

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

The final testimony to the rulers of the Jewish people had been given. It was rejected, and the Spirit-filled messenger killed. The last offer had therefore been completely rejected and the Gospel is now soon to be sent far hence to the Gentiles; those that are afar off are to be brought nigh. The eighth chapter is a transition chapter. The Gospel is preached in Samaria. The instrument used is not Peter or John, but Philip.

We divide this chapter into five parts:

- I. The first great persecution** (Verses 1-3).
- II. The preaching of the scattered believers. Philip in Samaria** (Verses 4-8).
- III. The events in Samaria** (Verses 9-24).
- IV. The Gospel in many villages of Samaria** (Verse 25).
- V. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch** (Verses 26-40).

### **I. The first great persecution.**

**“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. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison”** (Verses 1-3).

The first sentence with which this chapter starts belongs to the preceding chapter.

The young Pharisee, who soon takes the prominent place in this book, was in perfect agreement with the awful deed committed. He rejoiced. The death of Stephen was with his fullest approval. He took pleasure in it. He was an eye-witness to the entire suffering of Stephen from the moment the dispute took place to the time when the stones fell upon him outside of the city and his blood was shed.

Later he refers to the scene, which must have been impossible for him to erase from his memory.

**“When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:20).**

Concerning Saul the Lord said to Ananias, **“I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (9:16).** What was done unto Stephen was done unto Saul. The Jews and Saul with them, as we believe, disputed and resisted Stephen in the synagogue. The Jews disputed with Paul, resisted him, and rejected his testimony.

- Stephen was accused of blasphemy; so was Paul (Acts 19:37).
- Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses, the holy place and the customs; so was Paul (Acts 21:28; 24:6; 25:8; 28:17).
- They rushed upon Stephen with one accord and seized him. The same happened to Paul (Acts 19:29).
- Stephen was dragged out of the city. So was Paul (Acts 14:19).
- Stephen was tried before the Sanhedrim; so did Paul appear before the Sanhedrim.
- Stephen was stoned and Paul was stoned at Lystra.
- Stephen suffered martyrdom; so did Paul in Rome.

And yet, with all the sufferings that Paul had to undergo, he rejoiced. His eyes rested constantly upon that glorious one, whom Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, beheld in Glory. Later we hear him crying out from the prison in Rome, **“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Philippians 3:10).**

The first great persecution then broke out against the church in Jerusalem.

The words of the Lord concerning His own, that they were to suffer and to be hated, were fully carried out. Saul was evidently the leader. Perhaps from the very scene of bloodshed he led forth a mob of people, like so many tigers, having seen blood.

There is no detailed account of the persecution. They were driven out of Jerusalem. Houses were entered and men and women dragged out of them and put into prison.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, no doubt, refers to this first great persecution.

**“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of affliction. Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Hebrews 10:32-34).**

They were disgraced, flogged, their goods were taken from them and they were driven out of the city. All this they stood joyfully.

There is no record of anyone appealing to the Roman law. How many believers would in our day endure such persecution! But even this was only the beginning. Hundreds of years followed of the most cruel and satanic persecutions in which uncountable numbers were tortured, cast into dungeons, starved to death, burned alive, sawn asunder, cast before wild animals; every conceivable cruelty was practiced upon Christians. But the roaring lion had to withdraw, defeated.

Saul is the leading figure in this great persecution. He ravaged and laid waste the church.

What a miracle of grace to hear him later refer to his conduct, **“I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women”** (22:4). **“I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee. And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto His death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him”** (Acts 22:19, 20). **“Which thing I did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities”** (Acts 26:10, 11).

He called himself a blasphemer and a persecutor (I Timothy 1:13).

What light these confessions of the great apostle shed upon the brief record here in our chapter. In the Epistle to the Galatians and in I Corinthians he declares that he persecuted the church of God (I Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13). This should for once dispel the new teaching which has arisen, that the church did not come into existence till Paul had received the revelation concerning the church. That the church began on the day of Pentecost is frequently denied. But how could Paul persecute the church, if there was no church at all?

Then we see Stephen laid aside. His mangled body was carried by devout men to its resting place, while his spirit was in the presence of the Lord. These devout men were men like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Their lamentations were a Jewish characteristic. The Hope of Glory was not known to them. Later even the Thessalonian Christians sorrowed as others, who have no hope (I Thessalonians 4:13).

Then was made known that **“blessed Hope,”** which should forever dispel the sorrow and lamentations of God’s people. But that hope was unknown in the beginning of Acts.

