

ACTS

Chapter 8

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

8:1 *giving approval.* See 22:20.

all except the apostles. For the apostles to stay in Jerusalem would be an encouragement to those in prison and a center of appeal to those scattered. The church now went underground.

scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The beginning of the fulfillment of the commission in 1:8—not by the church’s plan, but by events beyond the believers’ control. See map of “The Spread of the Gospel”. – – The Holy Spirit kept blessing the teaching and preaching, and new members were multiplied daily from the city and the surrounding towns. How easy to forget that the Savior had said something about Judea and Samaria and the world. After all, the matter of the needy had been settled peaceably. They were once again of one heart and mind, studying the Word and waiting for Christ’s return. Wasn’t that what He said they were to do? But it was now the Lord’s time to move His children out. And so He allowed the blessing of persecution. The majority of those fleeing the city seemed to have ended up in Samaria. This was natural since Samaria was nearby, and the Sanhedrin and their subordinates had no authority in this country. (LL)

8:3 *began to destroy.* See 22:4. The Greek underlying this phrase sometimes describes the ravages of wild animals. – “On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme” (Acts 26:1-11). He had approved of Stephen’s execution, and he wanted to follow through by destroying the church. The Sanhedrin provided temple guards for the raids which he conducted. (PBC)

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ^a there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷With shrieks, evil^b spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

8:4 *preached the word.* Many witnesses to the gospel went everywhere proclaiming the good news. The number of witnesses multiplied, and the territory covered was expanded greatly (cf. 11:19–20). – The gap left by Stephen’s death is quickly filled by other witnesses. Stephen’s preaching will be carried on and extended by Philip, and his role of suffering witness will be taken over by the young man, Saul, introduced at the moment of Stephen’s death. The experience and work of Stephen and Saul will be similar, and both of these figures resemble their Lord. The continuity between Stephen and Saul could encourage the conviction that the Lord will continue to have powerful witnesses despite human opposition, which cannot halt the divine purpose.

From this point on the apostles must repeatedly catch up with a mission that is sparked by other persons and other forces. This shift does not make the apostles unimportant. They become the stabilizing, verifying, unifying element in a mission that moves to new areas and groups without their planning or control. As the mission begins to move beyond Jerusalem and Judea, it is useful to distinguish two roles within it: the role of the initiator and the role of the verifier. The apostles shift at this point from the former to the latter role. That is, their function is reduced to recognizing and confirming the work of the evangelists who bring the gospel to new areas and groups. The twelve intended to perform the “ministry of the word” themselves while the seven cared for the daily ministry of serving tables (6:2-4), but now those scattered, including Philip, appear as preachers of “the word”, with no indication that the twelve have authorized this. The fulfillment of Jesus’ commission in 1:8 does not wait until the apostles are ready to include Samaria. While they are trying to maintain Jesus’ claim on Jerusalem, the mission moves forward through Philip. (Tannehill) – It was not one of the Twelve but one of the Seven who began the work of preaching to non-Jews. That does not mean that the apostles were disobedient to the great commission or reluctant to begin carrying it out. They did their work where they were until God’s providence or special direction placed them elsewhere. The gospel, accompanied by signs, did its work among the Samaritans as it had among the Jews in Jerusalem. (PBC) – The Samaritans are not Gentiles. Indeed they lay claim – not without some justice – to being an ancient and deeply traditional form of the religion of Israel. In their eyes, it was the Judeans who were the interlopers and innovators. But in the eyes of contemporary Judeans, they were at best among the “lost sheep” of Israel. The evangelism of them by Philip therefore continues the work of Jesus in reaching out to the marginal and outcast among the people inviting them to a full participation in the restored people of God forming around the Prophet whom God raised up. (Sacra)

8:5 *Philip.* One of the Seven in the Jerusalem church (6:5), who now becomes an evangelist, proclaiming the Christ (Messiah); see also 21:8. Philip is an example of one of those who were scattered.

a city in Samaria. Some manuscripts have “the city of Samaria,” a reference to the old capital Samaria, renamed Sebaste or Neapolis (modern Nablus).

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is

the divine power known as the Great Power.”¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into^a the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money¹⁹ and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”²⁵ When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

8:9 *Simon.* In early Christian literature the “sorcerer” (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church and the “father” of Gnostic teaching.

8:10 *the Great Power.* Simon claimed to be either God himself or, more likely, his chief representative.

8:13 *Simon himself believed and was baptized.* † Some have questioned whether Simon’s faith was genuine. Since he was baptized, he had faith, as Luke states. But later, as it happens to other believers, he misunderstood the reception of special spiritual gifts, and his heart was “not right before God” (v. 21). We hope that Peter’s admonition (vv. 20–23) resulted in Simon’s repentance. – Peter urged Simon to have a genuine change of heart (repentance) concerning his attitude and to turn to the Lord for forgiveness. Praise the Lord, Peter’s strong words worked. The Holy Spirit worked the change in Simon’s heart, and he tasted the full joy and peace of Christ’s forgiveness. And there was joy among the angels in heaven! (LL) – The bitterness in Simon of which Peter spoke was not anger or hatred toward the apostles. It was the bitterness of unbelief which God will not stomach, which he will spit out. Luke does not say whether Simon repented or not. Second-century Christian writers referred to him as the father of all heresies. (PBC)

8:14 *had accepted the word of God.* † They believed the gospel proclaimed by Philip. *sent Peter and John.* The Jerusalem church assumed the responsibility of inspecting new evangelistic efforts and the communities of believers they produced (see 11:22). – The Seven had not become the apostles’ peers when they were chosen for the work of distributing welfare. They worked under their supervision. (PBC)

8:16 *not yet come upon any of them.* Since the day of Pentecost, those who “belong to Christ” (Ro 8:9) also have the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit had not yet been made manifest to the Christians in Samaria by the usual signs. This deficiency was now graciously supplied (v. 17).

