



Exit This Revival

BY Elizabeth Hodges
Acts 8

Philip and the Revival (Acts 8:1-8)

In the first four verses, we recognize that persecution forced believers out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. This fulfilled the second part of Acts 1:8, “ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria.” When this occurred, the believers took the gospel with them, thus multiplying the number of witnesses and expanding the territory that could be covered. God would bring a rich harvest from this persecution and suffering.

“Discomfort may be the best thing for us because God may be working through our hurts.” (Life Application Bible, page 1890)*

Philip is not the apostle of John 1:43-44, but one of the seven chosen in Acts 6:3, “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” These seven men were chosen to help minister to the daily needs of the widows. We refer to them as the first deacons. How are these men described? They were of “honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” All seven have Greek names indicating they would represent the Grecian widows well. Stephen, one of the seven, proclaims Christ to the Sanhedrin in Acts seven and is martyred.

Out of the seven, Philip is the only other one mentioned again in chapters 8 and 21. His two missionary journeys are recorded in chapter eight. During the persecution in Jerusalem, he had fled to Samaria. As an evangelist, he preached Christ to the Samaritans despite the hostility between them and the Jews. Old biases had no place in Christianity. This was a huge step for the early church.

Samaria had been the capital of the Northern Kingdom during the days of the divided kingdom of Israel. Assyria conquered it in 722 BC. The Assyrian king took many Jewish captives leaving only the poorest people, then

resettling the land with foreigners who intermarried with the Jews left behind. Children from these unions were known as *half-breeds*, much like marriages between the settlers and American Indians during the western settlement of our country.

Half-breeds, at least in Jewish eyes, but who ministered in this area in John 4? Jesus Himself according to verses 3-4. “He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria.” I imagine this was much to the chagrin of the disciples. What happened? The woman who came to the well accepted the living water Jesus had to offer, and because of her testimony and the word of Jesus, many in the city believed (verses 39-42).

At the beginning of Acts eight we read of a revival occurring in this same area with Philip as the evangelist. (The apostles had laid their hands on the seven, indicating they commissioned these men as apostolic representatives.) Stephen and Philip not only preached the gospel, but also performed signs and wonders.

In verses 5-8 Philip, “preached Christ, and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” What were some of those things? Demons were cast out, and palsied and lame people were healed. Many people, both men and women, believed and were baptized as evidence of God’s blessing.

Philip and the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25)

As is so often the case, when God is at work Satan tries to mimic and deceive. Enter Simon, the sorcerer. During this time of early church history, sorcerers and magicians were plentiful. They worked wonders, performed healings, practiced astrology, etc. Simon had impressed the people with his power. Even though the Samaritans held him in high regard, his power did not come from God, and his approach was vastly different from Philip’s.

Verse 13 tells us that “Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” Simon professes belief, but we later learn differently.

Meanwhile, once the apostles in Jerusalem discovered that Samaria had heard and accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to investigate. The Jerusalem Church assumed responsibility for inspecting new evangelistic efforts. The believers and apostles were still unsure if Gentiles, including the half-breed Samaritans, could receive the Holy Spirit. (This will not change until Acts 10 and Peter’s encounter with Cornelius.)

Philip was not an apostle, but he preached Jesus, the Word of God. Peter and John went to validate, bless, and support these new believers and to prevent them from becoming fragmented.

What was discovered? The Samaritans were



believers but still needed to receive the Spirit by the usual signs of the Day of Pentecost. Through prayer and the laying on of hands by Peter and John, these new converts received the Holy Spirit. The half-breed Samaritans become a bridge to the Gentiles (verses 15-17).

Though we don't have any details, Simon apparently liked what he saw and asked to buy such power. Peter responds, "Thy money perish with thee....thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (verses 20-21). The heart refers to one's will, affections, and allegiance.

How did Simon respond to this rebuke? "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (verse 24). What can we learn? If we are rebuked for a serious mistake, it is for our good. We should admit our error, repent quickly, and ask for prayer and forgiveness. Our faith must be genuine.

Verse 25 reads, "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." That would indicate Philip returned with Peter and John.