## **II. The preaching of the scattered believers. Philip in Samaria.**

**“They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ. And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For from many of those which had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed. And there was much joy in that city”** (Verses 4-8).

They were scattered abroad. Only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem (verse 1). This has been explained as a failure on the side of the twelve. It is incorrect; God guided them and kept them there. That they were not arrested and also put into prison may perhaps be explained by the fact that they were not Hellenists, but natives of the land. The persecution may have been the severest against the Grecian Jews.

And now for the first time we learn that *“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”*

**“They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”**

God permitted all these hardships, that the precious seed of His own Word might now be scattered abroad by the suffering saints. The Lord had said that they were to be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but also in Judea and in Samaria. This He accomplished by the suffering of His people. What a sight it must have been when they went north from Jerusalem!

A stream of men, women and children, in bodily pain from the hands of cruel men, stripped of their belongings, pours forth from the gates of the city. They were cast upon the Lord as never before and the Lord became more real to their hearts. And then they went about preaching. Everyone was a preacher. The great head of the church, not some ecclesiastical council, some committee, which ordained them and gave them authority, but the Lord Himself sent them out as His witnesses. Alas! what a contrast with ecclesiasticism of today with its man-made rules, its crystallized forms, ordinations, recognitions, etc.

And such an exodus from the city, out of which the Lord had been led forth to suffer outside the gate, has been repeated over and over again in the history of the church with like gracious results in scattering the seed of the Word. We mention only the Waldenses and the Huguenots. Satanic powers produced the first great persecution. But the wrath of the enemy had to praise the Lord. Out of it all there was brought Glory to Himself.

And now Philip comes in view. He was not an Apostle, but a Grecian Jew, one of the seven which had been chosen to look after the poor. The first great missionary move was therefore not accomplished by apostolic authority, or apostolic leadership, nor by the decree of an apostolic council, but by the Lord Himself, who chose His own instrument and led him forth into the field.

And He led Philip to Samaria where He Himself had gone, yea, to the very city of Samaria, which is Sychar. There He had once gone on the weary journey, and tired on account of the way, **“He sat thus on the well”** (John 4).

The servant of the Lord Jesus Christ went the same road.

What a comfort to remember when the servant is tired that He knows of this weariness. The Samaritans were not a race of strangers altogether, but they had Israelitish blood in them. They had claimed to possess the true law and the temple. A division was the result and they were hated. As we read in the Gospel of John, **“The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans”** (John 4:9). The soil there, however, had been prepared.

The Samaritans in large numbers had believed on Him, for the words of the woman with whom the Lord had that memorable conversation at Jacob's well. They invited the Lord to tarry, and many more believed on Him and these said unto the woman, **"Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know indeed that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world"** (John 4:42).

Among this people Philip appeared and preached Christ. With one accord they gave heed to these things. Had he preached something else it would not have been so. The great message still is to preach Christ. Miracles also took place. Unclean spirits were driven out, many taken with palsies and that were lame were healed, so that there was great joy in that city. These miracles in Samaria were of special significance of which we shall hear in the verses which follow.

Philip did miracles in connection with preaching the Gospel. Unclean spirits are especially mentioned. They came out of many which were possessed by them.

Like Judea, Samaria seems to have been much afflicted by demon possessions.

The city where Philip preached and the miracles were done, rejoiced greatly. **"There was great joy in that city"** (verse 8). Miracles were in order then because the Word of God was not yet complete. Now after the Revelation of God is complete, miracles are no longer a necessity. Faith rests upon the Word of God and not upon miracles. The verses which follow show that there was a special significance in the miracles done by Philip in Samaria.

### **III. The Events in Samaria.**

**"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: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 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. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done"** (Verses 9-13).

A sinister person is now introduced in this historical account.

Simon Magus, as he is called, was an instrument of Satan - most likely used in a special way to keep the Samaritans in darkness and counteract the work of the Lord, which had been accomplished there (John 3). He had bewitched the Samaritans, who were much given to all kinds of superstitions.

The superstitiousness of this people resulted in the fall of Pontius Pilate.

About the year 35 A.D., a deceiver had appeared in Samaria and claimed that the sacred vessels were hidden by Moses on Mount Gerizim and that he would discover them.

A very large multitude followed him, but Pilate was there also with soldiers and drove the people away. Large numbers of them were killed. The Samaritans made a complaint to Vitellius, the proconsul of Syria, who had Pilate dispatched to Rome to be tried.

