

**thou art
in the
gall
of bitterness**

Acts 8:1 – 26

~ At the beginning of our consideration of Acts, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to the apostles, “ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Judaea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” In this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God, we will see the apostles move out as witnesses into the lands Jesus directed them to. In our previous report, we witnessed Steven become the first martyr as persecution broke upon the early church by the religious leaders who despised the teaching of the resurrected Christ. Of course, they had recently murdered Jesus, so speaking of Him alive and back from the dead literally caused them to come unglued.

Many times, it seems Satan has won the victory when believers suffer or are persecuted or killed; but, not true, friends. Persecution and tribulation always accomplishes the furtherance of the Gospel. The only goal I am attaining to on safari is leading you dear readers to fulfill the commands of Christ; by taking His Word to the entire and uttermost parts of the world in the sound doctrine of the apostles – that is, to my own Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria – as I understand them. Astonishingly, I am realizing that the places with the greatest opposition to the Word of God is also where the greatest and most sincere turning to Christ is occurring. It just works out that way, friends.

So, our safari comes to what is recognized as the second major division in the Book of Acts. I do not divide the books we are studying as a normal Bible study would; because I am not interested in theology or doctrine: I am only interested in the spiritual aspect of our learning. From this chapter through chapter twelve, we see the Lord Jesus Christ at work through the Holy Spirit moving in the apostles....

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

~ **In our last report**, we read the account of Steven and Saul of Tarsus together during this time. Saul hated Steven; and, in their own diametrically opposed positions, those two men had the biggest effects on the early church of any men in the Bible. Steven was the first deacon, and he gave his life to be a part of the church. The young Pharisee in charge of Steven's execution was Saul, later to be converted and become known as Paul the apostle. Verse one says Saul was consenting, which means he was the man with final authority in this matter. Steven was seen by Saul looking up into Heaven and seeing the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. In all other Scripture, we see Jesus SITTING at the right hand of God – but Jesus STOOD UP to receive Steven. Saul, looking up, saw nothing; and Saul will regret this moment for the remainder of his life as evidenced by Paul's writings. I am sure Steven prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus.

As we read on, Saul persecutes anyone and everyone he can get his hands on in the early church and, as a result, the church is scattered. Saul is actually doing the church a favor at this time; although it was difficult, if not impossible, for the apostles to understand in that day. The church was settled in Jerusalem, and I seriously doubt they would have been motivated to move out unless prompted by such dramatic persecution. Judaea surrounded Jerusalem at this time and Samaria would have been to the north....

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

~ Burial is the proper internment for a Christian. Many question cremation. Well, there's nothing in the Word of God that condemns cremation, and I'm sure one won't lose salvation if they are cremated. However, the Bible does teach that the burial of the dead Christian is like planting a seed. The burial procession is a testimony, too. Stevens battered body must have been

HORRIBLY mutilated by stoning. So, they carry him tenderly and place him into the ground as gently as they would handling a frail little seed. The last chapter ended by stating Steven slept. Steven went to be with Christ, Who stood and waited for him to come to Him.

Someday, our flesh that is sown in corruption will be raised incorruptible. Likewise, the body is sown in weakness and raised in strength. I, personally, have a difficult time seeing and understanding how cremation sets that forth. Today, undertaker's claim we're running short of burial space; and the average family says burial is too expensive. Well, friends, this old earth is nothing but one huge graveyard - and it has been taking in bodies for many thousands of years! There's plenty of room for the Christian to be buried; although the average Christian may not be able to afford it any longer. The Word of God says, "the grave never says, 'enough!'" Well, either way, Saul was a very zealous young man in his pursuit of killing Christians....

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

~ Interestingly, the scattering of the apostles by malignant persecution didn't hinder the Gospel in any way, shape or form. Remember, when Paul was put in prison in Rome, he wrote to the Philippians, "... these things that have happened to me have happened for the furtherance of the Gospel." All things work together for good to those who are in Christ Jesus. See, friends, the cause of Christ is never hurt from the outside. Atheism doesn't harm Christianity; the church is only hurt from apostasy within. Well, the early church ran into these problems almost immediately from inception. After these things, we are introduced to the second deacon, Philip – a chief witness God used in a very marvelous way after the death of Steven....

