



## Acts Chapter 8

As we move into Acts chapter 8, I think that your going to find this particular chapter very interesting. After moving out of Chapter 7 and the stoning of Stephen who most believe was the first martyr of our Messiah.. the first in a very long procession I might add.. We find the Apostles being scattered and even hunted down by Saul who would become the Apostle Paul in the very next chapter.

Chapter 8 moves rather quickly as we read through the text but there is a lot more here than what meets the eye, and a lot more for those of us who already have some prior knowledge as to what's going on in the culture and the back drop of exactly what the Apostles are up against.

We're going to learn some Hebraic terms here today that you may or may not have heard of before, and we're going to go even deeper into the Jewish mind set of the second Temple period as we move through chapter 8, but even beyond that... I think you'll find this chapter very interesting.

Lets begin by moving into chapter 8 and reading the text for ourselves:

Act 8:1 Saul agreed that the killing of Stephen was a good thing. Some godly men buried Stephen and cried loudly for him. On that day the Jews began to persecute the church in Jerusalem, making them suffer very much. Saul was also trying to destroy the group. He went into their houses, dragged out men and women, and put them in jail. All the believers left Jerusalem. Only the apostles stayed. The believers went to different places in Judea and Samaria.

Act 8:4 They were scattered everywhere, and in every place they went, they told people the Good News.

Act 8:5 Philip went to the city of Samaria and told people about the Messiah.

Act 8:6 The people there heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he was doing. They all listened carefully to what he said.

Act 8:7 Many of these people had evil spirits inside them, but Philip made the evil spirits leave them. The spirits made a lot of noise as they came out. There were also many weak and crippled people there. Philip made these people well too.

Act 8:8 What a happy day this was for that city!

Act 8:9 Now there was a man named Simon who lived in that city. Before Philip came there, Simon had been doing magic and amazing all the people of Samaria. He bragged and called

himself a great man.

Act 8:10 All the people--the least important and the most important--believed what he said. They said, "This man has the power of God that is called 'the Great Power.'"

Act 8:11 Simon amazed the people with his magic for so long that the people became his followers.

Act 8:12 But Philip told the people the Good News about God's kingdom and the power of Jesus Christ. Men and women believed Philip and were baptized.

Act 8:13 Simon himself also believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed close to Philip. When he saw the miraculous signs and powerful things Philip did, he was amazed.

Act 8:14 The apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God. So they sent Peter and John to the people in Samaria.

Act 8:15 When Peter and John arrived, they prayed for the Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

Act 8:16 These people had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but the Holy Spirit had not yet come down on any of them. This is why Peter and John prayed.

Act 8:17 When the two apostles laid their hands on the people, they received the Holy Spirit.

Act 8:18 Simon saw that the Spirit was given to people when the apostles laid their hands on them. So he offered the apostles money.

Act 8:19 He said, "Give me this power so that when I lay my hands on someone, they will receive the Holy Spirit."

Act 8:20 Peter said to Simon, "You and your money should both be destroyed because you thought you could buy God's gift with money.

Act 8:21 You cannot share with us in this work. Your heart is not right before God.

Act 8:22 Change your heart! Turn away from these evil thoughts and pray to the Lord. Maybe he will forgive you.

Act 8:23 I see that you are full of bitter jealousy and cannot stop yourself from doing wrong."

Act 8:24 Simon answered, "Both of you pray to the Lord for me, so that what you have said will not happen to me."

Act 8:25 Then the two apostles told the people what they had seen Jesus do. They told them the message of the Lord. Then they went back to Jerusalem. On the way, they went through many Samaritan towns and told people the Good News.

Act 8:26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. The angel said, "Get ready and go south on the road that leads down to Gaza from Jerusalem--the road that goes through the desert."

Act 8:27 So Philip got ready and went. On the road he saw a man from Ethiopia. He was a eunuch and an important official in the service of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He was responsible for taking care of all her money. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

Act 8:28 Now he was on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet.

