

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 6, Acts 8 The Circle Widens

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: What does it look like to be led by God? Are you ready to go wherever He sends you?

Go Where God Sends You Chapter 8

Section 1: Persecution Acts 8:1-3

1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. **2** Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. **3** But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

This is exactly what Jesus had said: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would

love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (John 15:18-20). The believers were being thrown in prison. Some had fled their homes and run away to the north, into Judea and Samaria. Remember what Jesus had said to the Apostles before He left them:

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

http://members.tripod.com/chanyut_1/oliverssite/id46.html



God never intended His gospel to stay in Jerusalem. What Satan intended to destroy the church, God used to extend it. He is always in full control. He will move His gospel into as many territories as possible. Notice also that he does it through the believers.

Section 2: Let's Get This Party Started

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And 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. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Notice it says that Philip went down to Samaria. Although he was traveling north, in the Jewish mind, Jerusalem is always up and everywhere else is down. The city of Samaria had heard of Jesus. He had visited a sister city, Sychar, just five miles to the east, and talked to the woman at the well (John 4). Many had become believers. Now Philip is in Samaria proclaiming Jesus. God powerfully backed up Philip's words by casting out demons and healing many. It was a great party.

Section 3: Acts 8:9-25 The Spirit Is Not For Sale

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But

when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles¹⁴ performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that

nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

This is a fascinating piece of Scripture which raises many questions. Obviously, Simon had once had a reputation of being a magician. We can think of him as the David Copperfield of his day. But eventually, everyone had seen his act and he fell into obscurity. He was impressed with Philip and the power of the Spirit and responded in faith. But when the Apostles came and laid hands on people who then received the Spirit, Simon saw the possibility for a comeback. If he had this power, then maybe people would come to him again. He saw the Spirit as a money-maker and the ticket to a revitalized career.

The Apostles respond with disgust. They tell Simon that he has no part in this because his heart is not right. He is filled with bitterness (over his lost fame) and iniquity (the desire to use God’s power selfishly). Simon gets the message and pleads that these things not come upon him.

The Apostles preached and shared the gospel in many villages on their way back to Jerusalem.

Section 4: Acts 8:26-40 God Appoints an Ambassador To The Ethiopians

²⁶ Now 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. ²⁷ And 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 ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now 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.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his

mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And 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 baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And 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. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Philip had left Jerusalem, like the rest of the church. Always ready for God to lead him, he has an angel tell him to go to the middle of nowhere. He is not told why, just to go. When he gets there, he sees a chariot. The Spirit of God tells him to go.

This is really allowing God to lead. There was no blueprint, no well-thought out plan. There was God and His leading and a servant who would do whatever God said.

A high official from Ethiopia is in the chariot. Most likely Philip was running beside it and heard the man reading aloud from the Old Testament. Philip is polite. He doesn't push himself in, but is invited and starts where the eunuch is and tells him about Jesus. This is a key to evangelism, start with the truth that people know and lead them from this to Jesus. Even if all people know is nature, begin with nature and lead them to the Creator of nature and His Son.

I was once talking to a lawyer about Christ. We talked about the origin and foundation of the law. We talked about right and wrong and how without an absolute right, there is nothing which is really wrong. From this, I showed him how Christianity met all these realities. God is good (the word "good" comes from the word "God") and His character shows us what is right. The European and American legal systems were based in the Law of Moses. I am sure this discussion led him closer to a decision for Christ. I started from where he was.



Philip's explanation of the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus, included an explanation of baptism. In baptism we demonstrate that we are dying to ourselves and being immersed in Christ. Archaeologists have discovered that many of the baptisms of the early church were in the same shape as the local coffins.

<http://www.keyway.ca/htm2000/20000221.htm>

What if all our baptisms looked like coffins? It would sure help explain what happens when we come into Christ. We die to our old lives and are born again to a new life in Him.



<http://www.ebibleteacher.com/imagehtml/ntthings.html>

After this encounter, Philip was whisked away by the Holy Spirit (teleported?) and found himself in the city of Azotus on the coast.