Simon was one of the numerous persons who preached all kinds of evil and forbidden things. With his wicked sorceries he had ensnared the people.

Suetonius, a Roman historian, who lived in the first part of the second century of our era, gives the information that the whole eastern countries were at that time overrun with all kinds of wonder-workers, astrologers, healers and necromancers. One of the greatest was Apollonius of Tyanaeus, who died about 97 A.D. He was a great sorcerer and worker of miracles. His life and supposed miracles were often compared with those of our Lord.

Satan had anticipated the coming of the Gospel and used this man to keep the Samaritans in bondage, to counterfeit the power of God, and to oppose the truth. Simon used sorcery, and had amazed the Samaritans with his acts of sorceries. Satan revealed his powers through him, and Simon himself claimed to be some great one, perhaps the incarnation of some higher being.

The people of Samaria had believed him and his lying wonders, and even called him **“that man is the great power of God.”**

He was a false prophet and his signs and miracles he did, sprung from an evil source. All this is full of significance. Satan still counterfeits the Power of God. For the end of this present age there is predicted the manifestation of Satan in all power and signs and lying wonders (II Thessalonians 2:9).

As the age nears its close and with it the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory, Satan with his host of demons becomes increasingly active, ensnaring the people and leading on into blindness those who reject the Gospel. As in the days of the Evangelist Philip, so now he uses men as his instruments. Simon Magus is reproduced in our days not only in persons who, deluded as they are, claim to be some great one, but in systems, such as Spiritualism, Christian Science and Millennial Dawnism.

The hour of deliverance came for the Samaritans when Philip preached the Word, concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Signs and great miracles followed, and the Samaritans believed and were baptized. The miracles were done to show the power of God, to attest the preaching of the Gospel by Philip, and to expose the counterfeit powers of Simon. And he, like the sorcerers of Egypt, had to own that this was the power of God.

He was amazed when he beheld the great miracles. But more than that, he also believed, was baptized and then continued with Philip. But his faith was not through the Word of God. God's word alone can produce faith in man, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Simon was captivated by the miracles he had seen.

He believed in the same way as the many of whom we read in John 2.

**“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, on the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles He did.”**

But was this the true faith? Was this a saving faith? Are miracles necessary to believe?

The last two verses of the second chapter of John answer these questions. **“But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man.”**

He knew their believing on Him was not in truth. And so Simon Magus believed in the miracles. He also submitted to water baptism from the hands of Philip, which completely disproves that unscriptural teaching that water baptism is a saving ordinance, and that the new birth takes place in that act.

He continued with Philip. This also is significant.

He kept close in the company of the evangelist, no doubt to watch him and see whether he could discover the secret of the power of Philip. In the truth, in the Word of God, that wicked man had absolutely no part. Philip did not discern him. The attitude of Simon and his outward profession must, therefore, have been very cleverly devised. The discovery, however, came when Peter and John appeared in Samaria.

**“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Verses 14-24).**

From Jerusalem, Peter and John were sent by the apostles to Samaria. The Holy Spirit had not been given to the Samaritans. After the two apostles had prayed for them and laid their hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. This fact, that the Holy Spirit was given after the prayer of Peter and John, has led to erroneous teaching.

Ritualistic Christendom uses this passage in the defence of its traditional teachings of apostolic succession and different rites, which have no foundation in the Scriptures.

A recent commentary on the Book of Acts makes the following remarks on these verses:

“The Apostles supposed that the Holy Spirit would be given in answer to prayer and the laying on of their hands. Their expectation was justified; and the church has accepted this as the normal method. Luke gives us, in all, four accounts of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Chapters 2; 8; 10 and 19). On two occasions (Pentecost and Cornelius household) the gift itself was extraordinary. The two other occasions (Samaritans and disciples at Ephesus) were normal, and the gift was conveyed by prayer and the laying on of hands. These hands were apostolic; in the one case, those of Peter and John, in the other of Paul. Nowhere in the Acts is the laying on of hands by other than apostles mentioned in this connection; and it is evident from this incident that, although Philip was a prophet and one of the seven, although he preached the Word and baptized, yet he did not possess this power. We conclude then that, as Luke states it, through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Spirit is given. We are justified then, in finding here the beginning of the church’s rite of confirmation.”

Thus ritualism claims through the laying on of hands by men who are ordained through others, who likewise received ordination, and so back to the apostolic times to confer the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another erroneous teaching, built on the apostles communicating the Holy Spirit to these new believers, is one which becomes more frequent and is the source of much confusion among sincere Christians.

