

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 8

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER EIGHT

We may suffer persecution for believing in Jesus Christ, but like the persecuted and scattered church at Jerusalem, we must never stop boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The power and associated gifts of the Holy Spirit are never meant to draw attention to ourselves nor are they to be used for the purpose of financial gain, rather, they should always glorify God and lead others into salvation or a deeper walk with Him. God may perform miracles and signs through our hands, not only to set people free, but ultimately to cause sinners to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We must continue to grow in our knowledge of God's Word, continue to pray, and be quick to obey the Spirit. In doing so, we may be led across the paths of those sincerely seeking the truth and cause sinners to be saved from an eternity spent in hell.

Four Men Will Appear in Acts 8 whose lives greatly affect the early church. They will influence individual lives as well as entire nations. The first man appears in the first half of chapter 8, Saul of Tarsus who later becomes Paul the apostle. The second is Philip who becomes the first evangelist of the church age and sees revival change an entire city at one time. The third is Simon the Sorcerer whose stand against the gospel causes many to respond and receive the Holy Spirit. The fourth is the Ethiopian eunuch whose conversion will change an entire nation.

SAUL: PERSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH

Saul, the witness to the stoning of Stephen is bringing great persecution to the church at Jerusalem as he drags Christian men and women from their homes and has them thrown into prison. Many believers flee the city, but still boldly preach the gospel wherever they go.

SAUL PERSECUTES THE CHURCH

Saul is a member of the Sanhedrin, a devoutly religious Jew deeply steeped in Judaism (Philippians 3:4-9). As an unbeliever, Saul's mind is blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4) through religion, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy. Because of his religious background and persecution of the church, Paul considers himself to be the worst man who ever lived (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

Act 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the **church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Stephen's death is the first in an extended period of persecution. Jerusalem, the headquarters of Judaism, wants Christianity out. The church is scattered and sent out at Jerusalem (Acts 11:19; James 1:1). This is a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy found in chapter 1: 8.

The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem to form the government and counsel of the church at Jerusalem. They remain as many of their congregation leave the city for safer, more peaceful places to preach the gospel.

8:1 church, *ecclesia* (ek-klay-see-ah); Used in secular Greek for an assembly of citizens and in the Septuagint for the congregation of Israel. The NT uses the word in the former sense in 19:32, 39, 41, and in the latter sense in 7:38 and Hebrews 2:12. The dominant use in the NT is to describe an assembly or company of Christians in the following ways: 1) the whole body of Christians; 2) a local church constituting a company of Christians gathering for worship, sharing, and teaching; 3) churches in a district. Other related terms are: “spiritual house,” “chosen race,” and “God’s people.” (Compare “ecclesiastic” and “ecclesiastical.) The survival of the Christian church against all its opponents is assured in Jesus’ words from Matthew 16:18, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Act 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

Just as the young, devout men had buried Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5, they now bury one of their own who had become a renowned teacher in the city of Jerusalem. The process is repeated. The young men who had buried the bodies of Ananias and Sapphira became the deacons in chapter 6 as the church began to grow. As those first deacons (which included Stephen) enter the ministry, new young and devout men are being raised up under them.

Act 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Saul is a very committed and zealous man for the religion of the Jews. He believes what he is doing against the church is for God. At this point, Saul is Christianity’s greatest adversary. Later he will refer to himself as the worst sinner who ever lived (1 Timothy 1:15).

Religion is the greatest enemy of the gospel. The religious person is the most difficult to win and the least receptive to the gospel of grace. Religious people are too consumed in their own human good and arrogance to believe they need a savior (Isaiah 64:6; Titus 3:5).

THE CHURCH IS SCATTERED

Act 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad (*diaspeiro*) went every where preaching the word.

The Greek word for “scattered” means “to throw out as seed” (see James 1:1). These believers are not thrown away nor do they run away in fear. They dispersed to escape the persecution, but they are not silent about the Lord Jesus. For the Jews to believe they have gained a great victory over the Christians is as futile as believing they could get rid of seed by throwing it away on good soil.

