

Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 8

8:1 And Saul approved of their killing him.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

We are not told how much of a role Saul/Paul played in Stephen's death. Luke merely tells us that Saul/Paul approved of putting him to death. Luke also says that this became a time of the great persecution. Saul began ravaging (NASB) or destroying (NIV) the church. He didn't merely arrest them but he dragged them off. The believers were scattered throughout Samaria and Judea, except for the apostles who remained in Jerusalem. The word "But", separates verses 2 and 3. Luke is comparing the Godly men that buried Stephen to Saul. Saul was imprisoning men and women.

Philip in Samaria

8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

It is interesting how the persecution of the Christians helped spread the Gospel. They were forced out of their comfort zone and began proclaiming the Gospel where they went. Specifically, we are told that Philip went to Samaria. Philip was not met with resistance from the people of Samaria. They saw and heard and believed. They were of one accord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Philip was able to cast out demons and heal the paralyzed or lame. We are told that there was rejoicing because of what God was doing through Philip.

Simon the Sorcerer

8:9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

The miracles that God was doing through Philip were also thought to be magic. Simon was not someone that Philip would have wanted to have associated with his ministry because Simon's motivation was for personal gain. In the days of the Wild West, he would have been a snake-oil salesman. He would do anything to make a dollar. We know that the people were believing the correct message and for the right reason because they were accepting the message of Jesus and

were being baptized. Even Simon was baptized and followed Philip for a time. Verse 12 says that Philip proclaimed (NIV) or preached (NASB and KJV) the good news. This was different than Simon the magician who was selling his message. Philip was proclaiming his message and allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work.

8:14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When the apostles heard what was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. This was because Philip was a layman baptizing in the name of Jesus and Peter and John baptized with the Holy Spirit.

“They sent Peter and John to them: When Jesus gave unto Peter (and the other apostles) the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19) it was really for this purpose. Here they officially welcomed those (the Samaritans) who had previously been excluded from the people of God into the kingdom of God.” (Guzik)

8:18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon saw that something more happened when Peter and John laid their hands upon the Samaritans. Simon offered the apostles money to obtain this gift. There is a word named for Simon which means the sin of buying or selling church offices or privileges, it is 'Simony'.

8:20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25 After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Peter rebuked Simon, essentially cursing him for his wickedness. He told him to repent and pray for forgiveness. Simon asked Peter to pray for him so that nothing that he said would happen. Then Peter and John headed home and they shared the Gospel to other Samaritan villages.

Philip and the Ethiopian

8:26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his

chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Philip, even though he is a layman or disciple, is the main character or even utterly indispensable

"If one heard the call to leave such a blessed, fruitful ministry, one likely would think it was the devil speaking and not the Lord. One might think, "Not now" or "Not me" or "Not there." (Guzik)

An angel told Philip to head south toward Gaza. The road is described as a desert road, where he met an Ethiopian man heading to Jerusalem to worship. This man was a eunuch and he was important because he was responsible for the Ethiopian queen's money. This man was reading the book of Isaiah. It seems strange to me that this Ethiopian man was going to Jerusalem to worship. He was not from a Jewish nation but he had found a Jewish book but not necessarily God.

8:30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip did what he was told, he went to the chariot and started talking to the man. God puts people in our path to witness to but sometimes we don't listen. He started the conversation with a question. He said "Do you understand what you are reading?" The passage that the Eunuch was reading was Isaiah 53:7-8. This passage was a prophecy about the Messiah or the Christ who was Jesus.

8:36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" [37] 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

As they walked they came upon water, Philip gave the Eunuch an invitation to be baptized. There is no verse 37 in the NIV and NASB adds "Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This verse is present in the original Greek. Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water and baptized the Eunuch. When they came

out of the water, Philip was taken away. He appeared in Azotus which is Ashdod today about 40 miles away and then preached the good news of Jesus all the way to Caesarea about 60 miles away.