

## Acts 8 • How to Preach the Gospel

### Introduction

In Acts 1:8 Jesus says that the Gospel will first be preached in Judea and then spread to Samaria before eventually reaching the whole world. In chapter 8 we have some examples of the spreading of the gospel beyond the confines of Judea. To understand what's going on it's important to know that Samaritans are Jews of "mixed blood" because of intermarrying with other races, but trace their heritage to the same common ancestors; racially they're part Jewish. Proselytes, as in the case of the Ethiopian, are Gentiles with no racial connection to Jews who have converted to Judaism and are considered members of Israel through religious conversion. So the gospel is going from the core of Israel to its very fringes without actually moving out to the Gentiles (no racial connection/non-converts) just yet.

<sup>4</sup>Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup>Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

### [Read 8:4-5]

#### **Q: Was this Philip the same as the Apostle Philip, one of the Twelve?**

A: There's a lot of reasons why it's believed that this is the Philip mentioned in Acts 6:5 right after Stephen as one of the seven deacons. Among other things, Apostles are sent to follow up on Philip's ministry to the Samaritans, and Philip does not lay hands on people for them to receive the Holy Spirit as the Apostles will do. In Acts 21:8 he appears to be called "Philip the Evangelist."

#### **Q: If this IS Philip the Deacon, then what is an application of his ministry for us today? Isn't his primary responsibility to oversee the distribution of food to the church's widows?**

A: He is preaching the Gospel. Regardless of our service responsibilities and assigned administrative duties they never supersede our primary calling to witness and preach the message of the Gospel.

<sup>6</sup>The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. <sup>7</sup>For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup>So there was much rejoicing in that city.

### [Read 8:6-8]

#### **Q: It's well-known that the Jews and Samaritans hated each other, yet their enthusiastic response to the gospel doesn't come as a total surprise to the Apostles. Why is that? Who prepared the way for the Samaritan ministry?**

A: Christ. Remember the woman at the well, which took place in Samaria? Read John 4:34-38, paying particular attention to verses 37 and 38:

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup> For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

<sup>9</sup>Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; <sup>10</sup>and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." <sup>11</sup>And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. <sup>12</sup>But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. <sup>13</sup>Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

### **[Read 8:9-13]**

**Q: What is the chief difference between Philip's work and that of Simon the magician? What made all the difference?**

A: In v.12 the people "believed Philip preaching the good news." The message accompanying the signs caused the change that resulted in their accepting a greater name (Philip promoted Christ, Simon promoted himself) and being baptized in Christ. In v.11 it says of Simon "they were giving him attention" whereas in v.12 they "believed Philip preaching."

**Q: What is the hint in v.13 that something is not entirely right with Simon?**

A: Just like the rest of the people he believes and is baptized, but the people are focused on the message while Simon is still focused on the signs.

<sup>14</sup>Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup>who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup>For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup>Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

### **[Read 8:14-17]**

**Q: Is the Holy Spirit only given through the laying on of hands AFTER baptism?**

A: No. We will see it happen before baptism and without the Apostles laying on of hands. It's important to understand that some things were unique to the "Foundational Apostles" of the church of Acts and that what may have been **their** calling and response is not necessarily a hard-and-fast rule for the church throughout history. What they're recognizing, however, is the need to see the work completed that was initiated through Philip.

**Point:** *There's the work of preaching the Gospel, then the follow-on work of discipleship to live the Gospel.*

<sup>18</sup>Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup>saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

### **[Read 8:18-23]**

**Q: Is it enough to just believe and be baptized?**

A: No. [Get the group to articulate what is further needed.]

**Q: What does Peter identify as Simon's core problems?**

A: The intention of his heart (v.22), the "gall of bitterness" (v.23) and the bondage of iniquity (v.23).

<sup>20</sup>But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup>You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup>Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup>For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

**Q: What is wrong with the intent of Simon's heart?**

A: He's looking to regain what he lost in giving up his old life. He wants the new life **AND** the prestige of the old life. Seeing the people's attention turn from him to these others he's seeking a higher power that elevates him personally, not spiritually.

**Q: What is meant by the "gall of bitterness"?**

A: The people once "gave him their attention" and now he's no longer "special" in their eyes. Like Lot's wife looking back at Sodom or the stiff-necked Israelites in the wilderness looking back at Egypt, he has not completely forsaken his old life for the promise of the new. He is bitter that he can't have both. (Ever notice how converted celebrities and musicians often struggle trying to keep the old **AND** new life?)

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**Q: How can Simon be in bondage to iniquity if he believed and was baptized? Is there a contradiction?**

A: Simon was forgiven his sins in the course of the conversion process but he has not relinquished sin's hold on his life. It's similar to the Parable of the Sower in terms of the seed that fell on shallow soil.

