

OpenTheo

Acts 8:1 - 8:25



Acts - Steve Gregg

In Acts 8, we see the spread of the gospel beyond Jewish limitations and the emergence of churches outside of Jerusalem due to persecution. God sometimes stirs the nest to make the situation uncomfortable and lead believers to preach the gospel elsewhere. The conversion of Saul and the ministry of Philip is featured, including the evangelization of Samaritans, the rebuking of Simon the Sorcerer for trying to buy spiritual gifts, and the recognition of the Samaritan church as a legitimate part of the broader movement. This chapter also addresses the slippery slope of commercializing Christianity and the danger of the desire for power and prestige corrupting and misleading.

Transcript

We are now looking at Acts chapter 8. This chapter is devoted to the exploits of a man named Philip. It begins talking about Saul of Tarsus, who is going to be the real hero of the latter portion of the book of Acts. But after a few verses about Saul, we follow the activities of Philip.

And the chapter really divides into three parts. The first three verses give us a brief picture of Saul of Tarsus and his early activities as a persecutor before he was converted. And then the other two portions, much longer portions of chapter 8, are about Philip.

And one portion is about his activities in Samaria, and the other portion is about his encountering the Ethiopian eunuch. And those are both very important stories with reference to the spread of the gospel beyond the limitations of the Jewish environs. Because up to the time that Stephen was stoned, and that's what happened at the end of our last chapter, chapter 7, Stephen was put to death as the first Christian martyr.

Until that time, the church was essentially in Jerusalem. It's not that there weren't any believers anywhere else, because you can't confine faith in Christ to one city. Once people were there, they traveled and they probably made converts elsewhere.

But there were no recognized churches other than the church in Jerusalem until this point. When Stephen was stoned, as we shall see, a general persecution in Jerusalem made life there uncomfortable for the Christians, and a great number of them fled to

other areas. Now Jesus had said to his disciples in Matthew chapter 10, when they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.

And that's exactly what happened when Stephen was stoned and the general persecution broke out for the first time against the Christians as a community. They did flee to other regions, and they did evangelize, and some of these regions became places, all of them really, where churches sprang up. And we'll find, especially in the first story about Philip, that it was necessary for the apostles to kind of check up on these things, because it's not like the church in Jerusalem sent out missionaries to plant these churches.

These were accidental, brushfire phenomena. And in fact, the truth is we never read of the church of Jerusalem ever sending out missionaries. Maybe that's why God had to bring persecution.

He had told the apostles, go and make disciples of all nations, and here years after, at least a few years after Pentecost, they're still all in Jerusalem, and very possibly it was because there was such a great revival going on there. Who doesn't want to be under the spout where the glory comes out? Who wants to go somewhere else when there's all these exciting things happening in the church? And yet, you can get too contented and too comfortable and too excited about what's going on locally that you don't really want to get out. So, sometimes God stirs up the nest.

That's the term that Moses used in Deuteronomy when he talked about how God, when Israel were in Egypt, they were comfortable at first, but God stirred up the nest to make them want to leave. Now, he's referring to the fact that God made things uncomfortable with a new pharaoh who didn't know Joseph and persecuted them and enslaved them. Stirring up the nest refers to what an eagle does when the young are at the age they should be flying, but they don't want to leave the nest.

It's comfortable in the nest. So, the mother eagle, in order to induce them to actually fly and leave the nest, she begins to break up the bottom of the nest so that the twigs, the sharp points are pointing upward instead of sideways. And instead of the nest being feathered and cushioned, now there's these sharp points sticking up, and the young can't rest in the nest any longer because the mother realizes it's time for them to fly.

And so, she stirs up the nest, and they have no option but to leave and commit themselves to the wind and the air. And so, that's kind of what God said he did to Israel in Egypt. They were very comfortable in the days of Jacob and in the original migration from Canaan, but then God made it uncomfortable so that they'd want to leave and go back to Canaan.

That's kind of what God's doing with the church in Jerusalem. They're very comfortable. I mean, sure, the apostles have had to face the courts, but God has delivered them, even

opened prison doors for them.

I mean, who would mind being in a situation where there are verbal threats from the authorities, but God always overrules them. And God shows himself to be powerfully active on your behalf. That's great.

But the persecution then caused Christians to flee to many places, and one of them who did so was Philip, and we're going to read about his activities in this chapter. But we begin with Saul. We read in the, not quite the last verse, but almost the last verse of chapter 7, verse 58, when the Sanhedrists decided to stone Stephen.

I'm not even sure they decided to do that. They just kind of acted impulsively. They were so offended and angry at him, they just, as a mob, rushed out and stoned him to death.

But, you know, stoning people, that's exertive work. You know, you have to lift these heavy rocks. You don't want to work up a sweat.

God forbid that you should get uncomfortable killing a person. And so they had to take off their overcoats and lay them down somewhere with a coat monitor. And Saul, a young man, as he's described in chapter 7, verse 58, was the coat monitor.

The witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. All we know here is that he's a young man. How old? We don't know.

