

BACKGROUND

- FOLLOWING STEPHEN'S DEATH IN ACTS 7, GREAT PERSECUTION AROSE AGAINST THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE BELIEVERS HAD TO SCATTER BEYOND JERUSALEM. HOWEVER, PERSECUTION AND THE THREAT OF DEATH DID NOT STOP THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH. LUKE DESCRIBES HOW THE GOSPEL BEGAN TO ADVANCE IN SAMARIA. THIS MEANT THAT DESPITE THE BRUTAL MURDER OF STEPHEN, GOD CONTINUED HIS MISSION OF REDEEMING A PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF, A PEOPLE FROM EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE. GOD USED THE PERSECUTION OF STEPHEN TO LAUNCH HIS PEOPLE INTO SAMARIA. BEGINNING WITH SAUL. THE EVENTS OF CHAPTER 8 CENTER AROUND 4 MEN.

- **V:1-3, SAUL, A ZEALOUS PERSECUTOR (MORE ON SAUL IN ACTS 9, NEXT WK)**

- **V:4-8, PHILIP, A FAITHFUL PREACHER**

- **V:9-25, SIMON THE SORCERER, A CLEVER DECEIVER**

- **V:26-40, AN ETHIOPIAN, A CONCERNED SEEKER**

1. READ V:1-3, SAUL, A ZEALOUS PERSECUTOR

- SAUL, A HEBREW WAS BORN IN TARSUS, CILICIA (PROVINCE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, MODERN DAY TURKEY). HE WAS A ROMAN CITIZEN, THE SON OF A PHARISEE. HE WAS A "HEBREW OF HEBREWS", EDUCATED IN JERUSALEM BY GAMALIEL AND BECAME A DEVOTED PHARISEE AND WAS ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING YOUNG PHARISEES IN JERUSALEM, WELL ON HIS WAY TO BECOMING A GREAT LEADER IN THE JEWISH FAITH, GAL.1:14.

- SAUL'S ZEAL FOR THE LAW WAS DISPLAYED MOST VIVIDLY IN HIS PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH. HIS DEVOTION TO MOSES COMPLETELY CONTROLLED HIS LIFE AND ALMOST DESTROYED HIS LIFE. HE THOUGHT THAT PERSECUTING THE BELIEVERS WAS ONE WAY OF SERVING GOD, SO HE DID IT WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE, 2 TIM.1:3. IN HIS LATER YEARS, PAUL DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS EXCEEDINGLY MAD AGAINST THE BELIEVERS, HE DENOUNCED JESUS CHRIST, AND WAS A VIOLENT PERSECUTOR. HE DID IT IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF, 1 TIM.1:13. HOWEVER, GOD SHOWED HIM MERCY AND SAVED HIM.

- SAUL'S NAME (HEBREW) IS ALSO PAUL (HIS ROMAN NAME). DUAL NAMES WERE COMMON IN THOSE DAYS. HIS NAME WAS NOT CHANGED BY JESUS. FOR CREDIBILITY, SAUL WOULD GO BY THE NAME OF SAUL WHEN IN FRONT OF JEWS. HE WOULD GO BY THE NAME OF PAUL WHEN IN FRONT OF THE GENTILES, "BECOMING ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL", **1 COR.9:19-23**.

2. READ V:4-8, PHILIP, A FAITHFUL PREACHER

- PHILIP WAS CHOSEN AS A DEACON, **ACTS 6:5**. HE WAS ONE OF THE 7 MEN SELECTED OF A GOOD REPUTATION, FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND WISDOM, CHOSEN TO SERVE WIDOWS. LIKE STEPHEN, HE GREW IN HIS MINISTRY AND BECAME AN EFFECTIVE EVANGELIST, **ACTS 21:8**. GOD DIRECTED HIM TO EVANGELIZE IN SAMARIA, AN AREA THAT HAD BEEN PROHIBITED TO THE APOSTLES. HOWEVER, BOTH JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS MINISTERED THERE.

