

**Review and Intro**

In Acts 7 we saw Stephen's defense, as he used Israel's history to show that their relationship with God didn't depend upon the Land, or the Law, or the Temple.

- God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia and was with Joseph in Egypt.
- The people often rejected those whom God had sent to them.
- They had no Temple for much of their history, yet God was with them.
- Stephen called them stiff-necked, just as God had called them stiff-necked.
- As Stephen is dying, he forgives them, just as Jesus had forgiven those who killed Him. We are also introduced to Saul of Tarsus.
- In Chapter 8 persecution breaks out, and we see the ministry of Philip. Stephen and Philip take us into the next phase of the Gospel's expansion.

**Persecution Begins (Acts 7:57-8:4)**

*57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. 1 Now Saul was consenting to his death.*

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*At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*

- Note the contrast between Stephen and Saul.
- Saul may have been a leader in the drive to kill Stephen, if not a witness.
- We probably have all these details through Saul, who was a disciple of Gamaliel, and possibly one who had debated with Stephen. Saul consented to his death.
- Persecution broke out *on that very same day*. This is the first time Luke uses the word persecution to describe persecution of believers in Jesus.
- The believers were scattered but the apostles were not. Some think the persecution was mostly against the Hellenist believers.
- Why did the Apostles remain in Jerusalem?
- The persecuted believers spread across Judea and Samaria.
- The people weeping for Stephen could have been a form of public protest.
- In contrast to Stephen peacefully falling asleep, Saul runs wild, and it appears that then or thereafter people were put to death for their proclamation of Jesus: “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them” (Acts 26:9-10).

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## Preaching Christ In Samaria (8:5-8)

*5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.*

- Samaria is the next circle in taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.
- The Jews hated the Samaritans and vice versa. Samaritans were a mix between Jews and other peoples who had been brought into the north of Israel by the Assyrians centuries earlier. The Jews saw them as half-breeds and heretics.
- Jesus told a Samaritan woman, "...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (see John 4:23). Philip's ministry there would now cause Jesus' words to become more of a concrete reality.
- Philip goes down to Samaria, as one always descends from Jerusalem.
- They knew of Jesus, but now Philip is undoubtedly preaching the complete Gospel message of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation. He performs what we've been calling power evangelism.
- Casting out demons is a ministry for all Christians: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons..." (Mark 16:17a)
- Something that might have helped: the Samaritans believed quite strongly in the prophecy of the coming "Prophet like Moses."
- Whenever Jesus is working, there will be joy!

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### **Simon The Sorcerer (8:9-13)**

*9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

- "Simon the Sorcerer" had a long history of controlling the people of the region and amazing them with occult power. However, the Samaritans were now being exposed to the true power of God.
- Philip preached about the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ.
- People (including Simon) believed and were baptized.

### **The Spirit Falls (8:14-17)**

*14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

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- This is perhaps the most mysterious episode in the entire Book of Acts. Why didn't the Spirit fall upon the Samaritans the way He did in Acts 2?
- Some say it's because they really didn't believe, but that seems to contradict Luke's words and the whole flow of the story. It seems more likely that God suspended the usual order of things because he wanted Peter and John to be there as witnesses.
- Perhaps it happened this way so that the Jerusalem apostles would have a sure witness that God had fully included the Samaritans among the believers.
- Maybe God was giving them proof that the Gospel had now spread further.

### **Simon Rebuked (8:18-25)**

*18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." 24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." 25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.*

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- We don't know what exactly Simon saw. Most Pentecostals and Charismatics would say that he saw the Samaritans speaking in tongues or prophesying. In all the other instances of Spirit-baptism in Acts, tongues are present or implied. Simon certainly saw something that made him want to buy the gift of God.
- Simon's name has given us the name of the sin we call *simony*.
- Because of Peter's rebuke, people debate whether Simon was saved at all. At a minimum, Simon had a long way to go in his understanding. Perhaps because of his background in the occult, he seems to view Peter as a person of power.
- Peter and John also minister in Samaria as they return to Jerusalem.

### **Philip Preaches To An Ethiopian (8:26-35)**

*26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."*

*30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.*

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*32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." 34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.*

- Notice Philip's sensitivity to the Spirit, and his obedient heart.
- The Ethiopian treasurer served the *Candace*, a position that apparently meant the Queen Mother. We don't know if he was a Jew, or a "God-fearer."
- Ethiopia had had ties with Israel for centuries. According to legend, the Son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Menelik, was the first Emperor of Ethiopia.
- Only God can orchestrate meetings like this! The Ethiopian has been divinely "set up," and he's reading from the most famous Messianic prophecy.
- "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

### **The Ethiopian Believes in Jesus Christ (8:36-40)**

*36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

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*38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.*

- He seals his newfound belief with baptism and then he witnesses a miracle, as the Holy Spirit catches Philip away.
- There's a lot of joy in this chapter, and he went on his way rejoicing.
- Tradition tells us that this man became the first missionary to Africa, preserving his name as Simeon Bachos the Eunuch.
- The Ethiopian Orthodox Church preserves his name as Bachos, and believes him to have been a Jew called Simeon the Black. Perhaps he was the same "Simeon called Niger" found in Acts 13.
- Philip was found at Azotus (Ashdod) and preached all over until he came to Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea.
- This chapter shows us the lasting impact of Philip, opening up Samaria for the Gospel and sending the seed of the Gospel into Africa, too.
- We should imitate Philip in his sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and how well he knew the Lord and His Word!

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