Act 8:29 The Spirit said to Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Act 8:30 So he went toward the chariot, and he heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Act 8:31 The man answered, "How can I understand? I need someone to explain it to me."

Then he invited Philip to climb in and sit with him.

Act 8:32 The part of the Scriptures that he was reading was this: "He was like a sheep being led to the butcher. He was like a lamb that makes no sound as its wool is being cut off. He said nothing.

Act 8:33 He was shamed, and all his rights were taken away. His life on earth has ended. So there will be no story about his descendants."

Act 8:34 The official said to Philip, "Please, tell me, who is the prophet talking about? Is he talking about himself or about someone else?"

Act 8:35 Philip began to speak. He started with this same Scripture and told the man the Good News about Jesus.

Act 8:36 While they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The official said, "Look, here is water! What is stopping me from being baptized?"

Act 8:37 [Philip answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you can." The official said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

Act 8:38 Then the official ordered the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the official went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Act 8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away; the official never saw him again. The official continued on his way home. He was very happy.

Act 8:40 But Philip appeared in a city called Azotus. He was going to the city of Caesarea. He told people the Good News in all the towns on the way from Azotus to Caesarea.

The first thing that we are introduced to in chapter 8 is a young man by the name of "Saul". As we move forward through out the scriptures we'll be using his Latin name which is better known as "Paul".

Paul himself is a Pharisee according to Acts 23 verse 6. We know that Paul was born in Tarsus a city in eastern Asia Minor.. and we know that Tarsus at that time was the academic capitol of the world.

Paul had the very best teaching that money could buy. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel and it was said that before you could even sit at the feet of Gamaliel.. one had to have memorized the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament.

Paul was also well schooled in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, he was what was known as a "Hebrew of Hebrews". In Philippians 3 verse 5 we learn that Paul was circumcised as a child at the age of 8, and that he was originally from the tribe of Benjamin. We also learn that Paul was a true Hebrew Jew, with Hebrew speaking parents.

And I know that a lot of Bible translations use the word "Jew" in Philippians 3 verse 5 but the original word used there is "Hebraios" which means a Hebraean or a "Hebrew Jew". So Paul was indeed the real deal from the bloodline of the House of Israel, and was indeed himself a

Pharisee who had been brought up in the Synagogue system.

Now it's important to understand that even though Paul was a Benjamite by birth, the Benjamites were assimilated into the tribe of Judah also known as the "Southern Kingdom". So even though Paul was born from the tribe of Benjamin he would have been known as a Jew because he lived with, and came out of, the Southern kingdom of Judah.

It's no wonder why Paul didn't know who the Messiah was.. after being brought up in this hybrid religious system, that was a mixture of the Halakah or the man made, man created, man fabricated teachings of the Pharisees, and Gods original Torah.

The word Halakhah is derived from the root word "Heh-lamed-kaf" which more simply means to "walk, or to travel, or to go". Halakhah simply put means "The path that one walks".

Halakhah represents the overall legal code of conduct that Jews are supposed to live by according to the man made Synagogue system of Judaism. If you were to ask a Rabbi where the laws of halakhah come from.. he would tell you that they come from three sources: the Torah of Moses, The Oral Torah, and long held customs.

And some of these "customs" are so old that no one really even knows where they came from in the first place, or where they even began. But once again as we've said before in this study of the book of Acts.. the Oral Torah, and the Customs of the Pharisees (even though they were man made devices).. are all seen by the Pharisees as equally valid and authoritative.

Which means that in their minds.. there is no difference between Gods Torah, and their man made, man created, man fabricated Oral Torah, and their customs which was their version of the Torah.

Now along with this information we need to remember that Paul being a Pharisee himself often uses the terms "Law", and "customs" and "traditions" interchangeably. So we need to remember that every time that Paul uses the term "Law" he's not always talking about God Levitical Law, or the Torah by itself.

