

Persecution and Adventures of Philip the Evangelist !

V 1-3 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

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

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

“A great persecution arose... they were all scattered.” In chapter 5 we learned how the situation in Jerusalem had become intolerable for the Sanhedrin. When the disciples were dragged out of the temple to appear before the council, the temple police force *“feared the people, lest they should be stoned.”* (5:26)

As far as the Sanhedrin was concerned, the new movement of Christianity was getting completely out of hand, and, unable to stop it any other way, the rulers decided they would have to take the drastic step of waging all-out war against the disciples. And this last confrontation with Stephen seemed to be the trigger. Once they had crossed the line of murdering one disciple, then it became easier to kill and harass more of them.

And they found their “champion” in the young Saul, a firebrand Pharisee whose misguided idealism had inspired him to lead the wave of persecution against these upstarts who had dared to defy the religious status quo of Jerusalem.

In the end the persecution actually helped the Church to grow. Instead of staying bunched up in Jerusalem, its members went *“throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria”*.

“Saul... made havoc of the church.” Heavy-handed persecution.

V 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

“Went everywhere preaching the Word.” Saul, who thought he could slow down the growth of the Church, only helped to spread the Good News even further - the opposite effect of what he intended.

The rest of chapter 8 (verses 5-38) describes the adventures of Philip, the first disciple to be given the title of ***“evangelist”***. (Acts 21:8) This Philip was not the “Philip” who was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples; but rather he was one of the ***“seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”*** whom the Apostles appointed to oversee the management of money and food distribution in the Jerusalem church. (6:3) Luke refers to him later in Acts 21:8 when Paul and team ***“entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven.”***

Philip’s colleague, Stephen, had expressed the vision for worldwide mission with his stirring message to the council that God was not confined to one people or one place. And Philip was the first apostle to put that vision into practice.

Philip’s story is a remarkable one; nevertheless, it is only one of many other stories that could have been written about the exploits of the early disciples. The only difference is, his story was recorded. For it so happened that some years later, Luke, the writer of this Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke, ***“stayed many days”*** in the house of Philip. (21:10) This gave Philip the opportunity tell his story to Luke who in turn faithfully recorded it for future generations.

V 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

“The city of Samaria.” The ancient capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 722 B.C., they resettled many of the Israelites in other nations and allowed Gentiles from other regions to settle there. As a result the population had become a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, and the religion also became a rather mixed-up version of Judaism. But they did believe that Messiah would come (to their holy mountain - Mt. Gerizim).

V 6-8 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

“The miracles which he did... and many... were healed.” Philip follows in the footsteps of his former co-worker, Stephen, a man *“full of faith and power”* who *“did great wonders and signs among the people.”* (6:8)

As far as we know, these men, with Greek names, had not known Jesus personally in the flesh, nevertheless, their personal connection with Him via the Holy Spirit enabled them to manifest God’s power in remarkable ways. This is what Jesus had promised to His followers: He would bestow on them the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven so that they could do the same works as He did, and even *“greater works”*. (Matthew 16:19, John 14:12)

“There was great joy.” For those suffering from disease (physical or mental), from paralysis or deformity - in the days before modern medical knowledge and before the establishment of hospitals or other institutions - such afflictions were a much greater burden, both to the sufferers themselves and to their families. Needless to say, to be freed suddenly from these burdens caused *“great joy”* to all involved.

V 9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

“Sorcery.” Comes from the Greek *magos* (wise man) from which we get “magic”. It was the same word used for the “magi”, the *“wise men”* who came from the east to find Jesus. (Matthew 2) In this chapter of Acts, the word was translated as *“sorcery”* (*mageuo*) and in chapter 13 as *“sorcerer”* (*magos*). It seems the word could have a negative or positive connotation, depending on the spiritual orientation of the wise man concerned. Another word used for sorcery in the New Testament was *pharmakeia*; this definitely referred to the dark side - witchcraft, enchantment with drugs, and so on.

