

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 30 April 2017

**No.** T0987

**Speaker:** Mr. Stephen Thomson

## Good news that changed Cities: Samaria - Acts 8:5-25

Today we continue our present series entitled "Good news that changed cities". Last week we thought about Jerusalem, and in the coming weeks (in the Lord's will, of course) we will consider: Philippi; Thessalonica; Athens and Corinth. All these cities are mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit). Although Samaria is mentioned in Acts 1:8, Acts 9:31 and Acts 15:3, the main passage which tells us of the Gospel being preached in Samaria is found in Acts 8:5-25. So this very interesting historical account will be the background for our talk today.

What do we know about Samaria? Well, from 1 Kings 16 we know that Omri, king of Israel built the city of Samaria perhaps somewhere around 900BC. Omri was not a good king and "*wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD*" (see 1 Kings 16:25). Samaria became the capital city of Israel, that is the ten tribes who were led away from the LORD, and into idolatry, by Jeroboam, the son of Solomon.

Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that the twelve tribes of Israel split into two after the death of Solomon. Rehoboam took over the throne of a combined Israel (the twelve tribes) from his father Solomon for a short period before the kingdom was divided. His brother Jeroboam was king over the ten tribes which became known as Israel, and Rehoboam was king over the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) which became known as Judah.

The capital of Judah was Jerusalem, where the Temple was and where the worship of Jehovah continued under the levitical priests (at least in an outward way) but sadly, it wasn't long before they too turned away from the LORD. When we speak of Israel in the New Testament, we are almost certainly thinking about Judah (the two tribes). Strictly speaking, it was Judah who rejected their Messiah; it was Judah who said, "*His blood be on us, and on our children*" (see Matthew 27:25).

Our subject today is concerning the Good news that changed Samaria. It is interesting in Acts 1:8 we read that, after the Holy Spirit had come upon the Apostles, they were to witness for Christ "*... in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" The preaching of the Gospel was to spread out from the centre, Jerusalem, and Samaria gets a special mention! The Samaritans were religious, and claimed Jacob as their father. They were not Jews, but they were not heathens either. Evidently they had their own practices in relation to the worship of God at mount Gerizim. Perhaps this was why there was such tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. It is important to know these tensions existed, as I shall try and explain later in the talk. I said the main passage in Acts which tells us of the preaching of the Gospel at Samaria is Acts 8 but, before we go there, I feel it is worthwhile to look at the two occasions in the Gospels where Samaria is mentioned. It's always good to find our way into the Gospels, after all, "*the Gospel of God, [is] concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*" (see Romans 1:1-3). The good news (or Gospel) is all about Him, our Lord Jesus Christ!

In John 4:9, we read that the "*Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*" Everyone knew that. The woman who came to the well (see John 4:1-42) was surprised that the Lord Jesus, "*being a Jew*" (John 4:9), would even speak to her, "*a woman of Samaria*" (John 4:9), but the Saviour had come to Samaria especially to meet her need. Wonderful grace! Indeed, the Scripture records that "*He must needs go through Samaria*" (John 4:4). I understand that most Jews would have taken a detour to avoid passing through Samaria, but Jesus had a special reason to go. The Saviour had come to seek and save the lost, and not just those of the nation of Israel. Have you noticed that, apart from Mary the mother of Jesus, who spoke of "*God [her] Saviour*" (Luke 1:47), this Samaritan woman is the only other person in the four Gospels who we find using the word, "Saviour", apart from the angel to the shepherds in Luke 2:11. Whilst it is the men of the city who said, "*This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*", (John 4:42) there is no doubt in my mind that they were repeating her words, and what she had exclaimed to them after returning from meeting the Lord at the well (see John 4:42). What a contrast we have in these two women, and surely it shows that the Good news of God's salvation is to whosoever, both good and bad. Mary the greatly favoured Jewish woman (see Luke 1:28) who bore the Messiah and this outcast Samaritan woman, both needed the Saviour, "*which is Christ the Lord*" (see Luke 2:11).

It has often been pointed out that in John 3:3, the Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus, an upright, religious Jew, "*Ye must be born again*" but in John 4:21-26, to a sinful Samaritan woman, He speaks concerning the worship of the Father!

Perhaps the doxology in Romans 11:33 has its place here, *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!”*

In Luke 10:25-37, the Lord Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. You'll remember the story of the man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho (which is a downward journey!) and was beaten, robbed, and left to die by the roadside. In the parable, Jesus clearly identifies Himself with the Samaritan, the only one who was willing and who was able to help the man who was in need. The lawyer who was testing Jesus with this question would realise the force of the story Jesus told; the Priest and the Levite knew the law but were unable to do anything for the dying man; the Samaritan, (whom they would look down on) was both willing and able to help the man and to ensure he was “cured, carried and cared for”! Just like the Good Samaritan, Jesus was despised and rejected by those He came to save but that didn't alter the fact that salvation was only to be found in Him! I suppose this is an indirect reference to Samaria, but nevertheless an important one.