The book of Acts will trace his life for another 30 years beyond this point. And when he's in prison at the end of his life, he spoke of himself when he wrote to Timothy as Paul the aged, but he's probably no more than about 60. Come to think of it, that is pretty aged.

But the point here is that he was a young man, probably too young to have been entrusted with a seat on the Sanhedrin, which was a court of the elders and the rulers of the nation. But he was attached to that court as a protege of Gamaliel, one of the seated members, and no doubt was being groomed for a position on the court himself. But before, I think, before that ever occurred, he ended up becoming a Christian.

Then the Sanhedrin sent people after him. But he was simply a young man watching the stoning of Stephen and approving it. And that's what we see in chapter 8, verse 1. We hear of him again.

Now Saul was consenting to Stephen's death. Well, he got more active in his hostility toward Christianity soon after that. It says, at that time, the great persecution arose against the church, which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

Now the apostles apparently were needed to hold things together in a time of crisis in the church. And it's not that they were reluctant to go on the mission field or anything

like that, but no doubt the mother church, which in a sense becomes the mothership, needs someone at the helm who's got maturity and competence. And so the apostles did not at this time leave Jerusalem.

They did later. But perhaps they felt like a time of crisis was the wrong time. Perhaps they remember that Jesus had said in John chapter 10, the hireling is the one who leaves the sheep when the wolf appears.

The shepherd is willing to lay down his life for the sheep, but he that sees the wolf coming and runs away is a hireling and not the shepherd of the sheep. And they no doubt felt that, you know, everyone's running for their own safety, and we can't blame them for that. But we should be more courageous.

We should stay in the danger zone as long as there's a church here, as long as there's sheep endangered by the wolves. I don't know if that's how they were thinking. It doesn't explain why.

But the apostles were an exception to the general fact that a lot of people were fleeing for safety. And the apostles would have been the ones who were most targeted, as we know, because they'd already been arrested a couple of times. Persecution of the church historically has gone after the pastors and after the bishops and after the leaders, primarily more than the average churchgoers.

So they would be the targets of the persecution, but they stayed right there in the face of the danger. Perhaps feeling the church that was remaining behind injures them, would need their courage and their leadership. But some pretty good people fled, including Philip, as we shall see, who was one of the seven.

But he didn't leave out of cowardice. I think it's just a matter of, I think that people just had to decide, is God leading me to stay put or to live to preach another day? You know, and so Philip's one of those who fled. The apostles did not.

Verse two says, devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made a great lamentation over him. Now, these would be, you know, bold people. Here's a man who was killed by the persecution, and there's a general persecution scaring people.

And these guys go out and risk their legs to give Stephen a decent burial and make themselves presumably a target that they, we do not read that they were captured or punished for it. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Now, we're not going to hear about him again until chapter nine.

And in chapter nine, verse one, it's going to say, it's going to resume the story of Saul and say, Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for permission to pursue them to other lands. And

since they were fleeing to other lands, Saul was so hostile, he wasn't content to rid Jerusalem of them. He wanted to pursue them to the places they went and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains to be tried and punished.

This is the measure of his hostility. Now, this season of his life, of course, after he became a Christian, was an occasion of great shame to him. It would appear that Paul, as he later was known, never really got over the shame and regrets of this.

And I say that because in his letters, he often mentions it to his shame that he persecuted the church. Even in one of his very latest letters, which he wrote to Timothy, the pastoral epistles, including First Timothy, were among the latest epistles written by Paul near the end of his life. And he still talks about this shame he had.

Let me just show you a few places where he makes reference to it before we go on and talk about Philip. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul is, in this context, enumerating people who saw Jesus risen from the dead, and he includes himself as the last to see Jesus risen from the dead. And in verse 9, 1 Corinthians 15, 9, he says, For I am the least of the apostles, whom not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

He couldn't understand why God saved him, much less made him an apostle. If anyone was unworthy of that privilege, it was he. And he knew it because of his prior season of being an enemy of Christ to the degree that he was.

In Galatians chapter 1 and verse 13, he says, For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how that I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. So he's remembering and reminding his listeners that he had persecuted the church. And then, let's see, another case where he mentions it would be in Philippians 3.6. Here, he's just talking about the things that characterized him in his Jewish life, which he now counts.

They were once something he was proud of, but now there are things that he counts as dung. He counts them as worse than dung. He counts them as gain at one time.

He counts them as a deficit now, as a loss, he said. And one of those things is he was zealous for Judaism. He says in verse 6, Concerning zeal, I was persecuting the church.

I just mentioned that in passing with a list of things that distinguished him in the Jewish religion before he was saved. But then he's going to say a few verses later, But what things were gained to me, these I've counted as loss. He says, Indeed, I count all these things loss.

I count them as dung, as rubbish. Now, these were things he was proud of, how zealous he was for God, but how ignorant he was and how misguided he was. Then I mentioned in 1 Timothy 1 and verse 13, Paul said, Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a

persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.

Now, at the time that he was persecuting the church, he thought he was a very righteous Jew. But he says, I was actually a blasphemer because he was blaspheming in Christ. And I was a persecutor.

