



Book of Acts

Chapter 8

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Theme: Conversion of Ethiopian eunuch (son of Ham)

Center of attention is shifting away from Jerusalem, to Samaria, and later to the uttermost parts of the earth.

McGee Introduction: Stephen falls asleep. Jesus puts his body to sleep to await the Rapture. Stephen goes into the presence of Christ who is standing to meet him. Stephen is the first martyr of the church to go to be with his Lord.

The other young man there that day was a Pharisee, and he thought he had everything. He looked up into heaven when Stephen said that he saw the heavens open. I am sure that Saul looked up longingly and admitted to himself, *I don't see anything, but I'd like to see what he sees. I have an empty heart.* Stephen was a tremendous witness to Saul. Stephen was the one, I believe, who prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road, as we shall see.¹

A Zealous Persecutor—Saul (Acts 8:1–3)

The Book of Acts and the epistles give sufficient data for a sketch of Saul's early life. He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3), a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (see 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5), the "son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6), and a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25–28). He was educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and became a devoted Pharisee (Acts 26:4–5; Phil. 3:5). Measured by the Law, his life was blameless (Phil. 3:6). He was one of the most promising young Pharisees in Jerusalem, well on his way to becoming a great leader for the Jewish faith (Gal. 1:14).

Saul's zeal for the Law was displayed most vividly in his persecution of the church (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:6). He really thought that persecuting the believers was one way of serving God, so he did it with a clear conscience (2 Tim. 1:3). He obeyed the light that he had and, when God gave him more light, he obeyed that and became a Christian!

In what ways did Saul persecute the church? He "made havoc of the church," and the verb here describes a wild animal mangling its prey. When Christ spoke to Saul on the Damascus road, He compared him to a beast! (Acts 9:5) The stoning of Stephen, which Saul approved, shows the lengths to which he would go to achieve his purpose. He persecuted both men and women "unto the death" (Acts 22:4), entering both houses and synagogues (Acts 22:19). He had the believers imprisoned and beaten (Acts 22:19; 26:9–11). If they renounced their faith in Jesus Christ ("compelling them to blaspheme"—Acts 26:11), they were set free; if they did not recant, they could be killed.

In later years, Paul described himself as "exceedingly mad against them" (Acts 26:11), "a blasphemer [he denounced Jesus Christ], and a persecutor, and injurious [violent]" (1 Tim. 1:13). He was a man with great authority whose devotion to Moses completely controlled his life, and almost destroyed his life. He did it "ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13), and God showed him mercy and saved him. Saul of Tarsus is the last person in Jerusalem you would have chosen to be the great apostle to the Gentiles!²

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:541). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 8:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

ESV: Acts 6:8–8:3 Stephen Bears the Ultimate Witness. The Greek word for “witness” is *martyrs*, which came to be associated with witnessing to the point of death, from which the word “martyr” derives. Stephen became the first such “ultimate” witness in the early church (c. a.d. 31/34).

A young man named Saul (8:1)

Luke next introduces the man who will become the main character of Acts. He is Saul, who will later be called by his Latin name Paul. (We will call him "Paul" from here on out.)

Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in eastern Asia Minor (21:39). He was the son of an orthodox Jewish father — a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5) and was "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6).

Paul was trained in a Jerusalem rabbinic school under the respected teacher Gamaliel "in the law of our fathers" — that is, the ancestral Jewish faith (22:3). He was a brilliant and dedicated student. He would later say of these early years of learning: "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14).

Technically, Paul is a Hellenistic or Grecian Jew, like Stephen. He knows Greek culture, and is as comfortable in the Hellenistic world as he is in strict Judaism. But he is also part of the Jewish world in Jerusalem, speaking Aramaic like a native. He may even attend the Hellenistic Jewish "Synagogue of Freedmen," where he would hear Stephen speak. Like the Freedmen, Paul was more fanatically Jewish than many Jews native to Jerusalem.

Paul may be a member of the Sanhedrin, or perhaps a younger attendant, and if so, he would hear Stephen speak before its members in that ill-fated trial. What effect does Stephen's dire judgment of Judaism have on Paul? Paul is suddenly confronted with an incisive attack on the traditions he venerates. He realizes Stephen is no ignorant Galilean. Here is a member of the Nazarean sect who is challenging the very basis of Judaism. There is only one thing to do, and that is to eliminate the threat. Along with the rest of the Sanhedrin, Paul can only cover his ears (7:57) and attack the messenger, Stephen. The Sanhedrin drags Stephen outside the city walls. As they are about to stone Stephen, they take off their outer garments and place them "at the feet" of Paul (7:58), who gives his approval to Stephen's death (7:60). (It's intriguing to think that Paul himself may be Luke's source for the summary of Stephen's speech, as well as the story of his stoning.) Luke's phrase "at his feet" may signify that Paul is a leader of the opposition to Stephen. Perhaps he is instrumental in rushing Stephen and dragging him outside of the city to a place of stoning. Luke uses the expression "at the feet" three times in the story of church members selling their property and bringing the money to the apostles (4:35, 37 and 5:2). There it is clear that the expression is meant to convey the apostles' leadership.

Luke says Paul is "giving approval to his death" (8:1). How we see Paul's role depends to some degree on how we understand this phrase. Is he merely agreeing with the stoning, or is he in some sense sanctioning, or even motivating it? If Luke uses the expression "at his feet" in the same way here as earlier, it makes Paul more than an uninvolved onlooker. That is, people placing their clothes at Paul's feet would be offering a gesture to him—recognizing his authority.

Paul, then, may be one of the instigator's of Stephen's murder. That he had a leadership role in the Jewish community in general seems to be corroborated by the fact that he becomes the point man in the persecution of Christians immediately following Stephen's death (8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5). Whatever Paul's role, there is no mistaking that he becomes a driving force in persecuting the church in Jerusalem, and in other cities such as Damascus. The havoc he inflicts on the church would disturb him greatly for the rest of his life (Acts 22:20; 1 Timothy 1:13).

Paul is here called a "young man" (7:58), but the expression doesn't help us fix his age very narrowly. Apparently it could refer to a man between his mid-20s and 40. Josephus applies the term to Herod Agrippa when he was about 40 (*Antiquities* 18:197).³

Persecutes the church (8:1-4)

On the very day of Stephen's death and burial, "A great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem" (8:1). This is Luke's first use of the word "persecution," and for the first time, rank and file believers are affected. Stephen's death is not an isolated act of violence. A storm of persecution breaks out against the church in Jerusalem and increases in its fury.

The prime agent in this campaign of persecution Saul, better known today by the name Paul. Luke says, "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (8:3). This is a vicious pogrom of intimidation against the Jerusalem church, and Luke tells us Paul "began to destroy the church" (8:3).

"The word used of Paul's activities...can describe the devastation caused by an army or a wild beast tearing its meat. It conjures up a terrible picture of the persecutor as he went from house to house — perhaps every known Christian home and at least every known place of Christian assembly.... The relentlessness of the pogrom is underlined by the reference to women being dragged off as well as men." (David J. Williams, *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary, page 152)

Paul is obviously a zealot for Judaism, as he later admits. The proof of his zeal is that he violently persecutes the church (Philippians 3:6; Galatians 1:13, 22). He probably believes that the new faith is a dangerous distortion of the ancestral traditions he believes in — a distortion that endangers the nation's favor with God.

In later years, Paul refers to his devastation of the church as a shameful period in his life (1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Timothy 1:13). But that understanding comes later, after he is confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

Though Luke doesn't say, it is possible that the persecution is directed specifically against Hellenistic Jewish Christians, and those who share Stephen's views, those who downplay the importance of the temple. At least, the Hellenistic believers are the ones whose work Luke now begins to describe (8:4; 11:19). David Williams says, "We need not understand by the word all that every member of the church left the city; verse 3 shows that they did not. Luke is prone to use 'all' in the sense of 'many' (see discussion on 9:35). But even of those who left, many may soon have returned." (*Acts*, page 151)

³ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

This point is indicated by the fact that the apostles, who seem supportive of Jewish institutions such as the temple, are not forced to flee Jerusalem (8:1). Also, we find disciples in Jerusalem a short time later (9:26). This round of persecution apparently doesn't last long. Luke soon notes that the church throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee is living in peace (9:31).

Later we will see that the church in Jerusalem is flourishing under the leadership of James. He is called James the Just, and is known for his piety and respect for Jewish institutions. (But even he will be martyred under the urging of the high priest in A.D. 62.) Richard N. Longenecker points out:

"With the martyrdom of Stephen, the Christians of Jerusalem learned the bitter lesson that to espouse a changed relationship to the land, the law, and the temple was (1) to give up the peace of the church and (2) to abandon the Christian mission to Israel." ("Acts," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, page 353)⁴

Acts 8:1

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Saul's Persecution

Saul, Philip, and Simon...persecution, power and peril.

It took persecution—mainly the scattering of the bicultural, foreign Jews—to get the church to begin to do what Jesus had commanded them back in Acts 1:8. As the second-century North African theologian Tertullian pointed out, “the blood of Christians is the seed” of the church’s growth.

Clarke: Saul was consenting unto his death—So inveterate was the hatred that this man bore to Christ and his followers that he delighted in their destruction. So blind was his heart with superstitious zeal that he thought he did God service by offering him the blood of a fellow creature, whose creed he supposed to be erroneous. The word *consenting* signifies gladly consenting, being pleased with his murderous work! How dangerous is a party spirit; and how destructive may zeal even for the true worship of God prove, if not inspired and regulated by the spirit of Christ!

It has already been remarked that this clause belongs to the conclusion of the preceding chapter; so it stands in the Vulgate, and so it should stand in every version.⁵

[And] - connects events of Chapter 7 and 8.

[his death] - whose death? Stephen's. Remember that the chapter breaks are man's invention.

⁴ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

⁵ Adam Clark's Commentary on the New Testament

Clarke: There was a great persecution—The Jews could not bear the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection; for this point being proved demonstrated his innocence and their enormous guilt in his crucifixion; as therefore the apostles continued to insist strongly on the resurrection of Christ, the persecution against them became hot and general.

[**consenting**] Greek: *suneudokeo* (GSN-4909), gladly consenting or being pleased with this murder.

[**death**] Greek: *anairesis* (GSN-336), murder (Acts 8:1; Acts 22:20).

[**church which was at Jerusalem**] This was the first group of Christians not a church, as we would think of it today. Most of these folks went to the Synagogue and not a church.

[**scattered**] Greek: *diaspeiro* (GSN-1289), to disperse (Acts 8:1,4; Acts 11:19; cp. diaspora (GSN-1290), translated "scattered" in James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1). This was God's method of scattering the gospel to many lands. Jews dwelling at Jerusalem from all the lands of Acts 2:5-11 and who were saved took the gospel back to these lands when this persecution started. Every place they went they became a nucleus of the church (Acts 8:4; Acts 11:19-21).

ESV: they were all scattered. The scattering or “dispersion” (Gk. *diaspeirō*, “to scatter, disperse”) of the believers **throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria** was similar to the earlier *diaspora* (“dispersion”) of Jews throughout the world (see note on [John 7:35](#)), but this “dispersion” led to the fulfillment of the promise in [Acts 1:8](#) that the gospel would go to the end of the earth (cf. [James 1:1](#); [1 Pet. 1:1](#)).

[**except the apostles**] This was miraculous itself.

Clarke: They were all scattered abroad—except the apostles—Their Lord had commanded them, when persecuted in one city, to flee to another: this they did, but, wherever they went, they proclaimed the same doctrines, though at the risk and hazard of their lives. It is evident, therefore, that they did not flee from persecution, or the death it threatened; but merely in obedience to their Lord’s command. Had they fled through the fear of death, they would have taken care not to provoke persecution to follow them, by continuing to proclaim the same truths that provoked it in the first instance.

That the apostles were not also exiled is a very remarkable fact: they continued in Jerusalem, to found and organize the infant Church; and it is marvelous that the hand of persecution was not permitted to touch them. Why this should be we cannot tell; but so it pleased the great Head of the Church. Bp. Pearce justly suspects those accounts, in Eusebius and others, that state that the apostles went very shortly after Christ’s ascension into different countries, preaching and founding Churches. He thinks this is inconsistent with the various intimations we have of the continuance of the apostles in Jerusalem; and refers particularly to the following texts: Acts 8:1, 14, 25; Acts 9:26, 27; 11:1, 2; Acts 12:1-4; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; Acts 21:17, 18; Galatians 1:17-19; 2:1, 9.

And Saul was consenting, Was pleased with his being put to death, and approved it. Compare Acts 22:20. This part of the verse should have been connected with the previous chapter.

Barnes: At that time. That is, immediately following the death of Stephen. The persecution arose on account of Stephen, Acts 11:19. The tumult did not subside when Stephen was killed. Their anger continued to be excited against all Christians. They had become so embittered by the zeal and success of the apostles, and by their frequent charges of *murder* in putting the Son of God to death, that they resolved at once to put a period to their progress and success. This was the *first* persecution against Christians; the first in a series that terminated only when the religion which they wished to destroy was fully established on the ruins of both Judaism and Paganism.⁶

All scattered. That is, the great mass of Christians.

Barnes: Except the apostles. Probably, the other Christians fled from fear. Why the apostles, who were particularly in danger, did not flee also, is not stated by the historian. Having been, however, more fully instructed than the others, and having been taught their duty by the example and teaching of the Saviour, they resolved, it seems, to remain and brave the fury of the persecutors. For *them* to have fled then would have exposed them, as leaders and founders of the new religion, to the charge of timidity and weakness. They therefore resolved to remain in the midst of their persecutors; and a merciful Providence watched over them, and defended them from harm. The dispersion extended not only to Judea and Samaria, but those who fled carried the gospel also to Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, Acts 11:19. There was a *reason* why this was permitted. The early converts were Jews. They had strong feelings of attachment to the city of Jerusalem, to the temple, and to the land of their fathers. Yet it was the design of the Lord Jesus that the gospel should be preached everywhere. To accomplish this, he suffered a persecution to rage; and they were scattered abroad, and bore his gospel to other cities and lands. Good thus came out of evil; and the first persecution resulted, as all others have done, in advancing the cause which was intended to be destroyed.

McGee: Saul was taking the lead in the persecution of Stephen, and he was in the cheering section. Now this young man, Saul of Tarsus, was amazed when he saw the face of Stephen. Stephen was looking into the heavens, and there he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Young Saul looked up—he didn't see anything. But, friend, he wished he could. He will see a little later. I believe that Stephen is the one who prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road.

Saul becomes the chief persecutor of the church. This causes the church to scatter. Actually, he does the church a favor. They were all settled down in Jerusalem, and I don't think they would have moved out had it not been for the persecution which Saul of Tarsus instigated.

⁶ Barnes' Commentary on The New Testament

Judea and Samaria are the next territories which the Lord had told them to enter. Judea surrounds Jerusalem, and Samaria lies to the north of Jerusalem.⁷

Though Luke refers to “all,” he could not have included everyone, for the church continued on in Jerusalem. From the context it may be concluded that the primary objects of persecution were the Greek-speaking Jews. They would have been easily identifiable and would have been associated with Stephen.

Why the apostles did not leave the city is not stated. Perhaps their sense of obligation to the church in Jerusalem kept them there. The Jerusalem church undoubtedly became more Jewish with the evacuation of people who would be more sympathetic with Stephen. At the same time this persecution deepened the cleavage between the church and Judaism.⁸

We can sin without acting. Saul is not accused of false testimony or violent action against Stephen. He simply sat and did nothing, consenting to what others did. We are judged for what we approve as well as for what we do. Silent acceptance of the wrong others do is sin.

Acts 8:2

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

[devout men carried Stephen to his burial] It was a mark of piety, charity, and mercy to bury the dead.

[lamentation over him] This is something that was never done for those who were condemned by the Sanhedrin.

Dying unburied was the greatest dishonor possible in the ancient Mediterranean world; even risking one’s life to bury the dead was considered honorable and heroic. Adult sons or those closest to the deceased would take charge of burial. Jewish law forbade public mourning for a condemned criminal, but for anyone else it was considered a pious duty. Stephen’s pious friends ignore the illegal ruling of the highest Jewish court to honor their friend.

Clarke: Devout men carried Stephen to his burial—The Greek word, signifies not only to carry, or rather to gather up, but also to do everything necessary for the interment of the dead. Among the Jews, and indeed among most nations of the earth, it was esteemed a work of piety, charity, and mercy, to bury the dead. The Jews did not bury those who were condemned by the Sanhedrin in the burying place of the fathers, as

⁷McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:542). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:372). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

they would not bury the guilty with the innocent; and they had a separate place for those who were stoned, and for those that were burnt. According to the Tract Sanh. fol. 45, 46, the stone wherewith any one was stoned, the post on which he was hanged, the sword by which he was beheaded, and the cord by which he was strangled, were buried in the same place with the bodies of the executed persons. As these persons died under the curse of the law, the instruments by which they were put to death were considered as unclean and accursed, and therefore buried with their bodies. Among the ancients, whatever was grateful or useful to a person in life was ordinarily buried with him; thus the sword, spear, shield, etc., of the soldier were put in the same grave; the faithful dog of the hunter, etc., etc. And on this principle the wife of a Brahman burns with the body of her deceased husband.

