

Acts 8

A. Saul's persecution.

v1 And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

"Approved" – in ancient Greek it actually meant "to approve, to be pleased with." that's the zeal with which he enjoyed persecuting Christians.

V2 Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.

It is risky to stand for Stephen. But some devout men do it, just as how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and the women did for Jesus.

V3 But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

Persecution against Christians

v4 Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.

- a. "Scattering" - Two different words in the ancient Greek language for the idea of "scattered." One has the idea of scattering in the sense of making something disappear, like scattering someone's ashes. The other word has the idea of scattering in the sense of planting or sowing seeds. This is the ancient Greek word used here.
- b. We have to understand that these were followers of Jesus witnessing for Jesus. Not trained preachers.

- c. Command of Jesus to go from Jerusalem-Samaria-ends of the earth in Acts 1:8 is being fulfilled here Acts 8:1.

Emphases

Persecution causing the spread of the Gospel.

B. Philip's evangelism in Samaria

V5-8 - 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. 6 The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, 7 for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

- a. Philip was chosen along with Stephen Acts 6:5. He did not hesitate from evangelism after the martyrdom of Stephen, but rather continued in it.
- b. Reason for hatred between Jews and Samaritans - 600 years before this, the Assyrians conquered this area of northern Israel and deported all the wealthy and middle-class Jews from the area. Then they moved in a pagan population from afar. These pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of remaining Jews in northern Israel, and from these people came the Samaritans. The Jews considered them a lower class.
- c. Luke 9:51-56 – Samaritans had rejected Jesus and his band of travelling disciples. James and John had said that fire should be called upon them, whereas Jesus forgave them.
- d. Jesus's relationship with Samaritans – Samaritan woman (John 4), good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37)

- e. Now willingness to preach and accept the Samaritans along with signs would have been instrumental in many of them turning to Jesus.
 - f. That's why there is joy when a person receives Jesus.
- Illus** – Angola prison – Burl Cain – Warden 1995-2016

V9-13 - 9 Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. 10 All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." 11 And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

- a. people of all sorts turn to the gospel. Even Simon and many who were originally trusting in him. There is still a lot of growing up of faith yet to be done. Especially ability to do magic tricks was seen as power. That comes in conflict with the Holy Spirit. Jesus's miracles were signs not magic.

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16 (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- a. coming of apostles and laying on of hands signifies continuity between church in Jerusalem and in Samaria.
- b. Coming of the Holy Spirit – perhaps evident by the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- c. Hearing of the Gospel caused their conversion. Laying on of hands would have conferred special grace. Laying on of hands during baptism and ordination. We may have the question why baptism, Holy Spirit, gifts of the Spirit and conversion are all not manifested together. That is the mystery of God. During our baptism we declare by faith that this child is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! 21 You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." 24 Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you[e] have said may happen to me."

Further conversion of Simon. Compare with experience of Ananias and Saphira.

Emphases

The trap of using miracles and magic to project oneself. Jesus resisted it. The disciples resisted it. Today many fall for it.

Question

In the light of the Bible can you identify what is the difference between magic and miracle, faith and superstition? How can somebody use a claim of a miracle to project oneself?

C. Philip's evangelization of the Ethiopian eunuch

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

- The Ethiopian eunuch – a highly placed court official of the 'Candace' of "kandake", in charge of her entire treasury. Candace is the title given to female ruler or consort of the king of Kush, present day Sudan. The term Ethiopian could refer to ethnicity-race-color rather than actual present day country.
- Leaving a fruitful ministry to go into the wilderness at the command of God. That is to serve God's purpose.
- Perhaps Jewish faith could have been transmitted here since the time of Queen Sheba.
- High official yet humble to learn and listen
- Earnestly sought to worship. but not allowed to enter the temple (Deut 23:1). Yet went to worship over this long distance and expense. Sought God's word. Perhaps when he read another sad story of exclusion, it must have struck him.

God addressing eunuchs in Isaiah 56:3-5 - And let not the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to Yehovah speak, saying,

'Yehovah has certainly separated me from His people,' nor let the eunuch say, 'Look I am a dry tree.' For thus said Yehovah, To the eunuchs who guard My Shabbats, and have chosen what pleases Me, and are holding onto My covenant: to them I shall give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters – I give them an everlasting name that is not cut off.

30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

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

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

the eunuch would never have a chance to be taught about it. Regarding this passage from Isaiah 53:7-8, 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.

V35 – 38 - 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

The understanding of the suffering messiah made the eunuch realize the relevance of Jesus. Further, Philip's explanation and acceptance could have made the gospel so relevant to the Eunuch. That caused a readiness for conversion and baptism.

Philip is led away by the Spirit whereas this eunuch continues his journey joyfully. Shows that his faith was in Jesus. Ethiopian Christians trace their faith to this eunuch.

D. Philip in gentile regions

40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until 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. Philip is the only one in the New Testament specifically given the title, "The Evangelist" (Acts 21:8). Acts 21:8

finds him still in Caesarea, doing his work of evangelism there. Paul stayed at his home during his visit to Caesarea during his missionary journey. Philip had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

Questions

- 1. Philip crossed his boundary of comfort and familiarity to evangelize people. Even people who were traditionally thought to be beyond "God's chosen people". Can you identify people beyond our boundary of comfort and familiarity? Could God be inviting you to get to know somebody and serve them outside your comfort zone?**