

ACTS CHAPTER 8

There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world and that is an idea whose time has come. The Gospel of Jesus the Christ is much more than “an idea.” The Gospel is the “power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” according to **Romans 1:16**. It is God’s dynamite for breaking down sin barriers and setting the prisoners free. Its time had come and the church was on the move. The “salt” was now leaving the “Jerusalem saltshaker” to be spread over all Judea and Samaria, just as the Lord commanded in **Acts 1:8**. The events in Acts chapter 8 center around four different men: A Zealous Persecutor – Saul...A Faithful Preacher – Philip...A Clever Deceiver – Simon the Sorcerer...and A Concerned Seeker – an Ethiopian.

Saul Persecutes the Church (vs. 1-3)

Vs. 1-3 – Saul’s zeal for the Law was displayed most vividly in his persecution of the church. As a converted “*Paul*” he admits this in **Galatians 1:13-14** and **Philippians 3:6**. Saul really thought that persecuting the believers was one way of serving God, so he did it with a clear conscience (**2 Timothy 1:3**). Now regarding the phrase in **vs. 1** “*Now Saul was consenting to his death*” – the word *consenting* describes Saul’s attitude and it means to approve, or to be pleased with. Some people are reluctant persecutors, but Saul wasn’t one of these; he took pleasure in attacking Christians. The phrase “*a great persecution arose against the church*” lets us know Stephen’s death was only the beginning. The floodgates of persecution were now open against the Christians. Saul was only one of many persecutors of Christians and this was the first persecution of the Christians as a whole. Before, the apostles had been arrested and beaten and persecuted; but here, every believer was

threatened with violence and perhaps death. So, in what ways did Saul persecute the church? He made “*havoc*” of the church. The *Greek verb* for “*havoc*” carries the idea of a wild animal mangling its prey. The stoning of Stephen, which Paul approved and he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, shows the lengths to which he would go to achieve his purpose. He persecuted both men and women unto death (**Acts 22:4**), entering both houses and synagogues (**Acts 22:19**). He had believers imprisoned and beaten (**Acts 22:19; 26:9-11**). Saul was a man with great authority whose devotion to Moses completely controlled his life, and almost destroyed his life. But he did it ignorantly in unbelief according to **1 Timothy 1:13**. *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”* And praise God, He showed Saul great mercy and saved him. On the surface, Saul may have been the last person one would think would become an Apostle of Jesus the Christ and wrote almost two-thirds of the New Testament.

Christ is Preached in Samaria (vs. 4-8)

Vs. 4 – Now the Christians were forced to do what they had been reluctant to do – get the message of Jesus out to the surrounding regions. The Greek word for *scattered* in this verse carries the idea of scattered for the purpose of planting or sowing seeds. God can and will use pressing circumstances to

guide us into His will. Sometimes we have to be shaken out of our comfortable state before we do what God wants us to do. The end result was for the glory of God, because the persecution served to spread the message. The Greek word for “*preach*” in **vs. 4** means to proclaim the Gospel, to evangelize.

Vs. 5 – Philip, like Stephen, was one of the men chosen (original deacons) to serve the church family in practical ways when the dispute regarding Hellenist widows arose (**Acts 6:5**). God moved him from deacon to preacher to minister to the Samaritans. During Israel’s war with the Assyrians, the Assyrian king took many captives, leaving only the poorest people in the land and resettled it with foreigners. These foreigners intermarried with the Jews who were left, and the mixed race became known as the Samaritans who were considered half-breeds by the Jews and they avoided having contact with them. The Samaritans initially rejected the Old Testament beyond the Pentateuch – the first 5 books of Moses. But as we see, the Gospel message transcended the first century barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles; there is no room for racism in the church. Regarding the phrase “*Preached Christ to them*” - after the Jews had rejected the gospel again, we see God extending the offer of salvation in Jesus out to other peoples, beginning with the Samaritans. Now the Greek word for “*preach*” here in **vs. 5** means to

announce as a herald. Philip was God's commissioned herald to deliver His message to the people of Samaria.