These “wise men” could be thought of as the “scientists” of the ancient world. But in those days science and the supernatural were practiced together, not in conflict with each other as they are today. Back then a scientist or doctor was expected to have more than just technical knowledge. He was supposed to know how to invoke the help of the spirit world through prayers, incantations, magic potions, and so on.

Simon, we may presume, was drawing most of his “power” from evil spirits. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 contains God’s warning against dabbling in the dark side of the spiritual realm. However, there were many wise and spiritual men who received their inspiration and power from good spirits - such as the *“wise men from the east”*. (Matthew 2:1)

V 10-11 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”

And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

“Great power of God.” According to early church tradition, Simon was one of the founders of Gnosticism. Whether he was really one of the founders, we can’t be too sure. But anyway, it might be helpful to have a look at what this philosophical-religious belief system was all about since the same beliefs have persisted through history even into our modern day.

Gnosticism was propounded in a wide variety of sects and shades of belief and threatened to water down Gospel teaching in the early days of Christianity. This is not unlike how the bewildering array of secular-humanist-New Age doctrines undermine Christian faith in modern times.

The Gnostic sects all promised salvation through a secret knowledge of God that they claimed was revealed to them alone. Those who possessed this superior “knowledge” would achieve salvation. Some men, because of their “spirituality” and ability to perform miracles on a limited scale, were thought to have attained a form of divinity. Likely, that is why Simon the sorcerer, *“claiming that he was someone great”*, was said to be *“the great power of God”*.

[Mind Over Matter](#)

The mind truly is a marvel of God's creation with tremendous inbuilt capacity. Throughout history mystics, diviners, seers have harnessed the power of the mind to varying degrees - mind over matter. Some were empowered by God (as we have seen in the examples of Peter, Stephen, and now Philip) and some were given over to Satan (such as Simon the sorcerer).

God intends for our minds to become one with His mind, to be vehicles for His thoughts in order that He might show His might and power to the world. Mankind has had only limited glimpses of the mind's immense capacity however. God has veiled the full understanding, knowledge, and power of the mind for the simple reason that in this present age man's heart is not ready for it; his motivations are influenced too much by the forces of Darkness. Mankind would not be worthy of such full use of the mind's capacity for he would use it for his own glory and not the glory of God.

The powers that some worldly mystics and magicians do exercise now is nothing but child's play compared to the power that will be released in the End to those who are called to know the full mind of God, to be generators of God's power in those Last Days. We can look forward then to even greater miracles than what we read about in the Book of Acts - miracles that will heal, mend, change minds and hearts, call down the power of Heaven to save, protect, or even destroy.

Besides what we read about in the Book of Acts, we can refer also to the many miracles that God did through Moses, Isaiah, Elijah, and other prophets in the Old Testament. Many of these were miracles of death and destruction, which were needed sometimes to protect God's people then, the Israelites, against their enemies.

Have these manifestations of God's power been left on the shelf never to be seen again? Or should we not expect to see them revived in the perilous times ahead when they will be needed in the persecution-filled days of the near future prior to Christ's return?

Regarding the Gnostic doctrine that one's own spirituality can bring salvation, there are many Scriptures to correct that idea: *"But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God."* *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves."*

(John 1:12, also Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, and others)

The Gnostics often included Jesus in their belief system. For the most part this was a ploy of the forces of Darkness to try to put Jesus on the same level as all the other prophets and seers of history. Taking advantage of man's tendency to worship his mind, those dark spiritual forces have persuaded thinkers and philosophers all through history to open their minds to "knowledge" that contradicts the true knowledge of God. Being open-minded is a virtue, we know, but when it goes to the extreme of denying the ways and reality of God, then it becomes a form of unhealthy rebellion.

By the way, it is thought that the demon Pan rules in this domain of clouding the mind of man through his bewitching calls to be "open-minded" (to his lies). In any case, whichever demon it is, we can easily detect his influence in philosophies like Nietzscheism, Darwinism, or Marxism. These have undermined faith in our modern world with their ideas that deny or downplay man's need for God and His role in the creation of the natural world or in the unfolding of history. And in different forms the same tune has been piped into the ears of mankind throughout history.

