

Acts 8

Stephen is dead. But Stephen is alive. What started with Peter and John getting harassed by the Jewish authorities has reached the point of martyrdom.

Chapter 8 is about God can use even a man like Saul to move His plans forward. The believers were still huddled together in Jerusalem. They needed to GO AWAY. Saul wanted them to really go away as in disappear altogether...and by any means!

Rather than facing the persecution and possibly death, many in the church left Jerusalem and went into Judea and Samaria – just like the LORD told them to do! However, the apostles stayed behind. The scripture doesn't say why. Perhaps they felt that Jerusalem was critical because it was the center of all Judaism and proving the Jesus was the Messiah would have repercussions all over Israel and beyond.

The initial results of their actions are recorded here in Chapter 8.

(Acts 8:1 NKJV) Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; **and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**

Consenting: not only agreeing to it but feeling gratified with it and even taking pleasure in it.
except the apostles – stayed behind to care for the church.

(Acts 8:2 NKJV) And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

Lamentation: beating the breast (Jewish expression).
Who were these devout men? It appears that they weren't the apostles or disciples else Luke would have said so. These were religious men who, some believe, were Jews who were moved by Stephen's speech but especially his godly manner and his face as if he was an angel and as he was being stoned seeking forgiveness for them who stoned him.

(Acts 8:3 NKJV) As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

And so, to confirm Jesus's words:

Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

John 16:2-3 NKJV They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. (3) And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

(Acts 8:4 NKJV) Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Preaching = the word literally means 'good messenger/angel' and it's where we get the word evangelize. It simply means announcing the good news of salvation. Scholars do not believe that these folks were 'ordained' or appointed to preach/teach. They were gifted with a heart of evangelism where they would freely and zealously share the Good News. Evidently these were not the kinds of people who would plant a church or become teachers, but they proclaimed everywhere the news that Messiah had come.

(Acts 8:5 NKJV) Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

This is the city of Samaria in the region of Samaria. While it is north of Jerusalem, most times the Scriptures say "went down" to such-and-such place or city because Jerusalem is on a hill.

Remember, Samaritans were ½ blood Jews – these were the poorest of the Jews who stayed behind during the Assyrian invasions; they ended up marrying pagans that the Assyrians brought into the area. All of the children were not pure Jews; Judean Jews hated them and thought that they were unclean and unworthy. The Samaritans did follow the LAW and even had their own Temple, however, they had pagan influences in their rituals.

Regardless of these prejudices of the Jews, Jesus did not feel the same way: Remember the women at the well (John 4)? and the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10)?

Many (but not all) commentators believe that this Philip is NOT the apostle but rather a deacon.

1. It was said in verse 1 the even though many were scattered, the apostles remained in Jerusalem.
2. Philip is mentioned second after Stephen in the list of deacons.

(Acts 8:6 NKJV) And the multitudes **with one accord** heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (Acts 8:7 NKJV) For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. (Acts 8:8 NKJV) And there was great joy in that city.

(Acts 8:9 NKJV) **But** there was a certain man called Simon, who **previously practiced sorcery** in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, **claiming that he was someone great**, (Acts 8:10 NKJV) to whom they **all gave heed**, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." (Acts 8:11 NKJV) **And they heeded him because** he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

(Acts 8:12 NKJV) **But when they believed Philip** as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **both men and women were baptized.**

The Truth of the Good News was too powerful to take second place to a sorcerer.

(Acts 8:13 NKJV) Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Hmmm...does Simon seem more interested in signs and miracles than being saved...

(Acts 8:14 NKJV) Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, **(Acts 8:15 NKJV)** who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. **(Acts 8:16 NKJV)** For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. **They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** **(Acts 8:17 NKJV)** Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The apostles were ordained to lay hands on them for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

After the Samaritans came to the LORD, the apostles heard about it and they sent Peter and John. They prayed and laid hands on them to receive the Spirit's baptism.

This is another reason why many believe that Philip was the deacon and not the apostle. Philip only baptized them in the Name of Jesus. They did not receive the in-filling of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 8:18 NKJV) And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, **he offered them money,** **(Acts 8:19 NKJV)** saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." **(Acts 8:20 NKJV)** But Peter said to him, **"Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!** **(Acts 8:21 NKJV)** You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

(Acts 8:22 NKJV) Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. **(Acts 8:23 NKJV)** **For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."**

This is another demonstration of the word of knowledge. There was no earthly way Peter could have known the inner state of Simon!

But, Peter tells him what every one needs to hear: Repent! And pray for mercy! Are you struggling with habitual sin? Repent and Pray and repeat as needed.

(Acts 8:24 NKJV) Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Whether or not his repentance was genuine is not indicated. There is much written by the early historians about his continued love of sorcery. The fact that he would not pray to God himself makes me think that he wasn't really repentant.

(Acts 8:25 NKJV) So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, **they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.**

Folks, this is both astonishing and quite miraculous. The Gospel was going out to a people that weren't even considered 2nd class citizens! They were hated by the Judeans. Now, they, both men and women, were united in Christ with the Jewish believers! Inconceivable!!