Clarke: Made great lamentation over him—This was never done over any condemned by the Sanhedrin—they only bemoaned such privately; this great lamentation over Stephen, if the same custom then prevailed as afterwards, is a proof that Stephen was not condemned by the Sanhedrin; he probably fell a sacrifice to the fury of the bigoted incensed mob, the Sanhedrin not interfering to prevent the illegal execution.

Barnes: And devout men. Religious men. The word used here does not imply of necessity that they were Christians. There might have been Jews who did not approve the popular tumult, and the murder of Stephen, and who gave him a decent burial. Joseph of Arimathaea, and Nicodemus, both Jews, thus gave to the Lord Jesus a decent burial, John 19:38,39.

Barnes: Carried Stephen. The word translated *carried* means, properly, to *collect*, as fruits, etc. Then it is applied to all the preparations necessary for fitting a dead body for burial—as *collecting*, or confining it by bandages, with spices, etc.

Acts 8:3

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison.

[havock] Greek: *lumainomai* (GSN-3075), to treat shamefully or with injury; to ravage; signifies the act of ferocious animals seeking prey. This word is commonly applied to wild beasts, to lions, wolves, etc., and denotes the devastations which they commit. Saul raged against the church like a wild beast—a strong expression, denoting the zeal and fury with which he engaged in persecution.

[haling men and women] Dragging, not sparing age or sex, but forcing them before magistrates.

[committed them to prison] Only the Romans had the power of life and death. The Sanhedrin by whom Paul was employed could only imprison and punish short of death. It is true some were killed (Acts 26:10), but this was by Roman permission or by murder, as in the case of Stephen.

Prison was normally a holding place till trial; that Saul detains women as well as men indicates that he is more zealous than most of his contemporaries would have felt necessary (Galatians 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6). The only charge against the church members seems to be an assumption of their opposition to the temple, aroused by Stephen's speech.

Entering into every house To search for those who were suspected of being Christians. A Christian man's house was not his castle.

Haling men and women—Neither sparing age nor sex in the professors of Christianity. The word used for haling signifies dragging them before the magistrates, or dragging them to justice.

Committed them to prison—For, as the Romans alone had the power of life and death, the Sanhedrin, by whom Saul was employed, Acts 26:10, could do no more than arrest and imprison, in order to inflict any punishment short of death. It is true, St. Paul himself says that some of them were put to death, see Acts 26:10; but this was either done by Roman authority, or by what was called the judgment of zeal, i.e. when the mob took the execution of the laws into their own hands, and massacred those whom they pretended to be blasphemers of God: for these sanctified their murderous outrage under the specious name of zeal for God's glory, and quoted the ensample of Phineas as a precedent. Such persons as these formed a sect among the Jews; and are known in ecclesiastical history by the appellation of Zealots or Sicarii.

BKC: These verses contrast sharply with each other. **Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.** On the other hand **Saul began to destroy the church.** The word for "destroy" (*elymaineto*, used only here in the NT) appears in the Septuagint in Psalm 79:13 (80:13 in Eng. texts) about wild boars that destroy (NIV, "ravage") a vineyard. Saul's zeal was so great against Christians that it was as if he were wildly raging against them (cf. Acts 9:1, 13). In violence **he dragged off men and women** (cf. 9:29; 22:4-5) and beat them (22:19; 26:11). This caused havoc in Jerusalem (9:21). Saul's own later imprisonment as an apostle *for* Christ contrasted with his imprisoning these followers!

Stephen's martyrdom together with the ensuing persecution of the church confirmed Israel's unbelief and her obstinate refusal to accept Jesus as her Redeemer.⁹

NT New Testament
Eng. English
cf. *confer*, compare

⁹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:372). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

This verse and 9:1–2, along with the background of 7:58 and 8:1, show that Sha’ul in his zeal for traditional Judaism (Ro 10:2&N; Ga 1:13–14&NN, 4:18) was a formidable persecutor of Messianic Jews (Pp 3:6), possibly their worst persecutor (1 Ti 1:13–16&NN).¹⁰

ESV: Saul was instrumental in the persecution, as he testifies later in Acts (22:4–5; 26:10–11) and in his epistles (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13).

Acts 8:4

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Saul was intensely devoted to what he believed was right, sincerity is not enough. Zeal without knowledge... (another example is Simon Magus).

[scattered abroad] - actual Greek is “passed through”; it occurs 43x in the New Testament, 31x in Acts and Luke. That is, they travelled through the various regions where they were scattered. In all places to which they came, they preached the word.

Persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: it scatters it and only produces a greater harvest. The word translated “scattered” (*diaspeiro*, Acts 8:1, 4) means “to scatter seed.” The believers in Jerusalem were God’s seed and the persecution was used of God to plant them in new soil so they could bear fruit (Matt. 13:37–38). Some went throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 1:8), and others went to more distant fields (Acts 11:19ff).¹¹

LAN: Persecution forced the believers out of their homes in Jerusalem, and along with them went the gospel. Sometimes we have to become uncomfortable before we’ll move. We may not want to experience it, but discomfort may be the best thing for us because God may be working through our hurts. When you are tempted to complain about uncomfortable or painful circumstances, stop and ask if God might be preparing you for a special task.¹²

[preaching] Greek: *euangelizo* (GSN-2097), announce glad news; having regard to the matter announced. Thus, the very means devised by Satan to get rid of this new religion became the means of God in scattering and establishing it.

Clarke: They that were scattered—went every where preaching—Thus the very means devised by Satan to destroy the Church became the very instruments of its diffusion and establishment. What are counsel, or might, or cunning, or rage, or malice, against the Lord, whether they are excited by men or devils!

¹⁰Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 8:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

¹¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 8:4). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

¹²Life Application Notes

Barnes: Preaching the word. Greek, *Evangelizing*, or announcing the good news of the message of mercy, or the word of God. It is not the usual word which is rendered *preach*, but means simply announcing the good news of salvation. There is no evidence, nor is there any probability, that all these persons were *ordained* to preach. They were manifestly common Christians who were scattered by the persecution; and the meaning is, that they communicated to their fellow-men in conversation, wherever they met them--and probably in the synagogues, where all Jews had a right to speak--the glad tidings that the Messiah had come. It is not said that they set themselves up for public teachers; or that they administered baptism; or that they founded churches; but they proclaimed everywhere the news that a Saviour had come. Their hearts were full of it. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and they made the truth known to all whom they met. We may learn from this,

- (1.) that persecution tends to promote the very thing which it would destroy.
- (2.) That one of the best means to make Christians active and zealous is to persecute them.
- (3.) That it is right for *all* Christians to make known the Paths of the gospel. When the heart is full, the lips will speak; and there is no more impropriety in their speaking of redemption than of anything else.
- (4.) It should be the great object of all Christians to make the Saviour known *everywhere*. By their lives, conversation, and pious exhortations and entreaties, they should beseech dying sinners to be reconciled to God. And especially should this be done when they are *travelling*. Christians, when away from home, seem almost to imagine that they lay aside the obligations of religion. But the example of Christ and his early disciples has taught us that this is the very time to attempt to do good.

For the Messiah's stated purposes (1:8) the scattering of the believers (v. 1), which seemed a disaster, proved a blessing; because **they announced the Good News of the Word**, telling about Yeshua, **wherever they went**. As Yosef said to his brothers after an earlier persecution, "You intended evil for me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Compare Ro 8:28.¹³

Church scatters (8:1, 4)

For the present, those of the Jerusalem church who are successfully hunted down are persecuted, beaten and imprisoned--and possibly killed. Others see what is coming and flee throughout the province of Judea and Samaria (8:1).

This flight of church members actually causes the gospel to spread more widely. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (8:4). Later in Acts, we learn that people are traveling as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, "telling the message only to Jews" (11:19).

The law of unintended results begins to operate against Saul and the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem. William Willimon writes:

¹³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 8:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

"Earlier, it had been predicted that the gospel would be taken by witnesses into 'all Judea and Samaria' (1:8). Little did the followers know then that the impetus for this far-flung evangelism would be persecution! These refugees, scattered like seed, take root elsewhere and bear fruit. God is able to use even persecution of his own people to work his purposes." (*Acts, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, page 65)¹⁴

Acts 8:5

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

“Philip” – Not the apostle, this is the same guy that was one of the deacons from Acts 6:5, called afterwards, Philip the Evangelist, Acts 21:8.

The Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews; they were sometimes viewed as half-Jews. So Samaria was not a choice district to go out and evangelize in.

[city of Samaria] What city this was is not known. The old city called Samaria in the Old Testament had been completely destroyed by John Hyrcanus, 128 B.C. Herod rebuilt it in 27 B.C. and called it Sebaste, but it was never called Samaria. Sychem was the place of the heart of the Samaritan religion, and Mt. Gerizim was the place of their temple. It might have been this city. Christ had already won many converts here (John 4:1-43).

Israel had been divided into three main regions—Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea in the south. The city of Samaria (in the region of Samaria) had been the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel in the days of the divided kingdom, before it was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. During that war, the Assyrian king took many captives, leaving only the poorest people in the land and resettling it with foreigners. These foreigners intermarried with the Jews who were left, and the mixed race became known as Samaritans. The Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the “pure” Jews in the southern kingdom of Judah, and there was intense hatred between the two groups. But Jesus himself went into Samaria (John 4), and he commanded his followers to spread the gospel there (Acts 1:8).

Barnes: The city of Samaria. This does not mean a city whose *name* was Samaria, for no such city at that time existed. Samaria was a region, Matthew 2:22. The ancient city Samaria, the capital of that region, had been destroyed by *Hyrcanus* so completely, as to leave no vestige of it remaining; and he "took away," says Justifies, "the very marks that there had ever been such a city there, Anti. b. xlii. chap. x. 3. Herod the Great afterwards built a city on this site, and called it *Sebaste*, i. e. *Augusta*, in honour of the emperor Augustus, Jos. Anti. b. xv. chap. viii. 5. Perhaps this city is intended, as being the

¹⁴ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

principal city of Samaria; or possibly *Sychar*, another city where the gospel had been before preached by the Saviour himself, John 4.

[preached] Greek: *kerusso* (GSN-2784), to proclaim as a herald, without reference to the matter proclaimed, and without including the idea of teaching. He preached Christ which is the duty of every preacher and every man. Who among us are full time ministry? (John 16:13-15).

Barnes: And preached Christ. Preached that the Messiah had come, and made known his doctrines. The same truths had been before stated in Samaria by the Saviour himself, John 4 and this was doubtless one of the reasons why they so gladly now received the word of God. The field had been prepared by the Lord Jesus; and he had said that it was white for the harvest, John 4:35 and into that field Philip now entered, and was signally blessed. His coming was attended with a remarkable *revival of religion*. The word translated *preach* here is not that which is used in the previous verse. This denotes to *proclaim as a crier*, and is commonly employed to denote the preaching of the gospel, so called, Mark 5:20, 7:36, Luke 8:39; Matthew 24:14, Acts 10:42, Romans 10:15, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 15:12, 2 Timothy 4:2. It has been argued that because *Philip* is said thus to have preached to the Samaritans, that *therefore* all *deacons* have a right to preach, or that they are, under the New Testament economy, an *order* of ministers. But this is by no means clear. For,

- (1.) it is not evident, nor can it be shown, that the other deacons Acts 6 ever preached. There is no record of their doing so; and the narrative would lead us to suppose that they did not.
- (2.) They were *appointed* for a very different purpose, Acts 6:1-5; and it is fair to suppose that, *as deacons*, they confined themselves to the design of their appointment.
- (3.) It is not said that *Philip* preached, in virtue of his being a *deacon*. From anything in *this* place, it would seem that he preached as the other Christians did-wherever he was.
- (4.) But *elsewhere* an express distinction is made between Philip and the others. A new appellation is given him, and he is expressly called *the Evangelist*, Acts 21:8. From this, it seems that he preached, not because he was a deacon, but because he had received a special appointment to this business as an evangelist.
- (5.) This same office, or rank of Christian teachers, is expressly recognized elsewhere, Ephesians 4:11. All these considerations show that there is not, in the sacred Scriptures, an order of ministers appointed to preach as deacons.

(John 15:16) *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

Philip went to preach the gospel to Samaria as Jesus had commissioned (1:8). In the first century, the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans half-breeds and religious deviants. Following the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., Samaria had been resettled by colonists brought to the land by the Assyrians. These colonists intermarried with the remaining Jews, and the Samaritans were descendants of these mixed marriages. The Samaritans rejected the Old Testament Scriptures beyond the five books of Moses. Furthermore, they built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. To express their disdain for the Samaritans, Jews traveling to Galilee would generally avoid Samaria by crossing over the Jordan River into Perea. But the gospel message transcended the first-century barrier between the Jews and Samaritans. The Spirit of God created a loving fellowship of believers out of the hate that existed. The formation of the Samaritan church indicates that there is no room for racism in the church (see 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 3:26–28), for Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

ESV: Philip most likely visited ancient Shechem, the main city of the Samaritans, lying at the foot of their holy mountain Gerizim. The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, disdained by both Jews and non-Jews (see notes on [John 4:4](#); [4:20–21](#)). They believed in Israel's God and in many respects maintained their Jewish heritage but were not considered Jews by those from Judah.

Philip preaches the gospel (8:5)

The first seven chapters of Acts deal with mission work among Jews in Jerusalem. Luke is now finished with this part of the story, and he begins to describe gospel outreach activities further afield. He mentions that the scattered members of the Jerusalem church flee to other parts of the province of Judea, preaching the gospel as they go (8:1, 4). However, Luke gives no further details about the evangelization of Judea, nor does he mention anything about the churches in other cities of this province. (He is also silent about the work and church in Galilee.)

Rather, Luke turns his attention to Samaria, where scattered members of the Jerusalem church also evangelize. They apparently know that Jesus' earlier ban on the disciples entering any city of the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5) has been lifted.

Samaria was once the capital of the northern ten-tribed House of Israel, which separated from Judah after Solomon died. In the eighth century B.C., the northern kingdom was invaded by Assyrians. Samaria was destroyed and many of the people were deported to other parts of the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 17:17:5-6). The area of Samaria was resettled by peoples from other parts of the empire. The story of this resettlement is told in 2 Kings 17, beginning with verse 24. And in the intervening 700 years, many other peoples moved in and out of the area.

The antagonism between Samaritans and Jews is centuries old, and in some ways it dates back to the Assyrian resettlement. It was intensified when the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple in the fifth century B.C. (Ezra 4:1-16; Nehemiah 2:10; 4:1-8; 6:1-14; 13:4-8). This caused an unhealed and bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans that grew more intense through the passage of time. The Samaritans built a temple on their own sacred hill, Gerizim (Josephus, *Antiquities* 11:310, 322-24, 246). The Jews under the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.) destroyed this temple

when they conquered Samaria in the second century B.C. and added this territory to their realm.

But in 63 B.C. the Romans conquered Palestine and the Jewish kingdom. The Samaritans were liberated from Judean domination, but the unfriendly relations between the two peoples continued.

The intensity of Samaritan feelings against Jerusalem is shown by the Samaritans' refusal of Herod's offer of 25 B.C. to rebuild their temple on Mount Gerizim when it was known that he also proposed to rebuild the Jerusalem temple....The Judean antagonism to Samaria is evident as early as Ecclesiasticus 50:25-26, which lumps the Samaritans with the Idumeans and the Philistines as Israel's three detested nations and then goes on to disparage them further by the epithets "no nation" and "that foolish people that dwell in Shechem." (Longenecker, page 357)

For Jews to enter Samaria to evangelize the people and bring them into fellowship with Jewish Christians is a bold step indeed. Yet, to Samaria they go!¹⁵

Mission to Samaria (8:5)

While Luke wants his readers to understand that a number of believers from Jerusalem evangelize Samaria, he describes only the work of Philip. He begins with a simple summary of his activities: "Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ there" (8:5).

There is some disagreement as to which city Luke has in mind. Some commentators think it is the capital city of the province. In Old Testament times it was called Samaria, but Herod the Great had rebuilt it, naming it Sebaste. Others believe that Luke has Shechem in mind, because it is the leading Samaritan city (Josephus, *Antiquities* 11:340). Some think the Samaritan city of Gitta is the one Philip goes to. According to Justin Martyr, Gitta was the home town of Simon Magus (*Apology* 1.26). Another candidate for the site of Philip's original evangelization of Samaria is Sychar, a twin city of Shechem. It is near Shechem and is the site of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, and many people there believe that Jesus is the Messiah (John 4:5).¹⁶

Acts 8:6

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

[spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did] Miracles can be heard and seen (Acts 8:7; Matthew 4:23-24; Matthew 11:1-5).

Clarke: The people with one accord gave heed—He had fixed their attention, not only with the gravity and importance of the matter of his preaching, but also by the miracles which he did.

¹⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

With one accord. Unitedly, or with one mind. Great multitudes of them did it. We may disagree on small points, however those points should never be points of contention that would bring strife among the brethren. They may bring separation from the world but not among the “True Body of Christ.