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

~ Even amongst the apostles in the early church, not all of them possessed the authority of sign gifts. Only the leadership – those who were actively participating in spreading the Gospel of the resurrected Christ – had gifts! The day will arrive shortly after this time in which we are studying that the sign gifts will disappear completely from the church. The day sign gifts disappeared was the same day the apostles disappeared. Once the canons of Scriptures were established and closed, the main teaching element became the doctrinal gift of all spiritual blessings in the Heavens. Sign gifts have absolutely NOTHING to do with the church today. I know many will disagree with that statement; and that's okay – because you have an absolute right to be wrong....

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

~ While the Gospel brought great joy to multitudes of people, it also experienced an explosive growth that attracted many rank unbelievers. They were swept up in the emotion of it all. They made a profession of faith, but it was not genuine. See, if you claim to have a "sign gift," then you, by de facto, claim you are a great and wonderful little Sunday school Jesus person. If you think you have a gift today then you also, by de facto, claim as Simon the sorcerer claimed: that you are a great one! May God have mercy on your soul.

I hear many people today tell me how humble they are because they speak in tongues and perform healings. Well, humility isn't something you put on

and take off like a coat. Humility never manifests itself in leading services where you are healing others because – if you are honest – you know you believe that you are the only one capable of performing said healing. It doesn't work that way, friends. Why not be honest with yourself for a change? When you reflect an impression of being some great someone, you have already failed the Lord Jesus Christ in service. You are another Simon the sorcerer. When you apply your pride to the cause of Christ, you become an apostate....

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

~ Many people regard modern day sorcerers as great men of God. The practice abounds in contemporary churches. It's nothing new, obviously. Bewitching and deceiving great companies of people is not difficult – it just takes a little effort. Well, even the man with a truly God-ordained power who is giving out the Word of God is NOT to be looked to, my beloved. We are only to look to God and His Word for all of the answers to the questions in our life. If we can't find our answers in Scripture, then we simply can't receive the answer at that time. You are going to have to understand your Bible if you want to know if that which some man is saying is accurate or not. Holy Writ is our only moral compass and barometer of truth. Whenever we get our eyes on man, we get our eyes off of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the problem they had in Samaria at the time in which we are studying; and it's still our problem today....

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

~ Well, Simon was exposed to genuine Christianity as he came in contact with Philip; and Simon, being impressed, made some sort of profession of faith under the ministry of Philip at this time. Simon was the first racketeer in the church. Unfortunately, Simon won't be the last racketeer in the church. Simon professes to be a believer during this sweeping revival period Philip started; and he goes through all the outward ritual - and maybe even believes in those rituals. He is baptized and becomes the friend of Philip. Doesn't that all sound wonderful? Doesn't that sound like a true conversion in saving faith? Well, if that were the end of the story, it would be – but – there's more to it.

See, many people were professing faith in that day - but it does NOT mean they were saved. The same problem abounds in the modern church. This is a case of "head knowledge." Most of these men and women were just following a crowd for some potential perceived selfish benefit – just going with the flow, if you will. So many people do that in our churches. I challenge you to examine yourself right now and see if you have genuinely been converted. The best way to tell is by asking yourself how much you love Bible study? We all need to do that from time to time, as Paul said to. Simon had all the outward trappings of faith and, when he was asked if he believed in Jesus, he said, ".... yes!" Well, Simon was not saved, according to Scripture....

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

~ This is another episode of many people being baptized, but not being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These people are not saved, friends. I cannot stress to you the importance of what you are reading in this report – for those of you who actually bother to read them. This is ONLY an outward appearance of faith that had resulted in no change in the lives nor hearts of

these people. Going through a ceremony will never make you a Christian, my beloved. So, that all stages the background for how Simon was able to perpetuate his racket on so many of these people.

