

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from Bible Journeys: Philip's call - Samaria to Gaza Acts 8:1-40

Introduction

Good morning. Today we will consider the second talk in our series on 'Lessons from Bible Journeys'. Before commencing on this specific journey, we should set the scene by briefly touching upon events leading up to Philip's journey to Gaza.

At the beginning of Acts 8, in Acts 8:1-4, we are told of the persecution that resulted from Stephen being martyred in Acts 7:54-60. Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 8:2), is buried and Saul, the man who had watched the stoning, becomes the leader of Jewish extremists who systematically commenced a reign of terror by imprisoning every Christian that could be found (Acts 8:3). The persecution that occurred forced Christians to leave Jerusalem and flee to other cities and countries for their own safety.

However, this reign of terror had a very positive outcome. Those who were scattered to other parts went and preached the Gospel message (Acts 8:4). Indirectly the Satanic inspired persecution gave opportunity to carry the good news of salvation to an even wider audience and resulted in a dramatic increase in true Christian converts. I emphasise true because surely no one would want to pretend to be a Christian knowing that imprisonment or worse might be the result of such a commitment.

There are two Philips in the New Testament: Philip the disciple called by the Lord Jesus (see John 1:43) and the Philip of Acts 6:5. This second Philip was specifically recruited with six others, including the abovementioned Stephen, to help with administrative duties in the Jerusalem church looking after widows. It is this second Philip that we are considering here. However, they both have an evangelical outlook. In John 1:43-51 we have Philip called by Jesus to be a disciple and his immediate reaction is to find and bring his friend, Nathanael, to Jesus.

The Philip we are considering today, along with others, leaves Jerusalem when persecution erupts and he makes his way into Samaria and to the city which is also called Samaria. It was not to hide but to preach as Acts 8:5 states, *"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them"*. We might have thought, 'Philip, you should find some safe place to stay and not draw attention and possibly persecution to yourself'. But this was not Philip's way! He obviously felt that the Lord had called him to preach the Gospel. So as one door of Christian service closes another opens. This can also be true for us.

Philip's First Gospel Campaign

Let us read Acts 8:6-13 to cover the amazing Gospel campaign: *"And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practised sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 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 baptised. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done."*

Acts 8:6 indicates that multitudes came to hear Philip and they took notice of what was said. The message of salvation was not rejected. Also, Philip was able to heal people and liberate the demon possessed. This resulted in great joy in the city. So we see from Acts 8:6-8 that the Gospel campaign was having a tremendous impact.

However, Acts 8:9 introduces a "but", a man called Simon and we learn that he was involved in sorcery. Prior to Philip going to this city, Simon had control over the people, so much so, that everyone thought that Simon had this great power from God. Philip's coming displaced this man. Philip had the real power of God healing and helping people. Whatever Simon had done in the past it was not from God; his sorceries originated in Satan.

Acts 8:12 brings us back to Philip. Let us read this verse again, *"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 baptised."* As Philip preached, people believed and they sealed their commitment to Christ by being baptised.

Acts 8:13 has caused confusion among some Christians. Let us read it, *"Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptised he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done."* We are told that Simon also believed, he made a profession of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Outwardly he sealed that profession by being baptised. So all seemed to be going well. Simon also observed the miracles that Philip did. However, all was not right with Simon as we shall see.

Apostolic Intervention

News of the Gospel campaign got back to Jerusalem and the Apostles. This resulted in the Apostles sending Peter and John to Samaria to see for themselves what was happening. It was through the intervention of Peter and John that the Holy Spirit was given to the believing Samaritans. Let us read Acts 8:14-17, *"Now 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 baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."* This was a unique event but it linked the Samaritan believers with the Jewish believers. Where previously these two nations had absolutely nothing to do with each other, now true believers were one in Christ.

The Problem with Simon

It would appear from Acts 8:18 that Simon had not received the Holy Spirit as his words and actions seem to indicate, *"And 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.'" It is often true where there is a work of God and people are genuinely saved, Satan attempts to infiltrate in order to discredit the work.*

On this occasion Peter deals with Simon in the strongest of terms and clearly shows that Simon was not a real believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. The words of Scripture are sufficient in themselves to show this. *"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 the things which you have spoken may come upon me'" (Acts 8:20-24).* Basically Simon was interested in money and power; his heart was unchanged.

What do we learn from this?

1. That it is possible for people to pretend to be a Christian. Ultimately this can be damaging to the Christian fellowship.
2. The pretend Christian may think that they have salvation, but they are actually unsaved. We know that salvation and the Holy Spirit come from God as gifts. Salvation is through faith and the Holy Spirit is bestowed as He comes to live in each true Christian.

Peter then exposes the condition of Simon's soul, *"poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."* Sadly many people might indeed be like Simon, professing to be a Christian but have never made the true step of faith in Christ.

In Acts 8:25 we are told about Peter and John's final activity before returning to Jerusalem, *"So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."* As they returned to Jerusalem, Philip is once again left with the task of continuing his work in the city of Samaria, or so we might think.

Philip's second Gospel Campaign

Let us read Acts 8:26, *"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Rise and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is a desert place"* (English Standard Version).

This direct communication from the Lord, by an angelic messenger, sends Philip to another area of service. Philip makes no comment. This is surely challenging to any believer. Leave a very exciting and big work of God where many people are being saved and head off into the wilderness! This was possibly a journey of 50 miles or more. Philip is not

told what to expect but he is obedient to the messenger. In past years, when very large Gospel campaigns were going on all around the world, I do not ever remember any of those evangelists breaking off to go and preach to one person! This, as we will see, is what Philip was going to do.