It is taught from this historical account that a person may be a believer without possessing the Holy Spirit. The reception of the Holy Spirit, it is claimed, is a work entirely distinct from conversion. A Christian believer may be saved for a long time and be entirely destitute of the Holy Spirit; in order to receive Him, the believer must seek the experience and receive the Spirit; this is a very widespread teaching. The case of the Samaritans is often quoted to uphold this teaching.

All these wrong interpretations and wrong teachings would be avoided if the dispensational character of this part of the Acts of the Apostles were recognized. We have no teaching concerning the Holy Spirit and how He is to be received in this passage.

The doctrine of the Spirit and how the believer receives Him and His work in the believer is not taught in the Acts of the Apostles. This is a historical account, and if one holds to this and to the fact that Samaria (John 4:19-24) had a controversy with Jerusalem, the coming of the Apostles from Jerusalem, and the withholding of the Holy Spirit from the Samaritans till Peter and John arrived, becomes plain at once.

The Samaritan believers had to be identified with those in Jerusalem, so much the more because there was a schism between Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria had denied both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This had to be ended and could no longer be tolerated. It was therefore divinely ordered that the gift of the Spirit in their case should be withheld till the two apostles came from Jerusalem.

This meant an acknowledgment of Jerusalem; if the Holy Spirit had been imparted unto them at once it might have resulted in a continuance of the existing rivalry.

And Peter is in the foreground and uses the keys here with the Samaritans as he did on the day of Pentecost with the Jews and later with the Gentiles. Nowhere in the church Epistles, in which the great salvation truths and blessings in Christ Jesus are revealed, is there a word said about receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, or that one who has trusted in Christ and is born again should seek the gift of the Holy Spirit afterward.

When we reach the nineteenth chapter of this book we shall follow this at greater length.

There is no record here that the gift of the Spirit was attended by outward signs, such as speaking in tongues. Some manifestation must have accompanied the gift, for Simon “saw” that the Holy Spirit was given by the apostles’ hands. Then the wickedness of his heart was revealed when he offered them money for the same power to impart the gift. He is now completely uncovered.

No work of God had been produced in his soul or he would not have uttered such wicked words. His whole desire was to get power and pay for it. He made merchandise of that which is the gift of God, and all for his own advantage and for vainglory.

And this sin, which has been termed “*Simony*,” is still alive in many different phases.

One must think here in connection with Simon of the present day movement called “Christian Science.” This system uses no doubt occult things and contains philosophical speculation, which were not unknown to Simon the Sorcerer. But to become a successful healer a certain sum of money must be paid. The secret of power to heal is sold. And what else could one say of the more subtle forms of this sin? And now the two Simons face each other, Simon Peter and Simon Magus.

Peter at once detected the wicked heart of the man through whom the enemy of God had spoken. In holy indignation and condemnation Peter burst forth: “**Thy money perish with thee!**”

The sorcerer with his wicked heart thought that the Gift of God could be purchased with money. In this the aim was the Gospel itself. Salvation and all that is connected with it, including the Spirit, is the Gift of God, without money and without price; it cannot be earned nor bought. He had no part nor lot in this matter. And this is true of all who in the depravity of their hearts think of obtaining the power of God by what they do.

He sees himself uncovered and exposed “**in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity**” in spite of his outward profession, his baptism and association with Philip.

And while Peter thus spoke these burning words against him, he also exhorted him to repentance and prayer.

Simon Magus is a type of what apostate, self-centered, self-seeking Christendom is, as well as of that person who is the “**son of perdition**,” the personal Antichrist. And what had Simon to answer? “**Then answered Simon and said: Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me**” (Verse 24).

He was alarmed. He trembled like the demons, who believe and tremble. There is no confession from his lips, no self-judgment. He does not exhibit confidence in the Lord nor does he ask for forgiveness. He was not moved by repentance, but only by fear. We do not read anything again of him in the Word of God.

Much is reported of Simon the sorcerer by the most ancient sources, the writings of the so-called fathers. Justin Martyr, who was a native of Samaria, who lived about a hundred years later, tells us that Simon held the doctrines of Gnosticism (the same which have appeared in a modern garb in Christian Science) and that the Samaritans worshipped him as a divine being.

Epiphanius declares that he claimed deity among the Samaritans and that he was a Messianic pretender.