I was insolent. What a different self image he had as he looked back at that time of his life, the things he'd been so proud of. Now, we might say, But shouldn't a Christian kind of get over that? Once you've been a Christian, do you have to live in embarrassment and shame all your life about your past sins? Well, in a sense, probably, yes.

In another sense, certainly not. We're not supposed to carry guilt around. We're forgiven.

The grace of God means that we're a new creation in Christ. We're forgiven. But there is a continuity between the old life and the new in the sense that we're the same person.

God has made us new, but we still have our past. And that past often haunts us. Many times, the things we did before we were Christians still have maybe even legal consequences in our Christian life.

A person can go to jail as a Christian for things he did before he was a Christian. A person may contract diseases through their sins and then become Christians and still die of those diseases as a Christian. A person may, you know, father children in sin before they're a Christian.

Then when they're a Christian, they still have children to support. They still have all that. I mean, the truth is no one really entirely gets away with their sinful life.

Forgiven, yes. Ultimately delivered from everything associated with it in the resurrection, yes, or after we die and go to heaven. But in this life, frankly, choices matter.

Choices have consequences. And Paul, how could he think otherwise? As he thought back, these people that he loved like his own brothers and sisters now, these people that he would die for, the church. And realize that, you know, there's a time I was, I was, you guys were terrified of me.

I was scaring you guys to death. You were hiding under beds when I was breaking through your door. I wanted to take you off in chains.

And if I would have had my way, I would have had you killed. I mean, imagine looking back and saying, I used to think like that about these people, my friends. And, you know, a man should never look back at that and say, oh, that was nothing.

That was something. If you stop taking seriously the sins, the sins for which you've been forgiven and for which you bear no further guilt. But you forget from where you've come.

You forget to be humble. You forget to be broken. You forget to have a proper self-image that I am a sinner saved by grace.

I'm a saint because of grace, but I'm still a person who has done horrible things. And frankly, who would have thought I could do such things? I need to remember what I'm capable of, although I don't intend to ever repeat them. I need to remember what the grace of God has delivered me from and what I would be without it.

And those, you know, remembering old sins is not unhealthy as long as you're not bearing the guilt of them. So I'm forgiven for that. But it still brings me shame to think of it.

What a horrible thing that was. And that was me doing those things. I can hardly believe it.

It's so different than the way I am now. And that's how Paul was later. But at this point, he's not there yet.

That is, he's not ashamed yet. He's still proud of what he's doing. And that's where this narrative leaves him at this point, persecuting the church vehemently.

He's going to still be doing so when we come back to his story. But when we come back to it, we're going to see his soon thereafter, his conversion. In the meantime, something else is going on with another man of God, Philip.

Philip and Stephen were both among the seven that were chosen to do food distribution in the Jerusalem church. And we read about Stephen and how his ministry was used by God. And even his martyrdom was used by God.

By the way, the blood of martyrs is seed of the church. And you'll recall that when Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus said, among other things to him, It is hard for you to kick against the goads. What Jesus is saying is you've been kicking against the pricks, the goads.

Your heart has been pricked by me and you're fighting it. But what was pricking his heart? He certainly didn't show much evidence of a bad conscience when he's out there persecuting the church. But Jesus' words to him is saying, you know you're doing the wrong thing.

You're kicking against it. It's hard for you. It's not good for you.

Well, what was goading him prior to his conversion? My guess is Stephen was. There's good reason to believe that Saul, because of his approving of Stephen's death and his complicitness with it, there's a sense in which he had to step up and replace Stephen. It's very possible that Stephen could have been the apostle Stephen, the apostle Paul to the

Gentiles, had he not been killed because he was arguing with the Hellenists.

He was defeating them in argument. He had signs and wonders. He had many things about him, very much like an apostle.

And what we find is that in Paul's later ministry, Luke records many ways in which he and Stephen were similar. In a sense, Saul may have picked up Stephen's mantle inadvertently by God's design. After all, you approved of his death.

Well, someone's got to do the job he was going to do. You're hired, you know. You're appointed.

For example, unlike most of the people we read about in the book of Acts, both Stephen and Saul had visions of Christ in heaven. Stephen saw him as he was dying, so I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Saul saw him on the road to Damascus and was converted.

They both had visions of the heavenly Christ. We do not read that Peter did. Peter had a vision of a sheet loaded with animals, but we don't read of Peter or James or John.

Well, John in the book of Revelation, yes, but most of the apostles, as far as we know, did not have visions of Christ in heaven. Stephen did and Saul did. Both of them, of course, worked signs and wonders, which they were not unique in that respect, but it was still not very common for anyone other than apostles anyway to do it.

And Stephen and Saul, or Paul, after he was converted, worked signs and wonders. They both disputed and contended for the faith against unbelievers. Paul particularly is seen doing this in Athens in Acts chapter 17 and Stephen in the synagogue of the freedmen in chapter 6. Both of them apparently stretched the end of the old covenant.

Saul certainly did in his preaching. Paul. Stephen apparently did.

That's what he's accused of, at least, that he was preaching that the old laws of Moses were to be done away with and the temple was to be destroyed. They both saw, perhaps better than Peter and James and John at that particular time, that the temple and the Jewish system were defunct and were quickly to be replaced. That was Paul's emphasis.