McGee: Stephen had had the sign gifts of the early church, and now we see that Philip had those same gifts. Not everyone had them—only those who were in the places of leadership, those who were taking the Word of God out to the world. There came the day when the sign gifts disappeared. They disappeared after the time of the apostles. By the time the canon of Scripture was complete and established, the credentials of a true man of God was correct doctrine rather than sign gifts.¹⁷

ESV: The Samaritans would have been prepared for Philip's message about the Christ (Messiah). They had their own expectation of a prophetic Messiah called the Taheb, who they believed would come to their holy mountain (see [John 4:20](#)). John the Baptist and Jesus had previously ministered in this area ([John 3:23](#); [4:4–42](#)). Like the apostles, **Philip** had received the Holy Spirit's power to cast out demons and to heal, which served as a sign confirming the truth of his message.

Acts 8:7

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.

[**palsies**] Greek: *paraluo* (GSN-3886), paralysis. Translated "palsy" (Acts 8:7; Acts 9:33; Luke 5:18,24) and "feeble" (Hebrews 12:12).

Clarke: **For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed**—Hence it is evident that these unclean spirits were not a species of diseases; as they are here distinguished from the paralytic and the lame. There is nothing more certain than that the New Testament writers mean real diabolic possessions by the terms unclean spirits, devils, etc., which they use. It is absolute trifling to deny it. If we, in our superior sagacity can show that they were mistaken, that is quite a different matter!

LAN: Jesus encountered and drove out many demons during his ministry on earth. Demons, or evil spirits, are ruled by Satan. Most scholars believe that they are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God, and who can cause a person to be mute, deaf, blind, or insane. Demons also tempt people to sin. Although they can be powerful, they are not able to read our minds and cannot be everywhere at once. Demons are real and active, but Jesus has authority over them; and he gave this authority to his followers. Although Satan is allowed to work in our world, God is in complete control. He can drive demons out and end their destructive work in people's lives. Eventually

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:543). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Satan and his demons will be thrown into the lake of fire, forever ending their evil work in the world (Rev. 20:10).

Acts 8:8

And there was great joy in that city.

There was great joy in that city—No wonder, when they heard such glorious truths, and were the subjects of such beneficent miracles. That should bring great joy to any city.

Joy in forgiven sin, joy in healing mercy, joy in God's gracious presence. See how Christians, though persecuted themselves, make others glad.

Barnes: And there was great joy. This joy arose,

- (1.) from the fact that so many persons, before sick and afflicted, were restored to health.
- (2.) From the conversion on individuals to Christ. The tendency of religion is to produce joy.
- (3.) From the mutual joy of *families* and *friends* that their friends were converted. The tendency of a revival of religion is thus to produce great joy.

Proclaims Christ (8:5-8)

At first glance, we might assume the mission to Samaria is the first step in the evangelization of Gentiles. However, Jews consider the Samaritans more as schismatics than as Gentiles. (Samaritans kept the laws that distinguished Jews from Gentiles. We will later see that Peter had no problem in going to the Samaritans, but he needs a mind-changing vision before he visits a Gentile.) Jews consider Samaritans "half-Jews," if we might use the term. To put it another way, the Samaritans are viewed as "half-breeds," both religiously and racially, by the Jews. But they were thought of more as heretics from the faith rather than outright pagans.

The Samaritans themselves claimed to belong to the true stock of Israel and to be worshippers of Yahweh; they observed the Sabbath, and practiced circumcision. But they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and recognized only the Pentateuch as holy Scripture. They were therefore regarded by the Jews as heretics and schismatics rather than as heathens. (William Neil, page 120)

The Samaritans, like the Jews, expect a deliverer to come, a hope based on Deuteronomy 18:15. Jews call him the Messiah; Samaritans call him the Taheb, or restorer. John alludes to this Samaritan belief in the story of Jesus' encounter with a woman of Samaria (John 4:25).

It's surprising that any Jew is willing to go to Samaria to preach the gospel. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9). The hostility between the two groups is highlighted in the Gospel of John. When Jesus' Jewish critics curse him, they can think of no more vile epithet than to call him a Samaritan (John 8:48). Samaritans are hostile to Jews, as well. Luke records an incident that shows their hostility. The Samaritans of a small village refuse to welcome Jesus and his disciples simply because they are traveling to Jerusalem (Luke 9:52-56).

Yet, the two peoples do have much in common. The Jerusalem missionaries such as Philip can build on the common hope of a coming Messianic restorer. Since the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) are holy to the Samaritans, Stephen can speak of the Messiah as the second Moses. That is precisely what he does. In his preaching, Philip builds on the common hope for a coming Savior when he proclaims Christ (8:5).

Philip, a Hellenistic Jew, also finds himself on common ground with the Samaritans because he, too, is an outcast from Jerusalem. News about the persecution suffered by the Christian Hellenistic Jews has probably reached Samaria, making the Samaritans more disposed to receive the missionaries.

If the *apostles* went to Samaria, associated as they are with Jerusalem and Judaism, their attempts to evangelize might be snubbed. But now, Jews who are also rejected by Judaism (as the Samaritans are) are coming to Samaria. Thus, they share a status out of which a common bond can be forged. God works his will in mysterious ways! Historically, the movement of the gospel into Samaria following directly on the heels of the persecution of Hellenistic Jewish Christians in Jerusalem makes a great deal of sense. Doubtless a feeling of kinship was established between the formerly dispossessed Samaritans and the recently dispossessed Christian Hellenists because of Stephen's opposition to the mentality of mainstream Judaism and its veneration of the Jerusalem temple—an opposition that would have facilitated a favorable response to Philip and his message in Samaria. (Longenecker, page 355)

But we do not want to ascribe the success of the mission to Samaria solely to sociological factors. In the final analysis, Philip's message finds fertile ground because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke writes that when the Samaritans see the miracles, "they all paid close attention to what he said" (8:6).

As at Pentecost, it is God's power that gets the attention of people so that some might become receptive to the gospel message. Luke is telling his readers that Philip's work is to be seen in continuity with that of Jesus. Like Philip, Jesus performed miraculous works, expelling demons and healing the sick (Luke 4:33, 36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2, 29; 9:42; 11:24).

The work of the Hellenistic Jews (such as Philip) constitutes a new advance of the gospel and the church. But occurs in Samaria, a quasi-Jewish environment. A dispossessed group, but within the boundaries of ancient Israel, is experiencing the outreach of Christ through the church. However, a mission to pagan Gentiles is yet to occur.

Philip's evangelization of the Samaritans "continues the work of Jesus in reaching out to the marginal and outcast among the people and inviting them to a full participation in the restored people of God forming around the Prophet whom God raised up" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 151).¹⁸

¹⁸ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

Acts 8:9

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:

“But” - note opposition. Adverse connective.

Simon the Sorcerer “Simon Magus” - a magician.

[**Simon**] Ancient ecclesiastical writers say that Simon claimed he was the Father who gave the law to Moses; that he came in the reign of Tiberias as the Son; that he descended upon the disciples at Pentecost in flames of fire; that he was the Messiah, the Paraclete, and Jupiter; and that the woman who accompanied him called Helena was Minerva, or the first intelligence.

[**sorcery**] Greek: *mageuo* (GSN-3096), practice of the rites or sciences of the magi, the worshipers of fire among the Persians; a magician (Matthew 2:1).

Barnes: Used sorcery. Exercising the arts of the *Magi*, or *Magicians*; hence the name Simon *Magus*. Matthew 2:1. The ancient *Magi* had their rise in Persia, and were at first addicted to the study of philosophy, astronomy, medicine, etc. This name came afterwards to signify those who made use of the knowledge of these arts for the purpose of imposing on mankind-astrologers, soothsayers, necromancers, fortune-tellers, etc. Such persons pretended to predict future events by the positions of the stars, and to cure diseases by incantations, etc. See Isaiah 2:6; see also Daniel 1:20, 2:2. It was expressly forbidden the Jews to consult such persons on pain of death, Leviticus 19:31, 20:6. In these arts Simon had been eminently successful.

[**bewitched**] Greek: *existemi* (GSN-1839), to drive out of one's senses; to be amazed beyond measure (cp. Acts 2:7,12; Mark 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13). This is not a good translation. The Greek means merely that he *astonished* or *amazed* the people, or *confounded* their judgment. The idea of *bewitching* them is not in the original text.

[**giving out that himself was some great one**] Claiming to be some great one.

Clarke: And bewitched the people of Samaria Astonishing, amazing, or confounding the judgment of the people, from the word to remove out of a place or state, to be transported beyond one's self, to be out of one's wits; a word that expresses precisely the same effect which the tricks or legerdemain of a juggler produce in the minds of the common people who behold his feats. It is very likely that Simon was a man of this cast, for the east has always abounded in persons of this sort. The Persian, Arabian, Hindoo, and Chinese jugglers are notorious to the present day; and even while I write this, (July, 1813), three Indian jugglers, lately arrived, are astonishing the people of London; and if such persons can now interest and amaze the people of a city so cultivated and enlightened, what might not such do among the grosser people of Sychem or Sebaste, eighteen hundred years ago?

Clarke: That himself was some great one—That the feats which he performed sufficiently proved that he possessed a most powerful supernatural agency, and could do whatsoever he pleased.

LAN: In the days of the early church, sorcerers and magicians were numerous and influential. They worked wonders, performed healings and exorcisms, and practiced astrology. Their wonders may simply have been magic tricks, or the sorcerers may have been empowered by Satan (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thes. 2:9). Simon had done so many wonders that some even thought that he was the Messiah; but his powers did not come from God (see Acts 8:18-24).

Barnes: But there was a certain man, called Simon. The Fathers have written much respecting this man, and have given strange accounts of him; but nothing more is certainly known of him than is stated in this place. **Beforetime.** The practice of magic, or sorcery, was common at that time, and in all the ancient nations.

BBC: Magicians usually drew large followings in antiquity; given the prominence of Jewish magicians in Greco-Roman antiquity, a Samaritan magician should not surprise us. Like the Old Testament, official leaders in mainstream Judaism opposed magic, but even some later rabbis indulged in sorcery, claiming simply to exploit insight into the secrets of God's laws of creation.¹⁹

McGee: He sets himself up as some great one. We find the same sort of thing today. If someone claims to be a faith healer, that sets him apart, believe me. People may declare that the faith healers are humble. Humility is not manifest in services where a person is supposedly healing people and implying that he is the only person there who has that gift. That is "giving out that himself was some great one," as Simon the sorcerer was doing.²⁰

It is a basic principle in Scripture that wherever God sows His true believers, Satan will eventually sow his counterfeits (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). This was true of the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7ff) and Jesus (Matt. 23:15, 33; John 8:44), and it would be true of Paul's ministry also (Acts 13:6ff; 2 Cor. 11:1–4, 13–15). The enemy comes as a lion to devour, and when that approach fails, he comes as a serpent to deceive. Satan's tool in this case was a sorcerer named Simon.²¹

This is Christianity's first sharp confrontation with the occult. Moses had listed no fewer than 10 "abominations" of the nations, particularly of Canaan. He strongly warned the Israelites just before crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land (Deut 18:9-14). Sorcery is literally "magic arts," from *mageuo* (Gk.), the root for the English word "magic." Moses warned the Israelites that Canaan would be filled with the practitioners of

¹⁹ Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament

²⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:543). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 8:9). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

wizardry, necromancy, and divination. He then indicated to the chosen people that God was instituting prophecy precisely to teach and warn the Israelites about such things. Sorcery and its like were wholly unacceptable to the God of Israel (Lev 20:6, 27; Deut 17:2-5). Moses indicated that the prophets God would send, apparently beginning with Joshua, would teach the people to resist such practices. Prophecy would be established alongside the priesthood (Deut 18:15ff.). This may be an instance of double futuristic application of prophecy because Peter treated this prediction as having been fulfilled by the coming of Christ (2:22-24). In Christianity's first encounter with the Samaritan culture, Simon stubbornly resisted and apparently never actually became a Christian (8:18-24). Just as Christianity was victorious in its first confrontation with sorcery in the spread of the gospel into Judea and Samaria, so in the final segment of the Great Commission (cf. 1:8, note), the sorcerer Elymas vigorously tried to stop Paul and Barnabas from witnessing to the proconsul Sergius Paulus (13:8, 12). The missionaries demonstrated that the victory of the infant faith in its homeland would be repeated abroad.²²

Acts 8:10

To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

[This man is the great power of God] This man has great supernatural power.

Clarke: This man is the great power of God—That is, he is invested with it, and can command and use it. They certainly did not believe him to be God; but they thought him to be endued with a great supernatural power.

Many traditions revolve around **Simon** the sorcerer. It is alleged: (a) that he was the founder of the Gnostic heresies, (b) that he went to Rome and perverted Christian doctrine there, and (c) that he became involved in a miracle contest with Peter and lost. At any rate, this Simon of Samaria did practice **sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria**. Because of his "sorcery," the ability to exercise control over nature and/or people by means of demonic power, **people** called him **the Great Power**. They may or may not have thought of him as possessing deity. At any rate **Simon boasted that he was someone great**, and the people of Samaria believed him. Furthermore, he accepted their adulation.²³

²² Believer's Study Bible

²³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:372). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Acts 8:11

And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

[sorceries] Magical arts.

Twelve Forbidden Practices (Dake)

1. Enchantments—practice of magical arts (Exodus 7:11,22; Exodus 8:7,18; Leviticus 19:26; Deut. 18:10; 2 Chron. 33:6; 2 Kings 17:17; 2 Kings 21:6; Isaiah 47:9,12; Jeremiah 27:9; Daniel 1:20)
2. Witchcraft—practice of dealing with evil spirits (Exodus 22:18; Deut. 18:10; 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Chron. 33:6; 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4; Galatians 5:19-21)
3. Sorcery—same as witchcraft (Exodus 7:11; Isaiah 47:9,12; Isaiah 57:3; Jeremiah 27:9; Daniel 2:2; Malachi 3:5; Acts 8:9-11; Acts 13:6-8; Rev. 9:21; Rev. 18:23; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15)
4. Soothsaying—same as witchcraft (Isaiah 2:6; Daniel 2:27; Daniel 4:7; Daniel 5:7,11; Micah 5:12)
5. Divination—the art of mystic insight or fortunetelling (Numbers 22:7; Numbers 23:23; Deut. 18:10-14; 2 Kings 17:17; 1 Samuel 6:2; Jeremiah 14:14; Jeremiah 27:9; Jeremiah 29:8; Ezekiel 12:24; Ezekiel 13:6-7,23; Ezekiel 21:22-29; Ezekiel 22:28; Micah 3:7; Zech. 10:2; Acts 16:16)
6. Wizardry—same as witchcraft. A wizard is a male and a witch is a female who practices witchcraft. Both were to be destroyed in Israel (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:6,27; Deut. 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:3,9; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Kings 23:24; 2 Chron. 33:6; Isaiah 19:3)
7. Necromancy—divination by means of pretended communication with the dead (Deut. 18:11; Isaiah 8:19; 1 Samuel 28; 1 Chron. 10:13)
8. Magic—any pretended supernatural art or practice (Genesis 41:8,24; Exodus 7:11,22; Exodus 8:7,18-19; Exodus 9:11; Daniel 1:20; Daniel 2:2,10,27; Daniel 4:7,9; Daniel 5:11; Acts 19:19)
9. Charm—to put a spell upon (same as enchantment, Deut. 18:11; Isaiah 19:3)
10. Prognostication—to foretell by indications, omens, signs, etc. (Isaiah 47:13)
11. Observing times—same as prognostication (Leviticus 19:26; Deut. 18:10; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6)
12. Astrology and star gazing—divination by stars (Isaiah 47:13; Jeremiah 10:2; Daniel 1:20; Daniel 2:2,10; Daniel 4:7; Daniel 5:7-15)

All the above practices were and still are carried on in connection with demons, called familiar spirits. All who forsook God and sought help from these demons were to be destroyed (Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:6; Deut. 18:11; 1 Samuel 28; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Kings 23:24; 1 Chron. 10:13; 2 Chron. 33:6; Isaiah 8:19; Isaiah 19:3; Isaiah 29:4. See 1 Tim. 4:1-8; 2 Thes. 2:8-12; Matthew 24:24; Rev. 13; Rev. 16:13-16; Rev. 19:20).

McGee: These people felt that Simon the sorcerer was like a god. Just as with these people, there are a great many people who are bewitched today. My friend, do not be bewitched by any man or his power. Even if a man is giving out the Word of God, do not

look to the man. Look to the Word of God and check to see if he is presenting it accurately. Look to God. Turn to Him. When we get our eyes on man, we take our eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what had happened in Samaria.²⁴

Acts 8:12

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.

[preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God] Philip's message and power were greater than that of Simon and his miracles stood the test in a way that the feats of Simon could not.

