

Acts 8: The Ministry of Philip
8:1-24, Background and Samaria
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Overview

This week's passage emphasizes the need to let God be true. He often violates our simple assumptions.

For example, we think, "God blesses those whom he loves, and brings hardship on the unbelievers." But Acts 8:1-5 shows how God will sometimes bring suffering on his own people in order to advance his purposes. If our attention is focused on ourselves, we'll think this unfair. But if we are seeking God's glory, we'll have no problems with it.

Another example: we sometimes think, "If I just believe, God has to take me to heaven." But Acts 8:6-24 shows that nothing we can do by ourselves, not even belief, can force God to do anything.

1. 1-5, how the church moves beyond Jerusalem. God's use of temporal tragedy to advance his strategy of 1:8.

2. 6-40, a specific example: Philip.

a) Two stories about his ministry, both of which have the effect of sending the gospel even farther afield:

1) in Samaria, to the despised half-jews;

2) (next study) to an Ethiopian eunuch, who therefore could not fully proselytize, Deut. 23:1. NB: This would make the eunuch the first gentile convert! But not a very well-known one, and so not debated in Jerusalem as Cornelius was.

HBD III 836 says he could become a "proselyte of the gate" but not a "proselyte of righteousness"; see HBD IV 135 on these two kinds of people, which maintains that the potg is just a resident stranger, not even a God-fearer.

b) Both of these stories contain loud echoes of 2 Kings 5, the story of Naaman the Leper and Elisha.

A. 1-5, 25, The Great Persecution

1. 1:8 says the church is to expand beyond Jerusalem, first to Judea and Samaria, then to the uttermost parts of the earth. But so far things have been limited to Jerusalem. How will the Lord move them out? -->through persecution.

2. 1b summarizes 2-5. Three things to note:

a) *What* happened? "great persecution," v.3. Saul's efforts to "ruin" the church:

- 1) violates people's homes
 - 2) "hale" = OE for "haul." He forcibly lays hold on people and drags them out of the house.
 - 3) Result: imprisonment.
- By any standard, this must have been a very unpleasant time for the believers.

b) *When* did it happen? "at that time," the time of Stephen's death, cf. v.2. The "great mourning" reflects the notoriety of events among the believing community. One member suffered; they all suffered with it.

c) *Why* did God let it happen? "they were all scattered abroad." vv. 4-5 give more detail:

- 1) As they went, they preached the gospel (*euaggelizw*).
- 2) No distinction. The whole church was involved in "evangelizing."
- 3) Zoom in on a specific example, Philip going to Samaria.

Application: Beware the "Santa Claus" view of God. His first objective is his own glory, not our carnal comfort, and he will often use our suffering to advance his glory. This principle does not deny the truth of his blessing toward his people, but we only sense that blessing when we find our greatest joy, not in our comfort, but in seeing his glory, whatever our situation may be.

B. Acts 8 and 2 Kings 5

To understand the specific example that Luke now gives, of Philip's ministry outside of Jerusalem, we need to see how he is drawing on an Old Testament story.

1. Recall dependency of the Stephen story on 1 Kings 21: Naboth, Ahab, and Elijah.
2. Similarly, the Philip stories draw from 2 Kings 5: Naaman, Elisha, and Gehazi. See Brodie's article for full details. Both stories contrast two unbelievers:
 - a) Naaman foreshadows the Eunuch
 - 1) a wealthy pagan nobleman
 - 2) from a far country (Syria, Ethiopia)
 - 3) riding in a chariot (these verses in Acts, and two vision in Rev, are the only occurrences of "chariot" in the entire NT!)
 - 4) with a misunderstood book (letter from the king of Syria, prophet Isaiah),
 - 5) who experiences tremendous healing (cure of leprosy, salvation)
 - 6) by dipping in the water (Jordan, water by road to Gaza);
 - b) Gehazi anticipates Simon
 - 1) a superficial believer (Gehazi through association with Elisha; Simon the Samaritan Jew, said to have believed and

been baptized)

- 2) with carnal desires (Naaman's wealth; the showy ability to elicit charismatic signs),
- 3) whose hypocrisy is unveiled by a man of God (Elisha, Peter)
- 4) and who then faces punishment (leprosy, perishing).

3. Big Ideas:

- a) A study in true vs. false conversion; true believers are not always where we expect to find them, nor are our presumptions about who would be interested in the gospel always justified.
- b) Why draw these images from Kings? Both Elijah and Elisha ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was apostate. So the early church is pictured as laboring in the midst of an apostate religious institution, first-century judaism.