That seems to have been Stephen's too. They both experienced being stoned. Stephen was stoned to death.

Paul was stoned in Lystra. We don't know of any of the other apostles necessarily who were stoned. This is something that, you know, Stephen and Saul, or Paul, had in common.

Paul might in fact have been stoned to death. If so, he was raised from the dead. The people who stoned him thought he was dead when they dragged his body, seemingly

lifeless, out of the town.

And he may in fact have been dead, but we don't know. All we know is the disciples stood around him, apparently praying, and he stood up on his feet and walked back into the city. But both these men experienced being stoned.

Both of them had conflicts with the Hellenists in Jerusalem. The Hellenists in the synagogue of the Freedmen debated with Stephen. In fact, Saul might have been one of them, debating with him for all we know.

And Saul also, Paul, in chapter 9, which we haven't come to yet, and verse 29, also had conflicts with the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. And of course, both of them experienced arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin. Now, in most of these respects, they are not unique.

Many of these things happened to the other apostles, and some of them to other people besides. But this particular catalog of things, some of them include things that we don't know of anybody except those two experiencing, like stoning or the vision of Christ in heaven. But that there are so many areas of parallel, it makes one wonder.

And Luke doesn't tell us. The Bible doesn't tell us, but it's very possible. One wonders, is Jesus saying, okay, Saul, you approved of the death of Stephen.

I had work for him to do. It's falling to you now to do it. You're going to be the new Stephen.

Maybe. I won't say for sure. But Stephen, of course, dies as the first martyr, and even his death probably bore fruit.

He had a fruitful preaching ministry in signs and wonders, but his death may well have had a lot to do with Saul and his heart being prepared. When Jesus met Saul, he said, your heart is, you're kicking against the pricks. Your heart is being pricked.

Your heart is being goaded. What was that? Well, we know that he was impressed by seeing Stephen's face like the face of an angel. He could probably hardly not be impressed when Stephen said, Father, do not lay this sin to their charge.

Even his sermon was thoroughly scriptural. I don't know how any of the Sanhedrin failed to be impressed by Stephen's sermon. Saul and the rest of the opponents of Christianity must have, by sheer will and anger, resisted.

And that's what Saul was apparently doing. In fact, his vehement persecution might have been his way of overcompensating for a sense that he might not be right. I don't want to get too psychological because I don't know anything about psychology, but I do know that some people are thought to overcompensate.

Your typical bully, you know, the schoolyard bully, because he's really insecure. He compensates for it by acting like he's not insecure. That could be how Saul was.

He's feeling kind of insecure. He saw a man who's died with a face like an angel, saying, Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge. A man who'd given an incredible sermon, which none could refute, and many other arguments that none could refute.

And it was shaking him, no doubt. He was being goaded by his conscience. And instead of surrendering to that, he kicked against it.

And he seems to have overcompensated by being the most hostile, aggressive persecutor of the church of any Jew at the time. He volunteered for duties to go internationally and persecute the church. No one else was doing that as far as we know.

So this is Saul before his conversion. But one of Stephen's colleagues among the seven was Philip. And we read about him now, beginning of verse 4. Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Then Philip, who was one of these, went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitude, with one accord, heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, which is demons, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed, and the lame were healed.

And there was great joy in that city. Now we read a little later that those who believed him were also baptized. So we have conversions here.

There are miracles being done, not only healings of various kinds, but exorcisms. So, like Stephen, Philip is anointed for a miraculous ministry like the apostles had. Now, today I have often met people who call themselves apostles.

If you run in the circles I've run in the last 50 years, you run into people who think they're apostles. I'm always interested in knowing why they think they're apostles. I'm usually fairly convinced they're not.

Usually I don't see any evidence that they are, but they seem to have a group of people that follow them that think they're apostles. And I remember going to church in Oregon for a while, where the pastor was viewed as an apostle by the congregation. I had lunch with him.

I said, why do you think you're an apostle? I was pretty blunt with him. I was in his church, but I met with him every week for lunch. I guess I was his nemesis, but I'd always challenge him on things.

I'd say, so you're an apostle. Why do you call yourself an apostle? He said, well, I do kind

of an apostolic work. And I said, well, what's an apostolic work? He said, well, you know, there's a group of churches that kind of look to me to come in and troubleshoot when they've got problems.

Things are like Paul did with the churches and so forth. I said, doesn't every denomination of people who do that stuff, you know, problem in a church, the regional supervisor is called in to do something. Is that an apostle? You don't become an apostle by doing apostolic work.

If you did, then Stephen would have been an apostle and Philip would have been an apostle. Neither of them were. Philip is later called the evangelist.

And an evangelist is different than an apostle. Remember Paul said in Ephesians 4, 11, God gave first apostles. Well, he said he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists.

An evangelist is not an apostle. But as an evangelist, Philip did what we could call an apostolic work. He planted churches and he did signs and wonders.

And he, you know, he did the kind of things Peter and Paul and others did. But he's never seemed to be an apostle because you don't become an apostle by being by acting like one. Just like you don't become a Christian by acting like a Christian.

