

A Man Named Philip

Lesson #1

Acts 8:1-40

The book of Acts begins with the words, *"All that Jesus began to do and teach"* (Acts 1:1) meaning through his life, death and resurrection as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. That story continues in Acts with Jesus' ascension and the pouring out of his Spirit upon his disciples (Acts 2:33) to the spreading of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Before beginning the study of "The Persecuted Church," it is important to remember what the book of Acts is and is not. *"It is not the acts of the apostles, a comprehensive history of the early church or a manual on church order and function. It is rather an historical narrative motivated by theological concerns."*¹ Just as Dr. Luke recorded selective history about Jesus' life and ministry in his gospel, so too does Luke give an historical glimpse of the early church which provides the background and setting for the epistles, especially those of the Apostle Paul.

Introduction to "The Persecuted Church" – Acts 8:1 - 4

Year two of In the Word • New Testament ("It is Finished") concluded with the martyring of Stephen, a Hellenistic (Greek) Jew who is described in Acts 6:8 as *"a man full of God's grace and power."* The charges brought against Stephen were that he taught against the Temple and the Law of Moses. In his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen gave a history lesson showing that "you" (referring to the men of the Sanhedrin) are just like your forefathers who did not obey the Lord or his Laws. And now, it is "you" who murdered Jesus, the Righteous One of God. The members of the Sanhedrin became furious and took Stephen outside the city (Jerusalem) where he was stoned to death. Luke prepares his audience for the next part of the story by saying the members of the Sanhedrin placed their coats at the feet of a young Pharisee named *"Saul who also gave his approval to Stephen's death."* (Acts 8:1a)

1. What twofold effect did Stephen's death have on the early believers referred to as *"the church?"* (Acts 8:1b)
2. Stephen, like his Lord Jesus, died a criminal's death. Normally such a person would not be mourned or honored with a proper burial. Who tended to the body of Stephen? (Acts 8:2)
3. Luke already alluded to a change that would be taking place through Saul. What did Saul begin to do after Stephen's death? (Acts 8:3a)

- How did he do that? (Acts 8:3b)
4. What did Luke say the scattered believers were doing? (Acts 8:4)
 5. The Apostles were teaching daily at the Temple in Jerusalem in a section called “*Solomon’s Colonnade*.” (Acts 5:12) And, the good news was quickly spreading throughout Judea, particularly the towns around Jerusalem (Acts 5:16). According to Acts 1:8, where did Jesus instruct his disciples to take the gospel after Judea?

A Man Named Philip – Acts 8:5-25

6. As the gospel began to move out of Jerusalem, Luke introduced his readers to a man instrumental in its spreading. What information has already been given about Philip? (Acts 6:1-6)
7. While the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, Philip went to the area of Samaria. How did the Lord authenticate Philip as one sent by God? (Acts 8:6, 7)
8. How was Philip received in the city? (Acts 8:8)
9. There was a man in a city in Samaria by the name of Simon. Using Acts 8:9-11:
 - What does Luke say that Simon was doing?
 - What did Simon say about himself?
 - How did the general population respond to Simon?
10. But when Philip arrived, what happened when the people believed Philip’s good news? (Acts 8:12)

- What about Simon? (Acts 8:13)
11. When word reached Jerusalem that Philip's ministry was bringing in new believers who were being baptized in Jesus' name, what did the Apostles do? (Acts 8:14)
 - Why? (Acts 8:15, 16)
 12. How did that take place? (Acts 8:17)
 13. Simon had been impressed with Philip and his God-given abilities. Now, after seeing the Apostles, what did Simon do? (Acts 8:18, 19)
 14. Peter was furious! What was his immediate response to Simon's offer? (Acts 8:20, 21)
 15. What did Peter say Simon should do and why? (Acts 8:22, 23)
 16. How did Simon answer such a stern rebuke? (Acts 8:24)
- Reflect:** Simon saw and heard the same things as the others, yet his response was not the same. What do you think was Simon's motivation?
17. Peter and John stayed in the city long enough to proclaim the word of the Lord, then they returned. What did Luke say they did on their way back to Jerusalem? (Acts 8:25)

The Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:26-40

18. The story of Philip and Simon took place to the north of Jerusalem in the province of Samaria. Then, an *“angel of the Lord”* gave Philip some new instruction. Where was he told to go? (Acts 8:26)
19. Philip obeyed and on his way met an Ethiopian eunuch. What information does Luke give regarding this eunuch? (Acts 8: 27, 28)
20. The Spirit instructed Philip to, *“Go to that chariot and stay near it.”* Philip did as he was instructed and heard the eunuch reading from the scroll of Isaiah. How did Philip get the eunuch’s attention? (Acts 8:30b)
21. Philip was invited to join the eunuch in his chariot where he learned that the eunuch was having difficulty understanding Isaiah 53:7 & 8, *“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”* What was the eunuch’s question to Philip? (Acts 8:34)
22. How did Philip answer him? (Acts 8:35)

Reflect: This verse (Acts 8:35) is key to understanding how to share the good news with someone who is searching for the truth. What can you learn from this verse?

23. As they traveled, Philip explained the Scriptures to the eunuch opening his mind to understanding them. As a result, what happened when they came to some water? (Acts 8:36-38)
24. What took place immediately following this? (Acts 8:39)
- To Philip:
 - To the eunuch:
25. Suddenly, Philip found himself at Azotus (the Old Testament Philistine city of Ashdod) 19 miles north of Gaza. As he continued heading north, what did he do? (Acts 8:40)

¹ Strauss, Mark L., *Acts and the Pauline Epistles*, (Draft Manuscript Bethel Seminary San Diego 2004) pg. 2