

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

(Acts 8:1-40)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 37

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1. Persecution overruled for good (4).

The disciples continued to testify. The church grew.

2. Philip's experience in Samaria.

- A. Why he became an evangelist (4-5).
- B. The earnestness of his preaching (5).
- C. The fullness of his preaching (5, 12).
- D. The proof of the genuineness of his preaching (7).
- E. The result of his preaching (6-14).

(1) Many believed (6, 12).

(2) Great joy was produced (8).

(3) A noted sorcerer believed (9-13).

(4) It attracted the interest of the apostles (14).

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3. Philip's experience in the desert (26-40).

A. He was ready to obey the command of God (26).

B. He was ready to help one man find Christ (30-35).

C. He was well prepared to help an inquirer (30, 35).

- D. He was willing to minister to those of another race (27).
- E. He was blessed of God in pointing this inquirer to Christ (30, 40).
- F. An opportunity was given to preach to other cities (40).

We are saved by faith in Christ.

Stephen's body was laid to rest by devout men. It was an exceedingly sad service. Great lamentation was made over him. Men wept because a good man had been taken from them by violent hands. They could see that the persecution which had broken out would likely grow worse.

The persecution was prosecuted more bitterly. It was led by Saul. The homes of the Christians were not spared. A man's home was not his castle then. Men and women were dragged from their homes and committed to prison.

The result of this bitter persecution was to scatter the members of the church through the provinces of Judaea and Samaria. The apostles remained at Jerusalem, evidently as they thought, at the post of duty. As the captain feels so duty bound to be the last to leave the broken ship so they felt that they should be the last to desert Jerusalem on account of danger. This showed exceptional courage on their part. They would be persecuted most bitterly at Jerusalem but they would not flee. They counted not their lives dear that they might stand true to their Lord. There were interests of the church which needed to be looked after. There would be Christians who still needed the encouragement of their ministrations. There would be financial interests of the church which had been committed to their care, which they would not leave to be lost or confiscated by their persecutors. The deacons, or at least some of them, had been scattered. Stephen had been killed. Philip had been forced to flee to Samaria. All the responsibility of the church seems to have been thrown upon the apostles. They would not shirk that responsibility even if subjected to persecution. The Lord was still answering their prayer for boldness.

The view has been presented that the apostles should have left Jerusalem. It is true that it was according to the command of Christ that they should go into all Judaea and Samaria and into the uttermost parts of the world. Whether they should have begun to send out missionaries earlier in the history of the church we cannot say, but we do not think that they were declining to do their duty when in this crisis they remained at Jerusalem. The easier course would have been to flee with the other Christians. The hard course was to remain in the center of persecution.

PERSECUTION OVERRULED FOR GOOD

God overruled the persecution for good as he usually does: "**Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word**" (8:4). Those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the Word. They had been driven from Jerusalem but nothing could drive them from Christ. They were carrying out the divine command to take the Gospel into all the world. As they had begun at Jerusalem so now they would make any point in Judaea or Samaria where they had taken refuge a new center of preaching the Gospel of Christ. Wherever they were, their great theme would be, Christ. The Lord made their preaching effective. It is important to notice again that nothing could stop the growth of the church so long as her members and servants were filled with the Spirit.

Opposition, persecution, hypocrites or dissention had not been able to halt the growth of the church before, nor was more bitter persecution able to check it now. When Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ unto them we are told at once that multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things which were spoken by him: **“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did”** (8:6).

PHILIP’S EXPERIENCE IN SAMARIA

1. Why he became an evangelist: **“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them”** (8:4-5). We first heard of Philip when he was chosen as a deacon. It is quite possible that the example of Stephen had a striking effect upon Philip. Philip had no doubt done the work which was assigned him in the office of deacon. But Philip, like Stephen, was a Spirit-filled man and was not satisfied with the least that he could do in the mere performance of routine work. He longed to tell men of Christ. When a refugee in Samaria he may have helped others who were there, but there would be little if any property for him to look after, or food and clothing to distribute, as there was in Jerusalem. He, therefore, endeavored to do all that he could to proclaim Christ to the Samaritans and to organize a mission in the place where he was taking refuge.

