

Acts Chapter 8

2. *In Palestine and Syria, 8:1-12:25*

A. **Persecution begins, 8:1-4**

Act 8:1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

hearty agreement (συνενδοκῆω) = to take pleasure with others, to approve or agree.

cf. **Acts 22:20**, This word is also found in Rom. 1:32 and is used in reference to those who approve of sin. It's not just approval but one that encourages and agrees with. This is why NASB translates it "*Hearty Agreement*"

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem,

The word "day" can also refer to a longer or shorter period, so the AV translates it "at that time" The persecution began here and continued.

This was something Saul spearheaded, 1Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13,14,23

and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The Apostles still had a job to do, **Acts 6:2.**

Fleeing might have showed a lack of faith. We are not told what they dealt with while they stayed in Jerusalem, but because of their continuance there it would seem that God was protecting them and fear was not a problem. Compare **Acts 20:10-14**.

Also consider it was from here that the Gospel was to be sent forth. The Apostles stayed to teach, so others would be sent out, **Isa. 2:1-3**

Act 8:2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

These were religious men. No indication if they were Christians or not.

Barnes suggests the word “buried” involves being carried away and involves all the rightful preparations for burial. Include the loud lamentations and we have what appears to be a group that cared greatly for Stephen. Because of the manner of his death it would seem unlikely that this is a Christian group.

Act 8:3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

But Saul began ravaging the church

The word “but” provides some insights into Saul’s heart at this time. He was not concerned the least bit about what had happened to Stephen or how he was treated after his death.

Saul (Paul) was determined to destroy the church through intense persecution. The word ravage was used to describe the destruction of victims committed by wild and savage beasts, (Charles DiPalma) **Acts 9:1-2**

entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

He hunted down all, both men and women who were disciples of Jesus.

Act 8:4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

It might be concluded that God used the martyrdom of Stephen to cause the disciples to scatter. Not that He caused Stephen's death, but used it to carry out the great commission, **Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8** “Go therefore” literally means “as you are going” and this is what they did.

This is similar to **Mark 14:1-11**, where God used the evil heart of Judas to bring about the death of Jesus.

NOTE: That which was intended to end the spread of the gospel actually furthered it. Persecution does not stop disciples who are dedicated to the Lord, **Acts 5:40-42**

B. Philip in Samaria, 8:5-25

1. Philip, 8:5-8

Act 8:5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

Remember that Philip was one of the Seven chosen with Stephen, **Acts 6:5**. He did not allow what happened to Stephen deter him from carrying out his work. Paul gives Timothy similar advice. **2Tim. 2:7-13; 2Tim. 3:1-15**.

Samaria would be a place of relief, to some degree, for the disciples. The Sanhedrin have no power here and so he freely proclaimed Christ.

Philip would still have to contend with the fact that he was a Jew and there was no love loss between the Jews and Samaritans. But Jesus' earlier work would have paved the way for what Philip was doing, **John 4:7-45, 1Cor. 3:6**

Act 8:6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip,

H. Leo Boles states that giving attention means they kept holding the mind on the things which were spoken by Philip; it carried the meaning of spellbound.

as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

This would explain why they were "spellbound" and one of the purposes for miracles is once again revealed, **Mark 16:20**

Act 8:7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice;

The miracles performed by Philip were very visible. The demons came out shouting with a loud voice, **Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41**

What happens here shows that demon possession was not just some disease or illness as some have suggested.

and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Those with physical infirmities were also addressed and healed.

Act 8:8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

2. Simon, 8:9-13

Act 8:9 Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;

Simon was a man of great ability based on four facts.

1. He was not only able to fool the people in the city but also those of Samaria.
2. He was willing to boast that he was someone great.
3. The people viewed him as "The Great Power of God," v.10
4. He had astonished the people for a long time, v.11

Lenski notes, “This Simon belonged to a class of charlatans that were rather common at this period, who practiced occult arts in order to impress the people and to gain a following. Much was plain sorcery which was at times combined with a shrewd use of natural laws that were otherwise unknown. The range of their arts extended from conjuring of demons, dealing with the dead, influencing gods, to charms of healing divination, stargazing, and the likes.”

