

Acts 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.

This chapter is a direct continuation of events at the end of the previous chapter. The reference is to the stoning of Stephen. Saul consented to his death; the Greek implies that he assented to and was actually pleased that they murdered him.

As I read through several other translations, the consensus is that Stephen's death marked the beginning of a great persecution of believers in Jerusalem; and many believers sought refuge in the regions of Judea and Samaria. The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem despite the obvious risk to their safety.

I couldn't help but think again of God's command to His disciples right before His ascension.

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."

I am sure the Greek-speaking Jews that accused Stephen thought that they had won, so to speak, when he was killed. Instead, this event was the catalyst to the eventual spread of the gospel throughout the world.

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

Committed believers mourned the death of Stephen and took care to see that he was given a proper burial.

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

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

Saul, however, joined wholeheartedly in trying to destroy the church. They barged into the homes of known believers to arrest them and put them in prison.

Those believers that had escaped to other parts of the country boldly preached the word declaring the good news of salvation in Jesus.

This is an example of the truth of Romans 8:28 as declared by this same Saul after his conversion.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The persecution of believers actually serves to promote the spread of the gospel.

David Guzik referenced a more recent example of this same truth (and there are many, many more that could be cited).

“On Sunday, January 8, 1956, on the shores of a lonely river deep in the jungles of Ecuador, natives murdered five missionaries who came to tell about Jesus. To many, this death seemed like a senseless tragedy. Many could only see five young missionaries who had their careers cut short or the five widows and fatherless children. But God did an amazing work through those five men, even in their deaths, and the blessing still reverberates through people like Elisabeth Elliot - one of the five women whose husband was murdered.”

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

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

Acts 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.

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

You would think at first reading that this was Philip the apostle; however, verse one makes a point of saying that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. So, it would seem that this Philip was the one chosen to serve in leadership alongside Stephen (cf chapter 6).

Philip went to Samaria to preach Christ—the good news, the message of salvation, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to redeem man from sin. When the people heard Philip’s message and saw the miracles he did that gave evidence of the power of God in his life, they believed—“with one accord gave heed” to what he said. The miracles he did included casting out demons and healing many who were paralyzed and lame. The people rejoiced at the work of God among them.

I am reminded again at how readily those that were considered outcasts responded to the revelation of God’s word. Again, as with the woman who met Jesus at the well (cf John 4), the people in Samaria were ready to embrace the truth. How sad that God’s chosen people did not respond as readily; in fact, they rejected the evidence of the miracles of Jesus that declared Him to be their Messiah. Why? Because of pride and because of wrong expectations based on a wrong understanding of the word of God.

I think it is also interesting to note that in the body of Christ there should be no racism, no discrimination. Remember, the Samaritans and Jews had nothing to do with one another.

*John 4:9 “Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? **for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.**”*

Jesus had commanded that His disciples preach the gospel throughout the world and had even included Samaria by name (cf Acts 1:8 above).

Acts 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:

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

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

In the city where Philip was preaching was a man called Simon who was known as a sorcerer. He made a reputation for himself as a person of importance through the practice of magic. All of the people in the city believed that he was empowered by God and honored him accordingly. The CJB translation describes their response to him this way: "This man is the power of God called 'The Great Power'."

This section points out an important truth and warning—People are often deceived by the works of those that follow the enemy. The fact that the people were attributing Simon's "sorceries" to the power of God implies to me that he was not doing "bad" things. Satan loves nothing better than to deceive people about God. We have to constantly remind ourselves that he often appears as an angel of light, and he works through people just as surely as God does. Paul makes a point of this very truth in his letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 11:13–15 "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

Acts 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.

Acts 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.

When Philip preached the truth about the kingdom of God and of Jesus the Messiah (from the Greek for *Christ*), even Simon became a believer and was baptized along with all the other men and women that became believers. He continued following Philip and was amazed at the miracles and signs that he saw him perform. He knew that these miracles were far different from the trickery and deceit performed by a magician.

Signs are miracles that testify to the truth of God's word. Wonders or miracles are observable actions that cannot be attributed to nature; they are supernatural.

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

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

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

Eventually, the apostles in Jerusalem heard about how so many in Samaria were accepting Jesus as Savior. They decided to send Peter and John to the area to pray for the people to receive the empowerment of the Holy Ghost, and they did so by laying hands on them.

We know that God obviously answered that prayer from the response of Simon that follows.

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

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

Acts 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.

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

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

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

Simon immediately offered the apostles money to give him the same ability to confer the power of the Holy Ghost upon others. Peter rebuked him harshly and basically called for him to die.

He made known in no uncertain terms that the empowerment of the Holy Ghost was a gift of God; it was not for sale. Peter went on to accuse Simon of wicked motives. He warned Simon to repent of his wickedness and ask for God's forgiveness. Peter recognized that Simon had been poisoned by sin.

A couple of things jumped out at me as I read this section. First off, Simon was a new Christian; he had much to learn. His response makes me wonder if he had paid someone to teach him the practice of magic to begin with. He might have actually been convinced that he was doing good in light of how the people had responded to him (as pointed out in my comments under verse 11 above). He truly might not have understood that this was a bad thing he was doing. Again, I am reminded that Satan often appears as an angel of light as stated in the scripture above. Sadly, scripture reveals that there will be many who will be deceived into thinking they are serving the Lord when in actuality they are in the ranks of the enemy.

