

# ACTS

# Union Grove Bible Institute

## ACTS 8

### **The Ministry Of Philip (8:1b–40) IN SAMARIA (8:1b–25) The persecution of the church (8:1b–3)**

Chapter 8 is closely linked with chapters 6 and 7. The *subject* of persecution begun in 6 is continued in 8. Furthermore, the *personality* of Saul, introduced in 7, is also found in 8. There is a close connection between Philip (chap. 8) and Stephen (chaps. 6–7) because both belonged to the Seven (6:5). Even the order of their two names in 6:5 is followed in the sequence of the narrative in 6:8–8:40.

8:1b. **On that day** indicates that the **persecution of the church** was signaled by Stephen’s martyrdom.

The fact that **all the Jerusalem believers except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria** was God’s method of fulfilling the mandate of 1:8. The word “scattered” (*diesparēsan*), also used in 8:4, comes from the verb *speirō*, **used to refer to sowing seed** (Matt. 6:26; 13:3–4, 18; 25:24, 26; Luke 8:5; 12:24; etc.) This statement also prepares the way for the ministry of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:4–25).

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.

8:2–3. **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 about wild boars that destroy 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).

### **The Proclamation of The Message (8:4–8)**

8:4. Because of persecution believers were **scattered** (cf. v. 1) and **the Word of God spread** (cf. Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 2:14; Phil. 1:12–14). This is another evidence of God’s sovereign control; in spite of opposition the Word of God grew (cf. Acts 12:24; 19:20).

8:5. **Philip**, a Grecian Jew went to the Samaritans. Samaria is north of Jerusalem, but Luke said Philip **went down** because **Samaria** is lower in elevation than Jerusalem.

8:6–7. Philip’s proclamation of Christ was confirmed by **miraculous signs** so that **they all paid close attention to what he said.** The miracles (casting out **evil spirits**, i.e., demons, and healing **paralytics and cripples** [cf. 3:1–10]) authenticated his message (cf. 2:43).

8:8. Once again the gospel resulted in **great joy** (cf. comments on 2:46–47).

### **The Professions of Faith (8:9–13)**

8:9–10 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.** Simon **boasted that he was someone great**, and the people of Samaria believed him. Furthermore, he accepted their adulation.

8:11–12. Simon’s **magic** means his sorcery, has demonic powers. When **Philip** came to Samaria, **he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name 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. **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.**

8:13. Amazingly **Simon himself believed and was baptized.**

### **The Proof of the Work (8:14–17)**

8:14–17. It was necessary for **the apostles in Jerusalem** to commission **Peter and John** to Samaria for several reasons. The process: (1) Peter and John’s prayer (for bestowing of **the Holy Spirit**) and their laying **on of hands** (resulting in the coming of the Spirit) confirmed Philip’s ministry among the Samaritans. This authenticated this new work to the Jerusalem apostles. (2) This confirmed Philip’s ministry to the Samaritans. This message Philip preached was validated by the coming of the Spirit, a mark of the coming kingdom (cf. v. 12; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:23–27; Joel 2:28–32). (3) Because of the natural propensity of division between Jews and Samaritans it was essential for **Peter and John** to welcome the Samaritan believers into the church.

### **The Perversion of the Truth (8:18–24)**

8:18–19. The clause **Simon saw that the Spirit was given** implies there was some external manifestation to evidence the coming of **the Holy Spirit.**

The term *simony*, which is the buying or selling of things considered religious or sacred such as an ecclesiastical office, comes from Simon’s desire to purchase the **ability** to impart the Holy Spirit to others.

Luke's purpose in including this incident with Simon was to show the superiority of Christianity over the occult and demoniacs. Several times this kind of conflict took place in Acts, and Christ was always the Victor (13:6–12; 16:16–18; 19:13–20; 28:1–6).

8:20. Peter's response to Simon's request was one of outrage. **May your money perish with you!**

The reason for such strong language was Simon's failure to understand grace, the free nature of God's salvation and blessings. Peter explained his strong language by saying, **You thought you could buy the gift of God with money!**

8:21–22. The language of this verse, **You have no part or share in this ministry.** The question was whether Simon would **repent of his heart's intention.**

8:23–24. The allusion to **bitterness** (lit., "gall of bitterness," *cholēn pikrias*) seems to refer to Deuteronomy 29:18, which speaks of idolatry and bitter apostasy (cf. Heb. 12:15). **Simon** had been captivated by false doctrine and sin. Simon's was apprehensive about the outcome of his tragic request (Acts 8:18–19).

#### **The Promotion of the Work (8:25)**

8:25. **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!

#### **TO THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (8:26–40) The Command (8:26)**

8:26. God sovereignly directed Philip toward Gaza. The highway is referred to as **the desert road.** Ancient Gaza was destroyed in 93 B.C. and the city was rebuilt nearer the Mediterranean in 57 B.C. The old city was called Desert Gaza. The Greek for the angel's command could be translated, "Arise and **go to the south to the road ... that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.** This is desert."

#### **The Contact (8:27–30)**

8:27. The **Ethiopian eunuch** is described rather fully as **an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.** "Ethiopia" here refers not to modern-day Ethiopia but to ancient Nubia, the region from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, Sudan. Candace was a title given to the queen-mother, as Pharaoh was used of the king of Egypt. Governmental power rested in the hands of Candace, for the royal son, worshiped as an offspring of the sun, was therefore above such mundane activities as ruling over a nation. Rulership was therefore vested with the queen-mother.

8:28–30. The eunuch's wealth is revealed in the simple description **sitting in his chariot.** As this finance officer was riding, he was **reading from the Book of Isaiah.** Interestingly **Philip** was guided first by an angel (v. 26) and then by **the Holy Spirit** (v. 29).

#### **The Conversion (8:31–35)**

8:31–35. The quotation from Isaiah 53:7–8 was perplexing to the eunuch. Welcoming the opportunity to have **Philip** explain the passage, **he invited** the evangelist into his chariot. The Ethiopian knew the passage described an individual, but was it Isaiah **or someone else?** **Philip** seized the opportunity to present **the good news about Jesus** from Isaiah 53 (cf. John 5:39).

#### **The Consequences (8:36–40)**

8:36–39. The first consequence of Philip's evangelization was the eunuch's conversion. His response, **Why shouldn't I be baptized?** indicates that **water baptism** was the seal of a personal decision to trust in Christ (cf. Matt. 28:19). The second result was joy, for **the eunuch ... went on his way rejoicing.** A third result was a further outreach of the gospel to one who was neither Jew nor Samaritan, but a Gentile (African) worshiper of Yahweh. Possibly the eunuch was uncircumcised.

**When** the baptism was completed **the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again.** Whatever happened to the Ethiopian eunuch after that is unknown.

8:40. **Philip, however, appeared at Azotus.** This city is the same as **Ashdod**, an ancient Philistine capital. As he **traveled to Caesarea** he proclaimed **the gospel in all the towns** along the way. Evidently Philip then settled in Caesarea for he was still there about 20 years later (cf. 21:8). Significantly an evangelist may be resident or itinerant; Philip carried on both types of ministries.

The area around Azotus and Caesarea was later visited by Peter (9:32–43). Even though Philip the evangelist resided in Caesarea, the Lord called Peter from Joppa to give the gospel to Cornelius in Caesarea (chaps. 10–11).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 372–375.