Other sources say that he became after this a greater enemy of the truth, and having lost his prestige in Samaria he went to Rome and there established a wicked movement, which became a gall and bitterness to the true believers there. That he should have met Peter again in Rome and found his end there is only a legend. It is certain that he did not repent.

But the Gospel stream was not arrested. The acts of the enemy came to naught. The roaring lion as exhibited in the Sanhedrim the first persecutions - the more cunning deception of the counterfeit Simon, the sorcerer, all came to naught.

#### **IV. The Gospel in many villages of Samaria.**

**“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” (Verse 25).**

The apostles had accomplished their mission. They are turning homeward. On that journey they carried out the divine commission to be His witnesses in Samaria. Many villages heard the Gospel from their lips and with joyful hearts they declared the good news. What stir it must have made! They followed the Lord who had gone through Samaria, and what joy it must have been in these Samaritan villages when these two Jews heralded the good news! This is the last thing reported of John in the Book of Acts. Besides the Epistle to Galatians we hear his name only mentioned in the Apocalypse.

#### **V. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch.**

**“And an 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. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a 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, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 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. 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: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 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? 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. 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. 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. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea” (Verses 26-40).**

The last part of our chapter contains the most interesting account of the acts of Philip.

Called by the Head of the church to go forth as an Evangelist to Samaria, after his work was finished in Jerusalem, he had been mightily used in preaching the Gospel. There is no record of the numbers who were saved. When the Gospel was preached in Jerusalem by Peter we hear of numbers (chapters 2:41; 4:4), because it was still an offer to the Jewish nation in connection with the promised Kingdom, but now as Jerusalem has rejected that offer and the Gospel goes forth to Samaria, and to the Gentiles, numbers are no longer mentioned.

During this age the number of those who accept the Gospel and become members of the body of Christ, the church, is unknown. One of the sad features of present day Evangelism with its sensationalism are the reports of how many converts have been made, how many signed cards or promised to lead a better life. To what untruths and other evils such methods lead we need not to follow here.

Philip’s ministry was greatly blest and so will every ministry still be used if it is done as under the Lord, in humility and dependence upon Himself.

With such a successful field before him Philip might have settled down to strengthen the new converts and reach out after other places in Samaria. But the work of the Evangelist is to move about and preach the Gospel from place to place. Philip is commanded to change his place of testimony. The command was communicated to him by an angel of the Lord. It was a heavenly messenger who was used to direct his way.

The angel may not have appeared to Philip in visible form, for the text tells us that he spoke to him and does not mention anything else. His message informs Philip of the way he is to take.

Later in the account when it is the question of imparting spiritual instruction and dealing with the eunuch not an angel, but the Spirit speaks to Philip.

The direction of the angel calls Philip away from his pleasant field of labor into a lonely and desert road.

How many objections he might have made to such a call. Why should he leave the populous city and villages of Samaria where the multitudes heard him gladly and go on a journey which would lead him into an uninhabited region and to a deserted city? \*

\* Gaza was deserted then. Gaza was a fortress in the extreme south of Palestine. It was destroyed by Alexander the Great in the fourth century before Christ. What was not destroyed by him was in the year 96 completely overthrown by the Maccabaeen prince Alexander so that it was literally a desert.

But Philip realized his place as a servant and that the servant's work is to be obedient to his Master.

His Lord had been in Samaria and Philip had reaped what the Lord had sown. He had been sent to reap that upon which he had not bestowed any labor (John 4:36-38). And now the Lord called and he obeyed. He arose and went.

Obedience to the Lord is a beautiful thing and must always result in blessing. Happy is the servant who can say **"I do always the will of Him that sent me."** If this is the attitude and the heart's desire the Lord will direct and show us the way in which we are to go.

Such a life of dependence on the Lord and obedience to the Lord is truly great and will bring an abundant harvest. The obedient Philip may also be looked upon as a type of the nation itself. Some day the remnant of Israel will go forth in obedience to the call of the Lord and publish good tidings. Then it will be fulfilled what is written in Isaiah.

**"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:7-8).**

But while the Lord had His eyes upon His toiling servant and directed him in the way, He also saw and knew the inquiring, hungry soul which traveled along that road towards Gaza. He knew his heart and his longing for the truth and then He brought Philip to meet this soul and through Him He graciously brought light and blessing to the eunuch. And thus He works still. Oh! for more childlike confidence in His guidance! A blessed thing it is to watch His leadings and to see His hand in even the minutest things.