Any rejoicing on the part of the Jews will be short-lived; Christians began to crop up in the many places outside Jerusalem where believers had been dispersed.

PHILIP: THE EVANGELIST (5-8)

Philip goes to Samaria and preaches Christ to them. He also performs miracles, casts out unclean spirits from those possessed, and heals many paralyzed and lame people by the power of God. There is great joy in the city.

REVIVAL IN THE CITY

Act 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

One of those who fled Jerusalem was the second deacon mentioned in Acts 6, Philip, who was called to be an evangelist (Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11). Unlike the office of a teacher (which Stephen walked in), the evangelist does not expound Scripture, but simply brings out Jesus and the new birth from any section of Scripture. Philip's message is the same whether he is addressing the entire city or an individual -- salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. He does not preach sin, but Christ.

Philip is not the first to preach Christ in Samaria. This is the same city where Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4:5-42). Jesus informed his disciples that many had previously preached the gospel in Samaria. Some have planted, others have watered, and now God would receive the increase (John 4:37-38; 1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Philip is entering a city which has entered revival. The gospel has been preached, and the city is prepared for even greater numbers of souls to be won.

Act 8:6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

The ministry of the evangelist is accompanied by the power gifts, gifts of healing and working of miracles (1 Corinthians 12:28). The purpose of these gifts is to direct the focus of attention on salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

DEMONS FLEE AND BODIES HEALED

Act 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

At this time, Samaria is under the influence of the Greek culture and worships the demons of the Pantheon (1 Corinthians 10:21-22). Half of Samaria is comprised of a Jewish population and half is Gentile. The same is true of the worship. Citizens of Samaria acknowledge the God of Israel while at the same time acknowledge demonic gods.

Philip casts out devils and heals the sick. Not all sickness is a result of demons. A distinction is made between healing and casting out demons (Matthew 10:8; Acts 19:11-12). The same anointing delivers people from both, but we must depend on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to discern the difference.

Act 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

Joy is a fruit of the new birth, a result of salvation.

SIMON: THE SORCERER (9-25)

Simon is a sorcerer who had once practiced sorcery in the city of Jerusalem and is now in Samaria proclaiming he is someone correct. The people believe him because he astonishes them with magic. However, when Philip preaches Christ, many of the same people believed Philip's message, including Simon. Simon is amazed by the miracles and signs God performs through Philip and falls him as he preaches.

SIMON HELD IN HIGH ESTEEM

Act 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery (mageuo), and bewitched (existemi) the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

Up until now, Simon has been highly renowned in the city. He uses witchcraft and the powers of demons to display satanic signs and wonders to the people. Now Philip becomes more esteemed among the people than Simon as the one true power of God manifests through the ministry of Phillip. A similar situation will later occur in Paul's ministry in Ephesus when compared to the seven sons of Sceva (19:13-14).

According to Justin Martyr, Simon was born in Gitton, a small village in Samaria. He was educated under Dositheus in Alexandria and became a gnostic. Simon's mixture of religion, philosophy, and magic had gained him a reputation in Samaria.

Act 8:10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Simon has much attention as a sorcerer. When Peter and John arrived, he will feel neglected and attempt to buy back his reputation among the people.

Act 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

Satan's ministry is to imitate the works of God.

CONVERSIONS IN SAMARIA

Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Philip preaches three things: Christ (verse five), the kingdom of God (verse 12), and the name of Jesus (verse 12).

Act 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Coming from a background of sorcery, Simon has seen spiritual signs through demons. Now he is observing the true signs from God and is able to recognize the difference between the two. Simon is converted and strongly desire's to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He follows Philip closely to learn how he is able to perform these miracles.

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

Hearing about the conversion of the Samaritans (the first Gentiles to be converted), Peter and John were sent to the converts and prayed for them to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John are gifted by the Holy Spirit in leading others into the infilling. Philip is gifted in leading others into the new birth and getting them healed. Philip's weakness is getting people filled with the Holy Spirit. These disciples serve as a reminder that we all need each other as team members in the body of Christ. One person is not gifted to operate in all areas.