Often times when Paul uses the term "Law" or in some cases the "bondage of the Law".. he's often times talking about the law of the Pharisees, which as we've said is a man made, man created, man fabricated law. A "law" that our Messiah absolutely hated, and we can see evidence of that all through his ministry but especially in Matthew chapter 23 where he calls them a "Brood of Vipers" and "Whitewashed Tombs", and "Two Fold Children of Hell", "Blind Guides" and so on, for teaching and preaching their own man made, man created, man fabricated hybrid laws and customs.

So keep these things in mind as we move forward because these are things that most of today's

professing Christians have no idea about. And this is where today's modern day Christian denominational charters often times completely miss the mark with their man made, man created, man fabricated doctrines and their systematic rules of theology and understanding. Not understanding the culture of that day or the "Law" that Paul was talking about in many of his letters to the churches.

You see it wasn't always about Gods "law".. it was about the man made hybrid law of Judaism much of which I might add.. still stands to this day.

If we want to know the truth... we need to understand the history.. the culture, and the context upon which the scriptures were written. Because with out this knowledge, we're going to fall right in line with the lost, and if we're just playing "Follow the Leader" we're going to be just as lost as those men who are leading us.

And this is why he called them "blind guides" my friends. Our Messiah told the Pharisees and the Scribes of his time that they cross over land and sea to make one proselyte, (one follower) and when they do.. he's a two fold child of hell more so than they are.. why? Because they... just like our thousands of different Christian denominational charters of men today were teaching their own man made, man created, man fabricated hybrid religion.

And once again this hybrid religion that the Pharisees and the Scribes were teaching had a little truth from the Torah and the Tenakh, but it had a whole lot of customs, commandments, myths and traditions that they themselves had made up. And that's what made up this concocted man made, man created, man fabricated hybrid religious system.

And once again my friends.. I want us to understand.. nothing has changed between the Pharisees and the Scribes of our Messiah's time and our time. Christianity today has done exactly what the Jewish Pharisees, and Scribes had done back in their time. It's just like looking back into a mirror.

We have to remember that there were hundreds of these Synagogues that had been planted over hundreds of miles of territory. And each one of them were teaching and preaching things that were just a little different from the other just like today's Christian denominational churches are now doing.

And once again... this is why Stephen was stoned to death. It wasn't because he was blaspheming God... it was because he was speaking out against their hybrid religion... their traditions, and customs. This is why they stoned him to death. This is why they could not see their Messiah.

They had the first five books of the Torah, the Pentateuch committed to memory but yet even though they had learned to parrot the verses they did not understand, nor did they believe what

was written in them. You see once again... this is a perfect example of pursuing the law as if it were by works, rather than pursuing the law by faith because you love your Father in Heaven.

Notice in verses 1 through 4 that the very same day that they buried Stephen, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. And we see Paul breaking into Christian homes and dragging away whole families out of their homes and throwing them into prisons.

And once again my friends I want us to see this.. Paul who has more degrees than a thermometer.. a man who is well educated... a man who was born in Tartus the academic capitol of the world... a man who's well educated in the higher learning of men, and the philosophical teachings of Platonism, and Socrates, and Aristotle.. a man who has committed the Torah to memory... a man who was himself a Pharisee born by blood into the House of Israel.

And yet... he could not recognize his own Messiah until he knocked him off of his horse on the way to Damascus and struck him blind (as we'll see in the very next chapter).

Here he was murdering Christians like Stephen and rounding up whole families of Christians to be put in prison, not having any idea who his Messiah even was... Even after hearing the testimony of Stephen in great detail... and still with all of his education and higher learning he could not see who his Messiah was.

And lets be clear here my friends.. the reason why he could not recognize the prophecies clearly stated in the Torah that he had committed to memory my friends.. is because Paul had been anointed by men... and not anointed by God.. at least not until chapter 9.

There is a difference my friends. Many of today's Pastors, Priests, Bishops, and Popes are anointed by men.. but they are not anointed by God the Father or his Son, or his Ruach Hakodesh, and the sad part is.. that they are just fine being anointed by these men, and really have no thirst for the truth at all.. “blind guides”, “whitewashed tombs”, and “two fold children of hell” is what our Messiah refers to them as.