Four Things Philip Preached: (Dake)

1. The Word of God (Acts 8:4)
2. Christ (Acts 8:5)
3. The things of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; cp. 1 Cor. 4:18-20)
4. The name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12; cp. Mark 16:17; John 14:12-15; John 15:16; *John 16:23-26, notes)

Six Results of Gospel Preaching: (Dake)

1. Multitudes converted (Acts 8:6,12)
2. Miracles and healings (Acts 8:6-7,12-13)
3. Demons cast out (Acts 8:7)
4. Great joy (Acts 8:8)
5. Many baptized in water (Acts 8:12-16)
6. Holy Spirit given (Acts 8:14-23)

Clarke: But when they believed Philip—So it is evident that Philip's word came with greater power than that of Simon; and that his miracles stood the test in such a way as the feats of Simon could not.

Judaism acknowledged that pagan sorcerers could do miracles, which most segments of Judaism would attribute to Belial (Satan). The Old Testament taught that pagan sorcerers could duplicate some of God's signs on a small scale (Exodus 7:11, 22; Exodus 8:7), but that their power was definitely limited (Exodus 8:18-19; Exodus 9:11). Some writers have argued that Simon was not genuinely converted, given his subsequent behavior (Acts 8:18-24), but this issue depends on the meaning of "conversion"; like Judaism in the same period, early Christianity lamented not only false converts but also apostates (e.g., 1 Samuel 10:6; 1 Samuel 16:14; 2 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:19).

Simon's **magic** means his sorcery, his demonic powers (the Gr. words for "practiced sorcery" and "magic" are related). When **Philip** came to Samaria, **he preached the good**

²⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:543). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
Gr. Greek

news of the kingdom of God and the name (cf. 3:16) **of Jesus Christ.** The term “the kingdom of God” refers to the coming kingdom (cf. 1:3, 6). “The name of Jesus Christ” looks to His position as Messiah (cf. 8:5, “the Christ,” lit., the Messiah). In other words, the message meant that some Samaritans would become heirs of the Millennium by faith in Jesus, the Messiah.

As an evidence of their faith the Samaritans **were baptized, both men and women** (cf. “men and women” in v. 3). The contrasts and comparisons between Simon and Philip are striking. Both performed miracles, Simon by demonic power and Philip by divine power. Simon boasted and welcomed acclaim to himself, but Philip proclaimed Christ. People were amazed at Simon’s magic, but people were converted to Christ by Philip’s ministry.²⁵

Acts 8:13

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

One can believe a great deal about Christ, and yet not be saved. (No reason to say that Simon was insincere!) Simon was baptized, but not saved?! (Clearly self-deceived.)

[wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done] Bewitched by the signs and great works of power. See Acts 8:9.

Simon himself believed also—He was struck with the doctrine and miracles of Philip—he saw that these were real; he knew his own to be fictitious. He believed therefore that Jesus was the Messiah, and was in consequence baptized.

Barnes: And wondered. This is the same word that is translated *bewitched* in Acts 8:9,11. It means that he was amazed that Philip could really perform so much greater miracles than he had even pretended to. Hypocrites will sometimes be greatly attentive to the external duties of religion, and will be greatly surprised at what is done by God for the salvation of sinners.

Barnes: Then Simon himself believed also. That is, he believed that Jesus had wrought miracles, and was raised from the dead, etc. All this he could believe in entire consistency with his own notions of the power of magic: and all that the connexion requires us to suppose is that he believed this—that Jesus had power of working miracles, etc.; and as he purposed to turn this to his own account, he was willing to profess himself to be his follower. It might have injured his popularity, moreover, if he had taken a stand when so many were professing to become Christians. Men often profess religion because, if they

cf. *confer*, compare

lit. literal, literally

v. verse

²⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:372). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

do not, they fear they will lose their influence, and be left with the ungodly. That Simon was not a real Christian is apparent from the whole narrative, Acts 8:18,21-23.

Barnes: And when he was baptized. He was admitted to a *profession* of religion in the same way as the others. Philip did not pretend to know the heart; and Simon was admitted because he *professed* his belief. This is all the evidence that ministers can have; and it is no wonder that they, as well as Philip, are often deceived. The reasons which influenced Simon to make a profession of religion seem to have been these:

- (1.) An impression that Christianity was *true*. He seems to have been convinced of this by the miracles of Philip.
- (2.) The fact that many others were becoming Christians; and *he* went in with the multitude. This is often the case in revivals of religion.
- (3.) He had no religion; but it is clear Acts 8:20,21, that he was willing to make use of Christianity to advance his own power, influence, and popularity—a thing which multitudes of men of the same mind with Simon Magus have been willing since to do.

He continued, It was customary and natural for the disciples to remain with their teachers. See Acts 2:42.

McGee: Simon believes, he is baptized, and he becomes a friend of Philip. You would certainly think he was a real child of God. However, he is not converted. We will see that there are also others who are professing believers, but they are not born again. They have the head knowledge, they go along with the crowd, but they are not saved. Although they have been baptized with water, they have not been baptized into the church of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

There are a great many people like that today. I receive many letters from people who have told me that since they have been studying the Bible along with our program, they have begun to examine their faith. Many have come to realize that they have just been following along with someone else and that they have not been genuinely, personally converted. Paul says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves ...” (2 Cor. 13:5). It is a very good thing to check yourself. See whether you are in the faith or not.

This man Simon had all the outward trappings. He answered that he did believe in Jesus, and so he was baptized. But it was not a genuine faith.²⁶

Amazingly **Simon himself believed and was baptized.** Now rather than people following Simon, **he followed Philip!** His response must have had a profound effect on his own followers.

Was Simon saved? Luke did not specify this clearly, so it is difficult to be dogmatic. But seven facts suggest that Simon probably was not born again: (1) The verb “believe” (*pisteuō*) does not always refer to saving faith. Simon’s faith could have been like that of the demons in James 2:19, merely intellectual assent. (2) Furthermore, faith based on

²⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:543). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

signs is not a trustworthy faith (cf. John 2:23-25; 4:48). (3) In addition, Luke never stated that Simon received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-18). (4) Simon continued to have a self-centered interest in the display of miraculous power (vv. 18-19). (5) The verb “repent” (metanoēō) used in verse 22 is normally addressed to lost people. (6) The word “perish” (eis apōleian) employed in verse 20 is strong. It is related to the word “perish” in John 3:16. (7) The description of Simon in Acts 8:23 is a better description of a lost man than of one who is saved (cf. Deut. 29:18). Still one cannot be dogmatic on this point. The Lord knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19).²⁷

Simon the great power (8:9-13)

Luke intertwines his story of the Samaritan mission with that of a famous local religious personality named Simon, generally called Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer (Magician). He looms large in the writings of second-century Christians as the first heretic, troubler of the church, and founder of Gnostic Christianity. The early Christian theologian Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), bishop of Lyons, France, calls Simon the originator of a number of heresies (*Against Heresies* 1:23).

Justin Martyr, a native of Samaria who died around A.D. 165, says that his countrymen revered Simon as “the first god” or God above all (*Apology* 1:26). Luke notes a similar belief about Simon, saying he is known as “the Great Power” (8:10). According to Justin, Simon goes to Rome during the reign of emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), where his feats of magic bring him great honor.

Simon may even be claiming to be part of the church, teaching in its name. After all, “Simon himself believed and was baptized” (8:13). Luke may want to make clear to his readers that Simon has no relationship with the Christian community, nor does he have the approval of the apostles and Holy Spirit—despite the fact that he (or his followers) claim Christian roots.²⁸

Acts 8:14

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

“Peter and John” - always paired together. This is the last time you read about John, he disappears from the narrative record, but shows up, of course, in Revelation on Patmos and the letters.

Barnes: Peter. This shows that *Peter* had no such authority and primacy as the Roman Catholics claim for him. He exercised no authority of *sending* others, but was himself *sent*. He was appointed by *their* united voice, instead of claiming the power himself of directing them.

cf. *confer*, compare

vv. verses

²⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:373). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁸ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

[apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John] First mention of apostles leaving the revival at Jerusalem.

The word of God—The doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clarke: They sent unto them Peter and John—There was no individual ruler among the apostles—there was not even a president of the council; and Peter, far from being chief of the apostles, is one of those sent, with the same commission and authority as John, to confirm the Samaritans in the faith.

Barnes: They sent. That is, the apostles deputed two of their number. This shows conclusively that there was no *chief* or *ruler* among them. They acted as being equal in authority. The reason why they sent them was, probably, that there would be a demand for more labour than Philip could render; a church was to be founded, which required their presence; and it was important that they should be present to organize it, and to build it up. The *harvest* had occurred in Samaria, of which the Saviour spoke, John 4:35, and it was proper that they should enter into it. In times of revival there is often more to be done than can be done by the regular pastor of a people, and it is proper that he should be aided from abroad.

LAN: Peter and John were sent to Samaria to find out whether or not the Samaritans were truly becoming believers. The Jewish Christians, even the apostles, were still unsure whether Gentiles (non-Jews) and half-Jews could receive the Holy Spirit. It wasn't until Peter's experience with Cornelius (Acts 10) that the apostles became fully convinced that the Holy Spirit was for all people. It was John who had asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to burn up a Samaritan village that refused to welcome them (Luke 9:51-55). Here he and Peter went to the Samaritans to pray with them.

Barnes: And John. Peter was ardent, bold, zealous, rash; John was mild, gentle, tender, persuasive. There was wisdom in uniting them in this work, as the talents of both were needed; and the excellencies in the character of the one would compensate for the defects of the other. It is observable that the apostles sent two together, as the Saviour had himself done. Mark 6:7. The *reasons* why this additional aid was sent to Samaria were probably these:

- (1.) To assist Philip in a great work—in the *harvest* which he was there collecting.
- (2.) To give the *sanction* of the authority of the apostles to what he was doing.
- (3.) To confer on the converts the gift of the Holy Ghost, Acts 8:17.

BBC: From a theological standpoint, the work of the Spirit is one package (Acts 2:38-39), but in the experience of the church not all aspects of his work are necessarily manifested simultaneously. Luke emphasizes the prophetic-empowerment dimension of the Spirit so much that he rarely mentions other aspects of the Spirit's work known in the Old Testament and early Judaism; this prophetic-empowerment aspect is no doubt in view here, although Philip's hearers were already converted in Acts 8:12.

Peter and John go to Samaria (8:14)

The overwhelming success of the mission to Samaria soon reaches the ears of the apostles in Jerusalem. Peter and John are dispatched to Samaria as emissaries of the Jerusalem church (8:14).

There are several reasons why the apostles go to Samaria. For one, it is a mission of goodwill—to show that the church is one body. By sending the apostles to Samaria, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are demonstrating their brotherly bond with the Samaritan disciples. The Jerusalem church also needs to satisfy itself of the genuineness of the Samaritan conversions. Once they do so, there will be no question of the mother church accepting these new converts.

By going to Samaria, Peter and John are also confirming the validity of the Hellenistic Christians' ministry of evangelization. In fact, during the early years of the church, the apostles seem to exercise a general supervision over the progress of the gospel in general (11:22). But we should also note the collegial method of decision-making at Jerusalem. It is the *church* that sends the apostles to Samaria (8:14).²⁹

Acts 8:15

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

LAN: This was a crucial moment for the spread of the gospel and for the growth of the church. Peter and John had to go to Samaria to help keep this new group of believers from becoming separated from other believers. When Peter and John saw the Lord working in these people, they were assured that the Holy Spirit worked through *all* believers—Gentiles and mixed races as well as “pure” Jews.

LAN: 8:15-17 Many scholars believe that God chose to have a dramatic filling of his Spirit as a sign at this special moment in history—the spread of the gospel into Samaria through the powerful, effective preaching of believers. Normally, the Holy Spirit enters a person's life at conversion. This was a special event. The pouring out of the Spirit would happen again with Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:44-47), a sign that the uncircumcised Gentiles could receive the gospel.

[prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost] Sixteen great lessons here:

1. Prayer for the Holy Ghost is part of the gospel program (Acts 8:15; Acts 1:14; Acts 9:17-18; Acts 19:1-7; Luke 11:13; 1 Cor. 12:30; 1 Cor. 14:1).
2. The Holy Spirit being given here does not refer to receiving the Spirit of adoption, for all receive this when born again (Romans 8:9,14-16).
3. The Holy Spirit here must refer to the Spirit baptism and the supernatural gifts of the Spirit for service, not to salvation, for these people were already saved from sin, justified, born again, healed, baptized in water, and had great joy in Christ (Acts 8:6-13).

²⁹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

4. This experience was subsequent to the experience above (Acts 8:6-13).
5. It was for all believers (Acts 8:14-17).
6. It was evidently what the church at Jerusalem had received so they wanted other churches to have it (Acts 2:33,38-39; cp. Matthew 3:11; John 7:37-39).
7. Being converted, healed, baptized in water, and having great joy does not bring the Holy Spirit as the Church at Jerusalem had the Spirit, for the Samaritans had all this and yet lacked the Holy Spirit's power (Acts 8:6-13).
8. The Holy Spirit in this measure can be imparted by prayer and laying on of hands (Acts 8:15-23).
9. This does not mean that this is the only way to receive, for no hands were laid on men at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) or at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48).
10. Others besides the 12 apostles can lay hands on believers to receive the Spirit in this manner (Acts 9:17-18; Acts 19:1-7; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).
11. It is Biblical to hold special services for this extra reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17; Acts 9:17-18; Acts 19:1-7; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; Hebrews 6:2).
12. This experience was something that produced evidences that could be seen and heard by men or else no money would have been offered for such power (Acts 8:18-23).
13. Spiritual things are not for the purpose of making money (Acts 8:18-23).
14. The Spirit's power cannot be bought with money (Acts 8:18-23).
15. One must be right at heart to partake of this program (Acts 8:21).
16. It was "the gift of God" (Acts 8:20) which is also called the Spirit baptism in Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2:38-39; Acts 11:14-18; Acts 15:7-13; Acts 19:1-7.³⁰

Clarke: Prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost—It seems evident from this case, that even the most holy deacons, though full of the Holy Ghost themselves, could not confer this heavenly gift on others. This was the prerogative of the apostles, and they were only instruments; but they were those alone by which the Lord chose to work. They prayed and laid their hands on the disciples, and God sent down the gift; so, the blessing came from God by the apostles, and not from the apostles to the people. But for what purpose was the Holy Spirit thus given? Certainly not for the sanctification of the souls of the people: this they had on believing in Christ Jesus; and this the apostles never dispensed. It was the miraculous gifts of the Spirit which were thus communicated: the speaking with different tongues, and those extraordinary qualifications which were necessary for the successful preaching of the Gospel; and doubtless many, if not all, of those on whom the apostles laid their hands, were employed more or less in the public work of the Church.

Barnes: Prayed for them. They sought at the hand of God the extraordinary communications of the Holy Spirit. They did not even pretend to have the power of doing it without the aid of God.

Barnes: That they might receive the Holy Ghost. The main question here is, what was *meant* by the Holy Ghost? In Acts 8:20, it is called "the gift of God." The following remarks may make this plain:

³⁰ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

- (1.) It was not that gift of the Holy Ghost by which *the soul is converted, or renewed*, for they had this when they believed, Acts 8:6. Everywhere the conversion of the sinner is traced to his influence. Comp. John 1:13.
- (2.) It was not the ordinary influences of the Spirit by which the soul is sanctified; for sanctification is a progressive work, and this was sudden: sanctification is shown by the general tenor of the life; this was sudden and striking.
- (3.) It was something that was discernible by *external effects*; for Simon saw Acts 8:18 that this was done by the laying on of hands.
- (4.) The phrase, "the gift of the Holy Ghost," and "the descent of the Holy Ghost," signified not merely his *ordinary* influences in converting sinners, but those *extraordinary* influences that attended the first preaching of the gospel—the power of speaking with new tongues, Acts 2, the power of working miracles, etc., Acts 19:6.
- (5.) This is further clear from the fact that Simon wished to *purchase* this power, evidently to keep up his influence among the people, and to retain his ascendancy as a juggler and sorcerer. But surely Simon would not wish to *purchase* the *converting* and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; it was the power of working miracles. These things make it clear that by the gift of the Holy Spirit here is meant the power of speaking with new tongues, (comp. 1 Corinthians 14,) and the power of miracles. And it is further clear that *this* passage should not be adduced in favour of "the rite of confirmation" in the Christian church. For, besides the fact that there are now no apostles, the thing spoken of here is entirely that of the rite of confirmation. *This* was to confer the extraordinary power of working miracles; that is for a different purpose.

If it be asked *why* this power was conferred on the early Christians, it may be replied, that it was to furnish striking proof of the truth of the Christian religion; to impress the people, and thus to win them to embrace the gospel. The early church was thus armed with the power of the Holy Spirit; and this extraordinary attestation of God to his message was one cause of the rapid propagation and permanent establishment of the gospel.

Acts 8:16

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Barnes: He was fallen. This expression is several times applied to the Holy Spirit, Acts 10:44, 11:15. It does not differ materially from the common expression, "*the Holy Ghost descended.*" It means that he came from heaven; and the expression *to fall*, applied to his influences, denotes the *rapidity* and *suddenness* of his coming. Comp. Acts 19:2.

McGee: When the apostles heard that there was a great moving of the Spirit down in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to check on it. They found a great company of professing believers who had not been born again. They had not been baptized into the church by the Holy Spirit. They were not indwelt by the Spirit of God. They were not saved. They had gone through an outward ceremony.

