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Acts 8

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Acts 8.

Topics.

- Saul ravages the church.
- Philip goes to Samaria, heals many and preaches Jesus.
- Simon the magician.
- Peter and John go to Samaria to impart the Holy Spirit.
- Simon offers Peter money to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- The Spirit tells Philip to join an Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah.
- The eunuch is water baptised.
- The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip to Azotus.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Stephen stands before the Jewish council and after giving an overview of Israel's history accuses the high priest and all those with him of murdering Jesus. The chapter ends with those in the council taking Stephen out and in rage stoning him and laying his garments at Saul's feet.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

ACTS 8:1-4

1

Great Persecution arises against the Church in Jerusalem.

- **Acts 8:1-4:** And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. ⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

The words, "Saul approved of his execution" refers to the stoning of Stephen in the previous chapter. Stephens death on a human level manifested the evil that resides in a religious heart filled with pride and selfish-ambition, but on a godly level manifested the stunning and majestic glory of courage, integrity and faith that can dwell in a heart surrendered to God and to justice for all humanity no matter what their birth-right is or their position in life.

The church is scattered throughout Judea and Samaria: Jesus when giving the Great Commission prior to his ascension to the right-hand side of God told the apostles the Good News of the Gospel was to be proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the world. The aggressive persecution of the Jews, especially of Saul which followed the death of Stephen scattered the Jews who believed in Christ throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria which meant the Gospel was taken to these regions even through the apostles at this time stayed in Jerusalem.

Division and church splits: sometimes church splits and division though not the best outcome are not always a bad thing as they often result in two things, firstly it forces people to leave their comfort zone and learn to walk with Christ without relying on a pastor or minister and secondly it often result in other groups rising up who reach people the original group

would never reach and in this way God turns something that even though it may not be the ideal situation still results in people hearing the Good News of the Gospel.

Saul ravages the church: Luke tells us that, "Saul ravaged the church and entered house after house dragging men and women out and committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3). Ravaged carries the idea that he not only spoke evil of those who confessed the Lord Jesus Christ but also aggressively set about assaulting and abusing whoever believed in the Lord violently doing whatever he could to destroy and break up the church. Throughout the years I have heard people state that they are the worst sinner of all time and therefore believe God could not save them, all they have to do is look at the life of Paul prior to his conversion and ask themselves, "Have I broken up Christian families and put innocent men and women into prison simply because they were devoted to Christ as Paul did,? And then look at what God was able to do with Paul's life.

ACTS 8:5-8

Philip goes to Samaria, Heals many and Preaches Jesus.

- **Acts 8:5-8:** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.
⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was much joy in that city.

Samaria: the land of Samaria in the Old Testament was originally occupied by the ten Tribes of Israel, but when they were taken into exile the Assyrians occupied their land. After the seventy-year captivity many Jews returned to their farms and land in Samaria (they became known as Samaritan Jews). They took foreign woman for their wives and their Jewish faith became polluted by the gods of the people they were living amongst; it was because of this that the Jews at Jerusalem and Judah had no dealings with them (Samaria today is modern Syria).

Unclean Spirits: refers to mental illness or any other sickness that the people of this generation did not understand, according to Levitical law anyone who had any form of physical disability was considered unclean. For further information see the title:

- Unclean Spirits (Old and New Testament).

Philip goes to Samaria and proclaims Christ: Philip goes to Samaria and proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ and there is great joy as those who came out to hear him also witnessed stunning signs and wonders as Philip miraculously healed crippling disabilities, mental illnesses and various sicknesses.

ACTS 8:9-13

Simon the Magician.

- **Acts 8:9-13:** But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed (Bewitched in KJV) them with his magic (Sorceries in KJV) ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. ¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptised he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Magic: (Sorcery in KJV) means to practice magic or use sorcery.

Amazed: (Bewitched in KJV) means to astound or be astounded and wonder.

Prior to Phillip arriving in Samaria the people paid attention to a man named Simon because he was able to do some form of mystical trickery that deceived all the people of the city into believing that he was not only someone great, but that the Spirit of God was flowing through him and therefore they all paid attention to him until Phillip came with the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ after hearing Phillip proclaim the Gospel men, woman believed and were all water baptised.

Simon: heard the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (v12) he believed and was water baptised, he followed Philip and was stunned at the signs and great miracles Phillip performed amongst the people.

NOTICE: because Simon was able to do some form of magic or mystical tricks that the people did not understand he was able to amaze and bewilder them which resulted in them believing he was a great man of God and that his power was God's Spirit flowing through him. For a man to deceive a city in such a great way it is most likely he was a great orator, presented himself as a man of God to the people and proclaimed a spiritual message or some form of a pagan faith that already existed in Samaria.

ACTS 8:14-24

Peter and John go to Samaria to impart the Holy Spirit.

- **Acts 8:14-24:** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not yet fallen on any of them but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Peter and John are not laying hands on the Samaritans so that they will receive salvation we know this because salvation is not received by the laying on of hands, but by repentance and is available to all who come to Christ. Long before Peter and John came to these Samaritans, they had heard the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of God they believed, repented and were baptised into the name of Christ, so they had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit for eternal salvation. Peter and John are laying hands on the Samaritans so they will receive the gift of tongues (speaking in a language they had not learned). The gift of the Holy Spirit in this context was the gift of being able to speak in a languages or dialect other than their native language that others who were listening clearly understood.