When the Gnostics referred to Jesus, their emphasis was on His teachings, which was all well and good. But then they tended to ignore His resurrection, His divinity, and the simple fact that He is "*the way, the truth, and the life*" - the door to Salvation, the way to God, the giver of Eternal Life. (John 14:6,10:9) It was a trick of the Dark forces to use a half-truth in order to promote the lie that Jesus was on the same level as all the other prophets of history, and therefore not the Son of God.

We can understand then why Gnosticism proved to be a subtle attack on Christian faith that the early Church fathers had to contend with vigorously, mostly after the Book of Acts was written. And the same ideas have persisted into modern times. (The *DaVinci Code* book is a recent example.)

Another feature of Gnosticism was the idea of Dualism. For example, the separation of matter and spirit: Matter was considered "evil", and spirit was considered "good". In practice this led either to extreme

asceticism (being harsh on the “body”), or to extreme licentiousness. (The idea here was that since your “spirit” was good, then it didn’t matter what your “body” did.)

Another form of Dualism was the idea of separation of good and evil. God and the Devil were seen as two entirely independent and different entities. Partly true, but too much emphasis on that kind of doctrine tends to belittle the power of God and over-emphasize the powers of Darkness.

The Bible teaches very plainly that everything was created by God and that evil is under God’s control and shall one day be destroyed: *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”*. (John 1:2) *“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”* (Luke 10:19 and many others)

V12-13 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Conversion of Samaritans, and of Simon who, it seems, did the right thing, but for the wrong reasons, as we find out later. He *“was amazed”* by God’s power working through Philip, which was so much greater than his own.

V 14-17 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit. Because of the long-standing animosity between Jews and Samaritans, having Peter and John there to pray for the Holy Spirit may have been the Lord’s way of making it more

official and maintaining unity in the Church.

“They received the Holy Spirit.” A significant event because it showed that no longer could Judea claim to be the one and only people of God, but now many of the Samaritans had become the “people of God”. And this happened without their having to go to Jerusalem or a synagogue or follow the more proper form of Judaism as practiced by the Jews.

V 18-23 **And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”**

But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

“You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

“For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

Philip went down and had a big revival. A guy [Simon] tried to buy the power of the Holy Ghost and got rebuked for it! (8:8-20.) Some people try to do that nowadays, “If you’ll give me \$100, I’ll pray you a great prayer of deliverance! You give me \$1000 and you’re in for sure!” Some people go around selling the power of the Holy Ghost and healing! [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

The power of the Holy Spirit in its amplified form (which appears to be what Jesus was referring to when He taught His disciples about using the “*keys of the Kingdom*” to unlock Heaven’s power), can only be given to those who have the right motives and intend to use it unselfishly.

Simon may have been envious of the Apostles’ “power”; he also may have wanted to use the Holy Spirit, for pride’s sake, to impress his old followers and also to use this power for monetary gain. Whatever the case was, his attempt to buy the power of the Holy Ghost made Peter very upset, and he roundly rebukes Simon for being “*poisoned by bitterness*

and bound by iniquity.”

Those immersed in the Darkness (like Simon) might seek after God’s power only to use it for personal gain. But eager as they might be to learn and follow the steps to power, they will not find it. For sincerity of heart, dedication, and a deep love for and yieldedness to God are the first steps.

God discerns the inner motives of a person’s heart, and He will not be deceived or made a mockery of by selfish and power-hungry users of His keys to power. *“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”* (John 1:5)

During His time on Earth, Jesus used Heaven’s power to perform many great miracles. But it was never for His own personal gain or desires or to “amaze” the people. This is the example we must follow. For God’s power, loosed on earth by those who access it - the *“keys of the Kingdom”* - is meant to show forth the glory of God and to accomplish His will; they are not meant to be used in a pompous show.

It is a serious responsibility to use this power in humility of spirit as a servant of others, to serve those who seek out righteousness and truth, to use this power as the means to ride in victory, both now and in the troublous times to come.

V 24 Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.”