My friend, being baptized with water or going through some other ceremony will not make you a Christian. This gives the background to explain why Simon was able to put over his racket on the others. He liked this idea of performing miracles.³¹

The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon this band of Samaritan witnesses, although the response to Philip's preaching had been vast. This does not eliminate the primary role of the Holy Spirit in conversion, namely, that of coming upon men and women in convicting power. Presumably, the Holy Spirit dealt with the Samaritan believers, as is always the case when people repent, believe, and are born again (John 3:8b). Most versions, as here, use "He" rather than "it" in referring to the Holy Spirit. The word "it" is not proper for designation of a person. "Fallen" (*epiipto*, Gk.) is a neuter participle here because of the grammatical gender of the Greek word *pneuma* ("spirit"). This falling of the Holy Spirit upon a group of believers initiated the fulfillment of each of the three segments of the Great Commission of Acts 1:8.³²

Acts 8:17

Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

How could the Samaritans be saved, and yet not have received the Holy Spirit at the moment they professed faith?

Cf. John 4:3-24. Note that the issue for her was which temple to worship at! For 500 years temples in South at Jerusalem and in the North at Mt Gerizim had been rivals.

If the Spirit had immediately fallen on these Samaritan believers, the Body might have suffered division through the centuries...

But when the apostles from Jerusalem came and identified themselves with the believing Samaritans, the work was recognized as of One Body. God's intention was to build a single Body of Christ, not pieces and parts (1 Cor 12:13).

Barnes: Then laid they *their* hands, This was an act of prayer, expressing an invocation to God that he would impart the blessing to *them*. On *how many* they laid their hands is not said. It is evident that it was not on *all*, for they did not thus lay hands on Simon. Perhaps it was done on a few of the more prominent and leading persons, who were to be employed particularly in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel. It was customary to lay the hands on any person when a *favour* was to be conferred, or a blessing imparted. Matthew 9:18.

³¹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:544). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³² Believer's Study Bible

ESV: they received the Holy Spirit. Apparently in this unique case, where the gospel was first moving beyond the bounds of Judaism, the Lord sovereignly waited to give any manifestation of the full power of the Holy Spirit (cf. vv. 15–16) until some of the apostles themselves could be present (Philip was not an apostle), and therefore there would be no question at all that the Samaritans had received the new covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Jewish Christians had. This would show that the Samaritans should be counted full members of the one true church, the new covenant community of God's people, founded and based at that time in Jerusalem. It would also guarantee that the Samaritans, who for many generations had been hostile toward the Jews, would not establish a separate Christian church or be excluded from the church by Jewish believers. The Spirit was given only at the hands of the apostles, to show convincingly to Samaritan and other later, non-Jewish leaders of the church that both Jews and non-Jews who believed in Jesus now had full membership status among God's people (see Rom. 11:13–24; Eph. 2:11–22).

An important point may be behind the delay in the evidence of the Holy Spirit for the Samaritan believers. Luke may be implying that the Samaritans need to be brought into the church as a whole, not just into its Hellenistic branch. This does not mean that the converts can receive the Holy Spirit only through the apostles. Ananias, with no known ministerial function (and certainly not an apostle), is the instrument through which the Holy Spirit is given to Paul (9:17). Luke may be trying to show that God wants a link established between Jerusalem and the new venture in Samaria. So God seems to delay the Spirit until the Jerusalem apostles validate the Samaritans' conversion so they might become fully incorporated into the community of believers.

If the Spirit came on the Samaritans immediately upon their baptism, perhaps they would remain under suspicion by the mother church in Jerusalem. But when two leading apostles of high standing in the church validate the Samaritans' conversion, and show that God fully accepts this despised ethnic group, they will also be fully accepted by believers in Jerusalem. Since the apostles are the instruments through whom the Holy Spirit comes, something of a Samaritan "Pentecost" occurs (8:15-17), giving further proof that God is working among the Samaritans. The conclusion is inescapable: God loves Samaritans in the same way that he does Jews.

Acts 8:18

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Simon offered money! He didn't ask for the Spirit himself, he wanted the power to give the Spirit.

“Simony” - buying and selling position and office within the church... the purchase of spiritual things.

When Simon saw, By hearing these speak with different tongues and work miracles.

Clarke: He offered them money—Supposing that the dispensing this Spirit belonged to them—that they could give it to whomsoever they pleased; and imagining that, as he saw them to be poor men, they would not object to take money for their gift; and it is probable that he had gained considerably by his juggling, and therefore could afford to spare some, as he hoped to make it all up by the profit which he expected to derive from this new influence.

Barnes: Simon saw, That is, he witnessed the extraordinary effects, the power of speaking in a miraculous manner, etc. Acts 8:15.

Barnes: He offered them money. He had had a remarkable influence over the Samaritans, and he saw that the possession of this power would perpetuate and increase his influence. Men commonly employ the tricks of legerdemain for the purpose of making money; and it seems probable that such had been the design of Simon. He saw that if he could communicate to *others* this power, if he could confer on *them* the talent of speaking other languages, it might be turned to vast account, and he sought therefore to purchase it of the apostles. From this act of Simon we have derived our word *simony*, to denote the buying and selling of ecclesiastical preferment, or church offices, where religion is supported by the state. This act of Simon shows conclusively that he was influenced by improper motives in becoming connected with the church.

ESV: Simon saw that the Spirit was given. Since this was outwardly evident to Simon and no doubt to others as well, there must have been some outward manifestation of the Spirit. This may have been speaking in tongues, prophesying, or both (see [10:46](#); [19:6](#)), and it was an evident sign to the apostles that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Samaritans in a similar way to what had happened to the apostles and those with them at Pentecost. **offered them money.** Simon was acting in character, because magicians often exchanged secrets for money.

Acts 8:19

Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

“Everything has a price” seems to be true in our world of bribes, wealth, and materialism. Simon thought he could buy the Holy Spirit’s power, but Peter harshly rebuked him. The only way to receive God’s power is to do what Peter told Simon to do—turn from sin, ask God for forgiveness, and be filled with his Spirit. No amount of money can buy salvation, forgiveness of sin, or God’s power. These are only gained by repentance and belief in Christ as Savior.

McGee: Simon wanted to pay for the gift. Why? Well, because this man is a religious racketeer. He wants to use it for profit.

How many such claims are made by individuals today! They claim that great miracles take place in their meetings and humbly say they have nothing to do with them. If that is so, why do they permit this type of deception to go on? *Bewitch* is the word used here.

There have been religions racketeers around bewitching the multitudes from that day to this.

Persecution from the outside didn't hurt the church. It scattered the believers and actually worked for the furtherance of the gospel. What hurt the church was that people got on the inside, professing to be believers when they were not believers. Always the church is hurt from the inside.

It was the same with the Lord Jesus. He was betrayed from the inside. He was betrayed to His nation by one of His own disciples. His own nation betrayed Him to the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire crucified Him. Also today He is betrayed within the church.

It is like the wooden horse brought into the city of Troy. The city was impenetrable, it was invulnerable, until that wooden horse got on the inside. The Devil started out by persecuting the church, fighting it from the outside. He found that didn't work. It just spread the gospel. Then he decided to start his work from the inside. That is where he can get in and do damage. How many pastors could testify to that today!³³

Acts 8:20

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Clarke: Thy money perish with thee—This is an awful declaration; and imports thus much, that if he did not repent, he and his ill-gotten goods would perish together; his money should be dissipated, and his soul go into perdition.

Barnes: Thy money perish with thee. This is an expression of the horror and indignation of Peter at the base offer of Simon. It is not to be understood as an imprecation on Simon. The main idea is the apostle's contempt for the *money*, as if he regarded it as of no value. "Let your money go to destruction. We abhor your impious offer. We can freely see any amount of money destroyed, before we will be tempted to *sell* the gift of the Holy Ghost." But there was here also an expression of his belief that *Simon* also would perish. It was a declaration that he was hastening to ruin, and *as if* this was certain, Peter says, let your money *perish too*.

Clarke: That the gift of God may be purchased—Peter takes care to inform not only Simon, but all to whom these presents may come, that the Spirit of God is the gift of God alone, and consequently cannot be purchased with money; for what reward can HE receive from his creatures, to whom the silver and the gold belong, the cattle on a thousand hills, the earth and its fullness!

Barnes: The gift of God. That which he has *given*, or conferred as a favour. The idea was *absurd* that that which God himself *gives* as a sovereign could be purchased. It was *impious* to think of attempting to buy with worthless gold that which was of so

³³McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:544). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

inestimable value. The *gift of God* here means the extraordinary influences of the Holy Ghost, Acts 10:45, 11:17. How can we pay a *price* to God? All that we can give, the silver, and the gold, and the cattle on a thousand hills, belong to him already. We have *nothing* which we can present for his favours. And yet there are many who seek to *purchase* the favour of God. Some do it by alms and prayers; some by penance and fasting; some by attempting to make their own hearts better, and by self-righteousness; and some by penitence and tears. All these will not *purchase* his favour. Salvation, like every other blessing, will be *his gift*; and if ever received, we must be willing to accept it on his own terms, at his own time, and in his own way. We are without merit; and if saved, it will be by the sovereign grace of God.

Acts 8:21

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Clarke: Thy heart is not right—It is not through motives of purity, benevolence, or love to the souls of men, that thou desirest to be enabled to confer the Holy Ghost; it is through pride, vain glory, and love of money: thou wouldest now give a little money that thou mightest, by thy new gift, gain much.

Barnes: Nor lot. This word means, properly, a portion which *falls* to one when an estate, or when spoil in war, is divided into portions, according to the number of those who are to be partakers, and the part of each one is determined by *lot*. The two words denote emphatically that he was in no sense a partaker of the favour of God.

Barnes: In this matter. Greek, In this *word*, i.e. thing. That which is referred to here is the religion of Christ. He was not a Christian. It is remarkable that Peter judged him so soon, and when he had seen but *one* act of his. But it was an act which satisfied him that he was a stranger to religion. One act may sometimes bring out the *whole character*; it may evince the governing motives; it may show traits of character utterly inconsistent with true religion; and then it is as certain a criterion as any long series of acts.

Barnes: Thy heart. Your affections, or governing motives; your principle of conduct. Comp. 2 Kings 10:15. You love gold and popularity, and not the gospel for what it is. There is no evidence here that Peter saw this in a miraculous manner, or by any supernatural influence. It was apparent and plain that Simon was not influenced by the pure, disinterested motives of the gospel, but by the love of power and of the world.

Barnes: In the sight of God. That is, God *sees* or judges that your heart is not sincere and pure. No external profession is acceptable without the heart. Reader, is *your* heart right with God? Are your motives pure—and does *God* see there the exercise of holy, sincere, and benevolent affections towards him? God *knows* the motives; and with unerring certainty he will judge; and with unerring justice he will fix our doom, according to the affections of the heart.

Acts 8:22

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Simon still has the opportunity to repent.

[Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee] Peter did not indicate that Simon was past hope, but he must repent to be freed from the wickedness of wanting to buy the Spirit for personal gain.

Clarke: Repent therefore of this thy wickedness—St. Peter did not suppose his case to be utterly hopeless; though his sin, considered in its motives and objects, was of the most heinous kind.

Clarke: If perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee—His sin, as yet, only existed in thought and purpose; and therefore it is said, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven.

Barnes: Repent therefore. Here we may remark,

- (1.) that Simon was at this time an unconverted sinner.
- (2.) That the command was given to him *as such*.
- (3.) That he was required to *do the thing*; not to wait or seek merely, but actually to repent.
- (4.) That this was to be the first step in his conversion. He was not even directed to pray first; but his first indispensable work was to *repent*, that is, to exercise proper sorrow for this sin, and to *abandon* his plan or principle of action. And this shows,
 - (1.) that *all* sinners are to be exhorted to repent, as their first work. They are not to be told to *wait*, and *read*, and *pray*, in the expectation that repentance will be given them. With such helps they can obtain, they are to *do the thing*.
 - (2.) Prayer will not be acceptable, or heard, unless the sinner comes *repenting*, that is, unless he regrets his sin, and desires to forsake it. Then, and then only, will he be heard. When he comes *loving* his sins, and resolving still to practise them, God will not hear him. When he comes *desirous* of forsaking them, grieved that he is guilty, and *feeling* his need of help, God will hear his prayer. See Isaiah 1:15, Micah 3:4, Proverbs 1:28, Psalms 66:18.

Barnes: If perhaps. There was no certainty that God would forgive him; nor is there any evidence either that Simon prayed, or that he was forgiven. This direction of Peter presents *another* important principle in regard to the conduct of sinners. They are to be directed to repent, not *because* they have the promise of forgiveness, and not *because* they *hope* to be forgiven, but because *sin is a great evil*, and because it is *right* and *proper* that they should repent, whether they are forgiven or not. That is to be left to the sovereign mercy of God. *They* are to repent of sin; and then they are to feel, not that they have any *claim* on God, but that they are dependent on him, and must be saved or lost at his will. They are not to suppose that their tears will *purchase* forgiveness, but that they

lie at the foot of mercy, and that there is *hope*-not certainty-that *God* will forgive. The language of the humbled sinner is-

"Perhaps he will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish I will pray,
And perish only there.
"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try,
For if I stay away, I know
I shall for ever die."

Barnes: The thought, Your *purpose*, or *wish*. *Thoughts* may be, therefore, evil, and need forgiveness. It is not open sin only that needs to be pardoned; it is the secret purpose of the soul.

Acts 8:23

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity.

Clarke: The gall of bitterness—A Hebraism for excessive bitterness: gall, wormwood, and such like, were used to express the dreadful effects of sin in the soul; the bitter repentance, bitter regret, bitter sufferings, bitter death, etc., etc., which it produces. In Deuteronomy 29:18, idolatry and its consequences are expressed, by having among them a root that beareth GALL and WORMWOOD. And in Hebrews 12:15, some grievous sin is intended, when the apostle warns them, lest any root of BITTERNESS springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

Clarke: Bond of iniquity—An allusion to the mode in which the Romans secured their prisoners, chaining the right hand of the prisoner to the left hand of the soldier who guarded him; as if the apostle had said, Thou art tied and bound by the chain of thy sin; justice hath laid hold upon thee, and thou hast only a short respite before thy execution, to see if thou wilt repent.

Barnes: For I perceive. That is, by the act which he had done. His offer had shown a state of mind that was wholly inconsistent with true religion. One single sin may as certainly show that there is no true piety, as many acts of iniquity. It may be so decided, so malignant, so utterly inconsistent with just views, as at once to determine what the character is. The sin of Simon was of this character. Peter here does not appear to have claimed the power of judging the *heart*; but he judged, as all other men would, by the act.

Barnes: In the gall. This word denotes properly bile, or that bitter, yellowish-green fluid that is secreted in the liver. Hence it means anything very bitter; and also any bad passion of the mind, as anger, malice, etc. We speak of *bitterness* of mind, etc.

Barnes: Of bitterness. This is a Hebraism; the usual mode of expressing the *superlative*, and means excessive bitterness. The phrase is used respecting *idolatry*, Deuteronomy

29:18 "Lest there should be among, you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." A similar expression occurs in Hebrews 12:15, "Lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you," etc. *Sin* is thus represented as a *bitter* or poisonous thing; a thing not only unpleasant in its consequences, but ruinous in its character, as a poisonous plant would be in the midst of other plants. Jeremiah 2:19, "It is an evil and *bitter* thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God;" Jeremiah 4:18, Romans 3:14, "Whose mouth is full of cursings and bitterness;" Ephesians 4:31. The meaning here is, that the heart of Simon was full of dreadful, malignant sin.

Barnes: Bond of iniquity. Or, that thou art bound by iniquity. That is, that it has the rule over you, and *binds* you as a slave. Sin is often thus represented as *bondage* and *captivity*. Sinners are represented as chained to it, and kept in hard servitude, Psalms 116:16, Proverbs 5:22, "He shall be holden with the cords of his sins;" Romans 7:23,24. These expressions prove conclusively that Simon was a stranger to religion.

Sin, Slavery—The inability or the unwillingness to escape the past, disobedient life is a crucial link in the chain of sin's bondage. Only true repentance can change this situation.

Acts 8:24

Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Simon doesn't repent, he wants the apostles to pray for him thinking that their power would be greater. This is the last place we read of Simon in the Scriptures. Yet, we read a lot about him in the early church writings, he became the first anti-christ, one that fought the church, going from place to place opposing the Gospel.

Difference between believing about Christ, and totally trusting Him with you life, FAITH.

Don't let miracles or supernatural events fool you because Satan is not only capable of it, but prophecy says he will deceive many in the end times. Your protection in the Word of God, remember Acts 17:11 always.

[Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me] "Simon himself believed also ... was baptized" and "continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13); but later when he saw a chance to get power he was tempted to seek personal gain in religion (Acts 8:18-23). Here, turning back, from his wicked thoughts he asked for prayer (Acts 8:24).