How many of today's Christian denominational churches would even know their own Messiah if he walked right into their sanctuary's and stood right in front of them this very day? He wouldn't have long hair... because we know that it was a shame for a man to have long hair according to the Apostle Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians verse 14.

He wouldn't look like some frail pail white Frenchmen, like the pictures that most denominational churches have hanging on their walls today... he was a carpenter by trade, which meant that he grew up working in construction. He was a Hebrew who's skin would have most likely been olive in color. His hands would have been calloused, and his look would have been rugged, and his hair once again would have been cropped short even though he was from Nazareth. He was born into a Hebraic Jewish family, who was very Jewish not only in

appearance but in nature as well. He would not have kept the customs of the Nazaren's.. he would have kept the customs of this Father.

The very steeples that are mounted on top of today's modern day churches would have been an abomination to him... knowing that these steeples on these churches come from the pagan church of Rome, and he would be well aware that the Pagan obelisk comes directly out of ancient Egypt.

No my friends... today's modern day denominational churches would no more recognize their Messiah any more than Paul did. Because our modern day religious system is no better than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees of Paul's day. In fact.. one may come to the conclusion.. that it is much worse in many ways.

But even though a great persecution was moving against the Christians in Jerusalem, I want us to notice a couple of things. Number one... the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem even though many of the believers were being uprooted and scattered into the surrounding communities.

And number two... this scattering of these new believers just helped to spread the Gospel message even farther. Because these people were being scattered into the surrounding cities... the Gospel message was also being scattered out into the surrounding cities right along with them.

*Act 8:4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

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## **Church or Synagogues?**

And I want to focus in on something very profound in verse 1, and that is the word “church”. The word “church” is translated from the Greek word “ekklēsia” which means an assembly, or a gathering of people.

Now I want us to stop and think here. Why would they use the term “church” in place of and assembly or a gathering of people? The Complete Jewish Bible which is taken from the Mesoretic Texts translates it much more accurately. Lets take a look at it's translation:

*Act 8:1 and Sha'ul gave his approval to his murder. Starting with that day, there arose intense persecution against the **Messianic Community** in Yerushalayim; all but the emissaries were scattered throughout the regions of Y'hudah and Shomron.*

Notice here that it uses the term “Messianic Community” in stead of “church”.. which is a far better description than “church”. Why? Because the word “church” implies that a new Christian “church” was established, and we know that there were no established “Christian churches” at

that time.

The establishment of Christian “Churches” would not have taken place until hundreds of years later. These were exclusively Jewish believers who were being persecuted for their belief in their Messiah. Lets be clear.

Think about this for just a moment. The word “church” was originally a Latin word not a Greek word. The word “church” did not become popular until the invention of the Roman Catholic church, when gentiles had officially hijacked the Gospel message and the original Jewish movement of Yahshua Hamashiach who was himself a Jew who came from the tribe of Judah and the house of David just as it was prophesied that he would.

To translate the original Greek word “ekklēsia” as the Latin word Church paints an intellectually dishonest picture. Not to mention the fact that it is an insult to those first Jewish believers who gave their lives fighting for the truth of our Messiah and his Gospel Message.

We need to be clear and concise here. What was happening here in chapter eight is that we have one sect of Judaism being bullied by other sects or factions of Judaism. There are no Gentiles in chapter 8 of the book of Acts my friends.

This is not about a “Gentile Church”, or a “Gentile Religion”. Lets be very very clear. This is about a very Jewish Messiah being proclaimed amongst a very Jewish community. This is not a war going on between Jew and Gentile by any stretch of the imagination.

And it is tectonically important for us to take note of this. If we gain nothing else from chapter 8 of the book of Acts... let us see that this is has nothing to do with gentiles.

