

Acts 8 – Teaching continues amid persecution

I. Saul persecutes the church – 8:1-4

- A. “Saul was consenting to his death”?
 - 1. Remember that chapter breaks were added by man, not God. Therefore, we are to read this as “Saul consented to the death of Stephen”, as we find that it was at Saul’s feet that those who were going to stone Stephen laid their garments.
- B. We find that a great persecution began after Stephen was murdered.
 - 1. All the Christians, save the apostles and perhaps a few others in Jerusalem, spread out all over Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8) teaching the Gospel.
- C. Saul made havoc of the church
 - 1. “*Lumainomai*” – soiled, mistreated
 - 2. He entered “every house” and dragged men and women to prison
 - 3. The text does not specifically say that he personally killed anyone or that he personally was violent with the Christians. Even when Paul refers to himself as the “chief of sinners” in I Tim. 1:13-15, he refers to himself as “*a blasphemer, a persecutor* (one who pursues, puts others to flight), *and an insolent* (insulter, spiteful) *man*”. None of these terms are specifically a reference to violence. While this is not definitive evidence that he *never* used violence in his arrests of Christians, it means that there are no direct Scriptural references that Paul personally killed or physically hurt anyone.

II. Philip helps to convert the city of Samaria – 8:5-25

- A. **Philip teaches the city of Samaria and a sorcerer named Simon – 8:5-13**
 - 1. Philip taught the people of the city and the people “with one accord” heeded his words, hearing and seeing the miracles that he did.
 - a) Specific miracles: removal of unclean spirits, healing of paralyzed and lame – rare recorded example of a non-apostle with more than one miraculous gift
 - b) Note: Philip was willing to go to a place that had been regarded as undesirable by the Jews
 - c) Note: The Samaritans had enough connection with the law and the prophets to be looking for the Messiah who would “tell us all things” (Jn. 4:25)
 - d) This was part of the spread of the Gospel that Jesus foretold in Acts 1:8; interestingly, while the Samaritans had a “form of the Law”, they were never considered Jews...thus these were technically Gentiles, albeit possibly more palatable for the Jews than the “godless” Gentiles
 - 2. Philip encounters Simon the sorcerer
 - a) Simon had the people believing that he was a man with the power of a god
 - b) The people heeded him because of his “sorceries”
 - (1) Magic tricks? Possible drug-induced hallucinations?
 - c) As the people are taught by Philip, they begin to see Simon for what he really was: a fake.
 - (1) Note: Philip was teaching concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ

(a) This contradicts the teaching of some modern-day preachers that all we need to do is teach about baptism and not the church that belongs to Christ; Philip taught about (and defined) both.

- d) Simon became a Christian, being convicted by Philip's teaching
(1) Note: He still seemed overly fascinated by the miracles, and/or perhaps the attention that Philip received as a result.

B. Peter and John come to Samaria to bring the Holy Spirit – 8:14-25

1. Peter and John were sent to the Christian Samaritans so that some would receive the Holy Spirit
 - a) This would help establish them in truth
2. Simon attempted to buy the ability to lay hands on others so that they may receive the Holy Spirit
 - a) Peter severely reprimands Simon, saying that his thoughts and heart were not right with God – *“poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity”*
 - (1) Simon may have desired the ability for numerous reasons, such as money or influence; may have been jealous of the attention received by Phillip and the apostles
 - (2) If Simon's intentions had been honorable, Peter would not have responded in this way.
 - b) Simon begs Peter to pray to God for him; suggests that he is sincerely penitent and truly wanted to change

III. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch – 8:26-40

- A. Philip was commanded to go speak to an Ethiopian eunuch who was returning to Ethiopia after worshipping in Jerusalem
1. He was the treasurer for Candace the queen
 2. Interesting fact: In the actual Greek, the Queen's name is pronounced “kan-dak'-ay”, not “kan'-dus”
 3. It's interesting that an angel of the Lord came to Philip and gave him direction to go unto the Ethiopian eunuch. This is a very rare occurrence, even among the apostles as far as has been recorded.
- B. Philip taught from Isaiah concerning the Christ. As they passed some water, the Ethiopian desired to be baptized
1. No specific mention of baptism is found in what Philip taught, so it can be safely assumed that he taught the same facts that he taught the Samaritans: “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” included baptism for the remission of sins and understanding about the Church.
 2. “...and he baptized him.” = Philip baptized the eunuch
- C. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing. Philip was “caught” away (the term means to “seize”) and the eunuch “saw him no more”.
1. Miraculous? Sounds like it, but could also be that the Spirit told him to journey on to Azotus, thus the Spirit “seized” him by directing him elsewhere.
 - a) No point arguing over this as some do: God certainly had the power to miraculously transport him to Azotus, so why argue over it?
 - b) It is worth noting that if this was a miracle, it's the only example of miraculous transportation aside from Jesus after He was raised from the dead; this does not mean that God did not miraculously transport others when needed...just no record of it in Scripture.

Questions for Acts 8:

1. Jesus prophesied in Acts 1:8 that His gospel would spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria. Does this mean that God caused the persecution?
2. Why would Philip arbitrarily go to Samaria? If he was one of the seven chosen to help with the needs of the saints (Acts 6:5), did he “shirk” his responsibility?
3. Why was it necessary that the new saints in Samaria be given gifts of the Holy Spirit?
4. Even though we cannot know for sure, what do you suppose the motivation was behind Simon’s desire to purchase the ability to lay hands with the Holy Spirit?
5. Philip ran to the Eunuch and saw him reading from the prophet Isaiah. (T) or (F)?
6. Based on what is told to Philip in the command from the angel (and what Luke tells us), how can we observe Philip’s faith?
7. Based on the Biblical account, what are at least four things we know are necessary for baptism? (four things found (or implied) in the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch)
8. Does it really matter if the “catching away” of Philip was miraculous or not? Is it outside the realm of possibility or outside of God’s power for it to be miraculous?
9. What is one necessary inference we must draw from what we learn about the situation in Samaria involving the apostles, Philip, the Holy Spirit, and the laying on of hands?