- PHILIP NOT ONLY DECLARED GOD'S WORD, BUT HE ALSO DEMONSTRATED GOD'S POWER BY PERFORMING MIRACLES. IT WAS THE APOSTLES WHO PERFORMED MOST OF THE MIRACLES HOWEVER, STEPHEN AND PHILLIP DID SIGNS AND WONDERS BY THE POWER OF GOD. THE PEOPLE OF SAMARIA WHO HEARD THE GOSPEL AND BELIEVED WERE DELIVERED FROM PHYSICAL AFFLICTION, DEMONIC CONTROL, AND MOST IMPORTANT, FROM THEIR SINS. JESUS HAD SO TRANSFORMED PHILIP'S LIFE THAT ANY PREJUDICE AGAINST THE SAMARITANS WAS PUT TO DEATH.

- THE GOSPEL HAD MOVED FROM "JEWISH TERRITORY" INTO SAMARIA WHERE THE PEOPLE WERE PART JEW AND PART GENTILE. GOD AND HIS GRACE HAD BUILT A BRIDGE BETWEEN 2 ESTRANGED PEOPLES AND MADE THE BELIEVERS ONE IN CHRIST. SOON GOD WOULD EXTEND THAT BRIDGE TO THE GENTILES AND INCLUDE THEM AS WELL.

3. V:9-25, SIMON THE SORCERER, A CLEVER DECEIVER

- IN SCRIPTURE, WHEREVER GOD SOWS HIS TRUE BELIEVERS, SATAN WILL EVENTUALLY SOW HIS COUNTERFEIT, **MAT.13**. SATAN'S TOOL IN THIS CASE WAS A SORCERER, A FALSE PROPHET NAMED SIMON.

- THE PEOPLE WERE AMAZED AT THE THINGS THAT SIMON DID AND THEREFORE, THEY BELIEVED THE THINGS THAT HE SAID. THEY CONSIDERED HIM THE GREAT

POWER OF GOD. HOWEVER, SIMON'S SORCERY WAS ENERGIZED BY SATAN AND USED TO MAGNIFY HIMSELF WHILE PHILIP'S MIRACLES WERE EMPOWERED BY GOD AND WERE USED TO GLORIFY CHRIST. SIMON STARTED TO LOSE HIS FOLLOWING AS THE SAMARITANS LISTENED TO PHILIP'S MESSAGE, BELIEVED ON JESUS CHRIST, WERE BORN AGAIN, AND WERE BAPTIZED.

- **V:13**, "SIMON HIMSELF BELIEVED". HIS FAITH WAS INSINCERE AND WAS NOT IN THE WORD OF GOD BUT IN THE MIRACLES HE SAW PHILIP PERFORM. THERE WAS NO INDICATION THAT SIMON REPENTED OF HIS SINS. AFTER BEING BAPTIZED, SIMON CONTINUED WITH PHILIP NOT TO HEAR THE WORD AND LEARN MORE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, BUT TO WITNESS THE MIRACLES AND PERHAPS LEARN HOW THEY WERE DONE.

- **READ V:14-17**, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE SAMARITANS DID NOT RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHEN THEY BELIEVED. IT WAS NECESSARY FOR 2 OF THE APOSTLES, PETER AND JOHN TO COME FROM JERUSALEM, PUT THEIR HANDS ON THE CONVERTS, AND IMPART TO THEM THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT BECAUSE, GOD WANTED TO UNITE THE SAMARITAN BELIEVERS WITH THE ORIGINAL JEWISH CHURCH IN JERUSALEM. HE DID NOT WANT 2 CHURCHS THAT WOULD PERPETUATE THE DIVISION AND CONFLICT THAT HAD EXISTED FOR CENTURIES.

- WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THE FIRST 10 CHAPTERS OF ACTS RECORD A PERIOD OF TRANSITION FROM THE JEW TO THE SAMARITAN TO THE GENTLE. GOD'S PATTERN FOR TODAY IS GIVEN IN **ACTS 10**, THE SINNER HEARS THE GOSPEL, BELIEVES, RECEIVES THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT, AND THEN IS BAPTIZED.

- **V:18-24**, THE EPISODE WITH SIMON SHOWS HOW CLOSE A PERSON CAN COME TO SALVATION AND STILL NOT BE CONVERTED. SIMON HEARD THE GOSPEL, SAW THE MIRACLES, GAVE A PROFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST, WAS BAPTIZED, AND YET HE WAS NEVER BORN AGAIN. HE WAS ONE OF SATAN'S CLEVER COUNTERFEITS AND HAD PETER NOT EXPOSED THE WICKEDNESS OF HIS HEART, SIMON WOULD'VE BEEN ACCEPTED AS A MEMBER OF THE SAMARITAN CONGREGATION. BUT THIS EVENT TEACHES US 2 IMPORTANT LESSONS.

A. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT FOR SALE. IT IS GOD'S PREROGATIVE TO GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE CANNOT PURCHASE SALVATION OR THE GIFTS OF GOD. OUR MONEY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND TALENTS CANNOT SAVE US OR CAUSE GOD TO

APPOINT US TO POSITIONS IN HIS KINGDOM. TRUE INFLUENCE IN THE KINGDOM SHOULD BE SOUGHT, BUT WE SHOULD DO IT JESUS' WAY FOR JESUS' GLORY. THIS INVOLVES HUMBLE FAITH, COURAGEOUS HOPE, HARDWORK, SACRIFICIAL LOVE, AND HEARTS CONTINUALLY ENTHRALLED WITH THE GRACE OF GOD.

B. WE SHOULD MARVEL AT GOD'S AMAZING GRACE. SIMON RECEIVED A GIFT IN PETER'S REBUKE. HE WAS OFFERED A CHANCE TO REPENT AND BE FORGIVEN, THIS IS GRACE!

4. READ V:26-40, AN ETHIOPIAN, A CONCERNED SEEKER

- PHILIP'S HEART WAS WIDE OPEN TO ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE AND HE REFLECTED THE HEART OF GOD. THOSE WALKING BY THE SPIRIT ARE SENSITIVE TO GOD'S LEADING.

1. ACTS 6, HE WAS CARING FOR WIDOWS.

2. ACTS 8:4-8, HE DISPLAYED A CHRISTLIKE LOVE FOR THE DESPISED

SAMARITANS.

3. ACTS 8:26-40, HE DISPLAYED CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE NATIONS BY CARING FOR THIS ETHIOPIAN MAN WITH RESPECT.

- GOD'S INITIATIVE IN THIS STORY IS UNQUESTIONABLE. AN ANGEL OF THE LORD VISITED PHILIP IN A VISION AND CALLED HIM TO WITNESS IN THE MOST UNLIKELY PLACE. HE DIRECTED HIM TOWARDS THE WILDERNESS IN THE SOUTH TO MINISTER TO AN AFRICAN MAN, AN ETHIOPIAN WHICH IS STRIKING IN ITSELF. ETHIOPIA WAS CONSIDERED THE "END OF THE EARTH" BY THE GREEKS AND ROMANS. PHILIP'S WITNESS TO THE SAMARITANS AND THE ETHIOPIAN IS EVIDENCE OF THE SPREAD OF GOD'S GLOBAL MISSION AND A FORETASTE OF THE COMPLETION OF CHRIST'S COMPLETED MISSION, **REV.7:9.**

- THIS ETHIOPIAN WAS A EUNUCH WHO WAS SOMETHING LIKE THE MINISTER OF FINANCE TO THE QUEEN OF ETHIOPIA. HE WAS PROBABLY A GOD-FEARER WHO BELIEVED IN THE GOD OF ISRAEL, BUT HE COULD NOT EXPERIENCE FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY OF ISRAEL BECAUSE HE WAS A EUNUCH, **DEUT.23:1.** WHILE HE COULD VISIT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM, HE COULD NOT ENTER IT.

- **V:28,** THE ETHIOPIAN IS READING FROM ISAIAH, CONTEMPLATING THE PROMISES OF THE PROPHET. ISAIAH WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR EUNUCHS BECAUSE

IN HIS WORK THE PROPHET DESCRIBES THE FUTURE, WHICH PROMISES EUNUCHS "A NAME BETTER THAN SONS AND DAUGHTERS AND AN EVERLASTING NAME THAT WILL NEVER BE CUT OFF", **ISA.56:3-8**. HE DID NOT KNOW THAT HE WOULD SOON PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE THE FULFILLMENT OF SUCH PROMISES!

- **V:30-31**, THIS IS A GOD ORDAINED MEETING. PHILIP ASKS IF HE UNDERSTANDS WHAT HE IS READING AND THE ETHIOPIAN RESPONDS "HOW CAN I, UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME". THE ETHIOPIAN GAVE PHILIP AN INVITATION TO SHARE THE GOSPEL. **ACTS 8** IS A LESSON ABOUT HOW GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS. THIS CONVERSION STORY DID NOT HAPPEN BECAUSE OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM OR HUMAN PLANNING. THE ETHIOPIAN WAS LED TO JESUS BY PHILIP AS A RESULT OF DIVINE LEADING.

