

Acts Chapter 8

- We're re-introduced to Saul, but this first part is about Philip the evangelist:
- We cannot understand the scriptures apart from the key.

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

John 5:39-40 “³⁹Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.”

- The scriptures, apart from Jesus are dead:

2 Corinthians 3:6 “... for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

- If you don't have Jesus in your heart you're never going to understand the scriptures - it's just that simple.
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V: 1 At this time the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious council was divided into two groups. The Sadducees, who were liberal, and the Pharisees, who were legalistic.

- The Sadducees controlled the council because the High Priest was a Sadducee. The Sadducees had been the main opponents to the church because they didn't believe in miracles, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead, and resurrection of Jesus in particular.
- They opposed the church because they were working all these marvelous, undeniable miracles in the name of their risen Lord Jesus. These miracles were drawing the attention of all the people in Jerusalem, which incited the Sadducees against the church.
- The Pharisees had taken somewhat of a “hands off” approach to the church. Remember that it was Gamaliel, Saul's rabbi, who suggested that they leave the disciples alone because if this movement was of men it would soon pass away, but if it was of God then you can't fight it lest you end up fighting God. (**Acts 5:38-39**).
- Stephen's dispute was primarily with the Pharisees which is what drew them into the fight. As the Pharisees joined the fray in the persecution of the church they were far more zealous than the Sadducees.
- Saul was consenting (voting), in agreement with Stephen's death.

- As a Pharisee he would likely have been present for Stephen's "trial" and more than likely because of the proximity of the event, to that of Jesus as well.
- Many of the believers scatter abroad "except the apostles."
- God's power was working so mightily among them, and so many people's lives were being touched and healed, that the religious leaders were helpless to do much about them, so they stayed.

V: 2 Steven was the first Christian martyr. A few years later he would be followed by James, the brother of John, and ultimately by millions who would give their lives for the testimony of Jesus

"... *they made a great lamentation over him.*"

- Why this great lamentation? Part of it could certainly have been the loss of a dear brother and the grief that comes with that. But shouldn't they have been rejoicing that he was now in the presence of the Lord?
- Later Paul would write to the church in Thessalonica to correct a misconception within the church.
- They were convinced that Jesus was coming back at any moment to set up His kingdom on earth, and they believed, that anyone who died prior to His coming was going to miss out on the glorious reign of Christ and the kingdom age.

So Paul wrote:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 "13But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. 15For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

- This mis-perception might have been present within the early church and might have been the reason for the "great lamentation", thinking Stephen was going to miss out. Had they understood the truth that Stephen was alive and in the presence of God they would have rejoiced for him.

V: 3-4 By his own admission, Saul persecuted the church, persecuted Christians unto death.

1 Corinthians 15:9 “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

Galatians 1:13 “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jew’s religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:”

- After Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus and his eventual return to Jerusalem people were afraid of him and it took some convincing before they believed him to be truly saved.
- So we have Saul wreaking havoc in the church, persecution - common sense would dictate that this would be bad for the church, have a diminishing effect - but it had just the opposite effect.
- The church was primarily located in Jerusalem at that time, meaning that it was for the most part comprised of Jewish believers.
- Jesus sent His disciples out to the children of Israel first, then eventually to the Gentiles, even though there were a few Gentile believers running around like the demoniacs that got saved, or the woman from Tyre who’s daughter was healed, and the centurion who’s servant was healed, but at that time the Gentile believers were the minority, the Church for a short time was primarily Jewish.
- The Gospel is being spread now throughout Judea, Samaria, and everywhere abroad preaching the word just as Jesus said would happen.

Acts 1:8 “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

- *Now we switch gears from Stephen and our introduction to Paul and look at another of the 7 deacons - Philip.*

V: 5-6 Philip was in Jerusalem, where they laid hands on him, and now being guided by the Holy Spirit he goes “down” to the city of Samaria.

Map / Jerusalem / Samaria

- Philip preached Christ, not Christian living, or self help - he preached Jesus.
- This was an obvious move of the Holy Spirit in part indicated by their unity.

James 3:17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

- They gave heed, they listened and took it to heart.
- Part of the reason they listened to Philip was that they both heard about and saw the miracles that God did through him. This caused them to pay attention to Philip - which was one of the purposes of the miracles, to validate the messenger.
- There is a benevolent aspect to people being miraculously healed, or other miracles - but the real intent is that God would be glorified, and that the messenger would be validated. Miracles don't bring people to faith, God's Word brings people to faith.