Matthew 7:21–23 “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

The key to recognizing a true servant of the Lord is that his/her actions align with the revealed will of God according to His word—the scripture. Good works done without regard to sharing God’s love through the message of salvation do not align with His will. I think this deception is gaining more and more ground in the church today through the emergent church and its emphasis on the social gospel.

It also jumped out to me that Peter told him to ask forgiveness for “the thought in thine heart.” Though we can’t always control our thoughts, we can control the motives behind our thoughts. I believe that is what Peter was pointing out to Simon. He needed to understand that pride and the love of money were destructive to his faith.

Acts 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.

My first thought was that Simon’s response indicated that he understood Peter’s warning since he immediately wanted Peter to intercede for him in prayer. He didn’t want to suffer God’s judgment. He was a new Christian and wasn’t confident in his ability to pray.

Other commentators point out that Simon didn’t humble himself to pray, but relied on Peter’s obvious power with God to intercede for him to be spared God’s judgment without expressing remorse for the thoughts of his heart.

I am reminded that Simon Peter himself had been strongly rebuked by God and had even denied Jesus as His Lord out of fear for his own life. Peter’s subsequent testimony proved his faith genuine, but we have no further testimony from Simon. From Luke’s record we know that Simon responded to the gospel message in belief and was baptized. He continued with Philip and wondered at the miracles he performed. It wasn’t until Peter and John came to town and he was tempted by his past to seek “special powers” from them when he saw the connection between the laying on of hands and the manifestation of the Spirit in the lives of the believers that we have reason to question his salvation. Since there is no further information given, I guess we will not know until heaven whether or not Simon’s conversion was genuine.

Acts 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.

“They” seems to reference Peter and John since they are noted as returning to Jerusalem. Note that they took every opportunity along the way to spread the

good news of the gospel among the Samaritans.

Acts 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.

Acts 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,

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

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

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

Acts 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.

“Candace” = a title of the queens of Ethiopia

Philip, however, was told by an “angel of the Lord” to go south to the desert area of the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza. The NIV Commentary notes: “Gaza was the southernmost of the five chief Philistine cities in southwest Palestine and the last settlement before the desert waste stretching away to Egypt. The fifty-mile journey from Jerusalem to Gaza trailed off at its southwestern terminus into patches of desert.”

Philip didn’t question or complain about what he was told to do; he just went.

Luke tells us that he encountered an important man, a eunuch in charge of the treasury of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was in a chariot on his way home reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit told Philip to come alongside the chariot. When Philip got close enough to hear, he recognized the scripture from Isaiah and recognized an opportunity for ministry; so he asked the man if he understood what he was reading. Interesting to me is that the man readily admitted that he couldn’t without someone to help him; this attitude identifies a truth seeker. Evidently, he could tell from the way that Philip questioned him that he could help him and invited him to come up and sit with him.

Acts 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:

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

Acts 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?

Luke reveals that the man was reading from Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:7–8 “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is

brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken."

The man wanted Philip to tell him who the prophet was talking about. Was he talking about himself or someone else?

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

Philip immediately began with the words of Isaiah to explain the gospel and to declare that Jesus had come in fulfillment of the words of the prophet. Jesus had meekly yielded to the authorities as a lamb. Though Pilate tried to get Him to defend Himself, He wouldn't. Though he was taken from prison, put through a mock trial, scourged, ridiculed and taunted, He endured meekly to the point of death—even asking the Father to forgive those who were responsible for His death. He endured because He knew what His death would accomplish.

Isaiah 53:11 "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities."

Because of the willing sacrifice of Jesus, the "righteous servant," many will be justified (made righteous before God).

Acts 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?

Acts 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.

Acts 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.

Eventually, they came to some water; and the eunuch asked to be baptized. Philip assured him that if he sincerely believed the truth he had shared with him, he would baptize him. The man summed up his belief by declaring that he "believed that Jesus Christ [Messiah] is the Son of God." Taken in context with what he had been taught from the scripture in Isaiah, this was a clear declaration of saving faith.

Acts 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.

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

Immediately after baptizing the man, Phillip was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord. The eunuch never saw him again, but he went on his way rejoicing. I think Philip's supernatural disappearance just put an exclamation point on the

truth he had taught; it gave further evidence of the power of God at work in and through him.

Philip suddenly found himself in Azotus, another name for the old Philistine city of Ashdod—5 miles from Mediterranean, where the Philistines too the captured ark and put it in the temple of Dagon (1Samuel 5). From there he went to Caesarea stopping to preach in all the cities along his route.

In some ways I think Philip's experiences were more exciting than those of the apostles. This chapter gives a glimpse of how God works with men in the dimensions of time and space. God sees the end from the beginning and can intervene at any point in time or space to answer the hunger of even one person seeking spiritual understanding. He can move a man from point A to point B instantaneously. I am sure that we really only have a glimmer of what constitutes the reality of the physical and spiritual realm.