Barnes: Pray ye, Here remark,

- (1.) that Simon was directed to pray for himself, Acts 8:22, but he had no disposition to do that. Sinners will often ask others to pray for them, when they are too proud, or too much in love with sin, to pray for themselves.
- (2.) The main thing that Peter wished to impress on him was a sense of his *sin*. Simon did not regard this, but looked only to the *punishment*. He was terrified and alarmed; and he sought to avoid future punishment; but he had no alarm about his *sins*. So it is often with sinners. So it was with Pharaoh, Exodus 8:28,32 and with Jeroboam, 1 Kings 13:6. And so sinners often quiet their own consciences by asking ministers and Christian friends to pray for them, while *they* still purpose to persevere in iniquity. If men expect to be saved, they must pray *for themselves*; and pray, not chiefly to be freed from *punishment*, but from the *sin which deserves hell*. This is all that we hear of Simon in the New Testament; and the probability is, that, like many other sinners, he did not pray for himself, but continued to live in the gall of bitterness, and died in the bond of iniquity. The testimony of antiquity is decided on that point. Acts 8:9.

McGee: Simon doesn't ask to be saved. He doesn't ask for prayer for his salvation. He just asks that none of those terrible things happen to him. We do not know if this man ever came to Christ.³⁴

Acts 8:25

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.

[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] First evangelistic tour of Peter and John. Their message was "the word of the Lord" and "the gospel." This fulfilled the third stage of evangelization—Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8).

Peter and John were so convinced of God's working among the Samaritans that when they **returned to Jerusalem** they too shared **the gospel** with Samaritans, in fact, **in many Samaritan villages**. This was a remarkable thing for these Jewish apostles to do!³⁵

Barnes: In many villages, They *went* at first directly to the *city* of Samaria. On their return to Jerusalem, they travelled more at leisure, and preached in the villages also—a good example for the ministers of the gospel, and for all Christians, when travelling from place to place. The reason why they returned to Jerusalem, and made that their permanent abode, might have been, that it was important to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ in the very city where he had been crucified, and where his resurrection had occurred. If the doctrine was established *there*, it would be more easy to establish it elsewhere.

³⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:545). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:374). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

In chapters 8, 9, and 10 we find the record of three remarkable instances of conversion. I think that these three have been lifted out and given to us particularly for a lesson. (Chapter 8 gives the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, a son of Ham. Chapter 9 gives the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a son of Shem. Chapter 10 gives the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a son of Japheth. You will recall that the entire human family is divided into these three categories. This was an ethnological and a geographical division made after the Flood. Ham, Shem, and Japheth were the sons of Noah. We find here that the gospel reaches out to representatives of these three divisions of the human family.

You will also notice from these examples that in a conversion three factors must be brought into focus before there can be a conversion. All three of these are evident in these three representative conversions.

1. *The work of the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit had taken this man Philip to Samaria where there had been a great moving of the Spirit of God. Then the Holy Spirit moved him down to Gaza, and again we see His moving in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit of God had gone ahead to prepare the heart and also to prepare the messenger. This leading of the Spirit of God is absolutely essential. I'm afraid that a great deal of personal work is done in a haphazard manner and without the leading of the Spirit of God. I believe that we ought to make it a matter of definite prayer before we talk to anyone. We should talk to the Lord about the individual before we talk to the individual about the Lord. It is not simply that we need the Holy Spirit to lead us. What we need is for the Spirit of God to go ahead of us and prepare the way, then to call us up to where He is. We want to go where the Spirit of God is moving. This is the first essential in a conversion. We find it true in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and also in the conversion of Saul and of Cornelius.

2. *The Word of God.* "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The Word of God is the second essential. The Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and will reveal them to an individual. It is the Spirit of God using the Word of God. But, wait a minute, there must be a human instrument.

3. *The man of God.* The Spirit of God uses the man of God who delivers the Word of God to produce a son of God, one who is born again. We will see this in the record of the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch.

The second part of chapter 8 brings us to another part of the ministry of Philip. The gospel had gone to Samaria, and there were many genuine believers. But we also saw that in Samaria evil came into the church in the person of Simon the sorcerer. Now, in contrast to Simon the sorcerer, we come to the experience of Philip with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip led this man to Christ, and he became a genuine believer, a wonderful man of God.³⁶

³⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:545). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Acts 8:26

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.

Gaza was one of the five cities of the Philistines which was destroyed by Alexander.

[angel of the Lord spake unto Philip] (Dake) Ministry of angels in Acts:

1. Deliverance of the apostles from jail (Acts 5:19)
2. Directing Philip the evangelist where to preach (Acts 8:26)
3. Directing Cornelius where to find a preacher so he could be saved (Acts 10:3,7,22; Acts 11:13-18; Acts 15:5-11)
4. Deliverance of Peter from jail (Acts 12:7-11,15)
5. Executing Herod for pride (Acts 12:23)
6. Directing and comforting Paul (Acts 27:23)

[Gaza] Gaza was a town about three miles from the sea and the last town on the road into Egypt. It was located at the entrance of the wilderness.

Clarke: Arise, and go toward the south—How circumstantially particular are these directions! Every thing is so precisely marked that there is no danger of the apostle missing his way. He is to perform some great duty; but what, he is not informed. The road which he is to take is marked out; but what he is to do in that road, or how far he is to proceed, he is not told! It is GOD who employs him, and requires of him implicit obedience. If he do his will, according to the present direction, he shall know, by the issue, that God hath sent him on an errand worthy of his wisdom and goodness. We have a similar instance of circumstantial direction from God in Acts 9:11: Arise, go into the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one Saul of Tarsus, etc. And another instance, still more particular, in Acts 10:5, 6: Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side. God never sends any man on a message, without giving him such directions as shall prevent all mistakes and miscarriages, if simply and implicitly followed. This is also strictly true of the doctrines contained in his word: no soul ever missed salvation that simply followed the directions given in the word of God. Those who will refine upon every thing, question the Divine testimony, and dispute with their Maker, cannot be saved. And how many of this stamp are found, even among Christians, professing strict godliness!

Barnes: And the angel of the Lord. The word *angel* is used in the Scriptures in a great variety of significations. Matthew 1:20. Here it has been supposed by some to mean literally a celestial messenger sent from God; others have supposed that it means a *dream*, others a *vision*, etc. The word properly means a *messenger*; and all that it can be shown to signify here is, that the Lord sent a message to Philip of this kind. It is most probable, I think, that the passage means that God communicated the message by his Spirit; for, in Acts 8:29,39, it is expressly said that *the Spirit* spake to Philip, etc. Thus in Acts 16:7, the *Spirit* is said to have forbidden Paul to preach in Bithynia; and in Acts 16:9, the message on the subject is said to have been conveyed in a *vision*. There is no

absurdity, however, in supposing that an *angel* literally was employed to communicate this message to Philip. See Hebrews 1:14; Genesis 19:1, 22:11, Judges 6:12.

D.L. Moody once asked a man about his soul, and the man replied, "It's none of your business!" "Oh, yes, it is my business!" Moody said; and the man immediately exclaimed, "Then you must be D.L. Moody!" It is every Christian's business to share the Gospel with others, and to do it without fear or apology.

Barnes: And go, Philip had been employed in Samaria. As God now intended to send the gospel to another place, he gave a special direction to Philip to go and convey it. It is evident that God designed the *conversion* of this eunuch; and the direction to Philip shows how he accomplishes his designs. It is not by miracle, but by the use of means. It is not by direct power without *truth*, but it is by a message fitted to the end. The salvation of a single sinner is an object worthy the attention of God. When such a sinner is converted, it is because God forms a plan or purpose to do it. *When* it is done, he inclines his servants to labour; he directs their labours; he leads his ministers; and he prepares the way Acts 8:28 for the reception of the truth.

Toward the south. That is, south of Samaria, where Philip was then labouring.

Barnes: Unto Gaza. Gaza, or AZZAH, Genesis 10:19, was a city of the Philistines, given by Joshua to Judah, Joshua 15:47, 1 Samuel 6:17. It was one of the *five* principal cities of the Philistines. It was formerly a large place; was situated on an eminence, and commanded a beautiful prospect. It was in this place that Samson took away the gates of the city, and bore them off, Judges 16:2,3. It was near Askelon, about sixty miles south-west from Jerusalem.

McGee: Samaria is an area which lies north of Jerusalem. Now Philip is told to go way down to the south. What we know as the Gaza strip is south, over along the Mediterranean. This was the trade route down into Egypt and Ethiopia. He would probably travel through Jerusalem to get there.

Philip had been speaking to multitudes in Samaria, and now he is sent down to a desert. He is to leave the place where there has been a great moving of the Spirit of God and go into a place, a desert, where there is nobody. However, when he gets there, he finds that God does have someone to whom he is to witness.³⁷

An angel directs Philip to Gaza (8:26)

Philip's role in Samaria may be over, but he is about to play another important part in spreading of the gospel. An angelic messenger appears to Philip and instructs him: "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (8:26). Commentators point out that when Luke wants to stress the presence and activity of God, he often uses an expression like "the angel of the Lord" (as he does in 8:26) rather than "the Spirit of the Lord." Some examples are found in Luke 1:11, 13, 26, 28; 2:9, 13;

³⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:546). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

22:43; Acts 5:19; 7:30, 35, 38; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7, 11, 23; 27:23. Used here, the expression is a vivid way of describing Philip's divine guidance.

This is another opportunity for Luke to stress that the evangelistic work of the church is initiated by God, who sends his divine messenger to Philip. Whatever mission work Philip is about to do is not based on a program the church has thought out. After all, in this case, what would be the point of traveling to a "desert road" that leads to Gaza, and preach the gospel there?

But that's what Philip is told to do—go down the road that leads to the edge of the desert. (The road from Jerusalem to Gaza is 50 miles long, and leads to the main coastal trade route going to Egypt.) Commentators point out that the word "desert" in Luke's account can refer either to Gaza or to the road. Most likely the former is in view here. Apparently, the old town of Gaza is referred to as "Desert Gaza," in distinction to a newer town named Gaza. This is the southernmost of the five main Philistine cities in southwestern Palestine. It is also the last settlement before a traveler encounters the barren desert stretching to Egypt.³⁸

Acts 8:27

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,

Ethiopian caravan with a treasurer, this was the treasurer of all the treasure of the Queen of Ethiopia.

“Eunuch” - in the ancient times officials in the palace were eunuchs to protect the harem. But as time went on that title tended to be an office, not a condition imposed biologically. Deut 23:1; eunuchs were not allowed in the congregation of Israel, but this guy was worshipping.

ESV: Gaza was the last watering place before the desert on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt. Ethiopia was the ancient Nubian Kingdom, south of Aswan on the Nile. The designation **eunuch** could have been a mere title (for a “treasurer” or trusted royal servant), or could refer to his having been emasculated. Since he had been **to Jerusalem to worship**, the eunuch was probably a “God-fearer,” a Gentile who worshiped Israel's God but had not become a full convert (“proselyte”). As a eunuch, he would have been barred from the inner courts of the temple, which makes his reading “the prophet Isaiah” (v. 28) especially significant. Isaiah held out the promise that God would grant devout eunuchs a heritage “better than sons and daughters” (Isa. 56:3–5).

Falashas: an Ethiopian of Jewish faith. “Beta Esrael”: The origin of this group goes back to the days of Solomon. The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, and in those days Ethiopia included Saudi Arabia, so the Queen of Sheba was Ethiopian. They had a son, Menelik, who grows up there for a while and then returns to Ethiopia, and he brings with him,

³⁸ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

Judaism. He is the founder of a group called Falashas. They consider themselves Jews (about 30,000 of them today). They observe the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws, ritual cleansing, etc. They have a Bible written in Ge'ez which is a derivative of the Septuagint.

When Menelik leaves the Temple to go back to Saudi Arabia, he takes with him a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. There is folklore that he switched them, that he left the replica and took the real Ark to Ethiopia.

[he arose and went] Note how obedient Philip was to leave a wonderful revival and a city with all its conveniences to go to the desert to preach to one soul. He was not even told why he was to go south or how far. Gaza was 100 miles from the revival.

[great authority] Greek: *dunastes* (GSN-1413). Translated "potentate" (1 Tim. 6:15); "mighty" (Luke 1:52); and "of great authority" (Acts 8:27; cp. 2 Cor. 9:8; 2 Cor. 13:3; Romans 14:4).

[Candace] A title of Ethiopian queens, similar to Pharaoh in Egypt and Abimelech in Philistia.

[queen] Greek: *basilissa* (GSN-938) (Acts 8:27; Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31; Rev. 18:7).

[Jerusalem for to worship] Proof he was a worshiper of the God of Israel, perhaps getting his knowledge by tradition from the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10). It has been held by the Abyssinians that this queen of Sheba, called Balkis by some and Maqueda by others, not only was taught Solomon's religion, but also established it in her realm on her return home; that she had a son by Solomon named Menilek, who succeeded her in the kingdom; and that her people have preserved the Jewish religion from that time until now.

Barnes: A Man of Ethiopia. Gaza was near the confines between Palestine and Egypt. It was in the direct road from Jerusalem to Egypt. *Ethiopia* was one of the great kingdoms of Africa, part of which is now called Abyssinia. It is frequently mentioned in Scripture under the name of *Cush*. But *Cush* comprehended a much larger region, including the southern part of Arabia, and even sometimes the countries adjacent to the Tigris and Euphrates. Ethiopia Proper lay south of Egypt, on the Nile, and was bounded north by Egypt, that is, by the cataracts near Syene; east by the Red Sea, and perhaps part by the Indian Ocean; south by unknown regions in the interior of Africa; and west by Lybia and the deserts. It comprehended the modern kingdoms of Nubia or Sennaar, and Abyssinia. The chief city in it was the ancient Meroe, situated on the island or tract of the same name, between the Nile and Ashtaborus, not far from the modern Shendi. (*Robinson's Calmet*,)

Barnes: Under Candace, Candace is said to have been the common name of the queens of Ethiopia, as *Pharaoh* was of the sovereigns of Egypt. This is expressly stated by Pliny. (Nat. Hist. vii. 29.) His words are, "The edifices of the city were few; a woman reigned there of the name of CANDACE, which name had been transmitted to these queens for many years." Strabo mentions also a queen of Ethiopia of the name of Candace. Speaking of an insurrection against the Romans, he says, "Among these were the officers of queen CANDANCE, who in our days reigned over the Ethiopians." As this could not have been the Candace mentioned here, it is plain that the name was common to these queens—a sort of royal title. She was probably queen of Meroe, an important part of Ethiopia. (Bruce's Travels, vol. ii. p. 431-Clarke.)

BBC: [Candace] (*kan-dak'a*) seems to have been a dynastic title of the queen of Ethiopia and is mentioned elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature; tradition declares that the queen mother ruled in that land. She seems to have ruled a black Nubian kingdom south of Egypt partly in what is now the Sudan, a kingdom that had lasted since about 750 B.C. and whose main cities were Meroe and Napata (this should not be confused with Abyssinia, which came to be called Ethiopia in more recent times and converted to Christianity in the fourth century A.D.). This kingdom had *some* trade with Rome, but this official and his entourage must have been among the few Ethiopian visitors this far north. He is probably a Gentile "God-fearer" (see comment on "Acts 10:2). As the queen's treasurer, this man is a high and powerful official.

LAN: Ethiopia was located in Africa south of Egypt. The eunuch was obviously very dedicated to God because he had traveled such a long distance to worship in Jerusalem. The Jews had contact with Ethiopia (known as Cush) in ancient days (Psalm 68:31; Jeremiah 38:7), so this man may have been a Gentile convert to Judaism. Because he was in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia, this man's conversion brought Christianity into the power structures of another government. This is the beginning of the witness "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). See the prophecy in Isaiah 56:3-5 for words about foreigners and eunuchs.

An Ethiopian, from Greek *aethlein* ("to burn") and *ips* ("face")—a "burnt-face." The New Testament takes special note of this prominent black man, who was Jewish (see below).

Eunuch. Throughout the ancient Near East men in positions of power were often castrated. The *Tanakh* has a number of examples including 'Eved-Melekh the Cushite (Ethiopian) at Jeremiah 38:7. The term may also refer generally to a high official.

The Kandake (KJV "Candace," without "the"). Like "Pharaoh" or "Caesar," this is a title not a name; it means "queen" or "queen mother." The monarchy of Ethiopia claims to trace its genealogy from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10) through their son Menelik I to King Haile Selassie, who was deposed in 1974, some three thousand years later. Ethiopian Jews, who call themselves "Beta Israel" ("house of Israel") but are also known as Falashas (the Amharic word for "exiles"), consider themselves descended from Jews who came with Menelik I. This is legend, but "Ethiopian chronicles show that Judaism was widespread before the conversion to

Christianity of the Axum dynasty during the fourth century” (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 6:1143).

He had been to Yerushalayim to worship. Chapter 8 deals with two categories of persons in one sense joined to and in another sense separated from the Jewish people. The Samaritans (vv. 4–24) were not Jews but had Jewish ancestry (Yn 4:9N); they did not worship in Jerusalem (Yn 4:20–21). This Ethiopian was born Jewish or a Jewish proselyte, since the first full Gentile was not reached with the Gospel until chapter 10 below. But because he was a eunuch he was prohibited from worshipping in the congregation of God’s people (Deuteronomy 23:1). His travelling so far to worship, even though debarred, attests to his godliness. In later Scriptures God took special note of godly eunuchs (Isaiah 56:4–5, Mt 19:10–12).³⁹

Acts 8:28

Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

Authorship of Isaiah, see John 12:38-41.