Romans 10:17 "So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

- It is worth noting that Philip is not an "Apostle", in fact neither was Stephen, yet both of these men are being used of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do miraculous things.
- In other words the gifts of the Spirit were not limited to the Apostles themselves. These gifts continued long after the Apostles were off the scene.

V: 7-8 Here we have a sampling of the miracles that were done.

- Demons cast out of those that were possessed of them.
- Healing those that had the palsies; the long term effect of STD's.
- Those that were lame, most likely from assorted birth defects, like the man with the withered arm that Jesus healed in the Synagogue in Nazareth, or the lame man before the Temple that Peter and John prayed for. Things considered impossible for men to impact because they were like that from birth, or from injuries that could not be reversed.
- The work of Jesus is continuing just as He said it would:

John 14:12 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do..."

- The bottom line is that they were healed, from spiritual issues, from moral issues, and from physical issues, and there was great joy - our God can do it all!
- Whenever the gospel is received and wherever God is at work in the hearts of people, there is joy. Too many people have no joy, too many Christians have no joy!

John 15:11 “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

- Joy is also the result of prayer and fellowship with Him.

John 16:24 “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

1 John 1:3-4 “³That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

- The greatest joy is yet to come!

Jude 24 “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,”

- When we are presented by Jesus to our Father!

Psalms 16:11 “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Matthew 25:21 “His Lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

- So there is great joy in the church, things were going quite well at this point, then we come to the next verse that starts with “but..”

V: 9-11 But Simon... referred to as “Simon the sorcerer” was in the midst of the people and had for some time influenced the locals, possibly intimidating them, or taking advantage of them in some way. Held in high regard because of his “powers”.

- He bewitched / astounded the people and allowed the people to think of him as being somehow connected to the power of God.
- Even today Jewish mysticism or “Kabala” is an influence within Judaism and those looking for a spiritual experience apart from Jesus

V: 12 Another contrast, in spite of Simon the sorcerer’s influence - they believed Philip who was preaching the name of Jesus and the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

- They believed, and they took action upon that belief - they were baptized, a public proclamation of their faith.

- They heard the word and became doer's of the word.

1 John 3:18 "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

- Our actions often define or faith:

James 2:17-18 "¹⁷Even so faith if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

V: 13 Then Simon "believed" and was baptized, and continued with Philip observing all that he was doing, being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- At first glance this looks like an awesome miracle itself, that a notable sinner got saved.
- The truth will come out later that it was all a sham, a public statement made to gain some advantage with the other believers.
- It is possible to believe as Simon does here, and not be a born again believer...

James 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

- This is one of the first examples of someone saying that they are a Christian when they really weren't. We see a lot of that today, that is why Jesus told us:

Matthew 7:16-18 "¹⁶Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs or thistles? ¹⁷Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither dan a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

- Peter would discern this in **V: 21-22** You have no part with us in this matter, your heart is not right with God, being in the gall of bitterness, and bondage to iniquity or sin.
- These are not evidences of true salvation. (13)

V: 14-17 Hearing that God was moving and working this way in Samaria they sent Peter and John.

- You would think that given their status that Peter and John would have been doing the sending, yet they are the sent ones (Apostles).
- Gotta wonder if it was awkward telling the 1st Pope what to do and where to go...

- All kidding aside, isn't it awesome that these two Apostles saw themselves as servants and were willing to be sent!
- When we get to **Acts 10** Peter is sent to the Gentiles, to the house of Cornelius which would be a stretch for him in his walk, but here God gives him an intermediate step sending him to the Samaritans who were considered a step in between the Jews and the Gentiles.
- Peter and John came to join Philip seemingly with a purpose in mind: to pray that they would ¹⁵receive the Holy Ghost."
- They were baptized in the name of Jesus, not John the Baptist. Baptized in the name of Jesus - believers (V:12) and thus filled with the Holy Spirit; so the laying on of hands and prayer was to receive the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit.
- The distinction here is the difference between the Holy Spirit in-dwelling us, coming into us, being filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit flowing from us, overflowing us, commonly referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- A separate and distinct event for this particular group of believers.
- Although Philip was gifted of God to perform miracles of healing, and driving out demons he apparently didn't have the gift of the laying on of hands for people to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John had that gift, but Philip didn't.

1 Corinthians 12:11 "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will."

V: 18-20 Simon the sorcerer saw these things and watched seemingly how it happened, through the laying on of hands - so he offered them money to give him the power so that he could be the focus of the attention once again.