8:14 A Spirit-Filled Revival, HOLY SPIRIT FULLNESS. Peter and John's concern for the Samaritan revival directly relates to their desire that those born of the Holy Spirit also received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The text and their ministry clearly differentiate water baptism (verses 12, 16) from receiving the Holy Spirit's fullness (verse 17). The apostles laid hands on the converts, and they received the Holy Spirit with miracle signs. This attracted the interest of Simon the sorcerer (verses 18-19), who desired the same power demonstrated by the apostles as they laid hands on the converts. For the apostles, the Holy Spirit fullness was no small matter; their focus and approach were dedicated toward guaranteeing the transmission of the power of Pentecost among new believers. They obviously felt the need for every believer to become equipped with power, as sure as each of them had received new life in Christ and obeyed Him in water baptism. Such leadership is still needed in the church today.

INFILLINGS IN SAMARIA

Act 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

the Holy Spirit, just like salvation and every gift of God, has already been given. The prayer is not for the Holy Spirit to fall or come on them; He has already come in chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is already present and desires to fill these new believers.

The hindrance is not the Holy Spirit, but the will of the people. They need to be taught and prayed for to receive the Holy Spirit. This is the key to everything in the Christian life. Everything has been given in grace (2 Peter 1:3). Faith responds and receives the grace, the gifts which have already been given.

Peter and John are not prejudice against these people and neither are the leaders at Jerusalem (at this time). They are happy and rejoice with the Samaritans when they hear of their new births and the revival which hits the city. Peter and John are joyous when these new converts received the same Holy Spirit and the same experience they had received at Pentecost.

Act 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Philip had ministered to them the new birth, healings, miracles, and baptism.

Act 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritan believers and they received the Holy Spirit. The assumption can be made that the infilling of the Samaritan believers was accompanied by speaking in tongues. Simon would have sought while the apostles had because there had been some manifestation.

SIMON TRIES TO BUY POWER

Act 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Simon now wants the popularity and position of prominence he once held in Samaria returned to him and offers money to have this power.

Act 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

God does give this authority, but never to exalt a man, and never for money.

Act 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Simon is headed toward the sin unto death, as was the case with Ananias and Sapphira. He is not headed toward hell, because he has received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Instead, Simon has opened himself up to the destruction of his physical body because of his thoughts and words against the gospel and the will of God.

Act 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter (logos: utterance) for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

The utterance given by the people is speaking in tongues. Simon wants the authority associated with the Holy Spirit, but his motives are wrong. Peter tells Simon he has no part in operating in the power of God because of his wrong heart.

To fully enter into the plan of God, our motives and desires should be to help others, not to enhance who we are. The focus should be on God, not on us!

PETER CALLS SIMON TO REPENTANCE

Act 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Sin always begins with the thought of the heart. Not only should we ask forgiveness for the act of sin, we should also ask forgiveness for the thought of sin (1 John 1:9).

Act 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Peter perceives in his spirit that Simon's heart was not right before God (Mark 2:8; Luke 9:47).

8:23 The Bonds of Unforgiveness, DELIVERANCE. A sorcerer is one who deceives, manipulates, and delights to control others and does so by demonic enablement. Peter identified the basis for Simon's sorcery as bitterness---the deepening effect of unforgiveness (verse 2). Here is warning regarding the danger of tolerated or embraced unforgiveness, which may, like poison, permeate and bind the soul, ultimately corrupting everything around it. In Simon's case, his bitterness shaped his passion to control others (verse 19)---which prompted his quest to purchase the ability to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though having believed and been baptized (verse 13), the residue of his past bondage surfaces as he unworthily seeks power to manipulate others for self-exalting purposes. Peter discerns the root of his bondage (verse 23) and summons Simon to repentance and deliverance. Though Simon did not repent, this episode still points to one of the foremost keys to deliverance from entrenched bondage in a believer's soul---the act of unforgiveness. Forgiving others from our heart flushes out the "poison" with the power of the Cross. In contrast, unforgiveness can, as with Simon, lead down paths we would never have imagined we could travel. (See Matthew 6:14-15; Colossians 3:13; Hebrews 12:15-17.)

