

## ENFORCED EXPANSION (8:1-40)

The Lord had made it clear that the gospel was to be taken not only to Jerusalem but also to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. From the human viewpoint the church ~~had~~ seemed to have been very slow in carrying out this commission, but from the divine viewpoint nothing is slow. ~~God~~In the extended ministry in Jerusalem is seen the patient endurance of God in relation to His chosen people Israel. But they had heard and the time had now come for the church to expand. The means God used were the <sup>was</sup> fourth persecution and the result was witnessing in Samaria (8:5-25) and on the road to Gaza (8:26-40). However, we shall consider this chapter in relation to the three places around which the action centers.

### I. JERUSALEM (8:1-4)

Opinion was evidently divided in Jerusalem over the death of Stephen. On the one hand there were devout Jews who were not so sure that justice had been done, and it was probably some of these who saw to Stephen's burial (vs. 2). So disturbed were they that they made lamentation which literally means to beat the breast over him. But all were not of this opinion and so another persecution breaks out.

#### A. The Persecuted.

The persecution probably centered around the Grecian Jews of Jerusalem, for the church there was pretty well scattered "except the apostles" (vs. 1). This may have been because the Hellenists took the brunt of the ~~persecution~~ attack which had started with Stephen. Perhaps too some of the advice of Gamaliel still lingered in the ears of the Sanhedrin and they were not yet willing to touch the apostles. At any rate the apostles still remained in Jerusalem, but the others were scattered.

But this was God's way of spreading His Word, for as they went they preached the word everywhere (vs. 4), cf. 11:19). Robertson calls these

"emergency preachers" (III,102) for they were not ordained clergymen. But isn't this the normal pattern for all redeemed people, for the Great Commission was never given solely to ordained clergymen but to every believer in the One who gave it. The early church understood that, and this fourth persecution was God's means of giving them a push on their way.

#### B. The Persecutor

From this point it is not Peter but Paul who begins to demand the account in this book. The testimony of Stephen and the continued preaching of the apostles seemed to turn him into a one man gestapo for he is beside himself with anger. His activity is described like a wild animal for the word translated havoc is the same as found in Psa. 79:13. The ~~scope~~ <sup>command</sup> of his activity extended into the very homes of the believers and the scope of it included women ~~and~~ <sup>as</sup> well as the men, and his purpose was to ~~drag~~ <sup>hale</sup> (literally, drag) them to prison. As to the procedure Rackham points out that :

These were then examined in the synagogues--the courts of instance; and if they proved obdurate were beaten and otherwise tortured. Loss of their property was a natural consequence. Such scenes were enacted in 'all the synagogues.' p. lll.

### III/ SAMARIA (8:5-25)

"The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Jn. 4:9), but the Christians do. It is a shame for Christians to have race prejudice, ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> the early church ~~quickly showed~~ <sup>had to learn</sup> that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal.3:28). In some ways, however, the Samaritans were worse than aliens for they did have Jewish blood in their veins, but they were heretics (cf. 2Kg. 17:24; Ezra 4, Neh. 6, Jn.4).

#### A. Philip (8:5-8)

Another deacon comes now to our attention (cf. 6:5). The early church had an active board of deacons, and they were active in the thing that the Lord commanded every Christians. The pattern here is the same as everywhere-- Philip preached Christ, not the church of Jerusalem, the people listened,

God attested the oral message with miracles, and there was joy at the reception of the Word.

B. Simon Magus, ~~9-25~~ (8:9-25)

(1) His background.(9-11). On the scene now comes one Simon Magus.

This word, of Persian origin, but found in the Old Testament (Jer. 39,30), as well as in the Classics, is said to have been originally the name of a Median tribe, but was afterwards employed . . . as a generic designation of the priests, philosophers, and men of science, in the Persian empire. Such, no doubt, were the Wise Men (Magi) supernaturally guided from the East to Bethlehem, to do homage to the new-born King of the Jews (Matt. 2,1). The connection which existed between ancient Oriental science and the occult arts, as for instance between astronomy and astrology, occasioned a lower application of the name to sorcerers and wizards, ~~namely~~ a secondary usage which may still be traced in our words magic and magician. Alexander, I, 326.

Since the entire territory was flooded at this time with Messianic expectations, it may be that Simon claimed some Messianic distinctions.