Imparting the gift of the Holy Spirit: the only ones who were able to pass this gift of the Holy Spirit onto others were the apostles and those they had passed the gift onto by laying their hands on them this is why Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem. The Scriptures do not present

other believers having the ability to pass the gift on to others by the laying on of hands, but others did receive the Holy Spirit gift from God even before they were water baptised as the following Scriptures in Acts chapter ten show.

- While Peter was speaking in Cornelius house the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers from among the circumcised (Jews) who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles because they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we (Jews) have?" And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:44-48).

Thus, the gift of the Holy Spirit that Simon wanted to purchase was the ability to be able to lay hands on people and have them speak in a language other than their own native tongue that those listening could understand.

Simon offers Peter money to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit:

Simon was overwhelmingly impressed with the apostles' ability to lay hands on people and immediately they were able to speak in another language that they had not learned but others understood. So, he offers Peter and John money to buy the ability to impart this gift to others. Peter tells him, "No-one can receive anything from God no-matter how much money they may have." Peter then rebukes Simon and tells him to repent of the intent of his heart and for thinking he could buy God's gifts with worldly money. Simon has previously heard the Gospel of Christ, believed, repented and been water baptised and may have received the gift of the Holy Spirit himself. Peter is not saying Simon needs to repent and be water baptised again but that he needs to repent of his wrong attitude and the intent of his heart to get right with God. Simon's response to Peter, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (v24) shows he believed in the Lord and even feared God's judgment.

The meaning of the word tongues: the word, tongues, means a language different from their-own native language or previously unknown to the speaker. It was a common expression during the earlier ages for the introduction to many older Bibles to begin by saying:

Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the former
Translations diligently compared and revised by
His Majesty's special command A.D 1611

Both the Greek and the English words tongue and language can refer either to the organ of speech in our mouths or the language that is spoken thus the reason languages is often referred to as tongues, i.e., it is the organ (the tongue) that is speaking the language. The following two verses show that the Bible uses the word tongues and languages interchangeably showing that the word tongues simply means language, Luke writes:

- Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his *own language* (Acts 2:6 KJV).

Then in verse eight Luke states:

- And we hear every man in our *own tongue*, wherein we were born?

NOTICE: they weren't confounded because they couldn't understand what the people were saying, but because they heard them in their own language which those speaking had never learned and yet they understood what they were saying. For further information see: Acts 2 in Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

ACTS 8:25-40

The Spirit tells Philip to join an Ethiopian Eunuch reading Isaiah.

- **Acts 8:25-40:** Now when they (Peter and John) had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.
²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptised?" ³⁷And 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 ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptised him. ³⁹And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Eunuch: comes from the Greek word *eunouchos* and means keeping the bed it applied to a castrated human male, i.e., one who has had the testes (the organs that contain spermatozoa) removed. From ancient times, in the Far and Middle East eunuchs were used to take charge of the women in harems or to serve as chamberlains. They often attained positions of great influence

Philip joins a Eunuch man reading Isaiah: Peter and John leave Philip and return to Jerusalem preaching the gospel to many Samaritan villages as they go. God obviously wanted Philip to meet an Ethiopian official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians so an angel of the Lord gives Philip detailed instructions. Philip arrives at the location and the Spirit tells him to join a man seated in a chariot, Philip runs over (probably afraid the chariot might leave) the man was reading the following passage of Isaiah out loud:

- Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth" (v32-33).

This no-doubt stunned and thrilled Philip, since words are cited from Isaiah chapter fifty-three and the entire chapter echoes Christ.

NOTICE: The Eunuchs question, "Does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Many Scriptures are written in this way, they can apply to the writer, but at the same time echo the Lord Jesus Christ, this principal also applies to prophetic events, often a prophecy will be about a local event that is about to happen during that generation, but contained within the language of the prophecy is an echo of the same event taking place at a much later date and in a much greater and spectacular way such is the wonder of the Bible and the majesty of prophecy.

The Eunuch is water baptized: the words the Eunuch was reading was:

- He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" (Isaiah 53:7-8).

The entire Psalm is echoing Christ right up to the coming Kingdom of God on earth. Philip told man the Good News about Jesus and as soon as he saw some water, he asks Philip, "What prevents me from being baptised?" And Philip said, "Nothing if you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," he replied, "I believe" (v36-37). This man was so overwhelmed by the Good News of the Gospel and the love of Christ that Isaiah's words revealed to him that he was not going to wait a minute longer than he had to before being water baptised, he immediately stopped the chariot and went down to the water with Philip and was Baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing.

NOTICE: the words, "They both went down into the water and they came up out of the water," (v38-39) implies Phillip did not simply sprinkle a little water over the eunuch but that he fully immersed him in the water.

The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip to Azotus: some teach that the words, "The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip to Azotus" means that Phillip de-materialised travelled through space as a spirit and re-materialised at Azotus, while others simply believe it means that Philip did not know where he was going until he arrived in Azotus because he was being led by the Spirit in the same way as the Spirit told him to go to the man in the chariot (v29), or he was being led by the Angel of the Lord who had previously given him very detailed instructions were to go to find the Ethiopian man reading Isaiah in his Chariot (v26-27) either way he was in the will of God and being led by the Spirit of the Lord. Once he reached Azotus he began preaching the Gospel to all towns until he arrived in Caesarea.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