2. The earnestness of his preaching. Philip **“preached Christ unto them”** (v. 5). The word, “preached,” is *kerusso*, which means to proclaim as a herald. It therefore means that he was an official herald telling men of Christ, and that he was speaking with a loud voice and earnestly. Later the word, *euaggelizo*, (vs. 12, 35) is used, which means to “announce glad tidings.” Philip not only told the glad tidings of the coming and the death of Christ for lost men, but he preached as one sent of Christ who was eager to tell his message and earnest in his appeal that men might accept it.

It takes an earnest man to begin at once to preach the Gospel in a new community after he has been driven out from his home by persecution. Moreover, in Samaria the Jews had no dealings with the people. Philip believed that the Gospel was for others than Jews, and that a believing Samaritan was just as precious in the sight of God as an Hebrew of the Hebrews. The Samaritans were not exactly Gentiles, though they were not Hebrews. Philip went first to those who were between Jews and Gentiles and then to one who was a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish faith in the person of the Ethiopian. He was not prejudiced by race or color. He was so far in advance of his Jewish friends that he longed to win Samaritan or Ethiopian to faith in Christ.

3. The fullness of his preaching: **“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”** (8:12). The center of all Philip’s preaching was concerning Christ. We are told first that he proclaimed unto them Christ, and then we are told later that he preached unto them about the Kingdom of God. This is what Paul was preaching at the close of this book: **“Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him”** (Acts 28:31). It means that he was preaching a full Gospel. It must mean that he was telling the Samaritans that the kingdom of God included them as well as the Hebrews.

It no doubt means that Philip, like Peter, told his hearers that Jesus who had been crucified had been made both Lord and Christ; that He had ascended on high and sits at the right hand of God where he will remain until He has made His enemies His footstool.

Men and women everywhere, not only need to be taught that Jesus is their Saviour, but they need to be taught that the whole Gospel of Christ. Jesus does not desire superficiality in His ministers or in his missionaries. He desires not only that men shall know Him, but that they shall know His will and that they shall do it. The writer of the Hebrews warns against a superficial knowledge of Christ. He says that leaving the first principles we should press on unto perfection: **“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God”** (Hebrews 6:1). It is worse than if we had not known Christ, if after we have known of Him, we go on in sin regardless of His offer and of His warning.

4. The proof of the genuineness of his preaching: **“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”** (8:7). The signs which Philip did convinced the people of Samaria that he was a messenger of God. He cast out unclean spirits, many that were palsied and that were lame were healed. They had seen men try to do wonderful things by the use of sorcery, but they had seen nothing like this. The sorcerer could not heal chronic cases of sickness, nor could he cast out unclean spirits. When sorcerers tried it later in the presence of Paul, they found, not only that they were powerless, but that they were made a laughing stock by reason of their inability to control evil spirits. Evil spirits were always subject to the power of God and were compelled to obey Him, but they would not consent to be subject to mere man.

5. The result of his preaching (6-14).

(1) The first result of Philip’s preaching was that many believed: **“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 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”** (8:6-7).

Here again is an evidence of the power of the Gospel when it is spoken in faith. The Spirit of God can convince Samaritans as well as Jew. Jesus had told some of the Samaritans that the time would come when they would worship neither at Gerizim nor Jerusalem, but they who should worship God would worship in spirit and in truth. That prediction was being fulfilled. Prejudiced though the Samaritans naturally were against the messenger they believed his message. How wonderful is the power of the Spirit of God to break down all prejudice and change the hearts of hardened men!

(2) Great joy was produced: **“And there was great joy in that city”** (8:8).

There was joy on account of the wonderful works of God and physical manifestations of God’s power.

There was also joy, and this was the source of the deepest joy, because they had found Christ as their Saviour. There are many who think that in order to have joy they must continue to follow sinful amusements. They think that to accept the Gospel is to bring gloom and heaviness. But, as Philip showed the people of Samaria, the tidings of Jesus Christ are not sad tidings but glad tidings. There is nothing which brings more genuine joy to the human heart than the acceptance of Christ. Even in those days of persecution the Gospel brought joy. When the apostles were first persecuted they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. After Paul had suffered many persecutions and imprisonments he said that whether men ridiculed him or persecuted or mocked him, **“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice”** (Phil. 1:18). Again he said: **“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me”** (Phil. 2:17-18).

