funds, and finally kills and destroys [John 10]

Where as the **godly method** is **not** 'top-down' but the reverse **bottom up!** Convert the **masses** of people. Change the people first and spread the word. **Politicians** follow the **people's wishes!** In a godly democracy the people will elect a godly man to rule over them! Thus it is **so**

**important** to obey Christ's command to preach the gospel to every creature. Convert more and more people - politicians are not interested in **minority** views!! This is the **Church's task** to preach in a **positive way** the gospel – not be slagging each other off!! Not negatively! Primarily by **giving life** – not only by **protecting** us from **heresies**, but by **infusing life** into us!

### SIMON - FAITH for the WRONG REASON

We are now introduced to a man who had faith - “*Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere*”[13]! My friends, you **can** believe and yet not be saved! The devils believe and even **tremble!** It is a new **heart** you need. You need to be **regenerated!**

Simon, note, **wanted** this thing that Philip had. He was **fascinated** with it and **desired** it. But it was for the **wrong reason**. He wanted Xnity so that he could **continue** his **business** and **keep** his **followers!** Simon was magician/sorcerer. He had a great following “*both high and low, gave him their attention*”. He was even considered to be a god with **divine power!** The people said “*this man is the divine power known as the Great Power*”[10] (Lit: The Mega Dunamis of God)!

The crowds followed Simon and were “*amazed*” since a long time, but when Philip came on the scene, the crowds **left** Simon and started following Philip because he too performed “*great signs and miracles*” [13]. Of course Philip had something else! “*he preached* (evangelidzo) *the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus*”[12]! Ultimately people want more than just tricks and amusements! People need something with **meaning/purpose!** Our TV programmes which may **entertain** us for a while need to be replaced with something more **'edifying'** - something more **substantial** - yes, something **spiritual**.

Philip's preaching provided **hope** – something with “*good news*” for the future! It amazes me how many people are now believing in the **supernatural!** On one of the TV phone-in programmes last week I was surprised to see how many people believed in **angels** – represented as a **feather/dove** – all because something **good** happened immediately afterwards! And the hosts were all excited and believed it too! People are actually **looking for** something **spiritual** - to give them **hope!** People have no problem believing the supernatural – just God's supernaturalism! Satan has **prejudiced** our minds against God and His miracles! Man has

actually a **penchant** for the supernatural – thus your many films, etc!

Here we see the **unity** of the Church - “*when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God*”[14]. Note: **not** simply 'believed Philip', but '**accepted the Word of God!** It was not Philip but the Word of God they received! They decided to send to them their **two best men** “*they sent Peter and John to them*”[14].

**Why** did they send them (unasked for!) Well they came down to **pray** and to assist them. If there was a real revival, there would need assistance in counselling and instruction. \*But there is also the **question** of the **two-stage Holy Spirit** issue! What did the Peter & John have that Philip did not have? How did the Holy Spirit not come with Philip?

**Ans 1** – For some, baptism and membership in the church, **professed** faith/belief, **formal** confession with a **promise to** walk in the Lord's ways is enough! These Samaritans were pretty ignorant but nevertheless wanted to follow Jesus and so they were baptised, but were not **truly regenerated** – only God the **Holy Spirit** can do that! Some of them may indeed have truly **repented** under Philip's ministry, but others as Simon, did **not** truly repent. So Peter/John who were apostles and had the **gift** of imparting the Holy Spirit came and ministered to them!

**Ans 2** – There **are** those who believe that we can be converted and not have the Holy Spirit in **His fullness** and we still **need this 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing!** The modern charismatic movement!! This verse **supports** their view!

**Ans 3** - Being in the very early stages of the gospel, before the **canon** of Scripture was complete, this incident was a **one-off** event and not to be repeated after the Canon was closed. That is why tongue speaking, or gifts is not a **qualification** for eldership in the pastoral epistles!

**Lessons from Simon:** (1) there will **always** be a **counterfeits!** Where there is the real thing, counterfeits will arise! (2) People come to church and make a profession for the wrong reasons! In the **hope** things will get better. For some **social, psychological, religious** reason! Simon came for **power** “*Give me this ability...*”[19]. (3) Salvation is a **heart** work “*your heart is not right before God*”[21]. (4) He was **not released** from the **dominion** of sin “*you are captive to sin*” ie, in the grip/bond of sin! (5) He did **not repent** “*repent of this wickedness*”[22] (6) His prayer was **not** for **salvation** but to escape punishment “*so that nothing you have*

*said may **happen** to me*”![24] (7) There was **still mercy** for Simon. The gospel was still relevant! No point in saying “*Repent*” if not! **Christ!**