I would submit to you my friends that this is just another miss-translation that we find with in the King Jimmy translation. And we must contemplate... whether or not this may have been deliberate.

We have to remember that King Jimmy's translation was translated during the “Reformation Era”. And at that time the theological, and doctrinal war between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches was at it's peek.

Catholicism and the Vatican was doing all it could through it's “Society of Jesus” (better known today as it's “Jesuit Priesthood”) to destroy any and all Jewish strongholds on it's new found man made, man created, man fabricated hybrid religion of Catholicism... which it masks as Christianity. Even though it's not Christianity at all.

Reading throughout the Scripture and the “New Testament” writings, all one has to do is read what our Messiah had said about the hybrid religious system of the Pharisees and the Scribes to

know full well that he would in no way approve of today's man made, man created, man fabricated religious system of “Catholicism”!

Catholicism is Catholicism. Christianity is what we find in scripture. Catholicism is not found in scripture anywhere. In fact if you read and know your scripture at all.. then you already know that scripture is in direct opposition to Catholicism and all of it's pagan trimmings.

The vestments and clothing of the “High Priest” of the one true God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob looks nothing like the Pagan vestments and clothing of the Roman Catholic Pope, and this alone should give them away as heretics who are far worse than the Pharisees and Scribes of Yahshua's time.

Where do we find in the scripture to kiss the feet of a statue of Peter? Thats not even a statue of Peter.. it was originally a statue of Zeus that they brought into the Vatican to make people think.. that it's a statue of Peter.

And we could get into the Catholic created first day of the week Sunday Sabbath, and Catholic created “Good Friday” or the Catholic created “Easter” or the Catholic created “Christ-mass” and so on and so fourth but that's another study.

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## **Contending For The Faith!**

Changing gears now.. I want us to think about how brave the people who came to gather Stephens body must have been in the face of what was going on that day. Not only did they come to gather Stephens body but it says in verse 2 that: *Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.*

These devout men obviously believed what Stephen believed, and instead of being afraid themselves they stepped right up, and not only took the body of Stephen but they gave him a traditional Jewish burial and then lamented greatly over him while everyone watched.

Let me ask you this hypothetical question.. what if a Christian was beheaded here in America by a devout Muslim extremist on the corner of a major city street here in the U.S.?

How many “devout men” would run out to gather that Christian brothers body and give it a Christian burial and lament greatly over it? Knowing that those same Muslim extremist would be watching?

You see today... that would be politically incorrect... you might offend the Muslim extremist. You might send the wrong message... you might be a religious extremist yourself you see. You see if you're a Christian extremist even here in the United States.. you're already on the

Department of Homeland Securities “Terrorist Watch List” brother!

How many professing Christians today... would have the gravel... how many would have enough love in their heart... how many would have the wherewithal to contend for the faith enough to collect the body of a martyred Christian, and bury it, and then publicly and openly lament over that Christian brother or sister?

Think about that for a moment. You see that's what it takes to be a true Christian who contends for the faith... a true follower of Yahshua the Messiah who is not afraid of what men will do to the body.. a true believer who wears the full armor of God.

Are you ready?... because it's coming. Know... and understand... that it's coming.

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### **The Gospel Spreads Like Wild Fire!**

Lets go back to Acts chapter 8 verse 4:

*Act 8:4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

Once again... even though these people were running for their very lives we're told that they “went about preaching the Word”. Not matter what they did to them, no matter how severe the persecution, no matter what the consequences were... they continued to preach the Word.

I want us to also notice in verses 4 through 8... that the Philip that went down to Samaria is not the Apostle “Philip” that was one of the original 12 Apostles.

Remember it tells us that the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem in verse 1. This “Philip” who went to Samaria was the “Philip” that was chosen out of the Hellenistic Jews who was chosen to deal with the food distribution to the widows.

What we need to notice here is that even the believers knew and understood that even those in Samaria were eligible to be covered by the blood of their Messiah. Remember the Samaritans were hated by the Jewish leadership, and all other factions of Judaism. And even though there were those who were Jews and even some of the lost sheep of Israel among the Samaritans... there were also some Gentile converts among the Samaritans.