This spirit was not confined to the early church, but it always has been and is true of those who are lovers of Christ. The atheist, the skeptic and the infidel are not the people who are filled with joy. There may be signs of superficial joy among them, but often even when they appear to be happy they are heavy at heart and weary of life. It is among unbelievers that suicides abound. Dr. W.M. Taylor makes a comparison of Dr. Thomas Guthrie and John Stuart Mill as revealed in their autobiographies. Speaking of them in the order named he says: “The one was the sunniest, cheeriest, mirthfulness memoir I ever read; the other was the darkest, saddest, and most dismal work it has ever been my lot to peruse. To me they were typical instances. Let the one stand as an illustration of the fact that ‘true piety is as cheerful as the day’; let the other indicate how cold and dark the world of atheism must be.” (*Peter the Apostle*, p. 263)

(3) A noted sorcerer believed: **“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”** (8:9-13).

Simon was a noted sorcerer. He had advertised himself as some great one. The people generally had believed him and thought that he was **“the great power of God.”** He had been able to practice sorcery in such a manner as to deceive the people for a long time. But Simon saw that Philip was genuine and that he could do what he could not. He believed Philip and, along with others, was baptized. His belief, however, as we shall see, was only superficial. His heart was not truly changed.

(4) It attracted the interest of the apostles: **“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John”** (8:14).

The apostles at Jerusalem heard of the preaching of Philip, and of the remarkable results of it, and they sent Peter and John. Peter and John came to pray for the people of Samaria and to help them. It is, or at least ought always to be, the interest of the church to take note of and to promote new developments in new centers wherever the followers of Christ have been active and have made the glad tidings known and have brought in others to worship with them and to accept Christ as their Saviour. This is one of the reasons why the organization of the church is of value. When one part of Christ's body, the church, needs assistance, the whole body stands ready to render that assistance. Peter and John came, not merely as overseers, but as servants of Christ, to help. They found that they needed not only to pray with the newly gathered group, but to exercise discipline as well. They desired that those who were true believers might have the Holy Spirit and that any who were hypocrites might be kept separate. This is the last time we hear of John in the Acts.

6. That which was lacking in his converts: **“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”** (Acts 8:15-17).

Those who believed and had been baptized in Samaria had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John prayed and laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. What is meant here by receiving the Holy Spirit, we believe, is receiving the Spirit in power to work miracles. They had already received the Spirit in their hearts when they believed and were regenerated. It is not well to draw conclusions too hastily about the coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of men and what is essential to His coming. There are those who believe that the laying on of hands is essential to the reception of the spirit in believers. But if we study carefully the various instances when the Holy Spirit came upon men of the early church we shall find His presence is not dependent upon the laying on of hands, that He is independent of all the works of men, that as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so the Spirit comes upon men when and how He pleases. He is not bound by time or place or method.

Paul the apostle received the Holy Spirit with the laying on of the hands of Ananias, who was not an apostle, but a disciple. Cornelius and those who were with him received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands while Peter was speaking to them. Even those with Peter were amazed that Cornelius and his friends, Gentiles, should have received the Holy Spirit. It is important that we shall have the Holy Spirit in our lives and that He may give us power to witness for Christ, but let us not expect Him to be limited to one form, ceremony or method of coming. When we have learned that, we have learned a valuable lesson.

Let us not, however, neglect the importance of seeking the Holy Spirit and receiving Him into our hearts and lives. Dr. Chapman said that he had, in a congregation to which he ministered, a young man who was not educated but God marvelously used him. “This was the secret. With a heart burdened for the men of the city, I called together a few men of the church, and laying before them the plan I had in mind, told them first of all that we could do nothing without the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

When this had been explained, I noticed this man leave the room. When I sought him I found him in one of the lower rooms of the church, literally on his face before God. He was in prayer. I shall never forget the petition: 'O God I plead with Thee for this blessing.' Then without any emotion he rose from his knees, turned his face heavenward, and said, 'and now I claim the blessing.' For the first time he became sensible of my presence, and with a shining countenance he reached out his hands to clasp mine. You could feel the very presence of the Spirit as he said, 'I have received Him.' And I believe he had, for in the next months he led more than sixty men into the Kingdom of God. His whole life had been transformed (*Power and Its Secret*).