Act 8:10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

Act 8:11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

This actually plays a big part in showing just how truly great the miracles Philip performed really were as seen in the next verse.

Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ

It wasn't just the miracles that convinced the people. They believed the Philips preaching about Jesus.

they were being baptized,

As always preaching Christ, v.5 or preaching the kingdom of God involves preaching baptism. How did these people come to know about baptism? Philip preached it to them. You cannot preach Christ or the Kingdom absent of baptism, **Acts 8:35, 36**

men and women alike.

There is no mention of infant baptism here, as there never is in the New Testament.

Those baptized were adults who heard and believed the message preached.

Act 8:13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Even Simon himself believed;

The one who claimed himself to be someone great; who the people called the “Great Power of God” understood the difference between what he was able to do and what God did through Philip.

and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Simon repented of his ways and followed the path to salvation. He was baptized for the forgiveness of sins, **Acts 2:38.**

Having repented, Simon left his former life and began to follow Philip around being amazed at what he saw.

3. Peter and John sent, 8:14-17

Act 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

The receiving of the word of God is demonstrated in those of Samaria being baptized.
One does not truly receive the word until obedience to that word is demonstrated

Act 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles seek guidance in bestowing the Holy Spirit, **1Cor. 12:4-11**

Act 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Don DeWalt noted, “Luke used the term ‘fallen upon’ to describe the reception of the special powers.” (see **Acts 10:44; 11:15**)

Act 8:17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

This account of the receiving the Holy Spirit is not to be confused with the baptism of the Holy Spirit in **Acts 2:1-4** and **Acts 10:4**. Namely this act takes place through the laying on of the Apostles hands, this was not the case in the accounts of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This account of receiving the Holy Spirit is not to be confused with what takes place upon being baptized, Acts 2:38. These had already been baptized, v.12,13, so they would have received the promise Peter mentioned. Remember, this is a promise to all who believe, Acts 2:39. If what happens in Acts 8:17 is what Peter spoke of in Acts 2:39 we would need the Apostles around to bestow the Holy Spirit upon each of us.

What takes place here can be seen in **Acts 6:6-8** and **Acts 19:1-7**.

Note: This passage clearly shows that the passing on of miraculous gifts could only take place through the Apostles hands. Philip had the ability to perform gifts but not the ability to pass them on. Also consider that passing on miraculous gifts is not listed in **1Cor. 12:4-10** as one of the gifts.

The Scriptures also show that passing on gifts only took place through the Apostles hands. Acts 6:6-8; Acts; 8:17; 19:1-7. Some might see an exception in 1Tim. 4:14 and 2Tim. 1:6. But consider that Paul uses two different words in relation to the *laying on* of hands in both passages. In 1Tim. 4:14 he uses the phrase “**with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.**” In 2Tim. 1:6 Paul uses the phrase “**through the laying on of my hands.**”

1. The word **with** is **μετα** and when accompanied by a word in the genitive case it means “with or together with.”
2. The word **through** is **δια** and when accompanied by a word in the genitive case it means “of immediate agency, causation, instrumentality, by means of.”
3. The words “**laying on**” is one word in the Greek and is used in both 1Tim. 4:14 and 2Tim. 1:6. It is in the genitive case.

The word **with** indicates that the presbytery laid their hands on Timothy and the receiving of his gift accompanied this, but it was **through** Paul’s hands that the gift was actually bestowed.

Heads Up!

What was the reason for this occurrence, we see nothing else like it other than Acts 19? FF. Bruce, quoting a Professor Lampe writes, “The preaching of the Gospel in Samaria represented a crucial moment in the first advance of Christianity. Hence, after the Baptism of the first Samaritan converts, the leaders of the Church’s mission come down from Jerusalem and, by sign of fellowship and contact incorporate them into the apostolic church....”