- **V:32-35**, A SCROLL IS UNFURLED BETWEEN THEM AS THE ETHIOPIAN SHARES WHAT HE HAS BEEN READING FROM **ISA.53:7-8**, THE SUFFERING SERVANT SONG. PHILIP EXPLAINED THAT 750 YEARS BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION, ISAIAH HAD DESCRIBED THE SUFFERING AND EXULTATION OF JESUS. AT THE HEART OF JESUS' MISSION IS CHRIST'S SUBSTITUTIONARY WORK FOR SINNERS. PHILIP USED THE ISAIAH PASSAGE TO EXPLAIN THE GOOD NEWS. PHILIP KNEW THAT CHRIST IS THE KEY TO **ISAIAH 53** AND HE SAID SO. HE KNEW AND COULD EXPLAIN THAT THE STAR OF SCRIPTURE IS JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD WHO HAS BORNE OUR SINS IN HIS BODY ON THE TREE. THE PILGRIM FROM ETHIOPIA NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF ISAIAH AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD WAS OPENING HIS MIND TO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL AND GOD'S TRUTH.

- **V:36-38**, FAITH COMES BY HEARING AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD, **ROM.10:17**. THE ETHIOPIAN BELIEVED ON JESUS CHRIST AND WAS BORN AGAIN. SO REAL WAS HIS EXPERIENCE THAT HE INSISTED ON STOPPING THE CARAVAN AND BEING BAPTIZED IMMEDIATELY.

TAKE AWAY / PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

1. IN THIS STORY A DOUBLE BARRIER GETS BROKEN, PHYSICAL AND RACIAL BARRIERS FALL. A EUNUCH, WHO WAS ALSO A BLACK MAN, WAS RECEIVED INTO FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE PEOPLE OF JESUS CHRIST. THOUGH HE NEVER WOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO BECOME A FULL JEW, HE COULD BECOME A CHRISTIAN AND SO CAN EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

- **V:39-41**, WE DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS NEW CONVERT AFTER THIS SCENE, ONLY THAT HE JOURNEYED ON REJOICING IN **V:39**. CHURCH FATHERS CLAIM THAT HE BECAME A MISSIONARY TO ETHIOPIA.

- AFTER DISAPPEARING, PHILIP CONTINUED PREACHING THE GOSPEL, WORKING HIS WAY NORTH UNTIL HE FINALLY LANDED AT CAESAREA IN **ACTS 21:8**.

2. AS WE TRACE THE EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL DURING THIS TRANSITION PERIOD IN **ACTS 2-10**, WE SEE HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT REACHES OUT TO THE WHOLE WORLD. THE WHOLE WORLD WAS POPULATED BY NOAH'S SONS > SHEM, HAM, AND JAPHETH.

A. **ACTS 8**, THE ETHIOPIAN WHO WAS CONVERTED WAS A DESCENDENT OF **HAM**, **GEN.10:6**. (CUSH = ETHIOPIA)

B. **ACTS 9**, SAUL OF TARSUS WILL BE SAVED, A JEW AND THEREFORE A DESCENDENT OF **SHEM**, **GEN.10:21**.

C. **ACTS 10**, THE GENTILES FIND CHRIST, THEY ARE DESCENDANTS OF **JAPHETH**, **GEN.10:2-5**.

3. **FINALLY**, THIS MAGNIFIES THE NEED FOR JESUS' WITNESSES TO UNDERSTAND THE STORYLINE OF THE BIBLE. WE NEED TO BE PREPARED SPIRITUALLY AND THEOLOGICALLY TO DO THE WORK GOD INTENDS US TO DO. THE ETHIOPIAN MAN NEEDED MORE THAN A FRIEND IN HIS CHARIOT. HE NEEDED AN ENCOUNTER WITH SOMEONE WHO COULD EXPLAIN THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL WITH THE SPIRIT'S HELP. TO BE FAITHFUL WITNESSES WE NEED THE **SPIRIT** AND WE NEED A GOOD GRASP ON THE **WORD**. PHILIP WAS NOT ONLY PRAYED UP, HE WAS ALSO STUDIED UP. **AMEN** 🙏

