

Surrey Chapel Fellowship Group Notes 11th/ 12th December 2013

Acts 8:4-40 Scattered Witness

A brief review of the preceding chapters show how much can change in a year. There are different seasons in the life of the church when the church enjoys the favour of the people and when it faces persecution. This passage records the events as the Gospel begins to spread beyond Jerusalem.

2:41 "About three thousand were added to their number".

2:43 "Everyone was filled with awe".

2:47 "enjoying the favour of all the people" "the Lord added to their number daily"

3:9-10 "all the people.... were filled with wonder"

4:3 "They seized Peter and John and... put them in jail" ..

4:18 "commanded them not too speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"

5:18 "They arrested the apostles and put them in jail".

5:40 "and had them flogged"

7:57-58 "they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him".

Philip v.4-8

Philip the Evangelist was a leader in the church in Jerusalem. He travels to Samaria to witness to the people there. - Notice the similarities with Peter and John's ministry.

v.4 Although persecution is never a good thing, God can bring good out of it.

What was the affect of the miracles Philip was performing?

What is the significance of Philip, who was a gentile, performing miracles?

Simon v.9-25

The man identified here as Simon is likely to be Simon Magus who was a leading heretic in the early church according to post-apostolic Christian writings. In verse 13 he believes and is baptised. However verses 18-23 cast doubt on whether or not this was a genuine conversion. His belief seems to be like that spoken of by Jesus in John 2:23-25 - i.e. based on miraculous signs and not true commitment.

What was Simon's motivation in v. 19? and in verse 24?

What can we learn from Simon's actions? What are the warnings?

Why were Peter and Simon sent to Samaria?

The Holy Spirit v.15-17

The Holy Spirit works in the Gospels to authenticate the works and words of Jesus and in Acts to authenticate the works and words of the apostles. The with holding of the spirit until the apostles were present, made it clear that the samaritans had received the same new covenant empowering that the Christians in Jerusalem had. Therefore Samaritans could be counted as full members of the one true church. (Remember the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans and the other events in Acts where God has to convince people that the Gospel must spread to the gentiles.)

The Ethiopian v.26-40

Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian is another example of the Gospel going out from its Jewish confines to the gentiles. - There is evidence from the writing of Irenaeus that the eunuch went on to be a missionary to the Ethiopians. The verses quoted from Isaiah 53:7-8 provide Philip with an opportunity to witness to Christ.

As society moves further away from Christian values and the story of the Bible is less well known, the need to put Bible passages and stories into context and to be able to explain them clearly increases? How would you explain Isaiah 53:7-8 to an interested unbeliever?

Reading from Isaiah would have had special significance to the Ethiopian eunuch. See 56:3-5.

Note the number of details that God providentially worked out in this encounter.

Prayer points

Christmas services and outreach

Pray for Christians that are fleeing their homes in various parts of the Middle East due to increasing persecution. - Pray that they would be good witnesses wherever they settle.

ADB