Philip worked his way from Azotus to Caesarea preaching the gospel.

Philip and Stephen are just two examples of the thousands who had placed their faith in Christ in those days. God worked powerfully through them to spread the gospel.



<http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CPn05Acts08.htm>

What have we learned?

God will get the gospel out. Some feel this first persecution was God's way of getting the church to move beyond the borders of Jerusalem. He was forcing them to fulfill the mission He had called them to.

We also saw that God was backing up His word with signs and wonders. He even sent an angel to Philip and transported him by the Holy Spirit. God is aggressive for the gospel. We need to be as well.

What this Means for Us

Our lives belong to God. We gave up rights to them when we came to Christ. As Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.”¹ But let’s be clear on one thing—we got the best end of this deal. Our relationship with God and our Salvation in Christ is the great treasure that was in the field and the man sold everything he had to acquire it (Matthew 13:44-46). He ended up far richer in the exchange. So we also have received much more than we gave up. When we begin our Christian lives with this understanding, then God can do anything He wants with us. We are His. We were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).

When God wanted to move His gospel out of Jerusalem, He pushed the church through persecution. It would have been far better had the church understood the mission and just responded according to God’s plan.

God may call us to make unthinkable sacrifices, things that don’t make sense to us at the time. There have been people who were not allowed to marry the person they were in love with because God said no. There have been people who have had to leave ministries and churches because God had called them elsewhere. People have left jobs and moved their families because God moved them.

Wherever God puts us we are to spread the good news about salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are to pray for God’s Spirit to manifest Himself through us in fruits and gifts and power incidents. We want to be ambassadors for God’s kingdom. We need to listen to the Spirit and obey.

¹ *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pg. 99

Acts 8 Questions:

Section 1: Acts 8:1-3

This chapter is about God expanding the gospel into Judea and Samaria and beyond. He does this by bringing a vicious persecution against the church. Saul, a young zealot, was going house to house arresting Christians and throwing them into prison. Christians fled their homes and migrated north to Judea and Samaria. Now there were thousands to share the gospel in these places.

1. We know God wanted to spread the gospel out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8). Has there ever been a situation where God has led you to do something you did not want to do? How did you respond?

Section 2: Acts 8:4-8

One of those who left was Philip. He was one of the seven from the chapter 6. God worked through him mightily, performing miracles and healings. Many came to the faith.

1. Was any of this power to heal coming from Philip? If not, how was it happening? What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit? How do you give your life over to the Spirit?

Section 3: Acts 8:9-25

One of these was a magician named Simon. Simon had been something great at one time, but now he had fallen into obscurity. He believed the message of Christ and was baptized. When the Apostles heard of the people coming to faith, they went to Samaria to lay hands on the believers so that the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Simon saw this as a possible way for him to renew his

career. He offered to buy this ability from the Apostles. They chastised him for even thinking this way.

So, why did it take the Apostles to bring the Spirit to the believers in Samaria? The Apostles didn't have to be present for every believer to receive the Spirit in the church. But, it might be that God wanted to preserve the continuity of the church by showing the new believers that the authority of the church laid in the Apostles. The anointing was proof of this.

1. What did Simon do wrong? Was it in Ananias' power to keep his money, or did he have to give it to the church? What do you think happened to Simon after this? What does this section tell you about our gifts to God?

Section 4: Acts 8:26-40

After this, Philip is told by an angel to go to a deserted place on the road to Gaza. He meets an Ethiopian Eunuch and, starting with the Scripture he is reading, brings him to Christ. The Eunuch asks to be baptized and then Philip is taken away by the Spirit and finds himself in another city. He works his way to Caesarea preaching the good news to every town along the way. We need to follow his example and share Jesus with people from where they are.

1. Do you listen for the Spirit to set up appointments like this for you? How can we listen better for the Spirit's instructions?
2. Where does Philip start with in sharing with the Eunuch? Where would you start with in sharing the good news with a friend? Give some examples.
3. What is baptism? Is it important? What does it symbolize?