Act 8:24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

As far as we know, Simon never becomes a notable believer.

Act 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Testimonies have a place where the Word is also taught. Peter and John continue preaching in many of the small cities of Samaria and then return to Jerusalem. Philip is still in Samaria and will receive supernatural instruction to go to Gaza.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (26-40)

Next, an angel instructs Philip to take a road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip obeys and comes upon an Ethiopian eunuch of great authority, reading the book of Isaiah. In explaining the scripture, Philip preaches Jesus to the eunuch who receives Jesus and then asks Philip to baptize him in water. The moment Philip and the eunuch come up out of the water, Philip is caught away by the Holy Spirit, and the eunuch goes his way rejoicing. Philip is carried away by the spirit to Azotus, where he continues to preach from there all the way to Caesarea.

THE ETHIOPIAN COMES TO WORSHIP

Act 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

Act 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great **authority** under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

The Ethiopian is third in power in his kingdom and his treasurer to the queen. He is very dedicated to his office, his call as a eunuch, and to the Lord. When Philip finds him, the Ethiopian is searching for the Lord more than in a religious way. The eunuch is searching the scriptures when Philip finds him. He has become a Jewish proselyte and is traveling back from Jerusalem where he traveled for the express purpose of worship. He had probably been there for six weeks, from Passover to Pentecost.

His sincere desire to know the Lord causes the angel to give supernatural guidance to Philip. Because of one man's desire to find God, God sends Philip miles out of his way to minister to him (compare Luke 7:1-10).

8:27 authority, *dunastes* (doo-nahs-tace); A high official, an important personage, a court official, one invested with power, a ruler, a sovereign, a prince, a royal minister, a potentate. (Compare "dynasty.") Luke 1:52 suggests that the *dunastes* of the world systems will be replaced by the Prince of Peace. In Acts 8:27, the *dunastes* only exists during the reign of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. Jesus' kingdom is a perpetual *dunastes* without end.

Act 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

The chariot is either moving slowly or standing still. The Ethiopian's chariot is similar to a stagecoach with a driver. The eunuch is sitting in the back of the chariot reading the Scriptures when Philip arrives. Later, he will command the driver to stop the chariot (verse 38).

PHILIP OBEYS THE SPIRIT

Act 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

Philip now understands why the Lord has sent him into the desert. He does not know who the Ethiopian is, but it does not matter. Philip is one man who has been responsible for the salvation of many in his home country.

Act 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

The Holy Spirit speaks to Philip and tells him to go to the chariot. Again, Philip is quick to obey. He actually runs! When he arrives, he hears the eunuch reading aloud at the very place of Isaiah's prophecy.

Act 8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

This is the purpose of ministry, to guide, not to dominate or run the lives of others. Guidance is still the cry of people today. When we act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, His job becomes ours. He is sent to guide us into all truth.

Act 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

Act 8:33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

Philip is quoting Isaiah 53:7-8 here.

Act 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

The eunuch has been blinded by religion and Satan and is unable to understand the simplest of Scriptures (2 Corinthians 4:4). God will use Philip to help lift the veil.

Act 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Philip preaches the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

THE EUNUCH IS BAPTIZED

Act 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

Philip also preaches water baptism to the eunuch, as he had to the Samaritans (verse 12).

Act 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Water baptism should come only after a person has believed on the Lord Jesus. It is not part of salvation but an action that accompanies salvation. Water baptism is an outward act showing the inward faith a person has toward the Lord; it is an outward expression of salvation, not part of the new birth.

Act 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Water baptism is a complete immersion. Philip and the eunuch both go into the water and after the eunuch is immersed, they both arise from the water, signifying the eunuch's passage from spiritual death to life.

PHILIP CAUGHT AWAY

Act 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Although the Bible doesn't tell the story, this man's life influences all of Ethiopia. For the next 600 years, Ethiopia resists the Muslims. Through the life of one man, the gospel infiltrated the government of his land.

Act 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Azotus is the ancient city of Ashdod in Philistia. The Greeks will be the next group of people Philip will evangelize. Philip will then travel from Azotus up the northern coast.