Matthew 13:20-21: *"The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."*

<sup>24</sup>But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

**[Read 8:24]**

**Q: What is the hint in Simon's response to Peter that he is still not fully submissive, not really understanding?**

A: He asks not for Peter's prayers for a changed heart but desires to avoid punishment.

**Point:** *Isn't it interesting to contrast the lives of two "Simons", one that submitted to the full transformation of the Gospel, the other just for personal gain? What are some of the contrasts between Simon Peter and Simon the magician?*

<sup>25</sup>So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. <sup>26</sup>But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

**[Read 8:25-26]**

**Q: What is wrong with this situation from a purely human, analytical situation in the calling from the city to the desert?**

A: The harvest was ripe among the Samaritans. That's where not only a lot of people were, but a lot of people ripe for the Gospel. [Hebrews 11:8, *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."*] Going to the desert wasn't "logical."

**Point:** *It's worth discussing whether we follow God's leading or tend toward what "seems" or "feels" right. If we're "in the desert", so to speak, it may be that God has placed us there for a specific purpose. Are we prayerfully seeking God's will and actively asking to whom He is sending us?*

<sup>27</sup>So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup>and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup>Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

**[Read 8:27-31]**

**Q: How do we know that this was a spiritual man, someone seeking the God of Israel?**

A: Aside from reading Scripture, for him to be worshiping in Jerusalem meant he was a convert to Judaism.

**Q: Is Philip acting as an "information transmitter", a "salesman" or a "friend" and why?**

A: A friend. He approaches the Ethiopian from the exact source of his need and moment of interest.

<sup>30</sup>Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

<sup>31</sup>And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

**Q: What is the biggest difference between Simon the magician and the Ethiopian indicated in v.31?**

A: Although both are men of power and standing, the Ethiopian does not hesitate in the least to acknowledge he does not have all the answers and welcomes guidance. One looks backward, the other looks forward.

Luke 9:62, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

<sup>32</sup>Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

“HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO  
SLAUGHTER;  
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS  
SILENT,  
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

<sup>33</sup>IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS  
TAKEN AWAY;  
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?  
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE  
EARTH.”

<sup>34</sup>The eunuch answered Philip and said,  
“Please tell me, of whom does the  
prophet say this? Of himself or of  
someone else?” <sup>35</sup>Then Philip opened his  
mouth, and beginning from this Scripture  
he preached Jesus to him.

<sup>36</sup>As they went along the road they  
came to some water; and the eunuch said,  
“Look! Water! What prevents me from  
being baptized?”

<sup>3</sup>Let not the foreigner who has joined  
himself to the LORD say,  
“The LORD will surely separate me  
from His people.”  
Nor let the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a  
dry tree.”

<sup>4</sup>For thus says the LORD,  
“To the eunuchs who keep My  
sabbaths,  
And choose what pleases Me,  
And hold fast My covenant,  
<sup>5</sup>To them I will give in My house and  
within My walls a memorial,  
And a name better than that of sons and  
daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
which will not be cut off.

<sup>6</sup>“Also the foreigners who join  
themselves to the LORD,  
To minister to Him, and to love the  
name of the LORD,  
To be His servants, every one who  
keeps from profaning the sabbath  
And holds fast My covenant;

<sup>7</sup>Even those I will bring to My holy

### [Read 8:32-35]

**Q: What was Philip’s approach? How did he witness to the Ethiopian?**

A: He **BEGAN** with the Ethiopian’s question. Philip did not set it aside as trivial or unimportant to how Philip wanted to preach the gospel. Like Jesus, Philip ministered to the person’s physical and emotional need **as well as** their spiritual need. One leads to the other.

### [Read 8:36]

**Q: What is revealing about the Ethiopian’s question?**

A: His questions are all answered except if there is anything more he has to do to be baptized. Philip does not have to “close” the deal but leads the Ethiopian to a place desiring to personally accept the Gospel.

### [Read Isaiah 56:3-6]

*If the Ethiopian continued in his reading of Isaiah from chapter 53 where he was when he met Philip, he would have encountered this passage, a promise to both eunuchs and foreigners – of which the Ethiopian was both. Does God fulfill His promises? Is Christ the fulfillment of **ALL** Scripture?*

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And make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;

For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

<sup>8</sup>The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares,

“Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered.”

**Overall Application:**

- To whom are we being called to share the Gospel?
- What approach are we using?
- Are we sensitive to meeting the need in others where they live and in their personal questions?
- Are we willing to submit to the priority of preaching the Gospel over the ministry tasks we've assumed for the operation of the church?
- Do we acknowledge that regardless of our environment that we've already been placed by the Spirit in someone's path to share the Gospel? Are we looking for that opportunity?