Vs. 6-8 – Regarding the phrase *“Hearing and seeing the miracles which he did”*

- Philip came presenting the gospel, with signs and wonders following as an impressive confirmation. When the people found Jesus, there was great joy in that city. Undoubtedly, one reason there was such fruit was that Jesus had sown the seed in Samaria during His ministry (**John 4:1-26**). Now Philip reaped the harvest. The great joy in that city came from great sorrow and pain in Jerusalem. It came from the reality of spiritual power (the miracles which he did). But it especially came as Philip preached Christ to them. This passage is a proof positive that we must continue with our food distribution ministry at our adopted trailer park in E. McKinney whereby we suspect many who live there may be undocumented...like the Samaritans in our text, they need the Gospel shared in word and deed. The Gospel had now moved from “Jewish territory” into Samaria where the people were part Jew and part Gentile. God in His grace had built a bridge between two estranged peoples and made the believers one in Christ, and soon He would extend that bridge to the Gentiles and include them as well. No one is beyond the reach of the Gospel.

The Sorcerer's Profession of Faith (vs. 9-13)

Vs. 9-10 – This passage of scripture let’s us know Satan is not all-powerful, but he is not powerless either. And wherever God sows His true believers, Satan will eventually sow his counterfeits (**Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43**). The enemy comes in like a lion to devour, and when that approach fails, he comes as a serpent to deceive. The people were amazed at what Simon did and therefore, they believed the things he said. In the Bible, sorcery is associated with the occult, magical practices – and often with the taking of mind and mood altering drugs. Simon was renowned by the people and he was a *“legend in his own mind.”*

Vs. 11-13 - The Samaritans wrongly assumed that because Simon had real spiritual power, it was from God – yet that simply wasn’t the case. Whatever real power Simon had, it was from Satan, not God. Simon was convinced by Philip’s preaching and amazing miracles, to the point where he declared belief, he was baptized, and continued with Philip. Simon became a follower of Philip and his ministry. Now up to this point in **Acts 8:13** – there is nothing to indicate that Simon’s belief was false or insincere. Yet it will be tested by his conduct and response over time. But when we get to **vs. 21** Peter will show us just maybe Simon made an emotional decision and that his belief was not sincere; no heart transformation occurred.

The Sorcerer’s Sin (vs. 14-25)

Vs. 14-17 – read **Luke 9:51-55** and notice the growth in John now that he has been endowed with the Holy Spirit who leads and guides us to truth. This same John at one time wanted to have fire come down from heaven and destroy a Samaritan town is sent with Peter to pray for the Samaritans and to find out whether or not the Samaritans were truly becoming believers. You can tell a tree by the fruit it bears. When Peter and John saw the Lord working in these people, they were assured that the Holy Spirit worked through all believers – Gentiles and mixed races as well as Jewish people. In these verses it is obvious God wanted to unite the Samaritan believers with the original Jewish church in Jerusalem. He did not want two churches that would perpetuate the division and conflict that had existed for centuries. Jesus says all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Love fosters unity not separation and the Holy Spirit was the unifying factor that would bring the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles into one body called the church. Now in **vs. 15** when it says, “*they might receive the Holy Spirit*” the fact that these Christians received the Holy Spirit in what seems to be a *subsequent experience to their salvation* has caused much controversy; there have been different explanations offered.

- Some say they were never truly born again (converted) under Philip’s preaching. When Peter and John came, they really trusted in Jesus and then received the Holy Spirit.

- Some say they were truly born again. Then, in a subsequent experience, they received the Holy Spirit in a pattern that believers should follow today.
- Some say they were converted in response to Philip's preaching; yet God, in a unique move, withheld the gift of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John could bestow it on them. God's purpose in this was to ensure continuity between the church in Jerusalem and the new church in Samaria, guarding against division.
- Some say they were really born again and did really receive the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, but were given special gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands by Peter and John. And this is the belief of most Biblical scholars. Whatever the Samaritans experienced, it seems to have been more than the "regular" bestowal of the Holy Spirit at salvation. This is a re-filling of the Holy Spirit post salvation we should always desire and seek.

The first 10 chapters of Acts records a period of transition, from the Jew to the Samaritan, to the Gentile. God's pattern for today is given in chapter 10: the sinner hears the Gospel, believes, receives the Holy Spirit, and then is baptized. It is dangerous to base any doctrine or practice only on what is recorded in **Acts chapters 1-10** for you might be building on that which was temporary and transitional. Those who claim we must be baptized to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**) have a hard time explaining what happened to the Samaritans; and those who claim we must have "laying on of hands" to receive the Holy Spirit have a difficult time with **Acts 10**. Once you accept **Acts chapters 1-10** as a transitional period in God's plan, with **Acts 10** being the climax, the problems are solved.