Philip and the Ethiopia Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)

From a human perspective, God was doing great things in Samaria. Philip was serving faithfully, but God had another plan. Verse 26 states, "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." The reference to the angel confirms that God was guiding Philip and the program of building the church.

Is God really asking Philip to leave the revival and go to the desert? Yes. How did Philip respond? Did he question God's wisdom? Did he try to rationalize the ramifications of such behavior? Verse 27 says, "He arose and went." Philip immediately followed the Spirit's leading.

Would you or I have gotten up and gone to the desert?

When Philip gets to the desert, he sees an Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot on the way home. This eunuch was Queen Candace's treasurer, a man of very great authority. Ethiopia is south of Egypt in Africa and according to Psalm 68:31 and Jeremiah 38:7, the Jews had contact with Ethiopia in ancient days.

The Ethiopian eunuch was dedicated to God, and searching for truth, since he had traveled far to worship in Jerusalem. If he was not a full-fledged proselyte, he was a God-fearing Gentile. This gentleman was an example of Isaiah 56:3-5—God's blessings are for all people, even Gentiles and eunuchs who often were not even considered citizens in Israel. We cannot exclude in any way those whom God chooses to include in His plan of redemption.

As Philip draws near the chariot, he hears this gentleman reading aloud. Philip capitalizes on this opportunity to witness by beginning his approach with a question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch says he cannot unless someone guides or explains it to him. This man of authority was willing to ask for help. We cannot allow insecurity and pride to hinder or subdue our understanding of God's Word.

"When God moves us to speak to people, we may be sure He has been dealing with their hearts and preparing the way for us."

(NIV Study Bible, page 1639)*

Philip began where the eunuch was reading (Isaiah 53:7-8), not where he thought would be more effective. This passage describes God's servant who suffers humiliation, bears the consequences of others' sins, and is exalted by God. Philip explained how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. Jesus is found in both the Old and New Testaments, and God's entire Word applies to all people of all ages. As a student of the Word, Philip could explain its meaning clearly.

Back to Acts 8:36-38, the eunuch sees water and asks what would hinder him from being baptized? Philip responds, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The chariot is stopped, and the eunuch is baptized.

"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."

(Life Application Bible, page 1892)*

In verse 39 we learn, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more." Here is another *really?* Did the eunuch need other instruction? Should there have been time to rejoice after the baptism? This is reminiscent of Elijah's being caught up into heaven. Would the eunuch have known that? We are given no details. What we do know is the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." Joy is associated with salvation in the book of Acts and in our lives today.

Philip is next found in Azotus (verse 40), a city in Samaria 19 miles north of Gaza in Judea and 35 miles west of Jerusalem. Azotus is mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:1 as Ashdod, one of the five Philistine cities. Headed for Caesarea (60 miles further north), Philip preached in all the cities he passed through.

Revival was touching many lives, and we might reason, this eunuch was just one man, but God saw a much different picture. Sent by God, Philip was the first to go outside Jerusalem to preach. This eunuch, this one man of great authority, brought Christianity to the power structure of another government. He began witnessing to "the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Church history credits this eunuch with opening the continent of Africa to the gospel.

Philip and Faithful Service

Spiritual power is a gift from God to be used as a bless-

ing to the church. Philip provides examples of both mass and personal evangelism. Both are important as the gospel is spread to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Twenty years later we are given the next glimpse of Philip, when he hosts Paul and his company for many days (Acts 21:8-10). His four virgin daughters are prophetesses by this time.

Philip challenges us to faithfulness in listening, then obeying the voice of the Lord. His ability to answer questions stemmed from his knowledge of God's Word. Note how his spiritual legacy was passed to his four daughters.

Food for Thought:

Do we have such a grasp of the Scripture?

What is our plan of action to develop a rich relationship with our Lord and His Word?

Will we leave a legacy of faith to our children and grandchildren? Are we planting seeds now? Are we sensitive to those opportunities?

Are we willing to leave our comfort zones to serve and share the gospel with others as we go about our daily lives? *W*

*References:

Life Application Bible, KJV, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1989.

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The Wesley Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1990.

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Elizabeth and Eddie have three children and nine grandchildren. Both are retired but still active in ministry. Her heart's desire is to make much of Jesus while investing in others.