

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 8: PREACHING IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA, PART 1 (ACTS 8:4-40)

The stoning of Stephen initiated a full-blown assault against the church in Jerusalem. A young man named Saul was the face of this persecution. He ravaged the church, resulting in all the disciples (except the apostles) being scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA (ACTS 8:4-13)

8:4-8. The persecution that was intended to stop the gospel from spreading (Acts 7:54-8:3) actually worked to spread it even further! Because of the persecution, the disciples of Jesus Christ were scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8; and beyond, Acts 11:19). All the disciples had a role in preaching the gospel wherever they went (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Peter 3:14-16). Philip (Acts 6:5) went to a city in Samaria (Samaria was a region between Judea and Galilee; there was also a city by that name). The Samaritans were part-Jew and part-Gentile (resulting from intermarriages), part God-worshippers and part idol-worshippers (John 4:1-42). Philip preached Jesus as the Messiah to them (which included His identity, what He accomplished, and what He commands in His kingdom, v. 12). The crowds paid attention to Philip's message, seeing the miraculous signs he was performing (which confirmed the message, Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:1-4), and there was much joy in the city!

8:9-13. A man named Simon had practiced sorcery in this Samaritan city and had amazed and deceived the people into thinking he was someone great (claiming supernatural powers, though only practicing the equivalent of "magical" deception). He was viewed by the people as being "the Great Power of God." However, although the people had been captivated by Simon, they believed Philip. This involved the people believing Philip's true miracles above the tricks Simon did (consider a similar example in Exodus 7:1-8:19). Philip had preached the good news (gospel) about God's kingdom (God's reign/rule) and the name of Jesus Christ (as Samaritans also knew of the concept of the Messiah). This preaching clearly involved teaching what they must do to be saved (Acts 2:37-41), as both men and women were baptized! Furthermore, even Simon believed and was baptized! Then, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed

at the truly great signs and miracles he performed (surely recognizing what he had done as fake).

PETER AND JOHN VISIT SAMARIA (ACTS 8:14-25)

8:14-17. The apostles (who were still in Jerusalem, Acts 8:1) heard that Samaria had received the gospel and sent Peter and John to them. Particularly, they traveled there to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, as they had only been baptized in Jesus's name and had not received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. The apostles Peter and John then laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Although the gift of the Holy Spirit is given at baptism (Acts 2:38), this clearly did not involve the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. It required the laying on of the apostles' hands for believers to receive the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (Acts 19:5-6; Romans 1:11-12). Notice that Philip (though he was able to do miraculous things by the Spirit) could not impart the Spirit to others. Thus, these miraculous gifts of the Spirit would eventually cease (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

8:18-25. Simon saw (i.e. through the miraculous things that resulted) that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands and tried to purchase that ability to give the Holy Spirit through the laying on of his hands. Yet, Simon had no part in this ability (as no one did except the apostles). Though Simon had previously been saved (v. 13), Peter now sharply rebuked Simon for his sin, warning him about the destruction he would experience and that his heart was not right with God (showing the possibility of losing salvation, Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39; 2 Peter 2:20-22). As Simon stood condemned before God, he needed to repent and pray for the Lord's forgiveness (1 John 1:9)! The condition of his heart and life was now described as having been poisoned (in the gall, bitter fluid from the liver) by bitterness (perhaps in having lost his status among the people) and bound (enslaved) by wickedness. Simon requested Peter to pray for him (perhaps adding Peter's prayers to his own) so that he would not experience the consequences of his sin. Then, after concluding their time in the city, Peter and John journeyed back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

PHILIP PREACHES TO AN ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL (ACTS 8:26-40)

8:26-35. An angel of the Lord instructed Philip to go south to the road that connects Jerusalem and Gaza (a desert city/road, a coastal Philistine city). Philip obeyed. Somewhere along this road, he encountered an Ethiopian man (ancient Ethiopia corresponds with modern-day north Sudan). This man was a eunuch

(often referring to an emasculated/castrated man, Matthew 19:12) and a high-ranking official in charge of the treasury for Candace (queen of the Ethiopians). He had come to worship in Jerusalem (demonstrating his great zeal, despite likely being limited in his temple involvement, Deuteronomy 23:1) and was now returning to his home. On his journey, he was reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. The Spirit told Philip to go and join the chariot. As Philip ran up to it, he asked the man if he was understanding what he was reading. The man indicated he could not unless someone would guide him, and invited Philip to sit with him. The specific passage he was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8 spoke about One who would be led like a sheep to the slaughter, would remain silent, would be humiliated, would be treated unjustly, and would die. Not understanding, the eunuch asked whether the prophet was saying this about himself or another. Philip then used this prophecy (about the Messiah's suffering) to begin to tell him the good news (gospel) about Jesus, the Messiah!

8:36-40. The preaching of Jesus clearly involved teaching what Jesus requires. For, as they were traveling, the eunuch saw water and asked what would keep him from being baptized (indicating he had been taught its necessity, Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). Some Greek manuscripts include verse 37 that records Philip's condition that if the eunuch believed with all his heart, he may be baptized; as well as the eunuch's confession that Jesus is the Messiah (Romans 10:8-13). Ordering the chariot to stop, the eunuch and Philip both went down into the water for the baptism and came up from the water. In this, we see both the immediacy and necessity of immersion in water to fulfill Jesus's command for baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). After coming up from the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away (perhaps miraculously or perhaps through giving travel instructions), and the eunuch did not see him anymore. The eunuch, though, went on his way rejoicing now that he was saved (Acts 16:34; Luke 15:1-10)! Philip then appeared in Azotus (north of Gaza; west of Jerusalem). He traveled through all the towns until he came to Caesarea (a northern coastal city in Samaria, Acts 21:8-9).

CONCLUSION

Despite Jesus's disciples facing severe persecution, the gospel spread. In fact, the persecution seems to have been a catalyst for it to spread even more! The gospel was no longer just being spread in and around Jerusalem, and people were continuing to believe and obey.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How did the persecution impact the spreading of the gospel?

How did the miracles Philip worked compare with the things Simon did?

How did the Samaritans respond to the gospel's message?

How do you know whether being baptized in the name of Jesus included Holy Spirit baptism and/or the miraculous gifts of the Spirit?

How were the miraculous gifts of the Spirit given to others?

How did Simon sin after being baptized and what was he told to do about it?

How did the Ethiopian eunuch respond to the gospel's message?

What is involved in preaching Jesus?

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