

Bible Reading Challenge 43: THE CHURCH – FROM JERUSALEM TO SAMARIA

Key Verse: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” Acts 9:31

Now that Jesus has come back from the dead and the Holy Spirit has come into their hearts, Jesus's friends are REALLY excited. In just a few days, they've gone from being scared and hiding in a room so no one could find them, to bursting with joy and excitement and telling everyone about Christ. Imagine how angry the religious leaders must have been—no matter what they do, the message of the gospel keeps spreading!

So, this is a good place to ask, just what is the gospel? A lot of people, even Christians today, think they know, but their ideas may be a little fuzzy.

The word “gospel” means good news. What is God's good news? Well, let's remember what God had been up to before now. First He called Abraham to be the father of a people set apart. Next he grew Abraham's family into a nation, led them out of slavery, gave them the Law, and brought them back to the land He promised Abraham. His presence rested on the Tabernacle, and later on the Temple. He gave them kings to lead them, then prophets to teach them, but they couldn't keep His law and be a light to the Gentiles. But He knew that would happen, so when the time was right, Jesus came to take the sins of God's people away and pay for them in full. That's the Gospel for everybody, not just the Jews: we can't get to God, but God has come to us, and redeemed us from our sins by dying on the cross.

From this point on, God's people aren't just the Jews or the Israelites, but “the church.” And even though the church is full of people who aren't perfect, and even though the religious leaders are still trying to stop them, we'll see that the church will spread all over the world. This week we'll see the gospel carried southward in a chariot, and spreading northward into Samaria, and finally planted like a seed in the heart of a young man named Saul

Reading for this week: Acts 5-9

Further references: Acts 22:4-5, 26:10-11

Questions to think and talk about:

1. Find all references in these chapters about the church growing. Is there a cause given in each case? If so, what's the cause?
2. What is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? What is the sin of Simon (8:9)? Do you see these kinds of sins in the church today?
3. How was Stephen's trial similar to the trial of Jesus? What were the accusations? (See Mark 14:63-64, Matt. 26:59-60). What does this say about Stephen? (See John 15:18-21)
4. Stephen mentions Abraham, Joseph, Moses—what did they all have in common? What did Joseph and Moses share with Christ? (Hint for parents: **rejection**) Why does Stephen make such a big deal about the Temple? (See 6:13)
5. What is the result of Stephen's death? (See 8:1)
6. How can you see the Holy Spirit at work in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch? Name three specific ways.
7. What does the Lord predict about Saul in 9:15-16?

Activities:

- Add the words **gospel** and **martyr** to your vocabulary cards.
- **Make a Chariot**: Make a chariot like the Ethiopian eunuch would have ridden in.
(<http://www.jesus-without-language.net/philip-ethiopian-acts-8-make/>)
- Research the ancient history of Ethiopia—how long has the gospel been there?
- Draw Saul meeting the bright light on the way to Damascus.