

## The Acts of the Apostles

Lesson: 10

Topic: The Persecution Led by Saul and the Ministry of Philip

Reading: Acts 8:1-40

### *Review*

### *Scripture Analysis*

#### Verses 1-3

- QUESTION: Whose death was Saul consenting to?
  - Stephen's death.
  - Saul was the leader of the persecution effort against the Church in Jerusalem.
  - Verse 3 indicates he:
    - was ravaging the church.
    - Going into houses and arresting both men and women who were disciples of Jesus.
  - Saul wanted the Christian movement crushed.
- QUESTION: What had the great persecution of the Church caused?
  - It caused Christians to be scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,
  - However, Apostles remained in Jerusalem.
    - They were responsible for the church.
    - They had previously faced arrest before (See Acts 5:18).
    - They were willing to face it again, even death if need be.

#### Verse 4

- “Now those who were scattered...”
  - Those scattered took the Word of the Gospel.
  - Paul thought he was ravaging the church, but his persecution only caused the gospel to spread.
  - Here, we see how God was using this for good.

#### Verses 5-8

- QUESTION: Who was among the Christians were scattered? Where have we heard of him before?
  - Philip, the evangelist.
  - He was one of the seven deacons along with Stephen.
  - This is not the Apostle Philip (Acts 1:13). He would have been back in Jerusalem.
  - The congregation at Jerusalem was dispersed because of the persecution.
  - The deacons were no longer needed and Philip was free to live.

- QUESTION: What did Philip do?
  - Preached the Gospel and performed miracles in Samaria.
  - Like Stephen, Philip had a special “favor of God” to perform miracles.
  - The Lord singled out Philip as His instrument through whom He brought miracles when and where He desired.
- “went down to the city of Samaria...”
  - Jesus had preached in Samaria and was known to some of the Samaritan people.
  - Samaritans were people whose Jewish heritage had been adulterated through intermarriage.
  - Their observance of Judaism was regarded as corrupt.
  - There was a long-standing and deep-seated hostility between Jews and Samaritans.
  - It was in this region that Christians were having success in spreading the Gospel.

#### Verses 9-11

- “Simon, who had previously practiced magic...”
  - Simon was a sorcerer who practiced witchcraft.
  - This was common in the ancient world
  - The range of their arts extended from:
    - conjuring of demons
    - dealing with the dead,
    - charms for healing
    - divination
    - stargazing.
- “They all paid attention to him...”
  - Simon must have been good.
  - He cleverly deceived many into believing he had divinely imparted powers.
  - As a result, he gained a large following.
- “...for a long time...”
  - As Simon had held the people “a long time,” this would have made Philip’s work difficult.
  - However, Philip was able to break this hold on the people and Simon himself.

#### Verses 12-13

- QUESTION: What is it that broke this hold on the people?
  - The Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the Gospel.
  - Philip proclaimed the forgiveness of sins and salvation that comes through the death and resurrection of Christ.

- The proclamation of the Gospel led them to desire to be baptized.
- Men and women and even Simon were baptized.
  - Under the old covenant, only males were circumcised (Gen. 17:10).
  - But under the new covenant, Baptism consecrates both men and women in one faith (Eph. 4:5).
- QUESTION: What amazed Simon?
  - The power of the Gospel was greater than the sorcery he had practiced.
  - He who amazed others was now himself kept in a state of amazement.
  - Simone accompanied Philip by heeding his teaching or supporting his work.

#### Verse 14

- "...they sent to them Peter and John..."
  - Since the congregation at Jerusalem had been scattered, the good news that came from Samaria must have brought joy to the apostles who had remained in the city.

#### Verses 15-17

- QUESTION: What did the apostles Peter and John pray for?
  - That the believers in Samaria might receive the Holy Spirit.
  - It is always the nature of Christian prayer to pray for those things that we as Christians already have in Christ and those things that the Lord promises us in the Gospel and Sacraments.
- QUESTION: Did that mean that they had not received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized and believed the Gospel?
  - No.
  - Whenever sinners are converted and baptized their sins are forgiven and the Holy Spirit is given to them.
  - One cannot be a Christian and have faith in Jesus Christ apart from the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - "Be baptized...for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).
  - "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).
- "...for he had not yet fallen on any of them..." (v. 16)
  - Pentecost:
    - This phrase calls to mind what happened at the time of Pentecost.
    - At Pentecost, a public demonstration of the Spirit's approval was given.
  - The Samaritans had been:
    - Baptized as believers.
    - They had received the Word and Sacrament and all that Word and Sacrament bestow: The Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

- The Samaritans believers had not:
  - been distinguished by the sign of the Spirit's presences.
  - Other marks, other signs and seals that indicated they were true members of the church that is created by the Spirit.
  - The Holy Spirit came in a miraculous way and is apparent to all who might be present.
- Other examples of public demonstrations of the Spirit:
  - St. Luke records that this public demonstration appears as new groups were received into the one Church through the ministry of the apostles: Samaritans (chp. 8), Gentiles (chp. 10), and the disciples of John the Baptists (chp. 19).
  - Note that in each case, these groups knew God's Word and the promise of the Messiah from the OT.
  - The preaching and gift of the Spirit confirmed that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.
- Not all baptisms had public demonstrations of the Spirit:
  - Baptisms administered by the apostles after Pentecost.
- The Spirit has his reasons for manifesting himself in various ways.
- QUESTION: How did the apostles "confirm" that the Samaritans were, indeed, Christians?
  - They laid hands on them, testifying that the Gospel had rightly come to the Samaritans as it had come to the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem.

