

ACTS 8 — THE GOSPEL ON THE MOVE: PERSECUTION, POWER, AND GLOBAL MISSION

Big Picture

Acts 8 marks a major turning point in the story of the early church. Following Stephen's martyrdom, persecution breaks out in Jerusalem, forcing believers to scatter. What appears to be a crisis becomes the means by which the gospel begins to spread beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, just as Jesus commanded (Acts 1:8). This chapter highlights the unstoppable nature of the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the widening scope of God's mission to include outsiders and the nations. Through the ministry of Philip and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8 shows that the good news of Jesus is breaking barriers—geographical, ethnic, and social.

Structure of the Chapter

- 8:1–3 — Persecution and the Scattering of the Church
- 8:4–13 — Philip's Ministry in Samaria
- 8:14–25 — Peter and John in Samaria; Simon the Magician
- 8:26–40 — Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Key Themes

The Gospel Advances Through Persecution (8:1–4)

What begins as intense persecution following Stephen's death leads to the scattering of believers. Rather than silencing the church, this dispersion becomes the means of expansion. The gospel moves outward as ordinary believers preach wherever they go. God uses hardship not to hinder his mission, but to advance it.

The Breaking of Ethnic and Cultural Barriers (8:4–13)

Philip's ministry in Samaria is deeply significant. Jews and Samaritans had long-standing hostility, yet the gospel takes root among the Samaritans with great joy. This moment signals that the kingdom of God is not confined to one people group. The inclusion of Samaritans marks a major step toward the global mission of the church.

The Power of God vs. False Power (8:9–25)

Simon the Magician represents a misunderstanding of spiritual power. Though he believes and is baptized, his desire to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit reveals a heart still

shaped by control and self-exaltation. Peter's rebuke makes clear that the Holy Spirit is not a commodity to be acquired but a gift received through surrender. True power in the kingdom of God is not manipulated—it is given by grace.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Mission (8:14–17, 26–29)

The Holy Spirit is central throughout this chapter. The Spirit confirms the inclusion of the Samaritans and directs Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. Mission is not driven merely by strategy, but by the guidance and power of the Spirit. The expansion of the gospel is ultimately God's work.

The Gospel for the Outsider (8:26–40)

The Ethiopian eunuch represents multiple layers of marginalization—he is a foreigner, a court official of another nation, and a eunuch who would have been excluded from full participation in temple worship (Deut. 23:1). Yet he is seeking God, reading Isaiah, and is met by Philip. Beginning with Isaiah 53, Philip proclaims Jesus to him. The eunuch believes and is baptized, demonstrating that the gospel is for all people, including those previously excluded.

Scripture Fulfilled in Christ (8:32–35)

Philip interprets Isaiah 53 as pointing to Jesus. This reflects the early church's conviction that the Scriptures find their fulfillment in Christ. The suffering servant is revealed to be Jesus, whose death brings salvation.

Major Takeaways

- God often uses difficulty and disruption to advance his mission.
- The gospel breaks down barriers of ethnicity, culture, and social status.
- The Holy Spirit empowers and directs the mission of the church.
- True faith is marked by surrender, not control or self-interest.
- The good news of Jesus is for everyone—including those who feel excluded or far from God.