- Anytime we find ourselves desiring God's power in our lives, we must stop and check our motivations. Is our true desire to bring Him glory, or to bring attention to ourselves?
 - This is what is today referred to as "Simony" the practice of paying or bribing someone to get the office of leadership, a common practice during the dark ages within the Roman Catholic Church.
 - But Peter wasn't having that! "Your money perish with you!" We can't buy salvation, we can't buy the power of the Holy Spirit - it is the gift of God!
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- Philip being led of the Spirit is busy evangelizing to the people of Samaria, leading many to the Lord - and seemingly Simon the sorcerer is caught up in all of this, professing the he too is a believer and got baptized.
 - The Apostles in Jerusalem hear that God is moving and working in Samaria and send Peter and John to strengthen the believers and pray for their baptism in the Holy Spirit.
 - Even though salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit can be simultaneous we see here that these are distinct events.
 - It was necessary for two of the Apostles, Peter and John, to come from Jerusalem, put their hands on the converts, and impart to them the gift of the Spirit.
 - Why? Because God wanted to unite the Samaritan believers with the original Jewish church in Jerusalem.
 - God did not want two churches that would perpetuate the division and conflict that had existed for centuries.
 - In **Matthew 16** Jesus had given Peter the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”, which meant that Peter had the privilege of “opening the door of faith” to others. He opened the door to the Jews at Pentecost, and now he opened the door to the Samaritans. Later, he would open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 10).
 - As Peter and John arrive they begin to minister and soon discern the truth about Simon the sorcerer because of his attempt to purchase the baptism of the Holy Spirit with money.
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V: 20 “*Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee....*” meaning he is perishing, dying, not going to heaven... “your money go with you where you are going, which is to hell...”

V: 21 You have nothing to do with this: not part in the kingdom of heaven, no part in the baptism and or power of the Holy Spirit.

- This is a bold statement on Peter’s part; he is exercising the Spiritual gift of the discerning of spirits.
- Peter also gives the reason: “... *for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*”
- Simon confessed Christ, he was baptized... these would seem to be evidences of salvation yet he wasn’t saved.

- His words and actions are things that we can observe; but God see's things differently.

1 Samuel 16:7 "... for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

2 Chronicles 6:30 "Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; for thou only knowest the hearts o the children of men."

V: 22-23 Peter reveals and identifies the problem then he gives him clear direction and a path to success.

1. Repent! Turn away from your sin, and move towards God.
2. Pray: Humble yourself before God and seek His face in humility admitting your fault.

V: 24 Validating what Peter has discerned; Simon rejects Peter's counsel and says essentially. "No, you pray for me, that none of what you said comes true.

Acts 2:41-42 "⁴¹Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. ⁴²And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

- Simon wouldn't pray, nor would he repent - in his un-regenerate state he is going to perish.

V: 25 Peter and John preached the Lord Jesus, testified about Him, and had laid hands on the new believers (V: 17) they departed back for Jerusalem, and along the way they continued preaching the Gospel throughout the region of Samaria.

- The religious Jews pretty much avoided the Samaritans because they were considered half breeds and defiled. Jesus made it a point to go directly to Samaria and minister to the Samaritans.
- [\(Map\)](#) There is the city of Samaria, the region of Samaria, and the capital of Samaria which is Shechem.
- The fact that Peter and John preached the Gospel in many of the villages of the Samaritans demonstrates that God was working in their hearts, breaking down the prejudices that they's been taught their whole lives.

As Paul describes:

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

V: 26-40 The account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

V: 26 The angel of the Lord; the angel bearing God’s instruction spoke to Philip and said go!

- Philip is working, serving, and listening; he’s inclined his ear, he recognized the voice, and he’s committed to obedience.

Isaiah 30:21 “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

- The natural instinct would be to stay and participate in what God is doing in Samaria.
- He’s being redirected from the city of Samaria, in the North - to the road leading from Jerusalem towards Gaza in the south.
- **Map:** The modern highway that leads towards the coast, then South towards Gaza is over the same route as the original Roman roadway.
- There are still remnants of that ancient road today:

V: 27-28 The Spirit says go and we see that he is obedient and he goes.

- Philip arose and went, but this was not a quick trip, it was quite a distance from Samaria to and through Jerusalem, then heading towards the coast.
- As Philip was obedient he arrives at a “divine appointment” - something that God had arranged for His purposes and glory, he encounters the Ethiopian Eunuch.
- This Ethiopian is described as a man of great authority, the treasurer in Candace the queen of Ethiopia’s court. He had a heart for the things of the Lord in that he came to Jerusalem to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;
- God who knows all things saw this man who had come from so far away, making his way to Jerusalem to find God, but all he found was a bunch of scheisters hawking religion, and profiteering off of the people.
- Now he’s on his way home, disappointed, empty, but searching the scriptures, looking for the true God, crying out from his heart, “O God, I want to know you!”
- So God sends Philip.