7. The most faithful preaching may attract hypocrites: **“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”** (8:18-19).

When Simon noticed that power came through the laying on of the apostle's hands, he sought to purchase that power. Simon wanted the power to communicate the Holy Spirit. He did not ask for the Spirit for himself, but that through him others might receive the Spirit. Simon felt that he could soon make much more money than he had offered the apostles if he had the power to communicate the Holy Spirit to others.

Philip's preaching had been clear. He had pointed the people to Christ as the only Saviour. But as in this instance, so we usually find it today, there are those who want to imitate the Christians. Perhaps it is for gain, perhaps it is for honor, perhaps it is for popularity, perhaps it is to secure office, but there are nearly always men who are more or less like Simon in their desires. That revival is rare which does not produce its hypocrites as well as its converts. We do not judge the early church in Samaria by Simon, nor should we judge the church anywhere by a few who are guilty of "simony." If genuine money were not valuable it would not be counterfeited. If there were not a value in the possession of the Gospel of Christ there would not be so many who imitate the followers of Christ.

8. The danger of trifling with the Holy Spirit: **“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. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me”** (8:20-24). Peter said to Simon, **“Thy silver perish with thee!”** because he sought to buy the power of God. After Simon had been so sternly rebuked he asked Peter that he might pray for him that none of those things which he had spoken should come upon him. We are not told whether that request was answered, but from what we learn from secular history we suppose it was not. We are told that it was this Simon, who, several years after this time assisted Felix in his immoral practices, and that he himself continued to practice magic in connection with immoral practices. As Simon was in danger of perishing with his silver, so is everyone who trifles with the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira had tried to deceive the Holy Spirit. Simon was attempting to deceive the Spirit in another manner.

James Lyall told the following from his own experience. It was related in the Presbyterian Record. He said that when he was in the North of Ireland conducting services in one of the Presbyterian churches, “a tall, fine-looking, elderly man came up to me and said: ‘Mr. Lyall, I would like to have a talk with you.’ I said to him: ‘Come into the vestry here.’ We went in, and he began the interview by saying: ‘I want, in the first place to tell you who I am. I am an employer of labor in this city, and have hundreds of men and women on my pay-list. I am well-known and have a measure of influence in this city. But it is not that I wanted to talk about: it is concerning my spiritual condition.

“And he went on to say something like this: ‘Three years ago I was deeply convinced of my need of Jesus Christ. One night I was in my room alone with God - an unsaved man. I was conscious of the Divine Presence as I am of your presence now. I knew God was in the room, and I knew in my inner consciousness that if I yielded to Him that night I would be saved. I was just on the threshold of the kingdom, but I began to count the cost, and deliberately and wilfully got up from my knees and walked out of the room, as conscious that I had left the presence of God, as if I were to leave your presence now. A few months after this one of the ministers of the city came to me, and said: ‘We are appointing elders in the church, and the people are very anxious to have you as one of them.’ I refused at first. I felt I had no business, as an unsaved man, to be an elder of any church, but he pleaded with me, and others came and pleaded, and so I finally consented. From that moment I became a self-conscious hypocrite and despised myself.

“About a year later God came to me again; the pleading of His Spirit were overwhelming; the conviction of sin was appalling, and I felt that God was giving me another chance. But the Devil came and whispered; ‘Don’t make a fool of yourself. You are an elder of the church; everybody believes you are a converted man. Don’t begin to say now you are not. You will have all the people laughing at you.’ I yielded to the subtle temptation of the Devil, and once more resisted the Holy Ghost. In a moment when I had chosen I was conscious, as conscious as I am of your presence now, that I had resisted for the last time. I went out of God’s presence, banished even as Cain was banished from the Divine presence. Then he added, with a strange look in his eyes, that almost froze my blood: ‘Mr. Lyall, listen. Standing before you tonight in this vestry is a lost soul. I believe I am as much lost tonight as I will ever be in Hell only I have not got there. I have walked the streets night after night. I have not slept a whole night for months. I would have plunged myself into Belfast Loch before this were it not for what lies beyond.’ Then he continued: ‘I have not told you this because I want you to help me. My dear sir, I am beyond all human help and divine help, too. I want you to tell my story wherever you go, that men and women may be warned against the awful sin of resisting the Holy Ghost.’ He went out from that building and I never saw him again.”

