

**Acts Chapter 8 (ESV p. 1014) - A Comparison of Four Men**

Stephen's death triggered a great persecution of the church in Jerusalem, which at face value appears like a great tragedy. However, Stephen's prayer before his death triggered a succession of events that prove God's plan for victory was already in motion. Luke uses the stories of four men in this chapter to outline God's response to Stephen's prayer.

**Saul-** (v. 1-3)- is a hater of "The Way" (all those who believed that Jesus was the Son of God and the way to heaven), an adamant persecutor of the church. He is a man who approved and celebrated the stoning of Stephen. The Greek word used here for approved-syneudokeo, (soon-yoo-dok-eh'-o) means to take pleasure in or to applaud, so Saul actually took pleasure in the execution of Stephen and threatened to do more to any others who believed or followed Christ.

**Phillip-** (v. 4-8)- is one of the seven deacons chosen to keep peace in the church (Acts 6:5) along with Stephen. He is a disciple of Christ who preached the gospel and performed signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. He is a man who brought the gospel to Samaria (a land that was hated by most Jews because they were considered compromising half breeds who had intermingled with the pagans when northern Israel had been captured). The Samaritans were considered to be corrupting the true worship of God.

**Simon-** (v. 9-25)- is a locally famous magician from Samaria who proclaimed himself as "a great man". He is a respected man whose magic was believed to be a "great power of God." This man believed the preached word from Phillip and was baptized. Unfortunately, this man mistakenly believed he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit. This man exhibited envy, "Give me also this power." Fortunately, this man had the opportunity to repent and redeem his relationship with God.

**The Ethiopian Eunuch-** (v. 26-40)- is an important traveling government official who was seeking to worship. This man had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. On his return home he stopped to read the scriptures even though he did not understand them fully. This man humbled himself to ask for help in understanding, which God provided for him while he was still asking.

How God dealt with each of these men.

1. Saul was allowed to continue wreaking havoc on the people of Christ, for some time. We learn later in chapter 9 that this was temporary because God had a plan for him. (Acts 9:1-6)

2. Philip continued to preach and perform wonders in the name of Jesus, and many people were saved, healed, and baptized. (Acts 8:12-13)
3. Simon was rebuked for his lack of understanding about the gift of God (eternal life). He was told that his heart wasn't right in the sight of God. He could not share in the sanctification (the perfecting) of God through the Holy Spirit possibly because he already thought of himself as great, or maybe because he was envious of the men who could call on the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. He was not seeking righteousness. He was seeking notoriety and power. (Acts 8:21- "Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter") Translated from the Greek meros – share, or kleros – inheritance. He was advised to repent and pray to the Lord. Then, he was left to decide if he would. We are not told whether he did repent or not. We do know that he responded to Peter, "Pray to the Lord for me..." So, he believed in the power of prayer, and he did not want Peter's prediction to be fulfilled. Since we are not given any further details about Simon, we as believers hope that he repented and redeemed his relationship with the Father and eventually received the Holy Spirit.
4. The Ethiopian was sent a helper from God through an angel who pointed Philip in his direction. The Holy Spirit directed Philip to go near the chariot and stay with it. It was clear that the Ethiopian was seeking to know who the prophet Isaiah was referring to. When Philip explained about Jesus, the Ethiopian believed and was baptized and he left rejoicing.

Three men in this chapter did not know the Lord. One man had already chosen to be a witness for Him. The one who was already a witness chose to continue his path and to follow Jesus's call. One took some time to decide. One needed a little work, but he appeared to choose the way of the Lord. One accepted a new life in Christ immediately and left rejoicing in what had happened to him. The one thing that we can be sure about is that God answered Stephen's prayer. He gave each man a chance for redemption, just as Stephen had asked, following Jesus's example.

Related scriptures:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV p. 1079)– Salvation is a free gift. Not bought with money.

James 3:16 (ESV p. 1115)- Envy and selfish ambition lead to disorder and evil practice.

John 14:26 (ESV p. 999)- Holy Spirit teaches

Acts 1:8 (ESV p. 1006)- Holy Spirit gives power to witness

Galatians 5:22-25 (ESV p. 1078)- Holy Spirit produces fruit (good character)