C. **6-24, Philip in Samaria**

The passage is used to "prove" many things: the "second blessing," "confirmation." Need to keep in mind what the parallel with 2 Kings shows: the focus here is on Simon, not on the people of Samaria in general. Case study of someone who seems to be saved but actually is not.

1. 6-11, Compare the people's response to Philip and to Simon. "Give heed" 6, 10, and "have regard" 11 are all the same Greek word. Luke is emphasizing that their response to Philip is of a kind with their response to Simon. They see Philip's signs as similar to Simon's tricks, and Philip's words about Christ as comparable to Simon's vaunted position.

Right away, this makes us suspicious of the sincerity of their interest.

2. 12-13, Compare the responses of the people and of Simon to Philip.
 - a) Both believe and are baptized.
 - b) The grounds of their belief receive different emphases.
 - 1) With the people, the emphasis is on what Philip said.
 - 2) With Simon, it is on Philip's deeds.
 - c) Even the people's belief is none too secure:
 - 1) Note the expression, "believed Philip." The idiom here indicates intellectual assent.
 - 2) Contrast Acts 16:31, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," the standard idiom for trust and commitment.
 - d) In fact, the sequel shows that their faith is not yet a saving faith. Important lesson for us: beware a faith that is based on signs and directed toward propositions, but lacks repentance and commitment.
3. 14-17, The giving of the Spirit
 - a) The apostles come in great joy, to celebrate the inclusion of Samaritans into the body of Christ.
 - b) When they get there, something is wrong: No Spirit! Why not? Various theories.

- 1) RCC: Need apostolic confirmation. But the NT nowhere explicitly commands such a rite, and many people are saved without any apostle in the vicinity.
- 2) Pentecostals: second blessing. But Rom. 8:9 makes it clear that there is no salvation at all apart from the HS.
- 3) Simplest: Their initial faith was flawed, centered on signs and intellectual content rather than heart-based. They were ripe for saving faith, but their hearts hadn't turned until the apostles came, diagnosed the situation, and prayed for them.

4. 18-24, The Case of Simon

- a) 18-19, He sees the giving of the HS as a neat trick, and wants to learn to do it too. Shows how pervasive the orientation of the whole society was to magic.
- b) 20-23, Peter rebukes him. Three statements, each supported by a reason, give six units, which in turn form a chiasm emphasizing three points: his present spiritual *condition*, the *destiny* that awaits him, and his *thought* that affects that destiny.

1) His Condition, v.21.

a> His heart is not right (straight, upright) before God. Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. Our outward conduct matters not, if our heart remains covetous and hateful. Cf. the Sermon on the Mount. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and pharisees; theirs was outward only; ours must be inward as well.

b> "Neither part nor lot."

1> Num. 18:20; Deut. 12:12; 14:27,29; 18:1, the Levite;

2> cf. 2 Sam. 20:1, Sheba's rejection of David.

3> 1 Kings 12:16 = 2 Chron. 10:16 (Jeroboam's rebellion).

4> Gen. 31:14, Rachel and Leah feel alienated from Laban's household.

5> Deut. 32:9, this is what God has among his people. Simon is declared a foreigner, a rebel, to the community of believers.

c> Note that he, like the people, is said to have believed, yet that belief did not reach to his heart. *Mental belief is not enough to save us.* We must repent of our sin and receive the Lord Jesus, and the evidence of our salvation will be the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

2) His Destiny, v. 20a, 23.

These two verses use an idiom that is not obvious in English, but is more accurately rendered in v.20 than in

v.23. Literally, the idiom is "You are for X," and it has the meaning, "You are headed for X," "you are destined for X."

a> v.20, "Your money perish with you" = "May your money together with you be [destined] for destruction."

b> v.23, "You are [destined] for the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity"

That is, 23 does not describe Simon's current condition, but that toward which he is headed.

V.20 clearly describes a destiny of destruction. How about 23? See Lam. 3, esp. 3:7 (bondage), 3:5,15,19 (gall and bitterness), all as an image of God's vicious wrath (3:1). He will be bound forever in iniquity, poisoned by the bitterness of his lost opportunity.

3) His Thoughts, 20b, 22.

Two are described here: one actual, that leads to the destiny described, and another potential, that could deliver him from it.

a> Actual, 20b: that he could procure God's gift with money. Yet how often in the history of the church has this error been repeated: indulgences; masses for the dead; gifts to the church. None can bring "the gift of God," the saving influence of the Holy Spirit.

b> Potential, 22: repent and pray for forgiveness. Note the tentative nature of Peter's offer--given the superficiality of Simon's belief, can his repentance be anything more than the "sorrow of the world," 2 Cor. 7:10.

c) 24, Simon's Response. Peter's fears are realized. Notice two shortcomings of Simon's request.