When we come to Luke 17:11-19, we read an account of ten lepers being healed. The Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, for the last time. He was going to be crucified! Again He passed through Samaria and Galilee and He was met by ten men, who were lepers. They said to Him, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”* (Luke 17:13) and Jesus directed them to go to the priests (Luke 17:14). But as they went, they were all cleansed (Luke 17:14). It is such a remarkable story, but what we then read is so terribly sad. You can almost feel the Lord's pain in the words He spoke. When one of the lepers (who was a Samaritan) saw he was cleansed, he turned back and found Jesus, and gave Him thanks and glorified God (Luke 17:15-16). Jesus answering said, *“Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”* (Luke 17:17) How the Saviour must have felt seeing such ingratitude. But this thankful Samaritan had cheered the Saviour's heart as He made His way to Calvary. How mindful we need to be to “be thankful”! The Apostle Paul tells us that the last days would be marked by unthankfulness (see 2 Timothy 3:2). How true this is. So let us be willing and ready always to give thanks to our God and Father who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, and to our Lord Jesus Christ from whom all blessings flow. What wonderful blessings we have been brought into through salvation and how much we have to be thankful for!

And the good news concerning the wonderful blessings of Christianity should be shared with others. Before we get into our passage in Acts 8:5-25, perhaps I could refer to just one of the many Old Testament Scriptures concerning Samaria, which emphasises this point. In 2 Kings 7 we read a remarkable story about four lepers who were in a real predicament. They were outside the walls of Samaria, and the Syrians had besieged the city. They assessed their position and concluded that they would starve to death if they remained where they were, and they would be no better off if they went into the city. So they agreed that they would fall on the mercy of the Syrians; after all they had nothing to lose! The remarkable thing was that when they reached the Syrian camp, they found that the Syrian armies had fled. Read the story; it is truly amazing what God can do! They found food and drink, gold and silver, and clothes. But they said to one another, *“We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace”* (2 Kings 7:9). This good news had to be shared, so that others could enjoy the blessings which God had provided. What a lesson for those of us who have experienced the blessing of God's salvation, that we should share the good news of the Gospel with others who are in need.

It is interesting, in passing, to explain where the word ‘Gospel’ came from. We have already said that Gospel means good news. In old English, the composite word was ‘god’ (meaning good) and ‘spel’ (meaning news). So Gospel means good news or glad tidings. However, if we look up the meaning in Greek, we find that our English word ‘evangel’ comes from the word Gospel. So the idea is to preach the good news or glad tidings, to evangelise. Why is this interesting? Well, because in our passage today, we read of Philip, who is the only person in the Scriptures who is called an evangelist, a preacher of the glad tidings (see Acts 21:8). Paul encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5), something I think we need to be challenged about in our day too.

Our passage today is Acts 8:5-25, but let us look at the background for a moment. The previous chapter ends with the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:55-60), and Acts 8 begins with Saul; a young man who witnessed Stephen's death, and consented to it (Acts 8:1-2). As we know, and it is recorded first here in Acts 8:3, Saul persecuted the church, seeking to rid the world of the name of Jesus. The Christians were scattered abroad and, as they went, they shared the good news of Jesus Christ, the One who had been crucified but who had risen from the dead. God is always in control, not only moving behind the scenes, but moving the scenes He is behind. We find that persecution turned to preaching! After his remarkable conversion (see Acts 9:1-9), Saul (now the Apostle Paul) tells us the core message of the Gospel he preached when he wrote to the Christians at Corinth and said, *“The gospel which I preached unto you ... how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen...”* (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

This was the same message which Philip preached to the people of Samaria. We read, *“He preached Christ unto them”* (Acts 8:5). Later in the chapter, we read about the man from Ethiopia and, as Philip met him in his chariot, we read, *“He preached unto him Jesus”* (Acts 8:35). As we have already noted, the Gospel of God is concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord (see Romans 1:1-3). Sadly there are some today who seem more concerned about addressing

social and political issues in their preaching, but the Gospel which changes lives is the Gospel which has Jesus at its centre. He was *“delivered [to death] for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”* (Romans 4:25). And the only way whereby we can be right with God is when we show repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to preach Christ and Him crucified. The cross shows the extent of God’s love to man, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16), but the cross also shows the extent of man’s hatred to God. *“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”* (see 1 Corinthians 1:18). The old hymn asks the question, “What can wash away my sins?” and gives the answer, “Nothing but the blood of Jesus!”