Jeremiah 29:13 “And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.”

- He is kicking back in his chariot and reading the book / scroll of Isaiah.

To me this is kind of a picture of what Jesus described:

Matthew 18:12-14 “¹²How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? ¹³And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. ¹⁴Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

V: 29-31 Philip arrived on scene, now the Holy Spirit speaks to Philip, directing him to go near and join the Ethiopian. Philip is given direction one step at a time, as is often the same for us. First complete step one, then we will be given the next step.

- When the Spirit spoke to Philip, how did he respond? Enthusiastically! He ran over to the Ethiopian.
- The word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek words *en* and *theos*, meaning, “full of God.”
- He had just travelled 80 or so miles on foot, but in response to the Lord’s command “he ran.”

Colossians 3:23 “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

- This Ethiopian was an intelligent man, you don’t get to be the treasurer of the Queen by being a dummy. He was seeking understanding regarding the True and the Living God, and God sent him a tutor, someone to help.

James 1:5 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

God sent him the help he needed:

Romans 10:13-15 “¹³For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

V: 32-35 The place where the Eunuch was reading from was **Isaiah 53:7-8**.

- The Eunuch asked Philip who the scripture was speaking about?
- Philip began at this scripture to preach **Jesus** to him.
- Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the “5th Gospel”, or the “Gospel to the Jews”, I’ve heard it described as the “Gospel according to Isaiah.”
- The Ethiopian would presumably be a Gentile, but there is a possibility that he could be Jewish - through Solomon’s interaction with the Queen of Sheba.
- Ethiopian monarchs ruled Ethiopia since biblical times right up until Haile Selassie who claimed he could trace his genealogy directly back to Solomon & the Queen of Sheba.

Look again at verse 33.

“33b... **for His life was taken from the earth.**” (incomplete)

Isaiah 53:8b “... **for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was He stricken.**”

- What an awesome starting point to share the Gospel, beginning with a prophesy that describes the Messiah who would sacrifice Himself for His people!

V: 36-38 Philip and the Eunuch are cruising along in the Eunuch’s chariot (Philip got an up-grade from coach to 1st class!) when they got to the only water between Jerusalem and the coast.

Pictures: of the “way station” along the road.

- Seeing the water the Eunuch asked to be baptized. Baptism must have been part of the conversation that isn’t recorded in scripture.
- But again we see a willing heart that wants to please the Lord, action that correlates to a real faith, faith that is manifest.
- Philip sets the requirement: “**If thou believest with all thine heart...**” Full commitment.
- Notice he didn’t say, “well first you need to complete this six week course for new converts...” “fill out these forms, and when they’re approved” “after you join the church.

- No, none of that. If you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, your Lord, then you're good to go!
- You need to first be a believer, then it's appropriate to get baptized.

Romans 10:9 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

- The eunuch's response: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
- The eunuch found what he had been looking for. Not a ritualistic religion, not a denomination, he found the True and the Living God in a personal relationship with Jesus!
- So they stopped the chariot, they both went down into the water together and Philip baptized the eunuch. (Full immersion)

Three reasons to be baptized:

1. **Obedience to Jesus.**
2. **Public profession of faith.**
3. **Identifying with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection.**

1 Peter 3:21b (describing baptism) “baptism, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Romans 6:4 “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

V: 39-40 That must have been a trip! The eunuch is in the water coming out, Philip has his hands on him helping him into then out of the water and whoosh!

- The eunuch is left standing on his own, and Philip is suddenly standing in Azotus / Ashdod another 20 or so miles away from the Ethiopian eunuch.
- “caught away” / “caught up” - “*harpazo*” the same greek word used by Paul in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** to describe the rapture.
- This is another miracle all by itself - that leaves the eunuch rejoicing, and Philip finds himself just preaching the Gospel as he makes his way to Caesarea.
- Wherever he finds himself he just preaches Jesus:

2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

- The Ethiopian presumably makes his way back to Ethiopia and according to tradition, this man took Christianity back to Ethiopia. There has been a continuous church in Ethiopia that traces itself back to this Ethiopian eunuch.

1 Corinthians 2:14 “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

- Until a person comes to faith in Jesus, he or she doesn't yet have the Holy Spirit to reveal the deep truths of God's Word.