1) He asks another to pray for him, but he does not pray himself. Peter has instructed him to deal directly with God himself; he insists on a human mediator. If Peter had salvation to give him, he would have been cruel to withhold it; but only God can dispense forgiveness.

2) His prayer is not for forgiveness, but for deliverance. He does not want to suffer judgment, but is unwilling to acknowledge his sin. We must distinguish these two kinds of repentance. One brings life; the other leads only to death.

5. *Application*: Salvation comes only from God; we cannot save ourselves. Orthodox belief does not guarantee salvation. Only God's Spirit coming upon us and within us can bring new life. Our place is to repent, not of the judgment we justly deserve, but of the our wickedness against God.

Summary

Are we willing to let God be God?

1. His sovereign deeds are calculated first of all to fulfill his purposes, not necessarily to bring us comfort. We can find joy in them, but only if our purposes are subordinated to his.
2. Salvation is his sovereign gift. We must beware thinking that we can control it through our own mental gymnastics. Our focus should be much more on repentance and pleading for his mercy.

Hymn: Philip, The Evangelist

Analysis

A. 1a, Introduction of Saul

1 Sau^los de\ h)^n suneudokw^h th^| a)naire/sei au)tou^.

B. 8:1b-5, The Great Persecution

ampl p

1. text:

- a))Ege/neto de\ e)n e)kei/nh| th^| h(me/ra| diwgmo\s me/gas e)pi\ th\n e)kklhsi/an th\n e)n (Ierosolu/mois:
b) pa/ntes de\ diespa/rhsan kata\ ta\s xw/ras th^s)Ioudai/as kai\ Samarei/as plh\n tw^h a)posto/lwn.

2. ampl:

- a) "in that day" (could also be transitional link back to ch.7):
1) 2 suneko/misan de\ to\n Ste/fanon a)/ndres eu)labei^s
2) kai\ e)poi/hsan kopeto\n me/gan e)p' au)tw^|.
- b) "great persecution":
1) 3 Sau^los de\ e)lumai/neto th\n e)kklhsi/an kata\ tou\s oi)/kous ei)sporeuo/menos,
2) su/rwn te a)/ndras kai\ gunai^kas paredi/dou ei)s fulakh/n.
- c) "scattered": specification p (serves as transition to Samaria)
1) generic: 4 Oi(me\n ou)^h diaspare/ntes dih^lqon eu)aggelizo/menoi to\n lo/gon.
2) specific: 5 Fi/lippos de\ katelqw\n ei)s [th\n] po/lin th^s Samarei/as e)kh/russen au)toi^s to\n Xristo/n.

C. 5-24, Ministry in Samaria

1. 6-11, Contrast p: giving heed in two directions.

a) Philip

- 1) [5 Fi/lippos de\ katelqw\n ei)s [th\n] po/lin th^s Samarei/as e)kh/russen au)toi^s to\n Xristo/n.]

2) circ para

a> text: 6 prosei^xon de\ oi(o)/xloi toi^s legome/nois u(po\ tou^ Fili/ppou o(moqumado\n

b> circ: comment p

1> text: e)n tw^| a)kou/ein au)tou\s kai\ ble/pein ta\ shmei^a a(\ e)poi/ei:

2> comment (*shmeia*)

a: 7 polloi\ ga\r tw^h e)xo/ntwn pneu/mata

a)ka/qarta bow^nta fwnh^| mega/lh| e)ch/rxonto,

b: polloi\ de\ paralelume/noi kai\ xwloi\
e)qerapeu/qhsan:

3) 8 e)ge/neto de\ pollh\ xara\ e)n th^| po/lei e)kei/nh|.
cf. eunuch, v.39

b) Simon the Sorcerer

- 1) 9)Anh\r de/ tis o)no/mati Si/mwn prou+ph^rxen e)n th^|
po/lei mageu/wn kai\ e)cista/nwn to\ e)/qnos th^s
Samarei/as, le/gwn ei)^nai/ tina e(auto\n me/gan,
- 2) 10 w(^| prosei^xon pa/ntes a)po\ mikrou^ e(/ws mega/lou
le/gontes, Ou(^to/s e)stin h(du/namis tou^ qeou^ h(
kaloume/nh Mega/lh.
- 3) 11 prosei^xon de\ au)tw^| dia\ to\ i(kanw^| xro/nw| tai^s
magei/ais e)cestake/nai au)tou/s.