Something else has to be a factor. In the case of apostleship, the word *apostolos* in the Greek means one who is sent. So to become an apostle, you have to be sent.

You don't just say, I'm doing the same kind of things as an apostle, so I guess I'll call myself a sent one. How do you become a sent one if no one sent you? To be an apostle of Christ, Christ has to send you. If that didn't happen, I don't care what you're doing.

You're not an apostle. But Philip, who did all the same kind of things as an apostle, no one sent him. He just fled from Jerusalem under persecution.

He wasn't an emissary of the apostles or of Christ. I mean, specifically like the apostles were, but he was anointed to do that kind of thing. We can see that a person might have apostolic type behavior and function and ministry.

That doesn't qualify them to be called an apostle. And Philip never attempted to be. Now, by the way, how do we know this wasn't Philip the apostle? There was a Philip the apostle.

He's mentioned, of course, in the list of the apostles in chapter 1, verse 13, as being in the upper room. And we never hear of that Philip by name again. How do we know this isn't that Philip? Well, there's several reasons.

One is that this is one of the men who scattered from Jerusalem and were told the

apostles didn't in verse 1. So the church was mostly scattered, but the apostles didn't go. This man did. He was not one of the apostles.

Furthermore, the last Philip we've heard about in the book of Acts was Stephen's colleague on the group of seven, that ministry of the church. That's the closest in proximity to the story of any Philip that we read about. But further, we read at the end of this story that this Philip settled in Caesarea.

And later on, in Acts 21.8, we find that Paul and his companions stay in Caesarea with Philip, who has four daughters who prophesy. And in that passage, Acts 21.8, it says, Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven. That's this Philip.

This Philip, at this point, was ministering in Samaria. Then he went down into the desert and ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch. Then he worked up to Azotus and eventually to Caesarea.

That's what we read in this chapter. And he apparently settled in Caesarea, and it was still there decades later when Paul and his companions came to stay in Caesarea, and they stayed in his house. This is not the apostle, Philip.

This is one of the seven, who this guy is specifically said to be in chapter 21 and verse 8. So this is not the apostle, but he does things like apostles do. But he's an evangelist, as he's later called. Now, he went down to the city of Samaria.

It says the city of Samaria in the oldest manuscript. Some of them simply say a city of Samaria. If it is the city of Samaria, you remember that the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament, until it fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, was a city called Samaria.

That ancient city, the former capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, had been renamed by Herod the Great as Sebast or Sebastii. This was the name of the city that had once been the capital of the northern kingdom and had been called Samaria. So he says he went to the city of Samaria.

It might mean the city that had been called Samaria. Or, of course, now in this age that these apostles live in, Samaria had become a region. The region between Galilee and Judea was called Samaria, and there were many cities there.

Jesus had ministered in one of them, a city called Sychar near Shechem. And it may be that the city, sometimes they should say the chief city of Samaria, meaning it's not the city that's called Samaria, but in the region of Samaria, this was the chief city. And so some scholars think this could have been Shechem, which was a chief city in the area.

We don't know. I mean, Luke doesn't tell us precisely what city it is by its present name in his time. But nonetheless, it's a significant city.

And what's most significant is it's in Samaria because the Samaritans had not been reached out to by the Jews or the Jewish church up until this time. Now, the Samaritans were not considered Gentiles. They were half-breeds.

Their ancestors had been members of the northern kingdom but had, after the Assyrian conquest of the region, intermarried with Gentiles and done so for 700 years by this time. And therefore, their Jewish bloodline was very much compromised, and they were considered to be half-breeds by the Jews, part Jew, part pagan, both in their bloodline and in their religion because they had altered the Jewish religion. They had an alternative site of worship on Mount Gerizim and so forth.

So although they were part Gentile, the Jews did not regard the Samaritans as Gentiles. They were something worse. That Gentiles would worship idols, well, that's offensive to a Jew, but what do you expect them to do? They're Gentiles.

That's their religion. But these were partly Jewish. It was inexcusable for them to have mingled with the Gentiles like this.

They were considered to be Jewish schismatics or heretics, defectors, and therefore they were considered kind of part of Israel, part of the lost sheep of Israel. And by evangelizing them, though he was evangelizing a hated people from the perspective of most Jews, he was not evangelizing people that were considered to be Gentile. That was even more controversial later on when Peter did that in chapter 10.

But we do see Philip breaking the boundaries of pure Jewish evangelism, which had been going on for years in Jerusalem, and he now reaches out to the Samaritans. Later in the chapter, he's going to reach out to an Ethiopian who might have been a proselyte. We don't know.

It doesn't say. But he still was a man from another country. And so the gospel through Philip and through others, but their activity is not really specified.

He's initiating church plants elsewhere than in Jerusalem. And it's going very well. Miracles are being done.

People in mass are hearing him and responding to him. They're in one accord. They're hearing him and responding and being delivered from demons and great joy is in the city, which is a result of conversion in many of the passages in Acts.

But there was a certain man called Simon who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great to whom they all gave heed. That is, before Philip came, they had all been listening to this guy, Simon, to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying this man is the great power of God. And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

But when they believed Philip, as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. And Simon himself also believed. And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and was amazed, seeing the miracles and the signs which were done.