8:17 *placed their hands on them.* See v. 18; 19:1–7; cf. 2Ti 1:6; see also note on 6:6.

RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT – Why did God delay the giving of the Spirit? God used this unique situation to demonstrate to the apostles and the Samaritans and to the whole church that the old barriers between Jews and non-Jews had been removed. The church was to be one church, not a Jewish church and a Samaritan church separately. The Lord demonstrated this to the apostles and accomplished this through the apostles as an object lesson on the unity of all believers. (PBC) – The Holy Spirit miraculously distributed His charismatic gifts to those Samaritan believers on whose heads the apostles laid their hands. They, too, could speak in tongues and perform miracles of healing (1 Cor. 12:7-13). “All these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines” (1 Cor. 12:11). (LL)

8:18 *he offered them money.* Simon had boasted of having great powers before (see v. 10 and note), and now he tried to buy this magical power he believed the apostles possessed. – The Holy Spirit is God’s gift, not to be bought or in any way earned. To imagine that a gift can be bought is to turn grace into a business transaction. (PBC)

8:23 *full of bitterness.* See Dt 29:18.

8:25 PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN MANY SAMARITAN VILLAGES – The apostles had begun to preach the gospel to non-Jews, using the opportunity of the return trip to Jerusalem to do so. God was keeping the promise he had made through Joel, the prophecy which Peter quoted on Pentecost. (Acts 2:17; --Joel 2:28) (PBC) – By having the apostles return to Jerusalem, he maintains contact with the center of the mission, but by having them preach to villages on the way, he shows that the apostles not only approved the Samaritan mission but also took an active role in it. (Sacra)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian ^a eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” **30** Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. **31** “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ³³

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”^{b 34} The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”^{c 38} And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

8:26 *an angel of the Lord.* Cf. v. 29; see note on 5:19.
from Jerusalem to Gaza. A distance of about 50 miles.

8:27 *an Ethiopian.* Ethiopia corresponded in this period to Nubia, from the upper Nile region at the first cataract (Aswan) to Khartoum. – The Ethiopian was not from the area we know as Ethiopia today. “Ethiopian” simple means that he was a black man. He was from the kingdom of Nubia, which was located on the upper Nile River between Aswan (in modern Egypt) and Khartoum (in the Sudan). (PBC)

EUNUCH – A eunuch could not be a full-fledged convert to the faith of Israel (see Deuteronomy 23:1), but this man was a God-fearing Gentile believer. (PBC) – It was not uncommon for castrated males to hold positions of importance in oriental courts. It seems certain that Luke intends us to see this man as sexually mutilated. Such a condition precluded full participation in the assembly. The eunuch may be marginal within the Pharisaic definition of the people of God, but he is a mighty person in his own land (over all the queen’s treasury!). His chariot is capacious enough for himself and the scrolls and a guest. He speaks elegant Greek. He has a driver. Whoever the “historical Ethiopian” might have been, therefore, Luke clearly wants his readers to see him as a part of the “ingathering of the scattered people” of Israel. (Sacra)

Candace. The traditional title of the queen mother, responsible for performing the secular duties of the reigning king—who was thought to be too sacred for such activities.
gone to Jerusalem to worship. If not a full-fledged proselyte (Dt 23:1), the Ethiopian was a Gentile God-fearer.

8:30 *heard the man reading.* It was customary practice to read aloud. – Ancient manuscripts were written in capital letters with no spacing or punctuation between words and sentences. One had to read out loud, sounding out the words. (Burgland)

BOOK OF ISAIAH – He did something unprecedented – he bought a scroll of Scripture. Remember, there were no bookstores with scrolls just lying around to purchase. Also remember who he was – a black man and a eunuch. The purchase of this scroll must have cost him a pretty penny! But, more important, note the hand of God at work, for it was surely the Lord’s providence that had placed Isaiah, the evangelist of the Old Testament, into this searching man’s hands and caused him to be reading the choicest part of the book when Philip caught up to him. (LL)

8:34 *who is the prophet talking about ... ?* Beginning with Isa 53 (see v. 35), Philip may have identified the suffering servant with the Davidic Messiah of Isa 11 or with the Son of Man (Da 7:13).

8:35 *good news.* The way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

8:36 *they came to some water.* There were several possibilities: a brook in the Valley of Elah (which David crossed to meet Goliath, 1Sa 17:40); the Wadi el-Hasi just north of Gaza; water from a spring or one of the many pools in the area.

8:37 See NIV text note on v. 36.

8:39 THE EUNUCH DID NOT SEE HIM AGAIN – The eunuch was no longer excluded from full-fellowship with the people of God. Another non-Jew was added to the company of believers. We do not know from Scripture or from history whether other believers were gathered by his testimony to the Savior after he returned home. (PBC) *rejoicing.* Joy is associated with salvation in Acts (see note on 16:34).

8:40 *Azotus.* OT Ashdod (see 1Sa 5:1), one of the five Philistine cities. It was about 19 miles from Gaza and 60 miles from Caesarea.

Caesarea. Rebuilt by Herod and with an excellent harbor, it served as the headquarters of the Roman procurators. The account leaves Philip in Caesarea at this time; his next appearance is 20 years later, and he is still located in the same place (21:8).