

CHURCHES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction:

The death of Stephen marked the end of the first phase of starting churches throughout the world. Jerusalem had been saturated with the gospel. Thousands of Jewish people repented and received Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, but the ministry of Stephen clearly showed that Jewish leaders stoutly refused to do this. A clear difference had emerged between the church of Christ and the nation of Israel. The church was born out of Israel, but it became evident that it was not a part of Israel when it rejected Jesus as its Messiah and Savior. Therefore, God rejected Israel and chose the church to take the gospel to all people. Chapters eight and nine tell about the next phase of gospel-preaching and church-planting in Judea and Samaria, plus the men who were chosen to carry the Gospel to Africa, Asia and Europe, where more churches would be planted.

I. The Expansion by Persecution — 8:1-4

The church at Jerusalem was scattered except the apostles. Estimates vary as to the population of Jerusalem during these days. Some have said that it numbered about 100,000. The city had by no means become predominantly Christian. Luke records the number of Christians as 5,000 men (Acts 4:4) with multitudes added later (5:14; 6:1; 6:7).

A. The Cause — 8:1, 3

8:1, 3 — God used Saul to scatter the believing Jews so they would preach the Word throughout the land. Earlier, the Sadducees had been the main opponents of Christianity (4:1; 5:17), and the Pharisees had been less aggressive (5:34). Now Saul, a Pharisee (23:6), went against the more neutral view of his teacher, Gamaliel, and became a very zealous persecutor of the Christians. His prominent position is indicated by recording his name (7:58; 8:1, **3**). The persecution of the believers reached a climax in Jerusalem under Saul's supervision (1:3).

B. The Results — 8:4

The persecution by Saul caused thousands of believers to scatter to many parts of the world. As a result, the Word of God was preached everywhere. Were the believers extremely fearful in fleeing? The answer may be an obvious yes, but they kept on witnessing. The important point is that they were faithful to the Lord's commission even though they needed some additional prodding to move them out of Jerusalem. A summary of the three divisions of Acts is given below:

1. Jerusalem evangelized by the Lord's apostles — Acts 1-7
2. Judea and Samaria evangelized by the persecuted believers — Acts 8-12
3. World evangelized by the courageous missionaries — Acts 13-28

II. The Evangelization by Philip — 8:5-40

One of those scattered by the persecution was Philip. He is also mentioned in 21:8 as "Philip the evangelist." He was apparently one of the seven chosen by the church in Jerusalem to care for the widows (6:5). He was not one of the apostles.

A. Philip in Samaria — 8:5-25

1. The Results — 8:5-8

8:5-6 — There were remarkable results from Philip's ministry in Samaria. He, like Stephen, performed miracles. The people of Samaria gave full attention to the truths he was preaching. The miracles convinced the Samaritans that Philip was God's messenger.

8:7 — The same applied to the matter of casting out demons. As Christianity gained ground, there was less need for authenticating signs. As a person reads through the New Testament he can notice a rapidly diminishing record of the practice of expelling demons. There are twenty accounts of it in the Gospels, while only six accounts of it are found in Acts and the Epistles are silent on this subject. Furthermore, there are only three references to demons from Romans to Jude inclusive.

8:8 — The city of Samaria, where Philip preached, experienced great joy. This was true wherever the gospel was received (8:39). Philip later made his home in Caesarea and did not return to Jerusalem (21:8).

2. The Sorcerer — 8:9-25

Simon, the sorcerer, desired to have the miraculous gift of the Spirit.

a. The profession of faith — 8:9-13

8:9-13 — It is possible that he was not saved. Simon incurred the denunciation of Peter because he desired and sought to purchase from the apostles the authority to bestow the Holy Spirit. The nature of Peter's rebuke makes the spiritual status of Simon highly questionable. There are two basic reasons why Simon may not have had saving faith at first: (1) His strong attraction to miracles may have eclipsed any love for Christ - v. 13; and (2) Peter's rebuke, your money perish with you, also casts doubt on his salvation - v. 20.

b. The gift of the Spirit — 8:14-17

8:14-17 — Peter and John did not question the saving faith of the Samaritans, for they demanded nothing further of them. All that was lacking was the external manifestation which had originally accompanied the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost. This was the period of transition from God's exclusive use of the Jews to His use of all people who believed on Jesus Christ. The reception of the Spirit in an outward demonstration would clearly manifest God's desire to use the believing Samaritans as He had used the believing Jews after Pentecost. Furthermore, the unity of the church was at stake. By withholding the Spirit's coming until the apostles arrived, God insured that the work of Philip was united with that of the Jerusalem apostles.

c. The desire for power — 8:18-25

8:18-25 — The desire of Simon to purchase with money the apostles' power (of office) was rebuked by Peter. The practice today of buying or selling of a church office is called simony. Neither salvation nor spiritual gifts can be purchased with money.

B. Philip In Gaza — 8:26-40

8:26-27 — Philip was led by the Lord away from a city-wide revival in Samaria to one man in the desert. There were two main ways for the eunuch to go from Jerusalem to Gaza: the seashore route and the inland route. If Philip had taken the normal route along the seashore, he would have missed God's appointment for him. He was led to take the inland route to meet one specific man.