This was a remarkable conversion. This man was a notable false prophet, a sorcerer. He had the whole city following him, thinking he was the great power of God embodied in a man.

Very much like a false messiah, according to one of the church fathers, Simon, who was in later church writings called Simon Magus. Simon Magus claimed to be the word of God. Which is, of course, the title that the Christians ascribe to Jesus.

He was like a false messiah. But he was impressed. He was astonished by the miracles that Philip was doing.

Apparently, the great wonders that Simon could do did not measure up to those which Philip could do in the name of Jesus. And so he joined the movement. He got baptized.

It says he believed. And he got baptized and he continued with Philip. So he gave all the signs that the Bible says are signs of people getting saved.

Converted. Now, this man, as I said, is mentioned by the church fathers later on. One of them that does so is Justin Martyr, who happened to be a native of Samaria.

Justin Martyr was a Gentile convert to Christianity in the 2nd or 3rd century, 2nd, I believe. And he was an apologist for Christianity in the early church. And he was from Samaria himself.

And he talked about Simon Magus being there. And he talked about how he arose in Samaria but eventually traveled to Rome. Others, like Irenaeus and Hippolytus, who were also church fathers in the 2nd century, they also spoke about Simon Magus.

And a great deal of legends arose about him. One legend was that he was performing for Nero in Rome. And that Peter and Paul were in the audience.

And they prayed against his performance. And Simon was levitating and flying across the arena. And because they prayed, he fell to the ground and broke a few bones.

By one legend, this is why Nero killed Peter and Paul. Ruined his show. Another legend about him that I think comes from Hippolytus is that Simon claimed to his followers that if they buried him, he would rise.

If they could bury him alive, he'd rise again in three days. So they actually dug a hole, put him in it, filled it with dirt, and there he remains to this day. These legends about Simon, who knows how many of them have truth behind them.

But we do know that he did have powers. The Bible affirms that. We also read of him apparently being converted.

But that's not the last we hear of him. Because we now read in verse 14, When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet he had fallen upon none of them.

They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

But Peter said to him, Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Then Simon answered and said, Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things which you have spoken may come upon me. So, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they, that is Peter and John, returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of Samaria.

Now, Philip had had great success in his evangelistic work, but for some reason the Holy Spirit had not come upon anyone. Now, does that mean they weren't saved? After all, the Bible indicates that when people are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in them. It says in verse 15, the apostles came down to pray that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

It sounds like they hadn't, which raises questions about the authenticity of their conversion. But then the next verse makes it very clear the Holy Spirit had not come upon any of them. You might recall that when we were talking about Acts chapter 1, I pointed out that the apostles had the Holy Spirit in them from the time of John 20, 22, and Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

But 50 days later, the Spirit came upon them. And Jesus had told them, when they already possess the Spirit, you will receive power when the Spirit comes upon you. The Spirit coming upon you is a specific terminology that is used of being baptized in the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit.

It was used in the Old Testament of Samson when the Spirit came upon them, or the prophets when the Spirit came upon them, or Gideon when the Spirit came upon them. When the Spirit would come upon a person, it wasn't just that he was there, it's that he

empowered them. And Jesus said to the disciples, you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

And he did at Pentecost. And he came upon others, too, when they were converted. And in this case, he had not come upon any of these people.

And yet this language of the Spirit coming upon people is used in these other cases of the power of God coming upon them. For example, in chapter 10 and verse 44 in the house of Cornelius. Chapter 10, 44, it says, The gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

So the Spirit came upon these men as they were being preached to. And Peter later speaks of it in chapter 11 and verse 15. He says, This was empowering of the Spirit, the Spirit coming upon them.

That had not happened to any of Philip's converts in Samaria for some reason. He apparently had not laid hands on them, nor sought to impart the Holy Spirit in this way to them. Why not? Now, one theory, and this is often held by cessationists who don't believe that the gifts of the Spirit are for any time after the apostolic age.

They say, well, only the apostles could lay hands on people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's why Philip didn't try. And the apostles, Peter and John, had to come down and do it.

And the argument is, therefore, we don't have that anymore in the church because the apostles aren't here to do that anymore. It was something, a special apostolic gift to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. We don't have them anymore, so that doesn't happen anymore.

So they say. But they should say it doesn't happen in their church. To say it doesn't happen anymore is to deny the testimony of hundreds of thousands of Christians worldwide who say it does still happen without the apostles laying hands on them.

The Bible does not support the idea that only the apostles could lay hands on people to impart the Holy Spirit. When Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, Ananias, who was not an apostle, came to him and laid hands on him. And he was filled with the Holy Spirit and his blindness, and the scales fell off his eyes.

We'll see that in chapter 9. But Ananias imparted the baptism of the Holy Spirit to Paul without being an apostle. Obviously, it's not uniquely an apostolic gift. So why did the apostles have to be called in on this occasion? Why did Philip not do this? He baptized them.

I have to assume, if they were converted, that the Holy Spirit had come to be in them. But he had not yet, we're told, come upon them. This awaited something else to happen.