“Pray to the Lord for me.” It took a good, healthy dose of the fear of God to pulverize the old thought patterns and help Simon the ex-sorcerer get somewhere on the right track.

V 25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

“Preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” Fulfillment of Jesus’ command to *“be witnesses to Me... in all Samaria...”* (1:8)

V 26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to

Gaza.” This is desert.

“Gaza.” One of five chief cities of the Philistines.



* Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”—Acts viii. 29.

V 27-28 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was

returning.

And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

“So he arose and went.” He obeyed the voice of the Lord.

“A eunuch.” As a eunuch, this man would have been denied access to the temple and the opportunity to become a full proselyte to Judaism. (See Deuteronomy 23:1.)

“Ethiopians.” Kingdom south of Egypt.

“Reading Isaiah the prophet.” He was reading from the Septuagint Bible. Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, had translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek in the 200’s B.C. This Bible had come into fairly widespread use in the Greek-speaking world of that time, at least among those who could afford to pay for them - these hand-copied scrolls made from sheepskin.

Philip obeyed the Lord: Right in the middle of this big revival, God told him to get up and go out and witness to just one guy! (8:27.) “Now what do you mean, Lord? I’m getting to be a big evangelist, when I was nothing but a table-waiter before! And here’s my big opportunity! What do You mean You want me to go down and start hitchhiking rides just for the sake of one guy!” But it turned out he was a pretty important fellow! [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

V 29-30 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

“Philip ran.” Philip was instantly obedient to the Lord’s voice.

V 31-33 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

***He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
In His humiliation His justice was taken away,***

***And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.***

The eunuch was reading from just the right Scripture, Isaiah 53:7-8. The Lord certainly knows how to engineer situations, but Philip still had to do his part to take advantage of the set-up.



V 34-35 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?”

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

“Of whom does the prophet say this?” Whatever Jewish religious

experts the eunuch may have consulted would not have helped him much to understand this passage. Some thought the slaughtered sheep referred to Israel; some thought the “*servant*” referred to Isaiah; a few knew it was about the Messiah but were not willing to connect it to Jesus.

The Ethiopian happened to be a treasurer, the first man in the kingdom under Candace, the Ethiopian Queen! Do you know what the result of that was? One of the oldest, most ancient Christian churches in the World today - the Coptic Church of North Africa, one of the oldest forms of Christianity! Of course, it’s got a lot of ritualism & formalism now, 2000 years later!

But it shows they got the Gospel, and it shows the Ethiopian took it back to’em! He was a faithful witness, amen? Praise God! Because [Philip] preached to him not the weather, not politics, not social righteousness, or civil rights - but he preached Jesus! Amen? He got him saved, and baptised him in the nearby water. (8:35-38.)

[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

V 36-38 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

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

“What hinders me from being baptized?” The eunuch seemed to know intuitively that salvation was meant for all, even for a eunuch and a foreigner like himself.

“If you believe with all your heart.” This shows again that water baptism doesn’t save you, but if you’re saved, only then is it permissible to get baptized, as a testimony and sign of one’s consecration and devotion.



Philip's Route from Samaria to the Gaza road, then miraculously to Azotus, from where he made his way to Caesarea

V 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

“Caught away Philip.” Elijah and Ezekiel also had this experience of being snatched away miraculously to somewhere else. (2Kings 2:11, Ezekiel 3:12,14)

“On his way rejoicing.” The fruit of witnessing is joy in the hearts of those who receive the Gospel. The same happened in Samaria: *“there was great joy in that city”* (verse 8).

Since he took a little time out from his important revival work, and it took quite a bit of time to go hitchhiking in those days, God gave him a little ride by extraterrestrial transportation! (8:39-40) The Spirit caught him away and he found himself someplace else -

at Azotus. If you start out hitchhiking to win souls, God may give you quite a ride - a supernatural ride! PTL! [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

V 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

“Azotus.” Formerly the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod. “Caesarea” was the Roman capital of Judea, an important port city, one where Philip could have had opportunity to reach travelers from other parts of the Roman empire; it was also much safer to live there than in Jerusalem.

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 9\)](#)