In Acts 8:27 we find Philip responding and apparently without delay: *"So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship"*. Here we find that the Gospel campaign is aimed at one man. He is a foreigner, even more so than the Samaritans. This Ethiopian is a man of importance, directly responsible to the Monarch of Ethiopia. The security of the monarch's wealth was his responsibility. His vacation from normal duties was to visit Jerusalem to worship. The man is now returning home in his chariot and reading the book of Isaiah. As the Ethiopian was an important man, he would be accompanied by many servants and some, if not all, would hear what Philip had to say.

Now the Spirit of God directly communicates to Philip, *"Go near and overtake this chariot"* (Acts 8:29). Without hesitation, *"So Philip ran to him"* (Acts 8:30). As Philip catches up with the chariot, he hears the Ethiopian reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip ever ready as we all should be, to do the work of an evangelist (see 2 Timothy 4:5) takes the opportunity to ask him, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* There could be no better opening for a Gospel preacher when someone is already occupied with God's word. The Ethiopian gives the right response: *"He said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him."* Philip then discovers that the passage in Isaiah which was causing the Ethiopian some difficulty was Isaiah 53:7-8. As quoted in Acts 8:32-33, *"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."*

In Acts 8:32-33 we have summarised the whole series of events from the Lord being apprehended in the Garden of Gethsemane to the cross where our Lord Jesus Christ laid down His life. The Lord did not protest His innocence but Pilate did just that three times! (see John 18:38; 19:4, 6) No accusation of wrong doing was found whether before the high priest, Herod or Pilate. Justice was certainly taken away; it was the greatest injustice of all time. All hope appeared lost as His life is taken away. In reality the Lord Jesus laid down His own life in death as He committed His spirit into the hands of the Father. What appeared to be hopeless at this point in Isaiah is reversed in the following verses of Isaiah 53; all is not lost. Isaiah 53:10-12 state, *"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."*

When the Ethiopian asks *"Of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"* (Acts 8:34), Philip takes the opportunity to speak to him about Jesus (Acts 8:35). We can readily see how Philip would not only recount the events of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension but combine them with the teaching in the above verses from Isaiah - the Lord Jesus being the sacrifice for sin and the promise that He shall see His seed. The generation to follow was to be made like Himself because of the work of redemption, new birth, a new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit who works in the lives of believers, conforming them to the image of God's Son (see Romans 8:29). The impact is almost instantaneous in the heart of the Ethiopian. *"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?'"* (Acts 8:36).

Now there is a disagreement of thought as to whether Acts 8:37 was actually in the original manuscripts or simply a note made by copyists and was later added into subsequent copies of the text. However, the verse is in keeping with Romans 10:9 which states, *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* In Acts 8:37 Philip gives the challenge and the man responds with a confession; then there is no reason to refuse baptism. With this the Ethiopian commands his chariot to stop by the water, *"and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptised him."*

A Sunday School chorus comes to mind:

*"Romans ten and nine
Is a favourite verse of mine.
Confessing Christ as Lord,
I'm saved by grace divine.
For there the words of promise
In golden letters shine,
Romans ten and nine."*

Anon

Conclusion

Once the Ethiopian is baptised God closes this second Gospel campaign. The Ethiopian might have been greatly surprised at what happens next. Acts 8:39 states, *"Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing."* The Holy Spirit removes Philip immediately from this scene. Obviously Philip had done all that the Lord wanted him to do. Philip's work with the Ethiopian was complete and he was no longer needed. Whatever teaching that Philip gave, it was considered by God to be sufficient. The abruptness of the separation in no way depressed the Ethiopian as we are told that he continued his journey rejoicing (Acts 8:39). He had become a changed person: he had salvation, his sins forgiven and he knew Jesus as the Son of God. We hear no more about this man in the pages of Scripture. But as someone who had a new joy in his heart he would no doubt spread the Gospel message to others when he reached home. That there has been a church in Ethiopia from these early times is testimony to this.

What of Philip? Let us read Acts 8:40, *"But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea."* Earlier in Acts 8, we were not told exactly the point of contact when Philip met the Ethiopian. It was somewhere on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. About 20-30 miles north of Gaza city is the city of Azotus some five miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. By the Spirit of the Lord, Philip is transported to Azotus or Ashdod to give it its Old Testament name. In 1 Samuel 5 we can read the account of the impact the stolen Ark of God had upon the city and the pagan idol, Dagon. Now, it is possible that once again God makes an assault on the city by using Philip to preach the Gospel of the grace of God. We are told that Philip passed through and I am sure he would not waste an opportunity. But we are told that he preached in *"all the cities till he came to Caesarea"* (Acts 8:40). As one Gospel campaign ended, here another begins. Philip left Jerusalem and started in one city, then he moved and had one man to whom he preached the Gospel and now finally we read of him preaching in many cities. Philip was a versatile evangelist adjusting to the various situations in which God placed him. Are we as adjustable and useable as Philip? Are we able to respond to any given situation in which God places us?

This is not the end of Philip. Much later we read about him in the city of Caesarea. Let us read Acts 21:8-9: *"On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied."* The setting of these verses is the journey of Paul to Jerusalem before he is imprisoned. Philip, who is now called 'Philip the evangelist' offers hospitality to Paul and his travel companions. From these two verses we can assume that Philip settled down in this city. He married and raised a family and we are told of four daughters. These daughters had the gift of prophecy and would no doubt use that gift as guided by the Spirit of God in appropriate ways as befitting assembly order.

As we close this journey of Philip we see a man guided by the Spirit, responsible to his Lord and combining his remarkable gift of evangelism with the day to day responsibilities of family life.

Thank you for listening. The Lord bless you.

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