(Acts 8:26 NKJV) Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." **This is desert.**

Based on the geography, this might read "this is the beginning of the desert".

But the angel was pretty specific...And Philip had to go back thru Jerusalem to get to this specific road.

(Acts 8:27 NKJV) So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (Acts 8:28 NKJV) was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

The People of Ethiopia, Jewish and Christian, share the belief that they are descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, through their son Menelik, who returned to Ethiopia with his attendants after studying in Jerusalem. Various other theories claim that they are the descendants of the tribe of Dan or other tribes exiled by the Babylonians or descendants of the Jews of Elephantine in Egypt who migrated south to Ethiopia, or descendants of one of several possible Jewish military expeditions, or that they are Africans who were converted at a later date.

http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Ethiopian_Jews.htm

In other words, nobody really knows.

(Acts 8:29 NKJV) Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." (Acts 8:30 NKJV) So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Run Philip Run...

Philip hears him reading Isaiah aloud and asks him if he understands it. It was a good question given that the prophets are not always easy to comprehend.

(Acts 8:31 NKJV) And he said, "**How can I, unless someone guides me?**" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

That, my friends, is humility!

(Acts 8:32 NKJV) The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH. (Acts 8:33 NKJV) IN HIS HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY, AND WHO WILL DECLARE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN FROM THE EARTH."

As usual, this is the Greek translation: the Septuagint.

Isaiah 53:7-8 NKJV He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (8) He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions

of My people He was stricken.

(Acts 8:34 NKJV) So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

This has been the question ever since Jesus came and went back to the Father.

It's mainly an issue for unbelieving Jews who refuse to admit that it's a perfect description of Jesus. The rabbi's are so afraid that people would be swayed by its power, that they no longer read this passage in Synagogue. If you ask questions they will tell you that it describes Israel. If they don't tell you that, they'll tell you to stop asking questions!

(Acts 8:35 NKJV) Then Philip opened his mouth, **and beginning at this Scripture**, preached Jesus to him.

(Acts 8:36 NKJV) Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. **What hinders me from being baptized?**"

Evidently, Philip's teaching went beyond just the Gospel but touched on other topics as well, such as baptism.

(Acts 8:37 NKJV) Then Philip said, "**If you believe with all your heart, you may.**" And he answered and said, "**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**" (Acts 8:38 NKJV) So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Isaiah 56:4-5 NKJV For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, (5) Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.

But, isn't it amazing how simple coming to the LORD is? "**if you believe with all your heart**". It was important for Philip to ask and set forth the conditions, because he knew that it would be very wrong to baptize the man in the Name of Jesus, if he wasn't a believer!

(Acts 8:39 NKJV) Now when they came up out of the water, the **Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away**, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:40 NKJV) But Philip **was found at Azotus (aka Ashdod)**. And passing through, **he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.**

The Spirit of the LORD took Philip out of the water and put him some 30-40 miles north. After which, he traveled (in his own power!) about 100+ miles to **Caesarea**.

Know that some commentators (in particular, Adam Clarke) do not believe that this was a supernatural event, but that the Spirit of God made an impression upon Philip to immediately go north.

But many more believe that this was a supernatural move of the Holy Spirit. Why?

First, the phrase “was found” has been translated “found himself” giving credence to the idea that he himself was surprised by what happened.

Second, the word “caught” in the Greek is:

har-pad'-zo

to seize (in various applications): - catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force).

Depending on the context, this word means “taken by force” as used in John 6 where after feeding the 5000, some men wanted to make Jesus King.

John 6:15 NKJV Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

or in other ways “caught up” is used to describe what happened to Paul when the Spirit took Paul up to the 3rd Heaven:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 NKJV (2) I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago— whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was **caught up** to the third heaven. (3) And I know such a man— **whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—** (4) how he was **caught up into Paradise** and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Btw: the 1st Heaven is our atmosphere; the 2nd is “outer space” (where no man has gone before) where the stars and other planets are and the 3rd heaven, the highest heaven, is where God is.

Paul cannot definitively say whether he was dead or alive in his own body. The point being, something truly miraculous occurred.

The word is also used to describe what has called “the rapture”. (see 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17);

Other similar supernatural events:

John 6:21 NKJV Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and **immediately** the boat was at the land where they were going.

(when Elijah tried to send a message to Ahab that he wanted to meet with him)

1 Kings 18:12 NKJV And it shall come to pass, *as soon as* I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the LORD will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth.

(after Elijah ascended and Elisha became the Prophet)

2 Kings 2:16 NKJV Then they said to him, "Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send anyone."

Ezekiel 8:3-5 NKJV He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; **and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner *court*, where the seat of the image of jealousy *was*, which provokes to jealousy.**

Why did the Spirit whisk Philip away? It is left to conjecture;

1. Some feel as though Philip was taken so that the Ethiopian would not be able to pay him for his service. Salvation is always free;
2. Or to keep Philip from traveling with him to Ethiopia to disciple him.
3. The Spirit of the LORD had an immediate need and so He made sure that Philip was there at the appointed time and appointed place.

In any case, Philip was sent north into Samaria to preach the gospel.