So Philip preached this Gospel, and the people of Samaria gave heed to what he said. There was power in the preaching! God was at work! There were miracles, too, which accompanied Philip’s preaching. Those who were possessed with unclean spirits were delivered, and set free. The sick were healed, and there was great joy in Samaria. Now, I know that many listening today will be sceptical about present day miracles, but let me say, I believe God can, and still does, perform miracles today. However, it is perhaps good to be a little cautious about every claim made about miracles and healings etc. as, without doubt, there are some who are deceived by those who claim to be faith healers and miracle workers.

When the Lord Jesus was in the world, He performed miracles to give proof that He was the Son of God. In the days of the apostles and the early church, we again read of miracles being done, proving that the Holy Spirit was here and that this new beginning of the Church age (or Christian era) was of God. You’ll remember on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the twelve apostles, Matthias having taken Judas’ place (see Acts 1:15-26), these Galilean men spoke multiple languages so that all who were at Jerusalem at that time could hear the Gospel in their own language (see Acts 2:1-13). So we see that, at the beginning of the Church period, there were miraculous happenings, but these would cease. As we read through the epistles, we find that preaching and teaching the Word of God is the primary concern of the Apostles, and not performing miracles.

When God is at work, the devil (or Satan) is usually busy too. In our passage today, we read about Simon who was a sorcerer and had cast his spells over the people of the city, bewitching them (Acts 8:9-25). He was a deceiver and a cheat. We will return to Simon later in the talk, but for now, it is more important to see what God was doing through His servant Philip. We read in Acts 8:12, *“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.”* Those who believed the message concerning Christ were baptised. Baptism follows belief, and that most certainly (to my mind) is the Scriptural pattern. Philip baptised Simon, because he thought his conversion was real, but Simon was *“not right in the sight of God”* (see Acts 8:21). I know the verse is not found in all the manuscripts, but it is telling that in answer to the Ethiopian’s question (later in the chapter) when he asks, *“What doth hinder me to be baptized?”* (Acts 8:36), Philip said, *“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest”* (Acts 8:37). Perhaps the main thing to remember is that baptism, important as it is, is only valid for this life and has no effect in heaven. Salvation makes us fit for heaven, and baptism makes us fit for earth.

Going back to our passage, we see that when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them (Acts 8:14). When they arrived, they prayed and laid hands on those who had believed, and had been baptised, so that they would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14). Remember earlier I said that it was important for us to remember that there was tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. They didn’t get on at all. So how was that to be resolved so that the Church could still enjoy unity? Well, we see that the apostles who had been at Jerusalem, came to Samaria and fully identified with these new believers. That’s one of the wonderful things about the Church, things which would naturally tend to separate are removed. The Holy Spirit unites those who believe, to Christ and to each other. The challenge for us is to *“keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (see Ephesians 4:3). I know the Christian testimony is broken, fragmented into different groups, but our failure, doesn’t change what the Scripture says! *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (see Ephesians 4:3-6).

These were the early days of the Church era, and things were transitioning from Judaism to Christianity. For example, the apostles preached in the synagogues and there were disputes about eating certain foods etc. But what was happening was that God was calling out a people in separation from the world to the name of Christ, and that composed of both Jew and Gentile. I believe God will yet bless the Jew. The land of Israel is God’s land and He will fulfil His promises to the nation of Israel in a day which is yet to come. But for today the blessing of God rests upon those who are members of Christ’s body, His Church. We don’t receive the Holy Spirit today by the laying on of hands. We don’t need to pray either to receive the Holy Spirit. Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus plainly that the Holy Spirit is given, following conversion, and cannot be taken from us until we are safe in heaven. He says, *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise...”* (see Ephesians 1:13-14).

We don't have much time left to speak about Simon, but that is OK. In the language of Jesus' parable (see Mathew 13:24-30), Simon was a tare, growing amongst the wheat, planted by the enemy but he was found out as counterfeit, as all deceivers will be. The Lord Jesus warned against those who were false teachers and said, "*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them*" (see Mathew 7:20).

Let me close by telling you a story I read recently. Even when he was a young man, thousands flocked to hear Charles Spurgeon preach in London. It is said that 5,000 came to listen on Sunday morning and he begged them not to come on Sunday night, so that the unsaved could hear the message of the Gospel. At the same time as Spurgeon was filling the churches in England, there was a circus owner in America by the name of PT Barnum. He offered the young preacher an enormous amount of money to speak at his circuses, hoping to draw in great crowds. But Spurgeon wired back this verse, Acts 8:20, which says: "*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*" We thank God for men and women who serve God with such principle, and "*keep [themselves] unspotted from the world*" (see James 1:27).

May God bless you all.

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.