Also the book of Isaiah is quoted 21x in the New Testament in 6 different books (10 from Isaiah “1”, and 11x from Isaiah “2”). 4x by Jesus (3x from Isaiah “1”, and once Isaiah “2”), Matthew 2x (one each), Luke 4x, John 3x, Paul 6x quoting Isaiah “1” and “2” as the SAME Isaiah. There are 300 words and expressions that are common to Isaiah “1” and “2”, and these 300 words are NOT found in Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Clarke: Sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet—He had gone to Jerusalem to worship: he had profited by his religious exercises: and even in travelling, he is improving his time. God sees his simplicity and earnestness, and provides him an instructor, who should lead him into the great truths of the Gospel, which, without such a one, he could not have understood. Many, after having done their duty, as they call it, in attending a place of worship, forget the errand that brought them thither, and spend their time, on their return, rather in idle conversation than in reading or conversing about the word of God. It is no wonder that such should be always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Barnes: And sitting in his chariot. His carriage; his vehicle. The form of the carriage is not known. In some instances the carriages of the ancients were placed on wheels; in others, were borne on poles in the form of a *litter* or palanquin, by men, or mules, or horses. (See Calmet, art. *Chariot*.)

Barnes: Read Esaias, Isaiah. Reading doubtless the translation of Isaiah called the Septuagint. This translation was made in Egypt, for the special use of the Jews in Alexandria and throughout Egypt, and was that which was commonly used. *Why* he was reading the Scriptures, and especially this prophet, is not certainly known. It is morally

³⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 8:27). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

certain, however, that he was in Judea at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; that he had heard much of him; that this would be a subject of discussion; and it was natural for him, in returning, to look at the prophecies respecting the Messiah, perhaps either to meditate on them as a suitable subject of inquiry and thought, or perhaps to examine the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to this office. The prophecy in Isaiah 53 was so striking, and coincided so clearly with the character of Jesus, that it was natural for a candid mind to examine whether *he* might not be the person intended by the prophet. On this narrative we may remark:

- (1.) It is a proper and profitable employment on returning from *worship* to examine the sacred Scriptures.
- (2.) It is well to be in the habit of reading the Scriptures when we are on a journey. It may serve to keep the heart from worldly objects, and secure the affections for God.
- (3.) It is well at *all* times to read the Bible. It is one of the means of grace. And it is when we are searching his will that we obtain light and comfort. The sinner should examine with a candid mind the sacred volume. It may be the means of conducting him in the true path of salvation.
- (4.) God often gives us light in regard to the meaning of the Bible in unexpected modes. How little did this eunuch *expect* to be enlightened in the manner in which he actually was. Yet God, who intended to instruct and save him, sent the living teacher, and opened to him the sacred Scriptures, and led him to the Saviour. It is probable Acts 8:30 that he was reading it aloud.

McGee: We read here that this man of Ethiopia had charge of all the treasure of the queen. He was actually the Secretary of the Treasury. He was an official, and a high official of that day. This man was not traveling alone. He had a great retinue of servants and minor officials with him. He wasn't sitting in a chariot with the reins in one hand and a book in the other hand as we see him pictured. This man was sitting back in a chariot, protected from the sun by a canopy. He had a private chauffeur and was riding in style.

He was a citizen of Ethiopia, but he had come to Jerusalem to worship. This indicates that he was a proselyte to Judaism. He had just been to Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish religion. Although Judaism was the God-given religion, he was leaving the city still in the dark. He was reading the prophet Isaiah, but he was not understanding what he was reading.⁴⁰

Acts 8:29

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

[Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot] The Holy Spirit directed Philip to join himself to the chariot, knowing the readings of this man to accept the Messiah.

⁴⁰McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:546). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Clarke: Then the Spirit said unto Philip—This holy man having obeyed the first direction he received from God, and gone southward without knowing the reason why, it was requisite that he should now be informed of the object of his mission: the Spirit said unto him, go near, and join thyself, etc. The angel who had given him the first direction had departed; and the influence of the Holy Spirit now completed the information. It is likely that what the Spirit did in this case was by a strong impression on his mind, which left him no doubt of its being from God.

Barnes: The Spirit. Acts 8:26. The Holy Spirit is here evidently intended. The thought in Philip's mind is here traced to his suggestion. All good thoughts and designs have the same origin.

LAN 8:29-35 Philip found the Ethiopian man reading Scripture. Taking advantage of this opportunity to explain the gospel, Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. Philip (1) followed the Spirit's leading, (2) began the discussion from where the man was (immersed in the prophecies of Isaiah), and (3) explained how Jesus Christ fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies. When we share the gospel, we should start where the other person's concerns are focused. Then we can bring the gospel to bear on those concerns.

Acts 8:30

And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

“Heard him” - reading out loud.

[ran thither to him] Philip was quick to obey the Spirit and ran swiftly to meet the chariot.

[Understandest thou what thou readest? ... How can I, except some man should guide me?] These are questions 29-30 in the book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 8:33.

Clarke: Heard him read the Prophet Esaias—The eunuch, it seems, was reading aloud, and apparently in Greek, for that was the common language in Egypt; and, indeed, almost in every place it was understood. And it appears that it was the Greek version of the Septuagint that he was reading, as the quotation below is from that version.

Barnes: And Philip ran, Indicating his haste, and his desire to obey the suggestions of the Spirit. A thousand difficulties might have been started in the mind of Philip if he had reflected a little. The eunuch was a stranger; he had the appearance of a man of rank; he was engaged in reading; he might be indisposed to be interrupted or to converse, etc. But Philip obeyed without any hesitation the monitions of the Spirit, and *ran* to him. It is well to follow the *first* suggestions of the Spirit; to yield to the clear indications of duty, and to perform it *at once*. Especially in a deed of benevolence, and in conversing with others on the subject of religion, our *first* thoughts are commonly safest and best. If we do not

follow them, the calculations of avarice, or fear, or some worldly prudence, are very apt to come in. We become alarmed; we are afraid of the rich and the great; and we suppose that our conversation and admonitions will be unacceptable. We may learn from this case,

(1.) to do our duty at once, without hesitation or debate.

(2.) We shall often be disappointed in regard to subjects of this kind. We shall find candid, humble, Christian conversation far more acceptable to strangers, to the rich, and to the great, than we commonly suppose. If, as in this case, they are *alone*; if we approach them kindly; if we do not rudely and harshly address them, we shall find most men willing to talk on the subject of religion. I have conversed with some hundreds of persons on the subject of religion, and do not now recollect but *two* instances in which I was rudely treated, and in which it was not easy to gain a respectful and kind attention to Christian conversation.

ESV: The Holy Spirit directed Philip to approach the eunuch. People usually read aloud in those days, so Philip was probably aware that the eunuch was reading Isa. 53:7–8. A more appropriate passage could not have been chosen as a witness to Christ, attesting to the Holy Spirit's leading. The passage cited focuses on the injustice done to Jesus, something that reflects Luke's presentation of the cross (see Luke 23), as well as the death of Stephen, who followed in his way.

Acts 8:31

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.

Do you understand what you're reading? It is amazing how one can read and reread the Bible without seeing in it the reality of God and his son Yeshua;

“Guide” - medical technical term. Authorative teacher. Christ reference to blind guides.

Reading the Greek translation of Isa 53.

Both the Eunuch and Philip are prepared by the Holy Spirit for this interview.

[How can I, except some man should guide me] This is no proof that the Scriptures are hard to understand and that one must have an authorized interpreter.

The eunuch asked Philip to explain a passage of Scripture that he did not understand. When we have trouble understanding the Bible, we should ask others to help us. We must never let our insecurity or pride get in the way of understanding God's Word.

Barnes: **And he said,** This was a *general* acknowledgment of his need of direction. It evinced a humble state of mind. It was an acknowledgment, also, originating probably from this particular passage which he was reading. He did not understand how it could be applied to the Messiah; how the description of his humiliation and condemnation Acts 8:33 could be reconciled to the prevalent ideas of his being a prince and a conqueror. The

same sentiment is expressed by Paul in Romans 10:14. The circumstances, the state of mind in the eunuch, and the result, strongly remind one of the declaration in Psalms 25:9, "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way."

Barnes: And he desired, He was willing to receive instruction even from a stranger. The rich and the great may often receive valuable instruction from a stranger, and from a poor, unknown man.

Acts 8:32

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:

[He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth] The 13th Old Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 8:32; Isaiah 53:7-8, fulfilled). The next prophecy is in Acts 13:33. This is quoted almost word for word from the Septuagint.

Barnes: He was led, This quotation is taken literally from the Septuagint. It varies very little from the Hebrew. It has been almost universally understood that this place refers to the Messiah; and Philip expressly applies it to him. The word "was led" ηχθη, implies that he was conducted by others; that he was led as a sheep is led to be killed. The general idea is that of *meekness* and *submission* when he was led to be put to death; a description that applies in a very striking manner to the Lord Jesus.

Earlier servant passages in Isaiah refer explicitly to Israel, but Isaiah 49:5 distinguishes the servant from the rest of Israel, and in Isaiah 53:1-3 he is rejected by Israel; in Isaiah 53:4-12 he bears the sins of Israel, although he himself is not guilty (Isaiah 53:9) and suffers voluntarily (Isaiah 53:12). The official's confusion is understandable, but Philip's exposition is correct. (Luke does not report all of Isaiah 53, but the context is implied; because chapter and verse references had not yet been assigned, one had to cite part of a passage to let the readers know where one was reading.)

Spurgeon: It was the finger of God which pointed to this passage; for the sum of all Christian truth is Christ, both humbled and exalted. In this is contained an admonition for all teachers to lead souls, as the chief matter, to the knowledge of Christ, the Crucified and the Risen One. This, as a rule, is much more effective than moral preaching. The missionaries in Greenland who, with discourses on the living God and his holy commandments, preached for a whole year to deaf ears, struck home when they commenced with the evangelical message, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!"⁴¹

⁴¹ Spurgeon Devotional Commentary

Acts 8:33

In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

[In his humiliation his judgment was taken away] It was the custom among the Jews, when they were taking any criminal from judgment to execution, to call out and inquire whether there was any person who could appear in behalf of the character of the criminal or that could say anything in his favor. In Christ's case this inquiry was not made. It is of this breach of justice the prophet speaks. It shows how minutely the trial of Jesus was known 750 years before it took place.

[who shall declare his generation? ... of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?] Questions 31-33. Next, Acts 8:36. The Greek word for "generation" here is *genea* (GSN-1074), a begetting, birth, nativity, descent, genealogy, age, span of life. Acts 3:33 gives the true meaning, "for his life was taken from the earth," so who will declare His life and works?

Barnes: In his humiliation. This varies from the Hebrew, but is copied exactly from the Septuagint, showing that he was reading the Septuagint. The Hebrew is, "he was taken from prison, and from judgment." The word rendered "prison" denotes any kind of *detention*, or even oppression. It does not mean, as with us, to be confined in a prison or jail, but may mean *custody*, and be applied to the detention or custody of the Saviour when his hands were bound, and he was led to be tried. Matthew 27:2. It is not known why the Seventy thus translated the expression "he was taken from prison" etc., by "*in his humiliation*," etc. The word "from prison," may mean, as has been remarked, however, from oppression, and this does not differ materially from humiliation; and in this sense the Seventy understood it. The *meaning* of the expression in the Septuagint and the Acts is clear. It denotes that in his state of oppression and calamity, when he was destitute of protectors and friends, when at the *lowest* state of his humiliation, and, therefore, most the object of pity, that *in addition to that*, justice was denied him, his judgment—a just sentence—was taken away, or withheld, and he was delivered to be put to death. His deep humiliation and friendless state was followed by an unjust and cruel condemnation, when no one would stand forth to plead his cause. Every circumstance thus goes to deepen the view of his sufferings.

McGee: Where was he reading? You will recognize that this is from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He was reading the seventh and eighth verses. It is obvious that he must have been reading for some time. So it is also obvious that he must have read the preceding verses: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his

stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:3–6).⁴²

Acts 8:34

And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

Clarke: Of whom speaketh the prophet this—This was a very natural inquiry: for in the text itself, and in its circumstances, there was nothing that could determine the meaning, so as to ascertain whether the prophet meant himself or some other person; and the very inquiry shows that the eunuch had thought deeply on the subject.

Barnes: Answered Philip. That is, *addressed* Philip. The Hebrews often use the word *answer* as synonymous with addressing one, whether he had spoken or not.

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

[began at the same scripture] Began, but did not confine his remarks to this one scripture. He showed by the sacred books that Jesus was the Messiah and that He recently fulfilled the prophets by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

Clarke: Began at the same scripture—He did not confine himself to this one scripture, but made this his text, and showed, from the general tenor of the sacred writings, that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah; and that in his person, birth, life, doctrine, miracles, passion, death, and resurrection, the Scriptures of the Old Testament were fulfilled. This preaching had the desired effect, for the eunuch was convinced of the truth of Philip’s doctrine, and desired to be baptized in the name of Jesus.

LAN: Some think that the Old Testament is not relevant today, but Philip led this man to faith in Jesus Christ by using the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is found in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. God’s entire Word is applicable to all people in all ages. Don’t avoid or neglect to use the Old Testament. It too is God’s Word.

McGee: The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God.

I do not believe that people can be converted by hearing a song. The song may affect a person emotionally and influence the will to make a decision for Christ. However, if the Word of God is not in it, there can be no true conversion. It requires the Word of God. How important that is!

⁴²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:546). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Simon Peter, whom God used so wonderfully in the conversion of multitudes, makes it very clear that the Word of God must be involved if a person is saved. He wrote in his first epistle: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:23–25).

When the Spirit of God uses the Word of God, what is going to happen? These men were in the chariot, discussing the Word of God. Philip was telling the eunuch about Jesus.⁴³

Philip is called an evangelist (21:8), and, like any wise evangelist, he began communicating **the Good News about Yeshua** at the point of interest and concern of his hearer. Unwise evangelists, like unwise salespeople, sometimes use a prepared “pitch” that does not speak to the concerns of their “customer”; their message proves irritating, like scratching where it doesn’t itch.⁴⁴

preached Jesus to him: First-century Jews did not speak much about a suffering Messiah. The Jewish people, facing the yoke of Roman rule, believed that the Messiah would come as the Lion of Judah, a delivering King, not a weak lamb. They believed and taught that the suffering One spoken of by Isaiah was the suffering nation of Israel. Most likely this eunuch had heard the “official” teaching of this passage in Jerusalem but still had some questions. Philip showed him that suffering One was Jesus. He had to suffer on the Cross for the sins of all of humanity.

Acts 8:36

And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

[what doth hinder me to be baptized?] This is question 34 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 9:4. This request by the eunuch shows that Philip told him the whole gospel story.

Clarke: See, here is water—He was not willing to omit the first opportunity that presented itself of his taking upon himself the profession of the Gospel. By this we may see that Philip had explained the whole of the Christian faith to him, and the way by which believers were brought into the Christian Church.

The direction of the Holy Spirit in this incident is apparent again as Philip and the eunuch arrive at a rare watering place in the desert precisely when the eunuch requested baptism.

⁴³McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:547). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 8:35). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 8:37

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

[If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest] This is the secret of salvation (Romans 1:16; Romans 10:9-10; Ephes. 2:8-9).

[I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God] This, if believed with the whole heart, will bring the new birth (1 John 5:1).

Barnes: And Philip said, This was then stated to be the proper qualification for making a profession of religion. The terms are:

- (1.) *Faith*, that is, a reception of Jesus as a Saviour; yielding the mind to the proper influences of the truths of redemption. Mark 16:16.
- (2.) There is required not merely the assent of the understanding, but a surrender of *the heart, the will, the affections*, to the truth of the gospel. As these were the proper qualifications then, so they are now. Nothing less is required; and nothing but this can constitute a proper qualification for the Lord's Supper.

Barnes: I believe, This profession is more than a professed belief that Jesus was the Messiah. The name *Christ* implies that. "I believe that *Jesus the Messiah*" is, etc. In addition to this, he professed his belief that he was *the Son of God*-showing either that he had before supposed that the Messiah *would be* the Son of God, or that Philip had instructed him on that point. It was natural for Philip, in discoursing on the humiliation and poverty of Jesus, to add also that he sustained a higher rank of being than a man, and was the Son of God. What precise ideas the eunuch attached to this expression cannot be now determined. This verse is wanting in a very large number of manuscripts, (*Mill.*) and has been rejected by many of the ablest critics. It is also omitted in the Syriac and Ethiopic versions. It is not easy to conceive why it has been omitted in almost all the Greek Mss., unless it is spurious. If it was not in the original copy of the Acts, it was probably inserted by some early transcriber, and was deemed so important to the connexion, to show that the eunuch was not admitted hastily to baptism, that it was afterwards retained. It contains, however, an important truth, elsewhere abundantly taught in the Scriptures, that *faith* is necessary to a proper profession of religion.