Vs. 18-22 – Simon thought he could buy the Holy Spirit’s power and give it (or sell it) to whom he wanted but Peter is about to harshly rebuke him. In our world today it seems like everything has a price in our world of bribes, wealth, and materialism. But the only way to receive God’s power is to do what Peter tells Simon in **vs. 22** – *repent and turn from sin, ask God for forgiveness, and be filled with His Spirit*. And it is because of what Simon asked for in this passage that most theologians believe Simon was not really saved; he simply made an emotional decision. Church history later tells us Simon was associated with heresy and identifies him as an enemy of the Christian faith. His actions in this passage gives us the word simony – which means the “*buying and selling of church offices or privileges.*”

Vs. 23-25 – Peter’s words to Simon give every indication that the sorcerer was not a converted man by what he said about Simon in **vs. 23**. There is no evidence that Simon repented and sought forgiveness. This reflects how close a person can come to salvation and still not be converted. Simon was one of Satan’s clever counterfeits, and had Peter not exposed the wickedness of his heart with the word of God. **Vs. 24-25** highlight the fact even though persecution was still going on, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem preaching the Gospel in “many villages of the Samaritans” as they went their way – we too are to live out the Great Commission of “going and making

disciples.” Now that the doors were open in Samaria, they took advantage of it and shared the Gospel with accuracy clarity and with zest and zeal.

Christ is Preached to an Ethiopian (vs. 26-40)

Vs. 26-29 – Philip was not only a faithful preacher; he was also an obedient personal worker. Like his Master Jesus; he was willing to leave the crowds and deal with one lost soul. (*Why do you think the Angel did not speak to the Egyptian?*) The angel could have told this Egyptian official how to be saved, but God has not given the commission to angels: God has given the Great Commission of going and making disciples to saved people. It is every Christian’s business to share the Gospel with others, and to do it without fear or apology. Matter of fact, **1 Peter 3:15** says, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*” This pandemic will not be an excuse for saved people to not share the Gospel...with every crisis comes opportunity; with every storm comes lessons to be learned. Notice carefully the phrase “*This is desert.*” Leaving a fruitful ministry to go to a desert is foolish from man’s perspective, but it’s wise if directed by God. What could be more foolish than to leave a place of a prospering ministry and go to a desert road? Philip wasn’t the only one being led by the Spirit; the man of Ethiopia was also, though he didn’t yet know it. **Vs. 27** is so important...the

response to being called to do something for kingdom advancement should be “obedience.” Faith in God means being ready to move without full explanation. God has divine appointments ready for willing witnesses even in the midst of this pandemic. The Gospel was about to take a significant leap; it was about to go into Africa. The Jews had contact with Ethiopia in ancient days (read **Psalm 68:31** and **Jeremiah 38:7**), so this man may have been a Gentile convert to Judaism. Because he was in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia, this man’s conversion brought Christianity into the power structures of another government. This is the beginning of the witness to the ends of the earth statement Jesus gave in **Acts 1:8**. **Isaiah 56:3-8** provides us a prophecy for foreigners and eunuchs. (eunuchs of the Bible were usually castrated males or those incapable of reproduction due to a birth defect). A eunuch could also be someone who performed work typical of eunuchs, although he remained perfectly capable of having physical intimacy—i.e., “eunuch” in some cases was simply a title. Jesus identified 3 types of eunuchs in **Matthew 19:12** - natural eunuchs (“born that way”), forced eunuchs (“made eunuchs by others”), and voluntary eunuchs (“those who choose.”) When we go share the gospel, we have no idea the impact of our sharing the gospel after God gives us a divine appointment; we have no idea what God may do in the life of the one whom we share the Gospel with. The name

“Candace” is capitalized not because it’s a proper noun but it was the title for certain female royalty in Ethiopia. And the fact this Ethiopian was reading Isaiah (the longest writing of the prophets) reflects he was hungry for God’s Word. Typically, the scroll would cost him a lot of money, so it showed that he really wanted to read and know God’s word. What types of “spiritually enriching tools” have you invested in to better know and understand the Lord?

