

**Acts for today****'The Growing Church in the Acts of the Apostles'**

No. 4: Samaria

'The seed of the church is the blood of the martyrs' (Tertullian). The martyrdom of Stephen prompted the next stage of growth in the early church beyond Jerusalem. Believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), just as Jesus had promised (1:8). For the first time the Christian church was planted in non-Jewish soil. Significantly, the Samaritans had a good deal in common with the Jews, including knowledge of the Old Testament. Therefore, they could relate to Philip's preaching of Jesus as the Messiah.

Our 'Samaria' mission will be to those who share a common culture and understanding with us. This includes those on the fringe of our church, or who have stopped attending church. According to current figures, fringe attenders (approx. 10% of the population) attend church 1-3 times in a two-month period. However, a further 20% have left church for some reason, but are open to return if suitably contacted and invited. In what ways could we reach out to such people?

What key principles emerge from the mission to Samaria?

**Spiritual gifts**

When the people saw the miraculous signs that Philip did, they all paid close attention to what he had to say (8:6). If we're prepared to exercise God's gifts (e.g. prophecy, healing, deliverance, hospitality, care), we too will find people who are open to the gospel.

**Welcome**

The church leaders in Jerusalem came to lay hands on the new Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. This was no 'second blessing', but recognition of the need for costly reconciliation between groups that had been divided for centuries. As churches we need to welcome back and integrate those who have left, by establishing entry points into the life of the church, and effective welcome ministry on a Sunday.

There was great joy in the city (8)!

Are we good news for our neighbourhood?

*The Rev Paul Hardingham  
continues his series on the early Church.*

**Christians may not see eye to eye,  
but they can walk arm in arm.**

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