#### Verses 18-19

- QUESTION: What did Simon want to purchase with money?
  - The gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - Simon assumed that his money and former persuasive ability would bring him new powers.
  - He sought to purchase apostolic authority and continue his influence among the Samaritans.
  - The fact Simon went back to his old ways doesn't indicate he didn't believe.
  - He believed and was baptize but the sinful flesh caused him to revert back to his old ways.
  - We are simultaneous saint and sinner.
  - We must constantly put the Old Man to death through daily repentance less we fall away.
- Can't be purchased:
  - The Holy Spirit
  - Faith in Christ
  - The forgiveness of sins
  - Child of God

- These things can be received only as a gift of God through the Word and Sacraments of Christ.

#### Verses 20-24

- QUESTION: What did Peter call Simon to do?
  - Peter calls Simon to repentance.
    - contrition over sin
    - faith in the forgiveness of sins
- “may your silver perish with you...”
  - Peter pronounces a curse on Simon to emphasize the rejection of Simon’s offer.
- “you have neither part nor lot in this matter...”
  - Simon was unfit to receive even the gift so many Samaritans were freely receiving.
- “your heart”
  - Where fear, love, and trust reside.
  - Simon’s heart wasn’t straight in God’s sight.
  - Unless his heart changes, there’s no forgiveness.
- QUESTION: In what way is Simon like Ananias and Saphira?
  - They had their hearts set on money and fame.
- QUESTION: In what way is Simon not like Ananias and Saphira?
  - Unlike Ananias and Sapphira, Simon immediately asked Peter to intercede on his behalf and to remove the curse.
  - Simon asks for forgiveness.

#### Verse 25

- “They returned to Jerusalem...”
  - Since the apostles’ place was still in Jerusalem, they left the work of proclaiming the Gospel to the Samaritans in Phillips hands.
  - Yet, the apostles proceeded slowly back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the gospel along the way.

#### Verse 26

- “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip...”
  - Here, the Lord employed the service of the angels to give directions to Philip.
  - To which Philip promptly obeyed.
  - He is to go southward.
  - Not to Gaza but to the road that runs between Jerusalem and Gaza.
  - The Lord is lending Philip from the exciting, expanding work in Samaria to a place with no people.

### Verse 27

- QUESTION: Whom did the Philip meet on the road south of Jerusalem?
  - An Ethiopian eunuch, under the authority of Queen Candace, who had charge of her treasury.
  - Lutheran Study Bible says:
    - *Ethiopian*. OT “Cushite,” known to Israelites through contacts with Egypt and Sheba. Judeans fled into Egypt during the Babylonian exile and settled on the island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt. They likely spread the faith southward into Nubia (Sudan) and Ethiopia.
- QUESTION: Why had the Ethiopian eunuch come to Jerusalem?
  - As a convert to Judaism, he came to worship in the temple.

### Verses 28-29

- “Was returning...”
  - On his return homeward after his visit in the holy city, he was reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah
    - Verses 32-33 indicates it was Isaiah 53:7-8.
    - Prophecy concerning Jesus’ suffering and death for the sins of the world.
  - The fact this man was reading a scroll indicates he was:
    - wealthy. Few people could actually buy a scroll.
    - educated. He was reading.

### Verses 30-31, 34

- QUESTION: Joining the chariot, what did Philip ask the Ethiopian and what was the response?
  - Philip - Do you understand what you are reading?
  - Ethiopian:
    - How can I understand unless someone teaches me? (v. 31)
    - About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” (v. 34).
  - Roman 10:8-17, especially verses 14, 15, and 17 reveal:
    - “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”
  - You have the eagerness of the Ethiopian to read and study scripture, but
    - you have the inability of the Temple to properly instruct.
    - It appears the Ethiopian had not heard about Jesus while he was in Jerusalem.

### Verse 35

- “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”
  - From the OT, specifically Isaiah, Philip catechizes him and opens up to him the meaning of the Scriptures.
  - Philip preached repentance and the forgiveness of sin through Christ.
  - Philip shows Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

#### Verses 37

- You’ll notice there isn’t a verse 37
- Some manuscripts have, “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”
- However, it appears there isn’t enough textual evidence to admit into the text.
  - Not enough of the manuscripts have it.

#### Verses 36 & 38

- This catechesis, instruction in the Christian faith, called the Ethiopian to the faith and confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- QUESTION: What does the Ethiopian ask Philip?
  - What hinders me from being baptized?
- QUESTION: What does this tell us about Philip’s preaching?
  - When Philip preached Jesus, he was preaching about the forgiveness of sin and how this forgiveness is given through the waters of Baptism.
  - How else would the Ethiopian come to desire baptism.

#### Verses 39-40

- “Rejoicing”
  - Receiving this great gift, the Ethiopian goes forth rejoicing and most likely telling everyone when he gets home.
  - This ensures that Jews in Africa and also Ethiopians would likewise receive the Gospel.
  - Lutheran Study Bible says, “Ethiopian Christians trace their beginning to this man, though Ethiopian kings did not officially adopt Christianity until c AD 350.
- “Azotus”
  - The Spirit removed Philip and did it suddenly and miraculously.
  - All at once he was gone.
  - Azotus one of the five chief cities of Philistia, between Gaza and Joppa, where Jews and Gentiles likely dwelt side by side.

### ***Terms***

*Catechesis Summary*

*Learn by Heart Catechism Connection*