PHILIP’S EXPERIENCE IN THE DESERT

When the apostles, Peter and John, had testified to the people at Samaria they returned to Jerusalem, but on their way preached to many villages of the Samaritans: “**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**” (8:25). An angel of God called Philip, saying, “**Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert**” (8:26).

The account of his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch and the result of this meeting is recorded in the remainder of this chapter (26-40).

1. He was ready to obey the command of God: **“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”** (8:26).

Philip was not like Jonah. He did not refuse to obey the call of God. He arose at once and went to do God’s bidding. It would probably appear to Philip as a strange thing that he should be called away from a city where the work had begun in such a promising manner and was progressing so well to go away to a desert country. Did the Lord intend that he should go at this time? Was there not someone who could be sent in his place? Philip was willing to go where God wanted him to go and to do what God wanted him to do. His obedience was like that of Abraham. He responded without apparently knowing what he was to do. It would be well if all of Christ’s disciples were willing to obey at once as did Philip. The servant of God has learned one of his greatest lessons when he has learned obedience.

Sometimes it may be a serious problem to know what the will of the Lord is. If we are really in earnest and seek God’s guidance we can find it. An angel may not come and speak to us in the same definite way that he spoke to Philip. But God hears prayer and He will answer by making His will known to our hearts or guiding by His providence or in some other manner that we may know. When we read the lives of missionaries like John G. Paton and Hudson Taylor we see how often and how wonderfully God heard their prayers and guided them into new fields or to undertake new plans.

Once when David Livingstone was about to camp for the night he was so guided of God that he did not stop where he had first intended, but passed over the stream and camped on the other side. He said afterward, that if he had not done so the natives would have shot him with their poisoned arrows. His life was saved and he was enabled to go forward with his work by the inward guidance which the Lord had given in answer to his prayer.

2. He was ready to help one man find Christ: **“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”** (8:30-35).

Philip had been preaching to a whole multitude. Sometimes there are men who will take an interest in a multitude but who will not take an interest in one man. Our time and work is never lost if we are engaged in leading one man to Christ.

Jesus spoke to the multitudes, but He also spoke to individuals. He gathered His first disciples one by one. He put them to work that they might bring in others, but He spent a large part of three years in gathering and training twelve men. The man to whom Philip was sent was one of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was her chief treasurer. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning homeward when he met Philip. The soul of this man was not important merely because he was a great man in his country. God is ever ready to help an honest inquirer, and this man might be of larger value in the church because he was in a position where he could the better make known the saving love of Christ to others of his countrymen.

3. He was well prepared to help an inquirer: “**And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? . . . Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus**” (8:30, 35).

Philip was a well-informed interpreter of Scripture. He had made a study of his Bible. He was especially familiar with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. When the Spirit told Philip to join himself to the chariot in which the Ethiopian was riding he obeyed at once, and he found that he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The man replied that he could not unless he had someone to guide him. One wonders how the Ethiopian had failed to hear the Gospel of Christ when he was in Jerusalem, as he had gone there to worship. It is quite possible that he had reached Jerusalem after the persecution had become so bitter that the disciples had been scattered. If so he would probably not meet with any disciples and would not come in contact with any Christian public worship. He could scarcely have failed to see a great deal of excitement in Jerusalem and hear something of one who had been crucified and whose followers had been scattered. If so he would naturally wonder whether this man were really a good man and whether he were spoken of in prophecy. This may have been the cause of his diligent reading as he journeyed towards his own land. God would not allow Saul and his fellow persecutors to prevent this earnest inquirer from finding Christ. Ethiopia was to stretch out her hands to God. She did not stretch them out in vain.