Spurgeon: See the order: the word is understood, then comes faith, and then baptism. Is the Lord's order right? Then let no man alter it. None can have any right to church ordinances but those who believe with all their hearts that Jesus is the Son of God.

Acts 8:38

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

[they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch] Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water so burial in water could take place (Romans 6:4; Col. 2:12). They went down into the water and came up out of the water, as in other places (Matthew 3:6, Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10).

Clarke: And they went down—They alighted from the chariot into the water. While Philip was instructing him, and he professed his faith in Christ, he probably plunged himself under the water, as this was the plan which appears to have been generally followed among the Jews in their baptisms; but the person who had received his confession of faith was he to whom the baptism was attributed, as it was administered by his authority.

Barnes: And they went down both into the water. This passage has been made the subject of much discussion on the subject of baptism. It has been adduced in proof of the necessity of immersion. It is not proposed to enter into that subject here. Matthew 3:6. It may be remarked here, that the preposition εἰς, translated here "into," does not of necessity mean that. Its meaning would be as well expressed by "to," or "unto," or, as we should say, "they went to the water," without meaning to determine whether they went into it or not. Out of *twenty-six* significations which Schleusner has given the word, this is one. John 11:38: "Jesus therefore groaning in himself, cometh to εἰς the grave" - assuredly not *into* the grave. Luke 11:49: I send them prophets. Greek, I send *to* εἰς them prophets" -*to* them, not *into* them. Comp. Romans 2:4; 1 Corinthians 14:36, Matthew 12:41: "They repented *at* εἰς the preaching of Jonas"-not *into* his preaching, John 4:5: "Then cometh he *to* εἰς a city of Samaria," that is, *near to it*; for the context shows that he had not yet entered *into* it. Comp. John 4:6,8 John 21:4: "Jesus stood *on* εἰς the shore;" that is, not *in*, but *near* the shore. These passages show that the word does not necessarily mean that they entered *into* the water; but

- (1.) if it did, it does not necessarily follow that the eunuch was *immersed*. There might be various ways of baptizing, even after they were *in* the water, besides immersing. Sprinkling or pouring might be performed there as well as elsewhere.
- (2.) It is incumbent on those who maintain that *immersion* is the *only* valid mode of baptism, to prove that this passage cannot *possibly* mean anything else, and that there *was* no other mode practised by the apostles.
- (3.) It would be still incumbent to show that if this were the common and even the only mode then, in a warm climate, etc., that it is indispensable that this mode should be practised everywhere else. No such positive command can be adduced. And it follows, therefore, that it cannot be proved that immersion is the only lawful mode of baptism. Matthew 3:6.

Eunuch baptized (8:29-38)

As Philip, at the behest of the Spirit, runs up to the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot, he hears him reading from the book of Isaiah (8:32-33). It is hardly an accident that at the precise moment of Philip's arrival the Ethiopian is reading a passage that makes him open to the good news about Jesus. The Ethiopian is reading from the Suffering Servant section in Isaiah 53. As Philip approaches the chariot, the eunuch asks him whether the prophet is talking about himself or someone else (8:34).

Philip immediately takes advantage of this God-given opportunity. "Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (8:35). Jesus quoted from Isaiah 53, saying it would be fulfilled in his death (Luke 22:37). Now, Philip is preaching the same message. Philip, like Peter, apparently tells the eunuch that anyone who accepts Jesus as Messiah should be baptized for the remission of sins, and will be filled with the Holy Spirit (2:38). Thus, when somewhere along the road the Ethiopian sees water (a rarity in this area, except for the Mediterranean Sea), he asks for baptism. The eunuch halts his chariot, goes to the water and both of them go "down into the water and Philip baptized him" (8:38). The phrase "went down into" implies that baptism was done by immersion. Jesus himself was baptized this way (Mark 1:9-10). The fact that the official goes "on his way rejoicing" indicates that he has received the Holy Spirit (8:39). Luke often sees joy as a response to God's work in the world (Luke 1:14, 28; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; 10:17, 20; 13:17; 15:5, 7, 10, 32; 19:6, 37; 24:41, 52).

Africa has now been reached by the gospel in the person of the Ethiopian eunuch. In him, the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 is beginning to be fulfilled: "Ethiopia [Cush] will quickly stretch out her hands to God" (New King James Version).

Most modern translations omit verse 37 from the text and place it in a footnote. They do so because the oldest manuscripts do not have this verse. The verse reads: "Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized].' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" The verse simply makes explicit something that the other verses imply; it seems that an early scribe thought it should be more explicit, added it to the text, and many copyists followed suit.

The evangelization and baptism of a high-ranking Ethiopian represents another step in the advance of the gospel from its Jewish origins to a wider Gentile world. However, the church is still far from engaging in a full-bore missions effort directly to pagan Gentiles. "As with the Samaritans, the conversion of the Ethiopian does not yet represent a formal opening to the Gentiles, but rather to those who were marginalized within the people of God" (Johnson, page 160).⁴⁵

Acts 8:39

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.

This does not have to be a miracle. Maybe the Spirit just led him, or maybe it was a miracle.

[Spirit of the Lord] Proof that the Spirit of Acts 8:29 was the Holy Spirit. Here the Spirit translates Philip about 25 miles to Azotus.

[caught away] Greek: *harpazo* (GSN-726), to seize; catch away; pluck; pull or take away by force. It is translated "take by force" (Matthew 11:12; John 6:15; Acts 23:10); "catch away" (Matthew 13:19; Acts 8:39); "catch" (John 10:12); "catch up" (2

⁴⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts8.htm>

Cor. 12:2-4; 1 Thes. 4:17; Rev. 12:5); "pluck" (John 10:28-29); "pull" (Jude 1:23). This then means what it says and there is no need to change it.

The Spirit of the Lord. Acts 8:29. The *Spirit* had suggested to Philip to go to meet the eunuch; and the same Spirit, now that he had fulfilled the design of his going there, directed his departure.

Barnes: Caught away. This phrase has been usually understood of a *forcible* or *miraculous* removal of Philip to some other place. Some have even supposed that he was borne through the air by an angel. (See even Doddridge.) To such foolish interpretations have many expositors been led. The meaning is, clearly, that the Spirit, who had directed Philip to go near the eunuch, now removed him in a similar manner. That this is the meaning is clear,

- (1.) because it accounts for all that occurred. It is not wise to suppose the existence of a miracle, except where the effect cannot otherwise be accounted for, and except where there is a plain statement that there was a miracle.
- (2.) The word "caught away" ἠρπάσσε does not imply that there was a miracle. The word properly means, to seize and bear away anything violently, without the consent of the owner, as robbers and plunderers do. Then it signifies to remove anything in a forcible manner; to make use of strength or power to remove it, Acts 23:10, Matthew 13:19, John 10:28; 2 Corinthians 12:2,4, etc. In *no case* does it ever denote that a *miracle* is performed. And :all that can be signified here is, that the Spirit *strongly admonished* Philip to go to some other place; that he so *forcibly* or *vividly suggested* the duty to his mind, as to *tear him away*, as it were, from the society of the eunuch. He had been deeply interested in the case. He would have found pleasure in continuing the journey with him. But the strong convictions of duty, urged by the Holy Spirit, impelled him, as it were, to break off this new and interesting acquaintanceship, and to go to some other place. The purpose for which he was sent, to instruct and baptize the eunuch, was accomplished, and now he was called to some other field of labour. A similar instance of interpretation has been considered Matthew 4:5.

Why was Philip suddenly transported to a different city? This miraculous sign showed the urgency of bringing the Gentiles to belief in Christ. Azotus is Ashdod, one of the ancient Philistine capitals. Philip probably lived in Caesarea for the next 20 years (Acts 21:8).

Barnes: And he went on his way rejoicing. His mind was enlightened on a perplexing passage of scripture. He was satisfied respecting the Messiah. He was baptized; and he experienced that which all feel who embrace the Saviour and are baptized, *joy*. It was joy resulting from the fact that he was reconciled to God; and a joy, the natural effect of having done his duty promptly, in making a profession of religion. If we wish happiness, if we would avoid clouds and gloom, we shall *do our duty at once*. If we delay till tomorrow what we ought to do today, we may expect to be troubled with melancholy thoughts. If we find peace, it will be in doing promptly: just that which God requires at our hands. This is the last that we hear of this man. Some have supposed that this eunuch

carried the gospel to Ethiopia, and preached it there. But there is strong evidence to believe that the gospel was not preached there successfully until about the year 330, when it was introduced by *Frumentius*, sent to Abyssinia for that purpose by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria. From this narrative we may learn,

- (1.) that God often prepares the mind to receive the truth.
- (2.) That this takes place sometimes with the great and the noble, as well as the poor and obscure.
- (3.) We should study the Scriptures. It is the way in which God usually directs the mind in the truths of religion.
- (4.) They who read the Bible with candour and care may expect that God will, in some mode, guide them into the truth. It will often be in a way which they least expect; but they need not be afraid of being left to darkness or error.
- (5.) We should be ready at all times to speak to sinners. God often prepares their minds, as he did that of the eunuch, to receive the truth.
- (6.) We should not be afraid of the great, the rich, or of strangers. God often prepares *their* minds to receive the truth; and we may find a man willing to hear of the Saviour where we least expected it.
- (7.) We should do our duty in this respect, as Philip did, promptly. We should not delay or hesitate; but should at once do that which we believe is in accordance with the will of God. See Psalms 119:60.

McGee: Philip is snatched off the page of Scripture. He is not needed here anymore. The Ethiopian rides off the pages of Scripture in his chariot. He went on his way, rejoicing. Now what about this man? The first great church was not in the United States, nor was it in Europe, nor was it in Jerusalem, nor was it in Asia Minor. The first great church was in northern Africa. The Ethiopian evidently went back and, through his witness and his influence, a church was begun there. You would find it very profitable to read about the early church in North Africa.

Now what about Philip?⁴⁶

Spurgeon: When the good man's work was done, the new convert needed him no more, for he had the key of the scriptures in his own hands.

Acts 8:40

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Caesarea Sebaste - Built by Herod in honor of Augustus (Greek *Sebastos*). Between Carmel and Joppa, 55 mi NW of Jerusalem. Roman procurators resided there; present ruin has an inscription of Pontius Pilate. (Not Ceasarea Phillipi, which north of the Sea of Galilee.)

⁴⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:547). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[**Caesarea**] Not Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13), but a city built by Herod between Joppa and Mt. Carmel (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 16, 2:1). Philip settled here (Acts 21:8). Always when mentioned singly it refers to this city.

Clarke: Philip was found at Azotus—From the time he left the eunuch, he was not heard of till he got to Azotus, which, according to Dr. Lightfoot, was about 34 miles from Gaza, and probably it was near Gaze that Philip met the eunuch. The Azotus of the New Testament is the Ashdod of the old. It was given by Joshua to the tribe of Judah, Joshua 15:47. It was one of the five lordships which belonged to the Philistines, and is a seaport town on the Mediterranean Sea, between Gaza on the south, and Joppa or Jaffa on the north. Herodotus reports, lib. ii. cap. 157, that Psammeticus, king of Egypt, besieged this city 29 years, which, if true, is the longest siege which any city or fortress ever endured.

Barnes: Azotus. This is the Greek name of the city, which by the Hebrews was called *Ashdod*. It was one of the cities which were *not* taken by Joshua, and which remained in the possession of the Philistines. It was to this place that the ark of God was sent when it was taken by the Philistines from the Israelites; and here Dagon was cast down before it, 1 Samuel 5:2,3. Uzziah, king of Judah, broke down its wall, and built cities or watch-towers around it, 2 Chronicles 26:6. It was a place of great strength and consequence. It was distant about thirty miles from Gaza. It was situated on the coast of the Mediterranean, and was a seaport. The distance which Philip had to travel, therefore, was not very great; and as Azotus lay almost directly *north* of Gaza, it shows that, in order to reach it, he must have parted from the eunuch, whose route was almost directly *south* of Gaza. It is at present inhabited by Arabs chiefly, and is by them called *Mezdel*. Dr. Wittman describes it at present as being entered by two small gates. In passing through it, he saw several fragments of columns, capitals, etc. In the centre of the town is a handsome mosque, with a minaret. The surrounding country is represented as remarkably verdant and beautiful. In the neighbourhood there stands an abundance of fine old olive-trees, and the region around it is fertile.

Barnes: Caesarea. This city was formerly called *Strato's Tower*. It is situated on the coast of the Mediterranean, at the mouth of a small river, and has a fine harbour. It is thirty-six miles south of Acre, and about sixty-two north-west of Jerusalem, and about the same distance north-east of Azotus. This city is supposed by some to be the Hazor mentioned in Joshua 11:1. It was rebuilt by Herod the Great, and named *Caesarea* in honour of Augustus Caesar. The city was dedicated to him; the seaport was called *Sebaste*, the Greek word for Augustus. It was adorned with most splendid houses; and the temple of Caesar was erected by Herod over against the mouth of the haven, in which was placed the statue of the Roman emperor. It became the seat of the Roman governor, while Judea was a Roman province, Acts 23:33; Acts 25:6,13. Philip afterwards resided at this place. See Acts 21:8,9. Caesarea at present is inhabited only by jackals and beasts of prey. "Perhaps," says Dr. Clarke, "there has not been in the history of the world an example of any city that, in so short a space of time, rose to such an extraordinary height of splendour as did this of Caesarea; or that exhibits a more awful contrast to its former magnificence, by the present desolate appearance of its ruins. Not a single inhabitant remains. Of its gorgeous palaces and temples, enriched with the choicest Works of art,

scarcely a trace can be discerned. Within the space of ten years after laying the foundation, from an obscure fortress, it became the most flourishing and celebrated city of all Syria." Now it is in utter desolation. (See Robinson's Calmet, Art. *Caesarea*.)

Philip continued doing the work of an evangelist **as he went through all the towns** of the coastal plain northward **until he came to Caesarea**, some 40 miles north of Tel Aviv. There he married and settled down (21:8–9).

An old city rebuilt by Herod the Great, with a harbor, Caesarea became the capital city of the Roman procurators. Riots between Jews and Gentiles here marked the start of the Jewish war with Rome in 66 C.E. Partly unearthed by archeologists, the only inscription with the name of Pontius Pilate was found here. Today its amphitheater, built by Herod, is used for concerts; while nearby have been built homes for the well-to-do.⁴⁷

In October 1857, J. Hudson Taylor began to minister in Ningpo, China, and he led a Mr. Nyi to Christ. The man was overjoyed and wanted to share his faith with others. "How long have you had the good tidings in England?" Mr. Nyi asked Hudson Taylor one day. Taylor acknowledged that England had known the Gospel for many centuries. "My father died seeking the truth," said Mr. Nyi. "Why didn't you come sooner?" Taylor had no answer to that penetrating question. How long have *you* known the Gospel? How far have you shared it personally?

Spurgeon: This chapter should be read candidly, and its teachings accepted: what they are is so clear that there is little need of explanation. **Take heed how ye read.**

ESV: Philip was then taken to witness in the coastal region, first in **Azotus** (OT Ashdod), then in **Caesarea**, where he seems to have settled (see [21:8](#)). Caesarea was a city with a large Greek-speaking population. Originally a small harbor town known as Strato's Tower, it was rebuilt by Herod the Great in magnificent Hellenistic style with a greatly improved harbor. In Philip's day it was the seat of the Roman government of Judea. Excavations have yielded significant finds, including the Herodian port and theater, an "amphitheater" shaped like a hippodrome for horse races, a palace built on a promontory out into the sea (frequently identified as Herod's palace), and a great raised aqueduct. Herod built a temple to Augustus here, and an inscription found in the theater mentions Pontius Pilate's dedication of a *Tiberium* (a sacred site devoted to the emperor Tiberius). Tense relations existed between the mixed Jewish and Gentile inhabitants, and one cause of the First Jewish Revolt (a.d. 66–73) was the Gentile desecration of the Jewish synagogue in Caesarea.

Philip preaches along the coast (8:40)

Luke next recounts Philip's sudden appearance at the coastal town of Azotus. Philip travels in the area, "preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (8:40). Azotus is the old Philistine city of Ashdod, about 20 miles north of Gaza. Philip

⁴⁷Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 8:40). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

works his way north along the coastal road that runs through the coastal plain. He apparently preaches the gospel in such coastal cities as Lydda, Joppa, Jamnia and Antipatris. He probably spends considerable time in each town. What we have in Luke's brief notation is a missionary journey of substantial duration. Luke passes over in only one sentence the details of what may have been a months-long work.

Philip's final destination is Caesarea, which is either where he lived or later settled. After arriving in Caesarea, he disappears from Luke's account for 20 years. He reappears as Paul's host in chapter 21. By this time he is the father of four daughters, all four of whom are prophetesses (21:8-9).

It's intriguing to think that Philip himself may have been Luke's source for much of the information in Acts 8. Luke is with Paul when they stay with Philip's family in Caesarea before the final Jerusalem visit. He would have ample opportunity to discuss the events described in chapter 8. If Luke gathers his material at a later time, he could still interview one or more of Philip's daughters about the early days of the church.