Vs. 30-33 – The phrase “*heard him reading*” is so important. Philip knew at that moment that God had given him an *open door*, a *divine appointment* – and a *prepared heart*. This is a wonderful example of how God opens doors for evangelism. God directed Philip because God had already arranged an open door. What are some things we hear people say that are “door openers” for us to share Biblical truth? In **vs. 31** when the Ethiopian says, “*How can I, unless someone guides me?*” This is the proper question of anyone who wants to understand the Bible. We should never feel bad if we need to be taught before we can understand many things. It is wonderful when we come to understand the great truths of Bible on our own, but God also has a place and a purpose for teachers among the followers of Jesus. God calls the pastor to be a primary teacher of the Word (feeding the sheep the Word and praying for the sheep which reflects true love for the sheep are the pastors two most

important jobs). These verses also highlight why participating in a Bible study with someone preferably Biblically trained and spiritually mature. The Holy Spirit certainly leads us to the truth of the Scripture but the Holy Spirit does not eliminate the need for human teachers. Never allow your insecurity nor pride to keep you from asking for help to understand the Bible. The passage the man was reading was **Isaiah 53** particularly **verses 7-8**, the prophecy of God's Suffering Servant.

Vs. 34-35 – As Philip explained the verses to him, the Ethiopian began to understand the Gospel because the Spirit of God was opening his mind to God's truth. It is important to teach both the saved and the unsaved God's plan for Salvation (we must know **Ephesians 2:8-9** and then engage in and practice **Romans 10:9** and be encouraged by **Romans 10:13**). Regarding the phrase *I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?* The Jews of that day had different ways they understood the identity of this suffering servant. Some thought the suffering servant was the nation of Israel itself, as Israel had suffered greatly in wars, exile, and persecution. Some thought the suffering servant was Isaiah writing about himself. Some thought the suffering servant was the Messiah, but they found this hard to accept, because they didn't want to think of the Messiah suffering. And the phrase *“Beginning at this Scripture”* Philip talked about more than this

passage from Isaiah, but he started there. He began at common ground with the Ethiopian. And then the phrase “*preached Jesus him*” – this is the end result of all preaching and teaching. What does what we read have to say about Jesus; what would Jesus do; and/or how does it apply to you being more like Jesus. Philip made his way to talking about Jesus. Whatever questions we answer for people; always strive to make your way back to the main thing – Jesus the Christ. The Gospel begins with and is founded upon what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Vs. 36-37 - This shows that the Ethiopian did in fact believe, and he wanted to respond to the Gospel by being baptized to declare his belief. The text does not clearly state how the man knew baptism was a next step after accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, most likely Philip shared this with him while teaching. An example of this is with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden...read **Genesis 2:15-17** and **Genesis 3:2-3**. Eve was not even formed when God gave Adam instructions so for Eve to know what she said in **Genesis 3:2-3** she had to have been taught by Adam. After a declaration of who Jesus is we need to ask for a response to the Gospel and that is where we share where baptism fits in. It is something we do after we are saved; not to get saved. Notice this is where we get the phrase in many Baptist churches “believers’ baptism” based on what Philip taught in **vs. 37**. The Ethiopians

saw the truth of God and knew that it was for Him. And make no mistake about it; this was the work of the Holy Spirit not Philip's communication skills.

Vs. 38-40 – Baptism is an outward sign of an inward transformation to the Word of God and faith in Jesus. Now regarding the phrase in **vs. 39** - *“The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more... Philip was found at Azotus.”* Suddenly, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away as he and the Ethiopian came out of the water. He was then transported supernaturally in some way to the former Philistine city of Azotus (also known as Ashdod). This word caught translated from the Greek is the same word used in **1 Thessalonians 4:17** regarding the church being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This was a supernatural transportation but we have other examples in the New Testament of a supernatural transportation. A similar thing happened when the disciples' boat came immediately to its destination in **John 6:15-21**. Notice the phrase *“He went on his way rejoicing”* - the joy of the Ethiopian, even after Philip's strange departure, shows that his faith was firmly rooted in God, not in Philip. Finally, in **vs. 40** regarding the phrase – *“Passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea”* - This shows that Philip started preaching not only to Samaritan cities, but also the Gentile cities – such as Caesarea. This is the very beginning

of the gospel's spread to the end of the earth – as Jesus commanded in *Acts 1:8*. No wonder Philip is the only one in the New Testament specifically given the title, “*The Evangelist*” in *Acts 21:8*. Remember the Great Commission says, “**GO**” and make disciples; this cannot be done on the sofa.