

Acts 8

Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:4-25)

Because of the persecution unleashed by the death of Stephen and the leadership of Saul, the church is scattered and the dynamic begins to change from the world coming to the message in Jerusalem to the message going out to the world from Jerusalem. It is driven by persecution and the impulse of the Spirit not by strategy of the church.

Philip is preaching among the Samaritans who are half-bloods. They have a form of Judaism but it is corrupted, and they were hated by the Jews. There is a great manifestation of power by the hand of Philip and many believe and come to faith in Christ including Simon the sorcerer. As we move out of the context of the Jews we will see more fascination with the aspect of power and confusion as to where it comes from. Simon is baptized but he is focused on the power not the faith. He will later show his motivations.

The apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John as apostolic representation to confirm what is going on in Samaria as the gospel leaps over this boundary. The question is: Can the Samaritans receive the spirit in the same way as full-blooded Jews can? The answer is a resounding yes!!

Simon tries to get in on the power brokering side of the deal. He tries to buy the power. Peter reacts harshly to protect the integrity of the power of the Holy Spirit, but Simon is simply thinking like a Gentile. Simon is trying to purchase a priesthood, which is not uncommon in the context of the ancient world. This is a sign of things to come.

Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26)

This story has symbolic significance because in the Greek mind, Ethiopia was in the southern most extreme of the known world. If an Ethiopian hears the Gospel so early in the development of the Church then this was an indication that the message would indeed be carried to all peoples and nations throughout the world.

God calls the best, successful evangelist out of the midst of a revival to minister to one person who was highly strategic. We should not be surprised when God calls out the best of our Christian workers from important and successful ministries to go to the mission field. God is focused on his purpose of extending his Kingdom to the farthest points of the Globe and the most unreached people of the world. He will use his best resources to accomplish this goal.

The Ethiopian is a high official in the government of the country. There is a generic use of the word "eunuch" which can mean just a male in high government, civil service position. It does not have to mean that he is castrated. The evidence points toward this man being a proselyte because of the fact that he has in his possession a scroll of the book of Isaiah. This would not been easy for a Gentile to obtain unless he was a proselyte and taking it to a synagogue in his country.

Philip responds to the voice of the Spirit and goes to the Gaza road and then approaches the chariot. This is a divine appointment. The Ethiopian shows great interests but he is confused and cannot understand the scriptures without help. He

does not have the spirit and he does not have the Christological OT Hermeneutic. Jesus is the key to understanding the OT.

Philip began with that passage and told him the good news about Jesus. There is a sense in Luke where one must understand the progressive revelation of Christ in the OT (Luke 24:27).

The Ethiopian asks to be baptized. There is nothing preventing him from being baptized, there is water, there is a qualified mature Christian, he has an understanding of the Gospel and he has accepted it.

As they come up out of the water Philip is dramatically taken away and the Ethiopian goes on his way rejoicing in what God has done for him.

Philip then shows up on the coast some 30 miles away in what used to be Ashdod of the Philistines. He then preaches his way up the coast among the gentile communities until he reaches Caesarea. Which will be the next place where Apostolic ministry will take place with Peter and Cornelius (next step in the ethnic progression of the gospel).