

*Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.*

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

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First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #236

## **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

### **Chapter 8**

#### **Saul Persecutes the Church**

1. 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.
2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.
3. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.
4. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the enemy of the early church, the same enemy we have today, has tried to destroy the young, emerging church, first from without and then from within. None of these methods could stop the young church and many people were continually being converted to Christianity. Therefore, the enemy tries to scatter that which he cannot destroy. Persecution, however, did not destroy the church but only caused it to be scattered to a wider audience.

We know that, to some extent, persecution of the Church has gone on since the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. In fact, Paul wrote to in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:12: *Yes, and ALL who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, will suffer persecution.* Why is that? It is because Satan is the legal prince of this world (John 14:30) and is the source of this persecution.

Notice that everyone scattered except the apostles. These brave men remained in Jerusalem. They were not hirelings (John 10:12). You can always tell a hireling because the hireling always flees when pressure or trouble or persecution comes. Why? Because hirelings are in it for the money or for the recognition or fame or some kind of payoff.

In Jewish tradition the body is made by God and so should be treated respectfully. There were two main rules. First, the body must be buried

within 24 hours of death. (This was due, in part, to climatic conditions in Israel which would quickly deteriorate the flesh, leaving a horrible stench.) Secondly, the body must be buried outside the town that the deceased lived in. Thus, these devout men would not have been in any danger carrying the body of what the religious leaders saw as a criminal, since criminals as well as any other person must be buried in this manner.

Perhaps the greatest Christian who ever lived, Paul, as Saul, started out as someone we would be equal to a Hitler. He was vicious in his persecution of the church. No doubt he was an instigator in the stoning of Stephen, although he seemingly did not participate except to hold the cloaks of those who did the stoning. When we see him in the following chapters, we will understand the fear the Christians had of this man and the suspicion they had about his motives.

### **Philip Witnesses to the Samaritans**

5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.
6. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.
7. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.
8. And there was great joy in that city.
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.
10. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."
11. And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.
15. Who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
17. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.
18. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,
19. Saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
20. But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!
21. "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.
22. "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.
23. "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."
24. Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things you have spoken may come upon me."
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.

This is not the Philip who was the apostle and one of the twelve. This was Philip who was elected by the people to serve as a deacon. We do not hear much about the 7 deacons except for Stephen, who was soon murdered after his appointment, and Philip, who is regarded as the first Christian missionary.

I believe the thing that opened the door for Philip was his ability to move in the gifts and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself said that signs would follow those who believe: *In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.* We don't see much of the Church today walking in these signs and wonders. If we did, our houses or sanctuaries would not be able to contain all who would come.

Philip brought great joy to Samaria. Ironically, the Jews, of which Philip was one, as a general rule hated the Samaritans of the Northern kingdom. Why? Because the Samaritans were looked upon as gentile dogs, by the Jews, because they were originally Jews who had intermarried with foreigners (Assyrian capturers) during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC. The Jews of the Southern Kingdom were captured by the Babylonians, but refused to intermarry with their capturers. When those who were taken to Babylon, were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, the Samaritans

offered their help. The Jews of the Southern kingdom (with Jerusalem as the capital) refused their help since they were no longer “pure” Jews. The Southern kingdom treated the Northern kingdom like dogs, and there was a terrible rift and hatred between the Samaritans and Jews from that day forward. In fact, even the twelve apostles were not allowed in general to go to Samaria (Matthew 10:5). Yet after the Cross, the Gospel became for the whole world, and Jesus specifically told His disciples to be witnesses of the Gospel message in Samaria (Acts 1:8).

Verses 15-17 are very important to charismatic believers. Clearly, Peter and John came to minister to those who had already become born again Christians. By the laying on of hands and prayer, these new believers had the subsequent experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. No one can come to Christ without the Holy Spirit, but the infilling of the Spirit always follows the born again experience.

Simon was a master of sorcery. Different Greek words, such as *magos*, are translated as sorcery in the New Testament, but the family of words have a root meaning that has to do with magician and giver or portions in order to bring one into contact with the spirit world. In other words, Simon was a drug dealer. Sorcery is explicitly forbidden in the Word of God. Just to use one reference in Revelation 21:8: *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

Did Simon come to Christ but still had this iniquity drive in him, which wanted to be popular and powerful? He offered to buy from Peter and John the power of conferring spiritual gifts and was strongly rebuked by Simon Peter. In fact, Peter's comments make one believe that Simon had never really had a heart change, although verse 13 says he believed and was baptized.

### **Philip Witnesses to the Ethiopian Treasurer**

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 Gaze.” This is desert.
27. 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,
28. Was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.
29. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake the chariot.”

30. So Philip ran to him and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"
31. And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.
32. 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.*
33. *in His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.*
34. So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"
35. Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning at this Scripture preached Jesus to him.
36. 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?"
37. 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."
38. So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.
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.
40. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

In spite of all the things taking place in Samaria and the crowds that were coming to Philip's services, the Lord called him out of the city to the desert to minister to one person, an Ethiopian eunuch. Eunuchs are not homosexuals, and in fact, many Biblical figures were probably eunuchs, according to Josephus and including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Here is what Jesus said about eunuchs, *For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it* (Matthew 19:12). Eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's wombs are those who cannot procreate due to physical sterility. Those made by men were those who usually were captives, such as Daniel, whom the capturers made that way so that they could guard their women. And the final class is those who choose to be that way because of the Kingdom's sake. The Ethiopian eunuch was probably in the second

category. At any rate, he was a very smart man and was the treasurer for the queen of the Ethiopians. I assume that he was a black Jew, since he had come to Jerusalem to worship and was from Ethiopia. He was open to the Gospel message, and Philip preached Jesus to him. The requirement that Philip gave for salvation was that the eunuch believe with all his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This eunuch accepted Christ right there and asked to be baptized, confessing with his mouth his belief in Jesus.

There are many different teachings on Baptism in the Body of Christ. There are those who believe that, if a person is not immediately baptized after accepting Christ, they are not true believers. Others believe that candidates should be baptized in the name of Jesus only. Still others believe that those who are not baptized will not inherit eternal life, i.e. that it is a condition of eternal life. Some sprinkle, some dip, and some immerse. We prefer immersion, since it is the form of baptism that Jesus had, but we do recognize the sprinkled and dipped ones as being just as validly baptized as the immersed ones. For us, baptism is not the experience. Baptism is merely a symbol of the experience of being born again. In fact, as important as we believe baptism is, we recognize that neither the thief on the Cross, Zaccheaus, the Samaritan Woman at the well, nor others in scripture were baptized as far as we know from scripture. Additionally, Jesus did not water baptize anyone, again as far as we can tell from scripture. He furthermore only commissioned His disciples to water baptize at the end of His ministry as recorded in Mark 16:15-16: *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned."*

The last two verses of this chapter deal with Philip's translation from the place where he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch to Azotus. This translation or transportation by the Spirit is not that uncommon. There are indications that the Apostle Paul had this experience (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:20. Ezekiel had this experience on more than one occasion (Ezekiel 3:12, 8:3, 11:1, 43:5). Elijah was translated (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18:11-12), and perhaps Enoch was translated from earth to heaven (Genesis 5:24).

We hear of Philip later in the Bible and find that he has four daughters, all who are preachers, and that he had a godly home where Paul loved to stay (Acts 21:8).

### **The Healer**

Lois Irwin

He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.  
Surely He bore our sorrows and by His stripes we are healed.