

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### XVII. God's Authorized Spread Of The Church To Samaria

(Acts 8:5-17)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 8:5-17 presents God's authorized spread of the Church to Samaria, an essential step in guarding the credibility of the Church in Samaria along with the unity of the Church universal. We view it for our insight:

#### II. God's Authorized Spread Of The Church To Samaria, Acts 8:5-17.

- A. God is an orderly God, directing that all things be done in a fitting and orderly manner, 1 Corinthians 14:40.
- B. This focus on order was important in the fulfillment of Christ's Acts 1:8 prediction that the Church was to spread out from Jerusalem and all Judaea to Samaria, for there was a "natural propensity of division between Jews and Samaritans" (Ibid., p. 373). The spread of the Gospel from Hebrew believers to Samaritans thus ran the risk of creating rival churches, creating a schism that would not edify believers!
- C. Accordingly, In Acts 8:5-17, God orchestrated the **orderly** spread of the Church from Hebrews to Samaritans:
  1. First, the Gospel spread to Samaria through the ministry of Philip, Acts 8:5-13:
    - a. With the scattering of the Jerusalem Church after Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1, 4), one of the deacons who had served with Stephen named Philip went down (in altitude) from Jerusalem to a city in Samaria north of Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel of Christ unto them, Acts 8:5.
    - b. Philip's preaching was accompanied by miracles such as the exorcism of demons and the healing of those who were paralyzed and crippled (Acts 8:6b-7 NIV), what impressed the Samaritans as a whole to believe Philip's message, leading to their conversions and resulting great joy, Acts 8:8.
    - c. Even a sorcerer named Simon expressed faith in the Gospel, a man who had seduced the Samaritans with magic so that they claimed he was the power of God, for he was amazed at Philip's miracles, Acts 8:9-13.
  2. However, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had heard God's Word through the ministry of Philip, they sent the apostles Peter and John down to Samaria to examine and to validate this work, Acts 8:14. Christ predicted in Matthew 16:18-19 that Peter would have the "keys" to open the Kingdom up, and since he had opened it up to Hebrews by his preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41), the apostles sent him and John as witnesses so both men could Biblically verify the Church in Samaria (cf. Matthew 18:16).
  3. When Peter and John arrived, though they certified that the true Gospel had been proclaimed, and people who had believed had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit as had the Hebrew believers at Pentecost, Acts 8:16 with 2:1-13. Accordingly, Peter and John prayed that these Samaritan believers might receive the Holy Spirit, laying their hands on them to confer apostolic authority as to the reception of the Spirit, and they also received the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:17.
  4. Thus, under apostolic authority, the Church officially acknowledged that when Samaritans believed in Christ, they were justified in Christ, part of one Body with Hebrew believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

***Lesson:*** *To avoid letting natural tendencies of division between Hebrews and Samaritans create division between Hebrew and Samaritan believers in the Early Church, though God equipped Philip to perform miracles to validate the truthfulness of the Gospel he preached to Samaritans so they would believe in Christ and be baptized in His name, God waited to send His Holy Spirit on the Samaritans until the apostles Peter and John came, validated their conversions, laid their hands on them and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*

***Application:*** *(1) Since God's purpose of waiting to give the Holy Spirit to Samaritan believers until the apostles had prayed and laid hands on them was to reveal that Samaritan believers were spiritually united with Hebrew believers in Christ, (a) we should NOT practice the laying on of hands for believers to receive the Spirit and speak in tongues today. Indeed, (b) once one believed in Christ as early as Paul's ministry at Corinth, he was already spiritually baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) and (c) not all believers even in Corinth spoke in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30). (2) Since God used Peter and John in Acts 8:15-17 to open the door of the Kingdom to Samaritans in accord with Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:16, may we seek orderly, authoritative sanctions of ministers through established church leaders and pastors (via ordinations, church board approvals, etc.).*