This seems to be an appropriate conclusion if we also consider that John, one of the Apostles sent, had at one time desired to call fire down upon the Samaritans, **Lk. 9:51-56**. Here we have a visible sign of their acceptance into the church, **Acts 10:44; 11:15-18**

4. Simon's wickedness, 8:18-25

Act 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed

We are not told how the Spirit was being manifested, (ie... **Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:44-46**) but whatever it was Simon saw (recognized) that the Spirit was bestowed.

through the laying on of the apostles' hands,

This is specific, it was only through the apostles

he offered them money,

Simon thinks he can buy this power

Act 8:19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

"Give this authority to me as well,

The authority he wants is seen in the second part of this verse

so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

There is a recognition that this manifestation of the Holy Spirit was only given through the laying on of the Apostles hands.

Act 8:20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"

"May your silver perish with you,

This is a sharp rebuke indicating what will happen if he continues on this path.

Act 8:21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Peter makes it clear that Simon's actions indicate a heart problem.

Act 8:22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours

Peter gives Simon an opportunity to turn from his wicked ways.

and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

This phrase indicates that Simon was indeed a Christian. If he were not repentance and prayer would not resolve his sin problem, Acts 2:38

As well Peter is focusing on a single act of sin, "this wickedness of yours."

Heads Up! Here we have a clear indicator of what Christians are to do if they sin.

1. We know Simon is a Christian, **Acts 8:12,13**
2. His sins were forgiven, **Acts 2:38**
3. Now he finds himself once again caught in sin
4. He is told to do two things to resolve the issue

Repent, **2Cor. 7:8-10**

Pray to the Lord, **James 5:16**

This is how Christians are to deal with sin in their lives.

Act 8:23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

These are very strong expressions of just how serious his heart condition is.

Act 8:24 But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Simon is asking for intervention on behalf of Peter and John. This would indicate his desire to repent. In directly asking for the apostles help he seems to be seeking a higher authority to come to his aid, as if his asking for forgiveness would not be enough, but if the Apostles ask this is much better.

This reaction seems to show true repentance, compare **Matt. 19:16-22**

Act 8:25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Following the command in the great commission, as they head back to Jerusalem they continued to preach to those who would listen.

C. The Ethiopian, 8:26-40

Act 8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

Although Philip was doing a good work where he was God had other plans for him.

Act 8:27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

So he got up and went;

Philip did not question what God called him to do. When God said go Philip went.

and there was an Ethiopian eunuch,

This man was from a part of Africa known as Nubia. He was a black man as indicated by the word Ethiopian. **Αιθιοφ** = Aithiops; from **αιθω** – aitho (to burn) and **οφ** ops (an eye, face).

He was also a eunuch, an emasculated man. One who had been castrated.

a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,

The term Candace is not the name of the queen, but references her position. This is similar to Pharaoh and Caesar.

who was in charge of all her treasure;

He was a man of great importance, being in charge of her treasury. A eunuch was usually a bed keeper, bed guard, superintendent of the bedchamber, chamberlain.

and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

This eunuch was also a man devoted to God. The distance he would have traveled could have been as much as 200 miles. He had come to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish worship, to worship. The use of the word worship implies Jewish worship.

This eunuch in all likelihood was not a Jew by birth, but a Gentile proselyte. One who had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **Acts 2:10**. He would be referred to as a proselyte of the gate being a eunuch, **Deut 23:1**.

Act 8:28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Act 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

Philip is now given the reason he was sent to this place.

Act 8:30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet,

Here we begin to see some practical applications we can use in reaching out to the lost. First, Philip shows a sense of urgency, by running up to the chariot. It is possible that it was moving and that is why he was running. Nevertheless, it is obvious he did not want to miss this opportunity God had given him.

Philip also paid attention to what was being read aloud. He heard him reading Isaiah.

and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Secondly Philip takes the initiative by asking a very simple question, "Do you understand?"

Act 8:31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch's response is one that conveys the need for help, **Rom. 10:13-15**

Act 8:32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

Act 8:33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

The passages he was reading are from Isaiah 53:7,8. We also know that he is reading from the LXX because of the variation from the old Hebrew text. But as Lenski writes, "A glance at the text shows that even these are but variations in form and not thought."²

Act 8:34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

Act 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Philip takes the third step in evangelism, he preached (evangelized) Jesus to the eunuch. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies spoken of Him and Philip was able to take the mind of the eunuch to the man Jesus who had died on the cross for the sins of the world.