That's the laying on of hands from Peter and John. Now, it says Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, so they sent Peter and John to them. Now, what were they thinking? Why did they do that? Philip was doing fine, wasn't he? Well, you have to realize this is like a very new phenomenon.

For the first time in church history, there's a church breaking out outside Jerusalem. They had to wonder, is this like part of our movement, or is this like something else? You know, if somebody leaves a big church and starts their own movement, and it starts growing, the people from the church he left might say, now, is this like a branch of us? Is this a daughter church? Or is this like a rebellious cult starting out in opposition to us? We need to check this out to know whether we can say good things about it or not. I mean, something has happened.

We didn't send them. We didn't make this happen. We didn't know it was going to happen.

But if we're going to recommend this and recognize this as a daughter church of the Jerusalem church, we need to find out what it is. We're hearing reports about miracles and things like that and conversions. But in order for a church outside Jerusalem to be recognized as part of the same movement rather than a rival movement, the apostles went to investigate, and they apparently approved.

And by laying hands on people, they're showing they're connected with them, just like when hands are laid on people to anoint them, or I should say to ordain them in ministry or to send them out as missionaries. Laying on of hands was a sense of saying, we're connected. We are associated.

We're partners with you. We recognize you as, in a sense, an extension of our own hands and efforts. And so by the apostles coming down, it's not so much that this was necessary in order for the Holy Spirit to be brought on them, but rather this was necessary in order to determine whether this church is acceptable as a church or not.

It had to be approved by the apostles. And we find that after this, Peter and John went to other cities in Samaria, and they may have been investigating other outbreaks. And we know that Peter later is seen going up into Caesarea and so forth.

Why was he going up there? He was already evangelized. In fact, Philip the Evangelist lived there. But it seems that the apostles, at least in the early days when a manageable number of new daughter churches were springing up, they had to see, is this a daughter church or is this some kind of a rival cult movie? You never know until you check it out.

And by laying hands on them, they're saying, we're partners. We recognize this as the real deal. And I think Philip knew that although he was seeing the same phenomena that had been going on in Jerusalem, until the apostles in Jerusalem who were overseers of

the entire global church, until they looked at it and said, OK, we recognize this, then there'd always be some question as to the authenticity or the genuineness or the legitimacy of his movement.

So I think he probably sent word to them, hey, we've got something going on up here in Samaria. Send down some guys to check it out. And I think he didn't bother to lay hands on them because he was going to leave that to the apostles to do if they approved of things.

That's my guess. There may have been another reason. I don't know any other reason that can be suggested, but there could be one that I've never heard of.

I'm guessing that's what was going on. And that's why Philip didn't act on this before. But what we find is that when the spirit came upon these people, apparently something visible happened because Simon the sorcerer could see that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the apostles' hands.

We're not told what happened. There's a good chance what happened was the same thing that happened in other recorded cases where they spoke in tongues. Or I think in the case of the people in Ephesus in Acts 19, I think they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

But there were phenomena which made a profound impression on Simon. A man who had seen some pretty amazing stuff worked through his own career as a magician. Something that really impressed him was, that's a trick I'd like to add to my bag of tricks.

I'd like to have that added to my act. And so like going to the magician shop and saying, I want to buy that trick and add that to my show. He came to Peter and said, hey, you've got a good thing going here.

How much do I have to pay you to get the ability to do what you're doing there? Now, Peter said, your heart's not right with God. Your money perished with you because you think that the gift of God can be purchased with money. It cannot.

There's a term that has become common in church history called simony. I don't know if you're familiar with the word simony. It was referred to later activities in the church, centuries later, where being a bishop or a priest was a privileged condition.

This would be after the persecutions ended with Constantine's conversion. And the church in the Roman Empire became a privileged organization rather than a persecuted organization. And the leaders in the church became well-paid, comfortable, respected officials.

And just like people bribe people in high places to get jobs in the government or whatever. There was there was a tendency for people to pay bishops to appoint them to

be a priest or to pay a cardinal to appoint them to bishop. There was a lot of selling of church offices.

Once being a church officer became a privileged thing rather than a target for persecution. And the practice of buying church offices or buying ministry positions was called simony. And it was based on this story.

It's based on Simon Magus. It's after his name because he wanted to have a ministry like Peter's. But he didn't have a heart for it.

He didn't have the spirituality for it. He wanted to buy it. And just like many people later in later church history had offices and ministries in the church, but they weren't Christians.

They didn't have a heart for God. They've gotten their position by paying money for it. That whole practice was called simony.

It was condemned by many reformers. So the gift of God cannot be purchased with money. And again, as the church has become institutionalized, it is also in some measure become commercialized.

I mean, not only that there are Christian products you can buy, including a lot of what Keith Green called Jesus junk. You go to a Christian bookstore anymore, you hardly find any books. It's mostly Jesus junk.

Pens that have Jesus slogans on them. Coffee mugs that have Jesus slogans on them. Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't have a coffee mug with a Bible verse on it, but let's face it.

Someone's just making a lot of money off Christian consumers. A coffee mug that has a Bible verse on it isn't any better or worse than another coffee mug for drinking coffee or a pen for writing. It's just a way of saying, hey, these Christians, we can sell stuff to them because they will prefer something with a religious slogan on it.