2. 12-13, Comparison: two groups believe and are baptized.

a) Samaritans in general: temporal p (they respond to the preaching)

- 1) time: 12 o(/te de\ e)pi/steusan tw^| Fili/ppw|
eu)aggelizome/nw| peri\ th^s basilei/as tou^ qeou^ kai\
tou^ o)no/matos)Ihsou^ Xristou^,
- 2) text: e)bapti/zono a)/ndres te kai\ gunai^kes.

b) Simon in particular: (he responds to the miracles)

- 1) 13 o(de\ Si/mwn kai\ au)to\s e)pi/steusen,
- 2) kai\ baptisqei\s h)^n proskarterw^n tw^| Fili/ppw|,
- 3) qewrw^n te shmei^a kai\ duna/meis mega/las ginome/nas
e)ci/stato.

3. The apostolic intervention

a) 14-17, With the People

- 1) 14)Akou/santes de\ oi(e)n (Ierosolu/mois a)po/stoloi
o(/ti de/dektai h(Sama/reia to\n lo/gon tou^ qeou^
a)pe/steilan pro\s au)tou\s Pe/tron kai\)Iwa/nnhn,
- 2) 15 oi(/tines kataba/ntes proshu/canto peri\ au)tw^n o(/pws
la/bwsin pneu^ma a(/gion:
- 3) 16 ou)de/pw ga\r h)^n e)p' ou)deni\ au)tw^n e)pipeptwko/s,
- 4) mo/non de\ bebaptisme/noi u(ph^rxon ei)s to\ o)/noma tou^
kuri/ou)Ihsou^.
- 5) 17 to/te e)peti/qesan ta\s xei^ras e)p' au)tou/s,
- 6) kai\ e)la/mbanon pneu^ma a(/gion.

b) 18-24, With Simon: Interchange p

1) iu: Simon's offer

- a> circumstances: 18 i)dw\n de\ o(Si/mwn o(/ti dia\ th^s
e)piqe/sews tw^n xeirw^n tw^n a)posto/lwn di/dotai to\
pneu^ma,
- b> text: prosh/negken au)toi^s xrh/mata
- c> manner: quote p
 - 1> quote f: 19 le/gwn,
 - 2> quote: purpose p

a: text: Do/te ka)moi\ th\n e)cousi/an tau/thn
 b: purpose: i(/na w(^| e)a\n e)piqw^ ta\s xei^ras
 lamba/nh| pneu^ma a(/gion.

- 2) cu: Peter's response: quote p. Chiastic concurrent with three cause-effect p's. The CE alternation defines the units that the chiasm then relates more broadly.
- 20 Pe/tros de\ ei)^pen pro\s au)to/n,
 a> reason p
 1> A, destiny: text: To\ a)rgu/rio/n sou su\n soi\ ei)/h ei)s a)pw/leian,
 2> B, thought: reason: o(/ti th\n dwrea\n tou^ qeou^ e)no/misas dia\ xrhma/twn kta^sqai.
 b> conclusion p
 1> C, state: text: 21 ou)k e)/stin soi meri\s ou)de\ klh^ros e)n tw^| lo/gw| tou/tw|,
 2> C, state: reason: h(ga\r kardi/a sou ou)k e)/stin eu)qei^a e)/nanti tou^ qeou^.
 c> motive p
 1> B, thought: text: coordinate p
 a: 22 metano/hson ou)^n a)po\ th^s kaki/as sou tau/th's,
 b: kai\ deh/qhti tou^ kuri/ou ei) a)/ra a)feqh/setai/ soi h(e)pi/noia th^s kardi/as sou:
 2> A, destiny: motive: 23 ei)s ga\r xolh\n pikri/as kai\ su/ndesmon a)diki/as o(rw^ se o)/nta.
 Possible meanings:
 a: Simon's current state, bitter and bound in sin.
 b: His future influence on the church, poisoning and enslaving them (Deut. 29:18).
 c: His own future destiny, to be poisoned and enslaved (Lam. 3).
 The third captures the parallel with Peter's first clause, and leads to an overall chiasm.

- 3) cu: Simon
 24 a)pokriqei\s de\ o(Si/mwn ei)^pen,
 a> Deh/qhte u(meis u(pe\r e)mou^ pro\s to\n ku/rion o(/pws mhde\n e)pe/lqh| e)p' e)me\ w(^n ei)rh/kate.

D. 25-26, The Apostles vs. Philip (next week)

E. 26-39, Eunuch (next week)

F. 40, on to Caesarea (next week)