He who doubts the providential guidance of God surely does not read this passage with care. God had directed the Ethiopian to that portion of Isaiah which spoke most clearly of Christ, yes to that passage, which of all passages of the Old Testament, spoke most clearly of Christ. The passage 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.**” The Ethiopian asked concerning whom the prophet spoke, of himself or of some other man. Philip, beginning at that place, told him of the glad tidings of the coming of Jesus and of His death upon the Cross. The Ethiopian believed the Gospel as Philip preached it to him. Philip must have told him of the command of Jesus that those who believed should be baptized and what baptism meant, for he asked to be baptized. They both went down to the water and Philip baptized him.

The man who cannot find Christ and His atonement as it is foretold in the Old Testament, is blinded like the Ethiopian was until his eyes were opened that he might understand.

The most important key to help to open prophecy is the coming of Christ and His death upon the Cross. The atonement is the central theme of the Old Testament and the New. Not until we have found Christ and are guided by His Spirit are we prepared to expound the Scriptures to lost men. In this passage these all-important truths are found: Christ was to suffer: He was to suffer willingly: He was to suffer unjustly: He was to suffer as a Substitute; He suffered as the SON of God. The whole story of the work of Christ is summed up in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

4. He was willing to minister to those of another race: “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” (8:27).

This man to whom Philip ministered was an Ethiopian. He may have been a proselyte, as we suppose he was, but he was an Ethiopian. The only reasonable conclusion is that he was black in color. Philip did not hesitate for a moment to mount the chariot with the Ethiopian and to take with him as a brother.

Philip was the right kind of a missionary. He was willing to preach to the Samaritans whom the Jews disliked. He was willing to talk personally with, ride with, and teach the Ethiopian who was evidently of another color. God hath made all men of one blood. He desires that all in Christ shall be brethren. If Philip had been a modern disciple he might have made many mistakes. He might have refused to join himself to this man’s chariot because he did not like the race to which he belonged. He might have said, there are many of these people too ignorant to understand the Gospel, they are of beastly origin and cannot be taught what is right and wrong. He might have taught the man that he was reading from the second Isaiah and that this was a bit of the history of Israel which had been written at a late date and had nothing to say of Christ. But he didn’t. He obeyed the Holy Spirit and joined himself with the chariot and witnessed to a man in need of salvation.

Charles Darwin thought that he had found “the missing link” in the degraded inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego. But even Darwin was forced to change his mind. In his book, *“The Progress of World-Wide Missions,”* R.H. Glover says (p. 283), “The transformation wrought among the Fuegians as a result of the work begun by Gardiner drew from Darwin a frank testimony of astonishment and appreciation, accompanied by a donation to the Society’s funds and a request to be made an honorary member.” John G. Paton after long years of missionary service among some of the most primitive black people in the Islands where he worked and in Australia, spoke emphatically against the idea that some men are too low to receive the Gospel. He says: “When I have read or heard the shallow objections of irreligious scribblers and talkers, hinting that there was no reality in conversions, and that Mission effort was but waste, oh, how my heart has yearned to plant them just one week on Tanna, with the ‘natural’ man all around in the person of Cannibal and Heathen, and only the one ‘spiritual’ man in the person of the converted Abraham, nursing them, feeding them, saving them ‘for the love of Jesus’, - that I might just learn how many hours it took to convince them that Christ in man was a reality after all! All the skepticism of Europe would hide its head in foolish shame; and all its doubts would dissolve under one glance of the new light that Jesus, and Jesus alone, pours from the converted Cannibal’s eye.” (Autobiography, pp. 173-174).

5. He was blessed of God in pointing this inquirer to Christ. The Spirit of God who guided Philip guided the Ethiopian. The man believed the Word of God. His faith was confirmed by a miracle. **“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”** (8:39). This was a different kind of a miracle than Philip had performed to confirm the faith of the people of Samaria. But it was no more difficult for the Lord to perform than any other miracle. The Spirit of God is not limited to the usual kind of miracles in order to prove the truthfulness of His message.