So this was a real mixed bag of not only Jew and Gentile but also many from the lost sheep of the House of Israel and it's northern kingdom that was in the process of being dispersed into the four corners of the Earth. And here's Philip not only preaching and teaching the Gospel message of his Messiah but also healing people and casting out demons from within them!

You can imagine how the Pharisees and the Saducees and their Sanhedrin and the temple authority must have felt about that!

Now once again I want us to also notice that Yahshua (Jesus) had previously told the Disciples not to preach his Gospel message in Samaria back in Matthew chapter 10:

*Mat 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans,*

*Mat 10:6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

*Mat 10:7 And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

Once again this shows us that our Messiah did not originally come for the Gentile's. He came for the “Lost Sheep of The House of Israel”, just as he clearly says in Matthew 15: verse 24.

Yahshua had to first finish his work at the cross in order to once again join the two sticks of Ezekiel back into one stick in the Fathers hand, and then and only then could the rest of the nations be gathered to the “House of Israel” which is again... who the “New covenant” was made with... and remember... the “New Covenant” was not made with the Gentiles or any other people, other than... the “House of Israel” and for more information on that you can see Jeremiah 31:31 through 33, in the Old Testament, and in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 16.

There is much much more to know here in Acts chapter 8 than what meets the eye. Once again.. if we don't read the whole book... we won't understand what we're reading in any one chapter of the book with in the 66 books.

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## **The Samaritan Rift!**

Something else that I want us to know and understand is that the rivalry or the antagonism between the Jews in Jerusalem, and the Samaritan Jews, was centuries old. It intensified when the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem back in the fifth century B.C. And we can find evidence of this in Ezra 4:1-6, Nehemiah 2:10, 4:1-8, 6:1-14, and 13:4-8.

Remember the Samaritans had built their own Temple at mount Gerizim. The Jews under the Hasmonean ruler “John Hyrcanus the 1st”.. had destroyed the Samaritan Temple when they conquered Samaria in the second century B.C..

So for these new Jewish believers to go into Samaria, and to extend to them the Gospel message of this new Messiah was a bold step indeed. We need to remember that the Samaritan Hebrews and those Gentiles that were mixed in did not accept traditional Judaism.

The Samaritans practiced a religion based on their own version of the Torah and they did not

believe in the Prophets of Israel. They kept their version of the first five books of Moses only (also known as the Samaritan Pentateuch).

But the Samaritans were very aware of the Messiah who was to come, because of the prophecy of Moses, who had said that in his time a prophet like himself would arise that they were supposed to listen too, and I'm sure that it was this very prophecy found in the book of Deuteronomy 18:15.. that is what opened the door for Philip to come preaching the Gospel message of Yahshua to them.

Now at this point I want to be clear... the idea that Gentiles were being saved at this point in time is simply unfounded. The Samaritans were thought of by the Jerusalem Jews as “half-breeds”, both religiously and racially, but they were thought of as heretics from the faith rather than pagans.

The Samaritans claimed to belong to the true stock of Israel and to be worshipers of Yahovah, and they observed the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath and they practiced circumcision and they kept most of the Levitical laws as well.

So the Samaritans were never really thought of as Gentiles in any way, and we'll see Peter going to the Gentile Centurion Cornelius later on in the book of Acts who was the first Gentile of the New Testament that was notably saved through the Salvation of our Messiah.

And I say all of that to simply say this... as far as the Apostles and the new Jewish believers were concerned.. at this point in time...the Gentiles were not being offered the Gospel message or the free gift of Salvation offered by their Messiah. So once again it's important to understand that this is strictly a Jewish movement up to this point in time.

There are simply no Gentiles mentioned as of yet in the first 8 chapters of the book of Acts that we're aware of.

And I think we'll stop right here, but I can assure you... there's much more to know and understand from the 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the book of Acts.