And, you know, religious bracelets and religious jewelry and things like that. Now, I'm not trying to make them feel bad if they have religious jewelry. I'm just saying the manufacturers have turned Christianity into a commercial industry.

I even have a little bit of trouble selling Christian books, but at least they have something of value to offer if they're good books. I don't think people should sell the word of God if they don't have to. But I guess these days you won't find a publisher publishing Bibles for free unless they're sending them to Russia or China or somewhere like that.

So you pretty much have to buy them from people who publish them for sale. I don't

mind paying for them because it's worth it to me. But I just I have qualms sometimes about selling Christian stuff because the gift of God is free.

It's not to be sold or bought. It's not to be purchased with money. Now, this is a little different because Simon was trying to buy with money a ministry and a spiritual gift, which is not quite the same thing as buying products.

After all, Jesus said to his disciples, freely you receive, freely give. But he's talking about their spiritual gifts and the message they've been given. They got it for free.

They should give it for free. But I will admit that people who sell a coffee mug with the scripture on it, they had some expense in producing coffee mugs. They didn't freely receive it.

They paid for it and they make a profit out by selling it again. So, you know, if you're going to commercialize Christianity, I guess you could say, well, it's not the same thing as ministry. It's OK to sell products.

After all, there's nothing wrong with selling secular mugs for a Christian to sell to be in a mug manufacturing company. And you own it and it's secular. And he sells mugs and it costs him 50 cents to make them.

He sells them for two bucks. That's just business. And there's nothing wrong with Christian business.

It's just when you you put Christian slogans on stuff to sell them to people who wouldn't otherwise be interested in them because you're preying upon their religious fervor or whatever. I don't know. I'm not saying it's necessarily evil.

It's just always rubbed me wrong. No one has to be rubbed wrong by the same things I'm rubbed on by. But that's when you begin to turn Christianity or its words or its ministry into business.

I don't know how that doesn't slippery slope into the concept of, you know, the gift of God is being somehow commercial. And so, anyway, simony really applies to buying church offices with money. But there's a sense in which anyone who's turned the Christian movement into a business, it concerns me a little bit.

But and I say that as a person who got some books published by a Christian publisher. And actually, when I wrote my first book and Thomas Nelson agreed to publish, I began to think, how is this going to work? These people, they're going to sell it. And I've been in ministry at that time for 40 years or approximately or 35 at the time.

And I never sold a thing because I wouldn't because I'm against it. And I did have to kind of justify it to myself. So I'd let them publish it because I knew they'd sell it.

Well, I won't sell it. I'll buy copies for them and give it away just like I give everything else away. They can sell it.

I want to get the message out there. And if they're going to sell it and that's how it's going to get out there, I'll let them do it as long as I don't do it. You know, but that's some people say, well, that's just justifying something.

But I had to figure out how do I how do I get my books published and out in people's hands while still objecting to the whole commercial enterprise? So that could be regarded by some as a compromise on my part. I just came to terms with it. I just won't sell them myself.

That's why you can't buy my books from my Web site. You'll see a picture of them. But if you want to click on it, it'll take you to Christian book dot com and you can buy it from them.

I'm not going to sell it. People say, are you bringing a book, you know, box of books when you come to speak and have a table in the back? Never. I don't go and speak places and my wife at the back table with, you know, selling books.

So it's just I just have qualms about that. And and part of it is just the whole attitude that Peter expressed here. Your money perish with you if you think that the gift of God is supposed to be sold or bought with money.

But I don't say that to condemn anyone else. I just say that because, you know, I have my own conscience. Others may, but I cannot.

And but I do feel that may I may be a little extreme, maybe more than a person needs to be. But on the other hand, the church has gone to extremes in the wrong direction, too, as we well know. And when, you know, when when when certain television evangelists go in, as it has been recorded, they stay in hotels that cost ten thousand dollars a night while they minister in a certain place.

I think that's how they pay for that. Oh, they're paying for it. They're they're soaking people for that money.

I mean, the gift of God is not being given out free by them, not not entirely. So it concerns me. It concerns me that people think of Christianity or the gospel or the word of God as something that can somehow be pandered like like products for sale.

And this is something that Peter Peter is shocked. You can see Peter speaks very abrasively to him. Your money, basically some of the paraphrased verses, which has to say to hell with you and your money.

And apparently, Simon, I'm sure that we should pray that these things don't happen to

me. Now, he didn't. Peter said, you repent.

So this, you know, so you might be forgiven. Which is nice to know that even a man who's done that, you might even say he'd blaspheme the Holy Spirit by thinking he could buy and sell the Holy Spirit. But apparently he hadn't.

He was capable of possibly being forgiven. Pray, repent and pray that this of yours might be forgiven. And Simon says, oh, you pray for me that these things that you said won't happen to me.

And that's the last recorded words of Simon and the last recorded bit of conversation between those two men. And so we finish the first story about Philip. The other one occupies the remainder of the chapter.

But we will have to take that another time because the clock moves much too fast when we're going through this material.