As the Ethiopian read the Psalms he would be attracted by that passage which speaks of Princes coming out of Egypt and of Ethiopia stretching out her hands unto God. He would read in that same Psalm of the One who **“has ascended up on high,”** and **“hast led captivity captive”** (Psalm 68:18, 31). Thus as he turned from place to place in the Old Testament he would have his faith strengthened and his knowledge of Christ increased and confirmed, and he would be better fitted to be a teacher of his people.

History tells us that the Gospel once had a large hold in Africa. There were in the synagogues in Jerusalem, as we have seen, some from Africa. There were those who heard the Gospel in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and later, who would carry the Glad Tidings back to their homes in Africa. But even down in Ethiopia the Gospel once had a large following. This man of whom we have read, who was instructed of Philip, and who was baptized, in all probability had much to do with planting the Gospel in Ethiopia. But why did it not remain and flourish there? The most probable reason is that the Bible was never translated into the language of the people. Where people do not have the Bible in their own language the Gospel is soon lost. This is one of the great lessons of history which we should not forget. The effort of the missionaries and of the Bible Societies today to give all nations and tribes the Bible in their own language is a most commendable one. It is essential if the Gospel which is once planted in those lands is to continue to spread and flourish there.

The Ethiopian as he passed along the road was changed in a short time from a man who was groping in darkness, to one who had found the light of life. He became a new man, nay, a new creature, in Christ Jesus. He was joyful in heart and went on his way rejoicing. How can one read the Bible and doubt the reality of the change that comes when men are regenerated? This man could go back to the same environment and live a different life. He was a new man with a new destiny. Psychology cannot explain it, but it is a fact. Man retains the same mind and the same body, but he has a new heart, new aspirations and a new destiny.

6. An opportunity was given to preach in other cities: **“But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea”** (8:40).

As he passed along he would likely preach in Azotus, Lydda, Joppa, Antipatris, and other cities along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Philip’s journey, while primarily to one man, reached to many cities. He made his way to Caesarea, then an important city, the seat of the Roman governor. It was at one time the most important city of all Syria.

It contained gorgeous palaces and great temples. Here Philip found a profitable field of labor. He seems to have remained and to have made it his home: **“And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy”** (Acts 21:8-9). His was a godly home, the members of his family were not only Christians, but earnest workers with him. It was a center for the gathering of Christians. If the full history were written we would likely learn that multitudes heard Philip there and many believed as they did in Samaria. The story of Philip, like that of Stephen, is briefly told but we have in him a great and good man, one of the shining lights of all history. In his example of faith and service we have one which constantly spurs us on to holy living, courageous testimony and earnest preaching. He was an effective personal worker and he was a powerful preacher of Christ the Saviour and King.

Every reader of this chapter should remember that a sense of astonishment at the power of God will not save him; the rite of baptism will not save him; but if he is to be saved he must believe with all his heart, as did the Ethiopian, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

QUESTIONS (Acts 8:1-40)

1. Who were the men who carried Stephen to his burial?
2. What does this indicate concerning the companions of Stephen?
3. What man who had a part in Stephen’s death most interests us?
4. What further did Saul do to the Christian church?
5. What resulted from the dispersing of the church?
6. What group of men remained at Jerusalem notwithstanding the persecution?
7. What man who was driven from Jerusalem preached at Samaria?
8. What was the burden of his message?
9. What was the effect of his message upon the people?
10. What did Philip do besides preaching which led the people to believe?
11. What did the apostles do to help on with the work in Samaria?
12. What did they do to leave the people better than when they came?
13. What will be the outcome in any church if the Holy Spirit is not present?
14. Why did Simon want the Holy Spirit? Does it appear that there are many like him today?
15. What is the danger of trifling with the Holy Spirit?
16. What does Philip teach us about obedience when he was called from Samaria to the desert?
17. What does it teach us about being willing to leave the crowd to testify to one man?
18. What does it teach us about being willing to minister to those of another race?
19. How did Philip convince the Ethiopian that Jesus was the Christ? What may we learn from this?
20. Give some of the lessons which we may learn as evangelists or missionaries from Philip?

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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