Subsequent events seemingly form a partnership with the apostles through the Gospel. Simon loved the idea of performing miracles - because he made big money doing it. They seem to have believed in Jesus, but they had no idea of the conditions and facts of the Gospel. We should also consider that it took an apostle to open each individual geographical area at this time; and that had not happened in this region. Peter opened Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Peter and John opened Judaea and Samaria. Paul, of course, will take the Gospel out to the Gentiles beyond. That hasn't happened yet – and only apostles can bring the world the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Word of God. I, personally, believe that is the most satisfactory explanation for this passage we are examining....

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.

~ Simon desperately wanted to buy into the apostleship business. He would have given all he had to pay for the gift. Of course, he was only seeking a financial return; remember, he is a religious racketeer. That's what they do. Simon plans to make merchandise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, so many claims are made by individuals about miracles taking place in their churchy meetings. They very piously and seemingly humbly say they have nothing to do with it. They even seem to give the glory to Christ. The problem is, if they honestly desired to glorify Christ, then they would not allow that type of thing to continue to deceive – bewitch – so many people. Religious racketeers are EVERYWHERE today tricking and hurting people. From the days in which we are studying to this day in which you are reading this report – apostasy abounds – and NOTHING hurts the church more than what we are reading about in this section of Scripture.

Outside persecution never hurts the church. In fact, it caused the preaching of the Gospel to be furthered by being scattered abroad. However, when apostates join a church, they will literally destroy it. Permitting those who profess to be believers when they are not believers to join you in fellowship spells an immediate end for any church. It happens all the time. Jesus was betrayed to the nation Israel from the inside – by one apostle. In turn, Israel betrayed Him to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire, in turn, crucified Him for the religious leaders! That’s how it works, my beloved. Today, Christ is ALWAYS betrayed from inside church organizations. Much like the wooden horse brought into the city of Troy. The inhabitants believed Troy was impenetrable, invulnerable and could never have been destroyed. Jesus and the Bible are only about money, money, money to an apostate. The reason I say Simon was not converted is because Scripture tells us in verse twenty-one – in no uncertain terms – Simon was not converted....

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

~ God cannot make His point any stronger or more succinct than He has in this passage, my beloved readers. Simon didn’t ask that he might receive a prayer that would save him. No – he only wants to escape the judgment of what he knew was going to happen as the result of doing apostate evil. Candidly, and honestly – because I always am honest with you dear readers, I won’t judge Simon the sorcerer on that – because I am afraid of

projecting; but my personal opinion is Simon was never saved. My only prayer when I appear before God is, “.... Lord, I am sorry I failed You.” I know I need salvation. I needed it decades ago. I needed it a few years ago. I needed it yesterday – I’ll need it tomorrow and throughout eternity. I thank Christ that He going to be my Savior forevermore. That is what makes the difference between an apostate making merchandise of Christ and the genuine man of God receiving gifts for teaching sound doctrine in a sincere, systematic and educated manner....

25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

~ So, our Spiritual Safari concludes this report with the Gospel beginning to be taken to the ends of the earth. There will still be a church in Jerusalem, but the center of preaching will move to Antioch, then on to Ephesus, Alexandria and Rome. The center of the church will continue to move and shift geographic locations throughout the remainder of Scripture. Right now, today, I cannot identify any center of the church, personally. It most definitely has reached the ends of the earth as I type this report. I believe this type of platform on which I teach is the finest – and final – medium that will take the Gospel into the world. I suppose I could be wrong; but I don’t think so!

Alright, that brings us to a new section of the ministry of Philip which we will begin in the next leg of our safari. What happened back in Samaria doesn’t sound too good, does it? Well, many did genuinely believe in Samaria, to be sure. This account was given to believers to show the extent of evil creeping into the church – unawares – even at this time. In contrast to Simon the sorcerer, we’re going with Philip now as he leads an Ethiopian Eunuch to a genuine saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ – and the eunuch is certainly genuine....

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

~ Most of us know where Gaza is along the Mediterranean coast; and at the time we are considering, this was the normal route to Egypt and Ethiopia. The eunuch has been to Jerusalem, and he is on his way home now. That's when God sends Philip to the desert, where there would have been nobody to preach at this time; however, when Philip gets there, he will be used by God to teach a very specific lesson to a very specific man. We'll consider that in our next report ~