The person journeying, most likely in a caravan, on the road to Gaza, was a man from Ethiopia. He was a eunuch of great authority under Candace Queen of the Ethiopians; he was her treasurer.

He had been in Jerusalem to worship, most likely to attend the feast of Pentecost and was sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah.

Who Queen Candace was, and in what part of Ethiopia her kingdom existed is learned from the Roman writer Pliny, and the Greek geographer Strabo.

Both declare that there were several queens by that name ruling over the Ethiopians. The head of her kingdom was Meroe.

The eunuch was one of those who looked to Jerusalem, for light and blessing and had gone there to worship. He returned unsatisfied, still a seeker. As eunuch he was by the law an outcast and could not enter the congregation of Israel; however blessings are promised to the eunuchs in the very book from which he was reading (Isaiah 56 :3-5).

And then the Spirit directed Philip to join himself to the chariot. The Ethiopian read the book of Isaiah aloud and Philip's question addressed to him was, "**Understandest thou what thou readeest?**"

He was reading the Greek translation of that all important chapter, the fifty-third. He read of Him who was led as a sheep to the slaughter and opened not his mouth. By his question the eunuch showed his ignorance in the Scriptures. He did not know that the passage had any reference to the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah of Israel.

"One would wonder that whilst he was at Jerusalem he should have heard nothing concerning Jesus. Or perhaps what he heard of Him was the occasion of his studying at this time that passage in Isaiah's prophecy." \*

\* Lightfoot in Hebrew and Talmudical exercitations upon the Acts.

It was then on that lonely road that Philip preached Jesus unto him.

He began at the same Scripture, which indeed is a good starting point. And the message Philip preached, showing Jesus as the One in whom these prophecies were fulfilled, was at once accepted by the seeking eunuch. He who by the law is excluded from the congregation of Israel is now received into another congregation, even joined to the Lord and added to the company which are saved. Nothing could hinder baptism, for he had believed; he himself asks to be baptized.

The profession of faith put by this verse in the mouth of the Ethiopian anticipates Paul.

The first time that Christ is preached that He is the Son of God is in Acts 9:20. Peter preached Him as the rejected Jesus of Nazareth, raised from the dead and Philip simply preached Jesus. It was reserved for Paul to declare the fulness of the Gospel of the Son of God, that Gospel of which he writes to the Galatians "**I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ**" (Galatians 1:12).

The baptism takes place. Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and when they were come up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip and the eunuch saw him no more. Philip's mission was accomplished and now a miraculous event takes place. This is an interesting occurrence.

The Greek word for "*catching away*" is used a number of times in the New Testament and means each time an action by power. It is found eleven times in the New Testament. In Matthew 11:12; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12; 28. Acts 13:39; 23:10; II Corinthians 12:2,4; I Thessalonians 4:17; Jude 23; Revelation 12:5.

It is interesting to see that in the account of Paul's rapture into the third heaven this word is used and also in the divine revelation concerning the coming of the Lord for His Saints (I Thessalonians 4:17). The catching away of Philip after the work was accomplished is a little type of what will take place some day by the mighty power of God, when all the living believers will be removed from the scene of their present labors. "**Caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air,**" this is the blessed and imminent future of all God's children.

And the eunuch? What became of him? Did he go to the queen and did he give up his treasurership and become a great Evangelist through whom all Ethiopia was converted? Tradition may tell us these things but the divine record is silent.

The time was not then nor has it come since that time, that "**Princes come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God**" (Psalm 68:31); the fulfillment of this is reserved for the Millennial reign of Christ over the earth. The Holy Spirit has just one little sentence about the eunuch. But it is a most precious statement He makes concerning the Ethiopian who had received the knowledge of the truth and had believed the Gospel. "**He went on his way rejoicing.**" He had Christ and well could he go on his way with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And, dear reader, this sentence should express the experience of every true believer. If we have Christ and are His and He is ours, if we know we are saved, and safe and have before us nothing but glory, then we too should go on our way rejoicing. Yea, even when trials and perplexities surround our path, the joy in the Lord must be our portion. Anything less dishonors the Lord and the Gospel.

Philip was found some 20 miles north of Gaza, at Azotus. From there he started out anew preaching the Gospel. In many cities his voice was heard, these coast cities were inhabited by many Gentiles and included larger places like Jamnia, Lydda, Joppa and Antipatris. The day of Christ will make known the labors and also the reward of this great Evangelist. Then he came to Caesarea. But did he stop with that? We know not. Twenty years later we shall find him there and Paul was then his guest.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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