*Act 8:36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"*

Apparently Philip had taken the fourth step in evangelism, he instructed the eunuch on the necessity of baptism, as we see in the eunuch's response when they come upon some water.

This passage also clearly indicates that you cannot preach Jesus without preaching baptism. The reason is found in the forgiveness of sins, **Matt. 26:28, Acts 2:38**

Note: There has been much debate on where the water came from, some insisting that no water was to be found on this road. But the passage is clear, they came across some water on this journey, and it was enough for both of them to go down into, **vs. 38,39**

² Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament, Acts, pg.342

Act 8:37 [And 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."]

The textual evidence does not support the addition of this passage, although the concept related is not incorrect, **Rom. 10:9,10.**

Act 8:38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Philip now demonstrates the fifth step in evangelism, taking care of the sin problem as soon as possible. Once the eunuch understood what he needed to do, there was no need to delay. As soon as water was available he was baptized for the remission of his sins.

Notice too, that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. The word into is **εἰς**. They did not go by the side of the water but literally into the water. This is also clear by the fact that the eunuch was baptized. The word baptism literally means immersion. This in itself necessitates going down **into** the water. If sprinkling or pouring were intended this act then was foolish and unnecessary.

Act 8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

When they came up out of the water,

“they came”, is to arise or ascend

“up out of” is the word **ἐκ** in the Greek and is “A primary preposition denoting origin (the point whence motion or action proceeds), from, out (of place, time or cause; literally or figuratively; direct or remote).”

Again we have further support that Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Because they came up out of water.

Note: First Gentle convert?

the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him,

Some see this as a miraculous event. The Greek for “snatched away” can have a miraculous sense to it, **1Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:11; 2Cor. 12:2,4.** (was caught)

Thayers Definition:

- 1) to seize, carry off by force
- 2) to seize on, claim for one’s self eagerly
- 3) to snatch out or away

Also consider v.40 and the phrase “Philip found himself”

but went on his way rejoicing.

The rejoicing takes place after he has been baptized, compare, **Acts 16:31-34.**

Note: Below I have include an argument used by Lenski to prove that baptism does not have to be immersion. The reason I do this is so we might see the fallacies in how people interpret Scriptures. This is from his commentary on Acts.

Eusebius reports about a small pool that was formed by a spring near the road, Robinson speaks of a small temporary stream. Neither here nor elsewhere do we read that a robe or garment was laid aside before baptism. We are left to suppose that the two men went to this water, and that the baptismal act was an application of water by pouring or by sprinkling. Those who make the words "they both went down εἰς, into, the water" a part of the baptismal act in order to obtain immersion by means of εἰς τὸ ἰδωρ, "into the water," prove too much: Philip went down under the water as well as the eunuch. This is true also in regard to the following words.

39) But when they came up from the water, the Lord's Spirit snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he proceeded to go his way rejoicing. Philip, however, was found at Azotus; and, passing through, he proclaimed the good news to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

We may translate, "they went *down into the water*" (v. 38), and now, "they came *up out of the water*," and may with R., *W. P.* even emphasize: "Not from the edge of the water, but up out of the water"! The difficulty lies in *αμφοτεροι* "both," Luke even adding: "both Philip and the eunuch." To be sure, *εις* and *εκ* are correlatives: as far as the one takes "into," so far the other takes "out of." But these prepositions apply to "both Philip and the eunuch." Take your choice: *to* the water, *from* the water; or stepping *into* and again stepping *out of* the water; or *down under* the water and again *up from under* the water. Total immersion if you prefer, but for *both*. Not we but Luke combined them.

One of the problems I see is that he has justed bypassed what was clearly stated by Luke so he can justify his point. The Scriptures are clear, Lenski muddies the water.

They both went down into the water, *not under*, only one went under, the eunuch in baptism.

Act 8:40 But Philip found himself at Azotus,

According to Dr. Lightfoot, this is about 34 miles from Gaza on the way to Joppa It is a seaport town of the Mediterranean.

and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

Philip continued to preach wherever he went. He finally settled in Caesarea. This is probably where he stayed for the rest of his life, **Acts 21:8.**