The Ethiopian eunuch was probably a proselyte, in other words, a convert to Judaism. He was a very important man in Ethiopia.

8:28 — As was the custom, the eunuch read aloud. Ambrose (A.D. 340-397) was one of the first to read silently and people came just to see him read this way.

8:29-35, 40 — Philip was a layman, but he was spiritually qualified to do a great work for the Lord. Earlier it had been stated that he was a godly, Spirit-filled man (6:3). He was also a very successful preacher in Samaria (8:5-8). He was obedient to the angel of the Lord who told him to leave the city and go to the desert to do a special work for the Lord (8:26-27). He also was alert to the Holy Spirit when He told him to witness to the eunuch who was sitting in his chariot (8:29). Furthermore, he ran to his chariot which showed his enthusiasm to do the Lord's work (8:30). He proved he was able to meet strangers and win their confidence when he was invited by the eunuch to come and sit with him so he could explain the Scriptures to him (8:30-31). He was very capable in explaining the Word of God (8:32-35). Furthermore, he kept busy after he witnessed to the eunuch (8:40). He knew how to bring a spiritually hungry man to Jesus Christ to make a definite decision (8:36-38).

8:36-39 — The decision of the eunuch to receive Jesus was the result of Philip's witness. His decision was so definite that he wanted to be baptized. This expression of personal faith in Jesus Christ was not prompted by the decision of others or by public pressure or even by personal gain as the case may have been with Simon (8:9ff). The Holy Spirit prompted the eunuch to make his decision. Genuine saving faith should be expressed by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ so others can know that a definite decision has been made. Baptism before salvation is not Biblical baptism. The eunuch's decision brought him much joy (cf. 8:8). It seems that this man was chosen by the Spirit to be a witness for Christ in Ethiopia.

III. The Experience of the Persecutor — 9:1-31

A. Mercy Shown to Saul — 9:1-9

9:1-2 — Saul was on a mission of persecution. He was an enemy of God, as is the case of every unsaved person (Rom 5:6-10). He had driven the believers out of Jerusalem and then he went after them when they located in other cities. He had gone to the high priest and received official sanction to support his persecution.

9:3-7 — This vision is also recorded in Acts 22 and 26. It came with a blinding light at noon (v. 3; cf. 22:6; 26:13). The men with Saul saw the light and heard a voice, but without understanding. Saul discovered that he was persecuting Jesus (vv. 4-5). He did so when he persecuted His body. Christ feels the sufferings of all His people (Heb 4:14).

B. Message Given to Saul — 9:10-19

9:10-16 — Ananias was told about the things that Saul was going to do for the Lord. The "Apostolic Authority" was not laid on Saul by the apostles, but it was an ordinary disciple who laid his hands upon Saul. This shows a transition was taking place from the exclusive authority of the apostles to the authority given to other godly men. Saul's commission to go to Gentiles first was not directly from God. He was given this word from God by Ananias.

9:17-19 — Saul was filled with the Spirit after Ananias laid hands on him. This was done before he was baptized by water. Furthermore, He could not be filled by the Spirit without being baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. So when did Saul receive the baptism of the Spirit for salvation? It must have happened when he met Jesus on the road and trembling with astonishment said, Lord, what will you have me to do? Salvation is not given to a sinner by a

man of God laying hands on him, or by being baptized. A sinner is saved when he submits to Jesus as his Lord and Savior (Jn 1:12-13; Rom 10:13).

C. Message Preached by Saul — 9:20-25

9:20-22 — Immediately Saul confounded the Jews in Damascus by his preaching. Then Saul probably went to Arabia. Saul was there for three years (Gal 1:17-18). This probably occurred in the time between Acts 9:22 and 23. He probably went to the Syrian Desert, the northern part of Arabia, which is east of Damascus.

9:23-25 — When Paul came back to preach, he received great persecution from the Jews.

D. Ministry of Saul in Jerusalem — 9:26-29

9:26-29 — The Christians still feared Saul until Barnabas guaranteed Saul's genuine salvation. Saul preached boldly in the face of death.

E. Ministry of Saul in Tarsus — 9:30-31

9:30-31 — He was sent to Tarsus, his birthplace, and stayed there several years before Barnabas invited him to work with him in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). The churches now had a time of peace and prosperity.

IV. The Empowerment through Peter — 9:32-43

A. Peter in Lydda — 9:32-35

When Aeneas was healed by Peter, the whole city of Lydda turned to the Lord. Lydda was a city in the coastal plain of Sharon.

B. Peter in Joppa — 9:36-43

9:36-42 — As a result of Christ's work through Peter, many believed in the Lord when Dorcas was raised from the dead.

9:43 — Peter lodged with a tanner. The Jews abhorred the members of the tanning trades because they handled skins from ceremonially unclean animals. This is a possible evidence of Peter's broadening outlook of Christianity and is an interesting preface to the events of Acts 10.