Besides being a magus, he was a philosopher; and he had elaborated a hierarchy of divine emanations (i.e. successive mediators between God and man) which he called Powers. Of these Powers he professed to be himself the chief, giving himself the name of The Great Power of God. Rackham 113.

This was the background of the man who had the people of Samaria fooled when Philip came to preach Christ to them.

(2) His Baptism (12-13). After the people believed they were baptized with water as a testimony of their faith. Simon too believed and was baptized, but he evidently did not believe unto salvation as evinced from the rest of the account. There is a faith which is not unto salvation (Jas. 2:14-20, especially note vs. 19) and there is a faith which is unto salvation or amount (Jas. 2:21-26). The difference is not in the quality of the faith but in the object of the faith. Simon evidently believed that Jesus was a greater power from God than he was, but he did not receive Him as His own Saviour. It is so easy to believe facts without ever having transferred trust to another. Only the latter and that unto Christ saves. Simon's subsequent action shows that his belief was only in the miracles (vs. 13) and not in the Risen Saviour. This incident also clearly shows that a person may be baptized without having

been converted. It also shows that even in the most carefully guarded circumstances (for no one would doubt Philip's ability to discern) the tares will grow with the wheat. Simon believed and was baptized, but "the belief was intellectual assent, and the baptism was intellectual consent." Morgan p. 200.

(3) His Backsliding (18-25). Money talks once again! Simony is traffic in ecclesiastical matters, and this was that which led to Simon's unmasking (cf. 2 Peter 2:15). The apostles had come down to lay their hands upon the believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw this marvelous power He desired to purchase it. Once again it is the holy man Peter who discerns the matter and strongly warns Simon (vs. 20) but without avail. Simon does not repent but only desires that the judgment would not fall upon him (vs. 24). He wanted escape at the price of no repentance. That Simon was not saved is shown by Peter's words "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (vs. 21). That Simon's profession of Christianity was excellent is shown by the fact that Philip did not see through him. If the Roman Catholic Church has its beginnings in the Apostolic Era it is right here, for here is the first one to try to purchase religion with money and here is the first one to pray to Peter! The legends of church history have it that Simon did not repent "but that having lost his reputation or at least his influence in Samaria, he went to Rome--the common resort of all new teachers, philosophers, and doctrinaires--and there won a body of disciples who preserved his memory and teaching, and proved to be a root of gall and bitterness to the church." Rackham 120 This is the tragic end of a man who had greatest opportunity in the knowledge of the truth, but who had never received the Crucified and Risen Saviour into his heart. May no one who reads these pages be relying on his acceptance of the facts of any creed or preaching; rather may all be sure that they have received

the Person into their hearts. There are many Simons in our churches today; there are too few Peters and Philips.

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C. Peter and John (8:2-25)

When the church at Jerusalem heard what was happening in Samaria they sent Peter and John as their emissaries. Here are two men so diverse in nature yet working together in perfect harmony in the Lord's work. Incidentally, this is also the last mention of the apostle John in ~~the~~ New Testament history. In connection with the word above, notice too that Pope Peter was sent by the Jerusalem Church. There is little primacy in that. When they came they prayed, and laid their hands on the believers and the Samaritans then received the Holy Spirit. Our Lord likened the work of the Spirit to the wind which "bloweth where it listeth" (Jn. 3:8); the book of Acts furnishes many examples of that truth. We do know what the coming of the Spirit on these Samaritans accomplished, for Paul tells us that in 1 Corinthians 12:13. They were at this moment baptized into the body of Christ. What happened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost happened in Samaria when Peter and John came. But we cannot establish a pattern from the book of Acts for how He comes. If we say that it is through the laying on of hands then we remember that such was not the case on the day of Pentecost nor at the house of Cornelius (10:44). If we say that it was always by the hands of the apostles as it clearly was in this case (vs. 18) then in the very next chapter we find an exception in the case of the apostle Paul (9:17). Four times in the book of Acts there is record of the coming of the Spirit upon groups of believers (chapters 2, 8, 10, 19). From these no pattern can be established. If we today were seeking an example from the book of Acts then we must take the Gentile example in chapter ten. There the Spirit came the moment they believed and without any human instrument. But the question of the delay of His coming in Samaria is still unanswered.

The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans has already been referred to. It seems to me that ~~this~~ was the reason that God delayed the giving of the Spirit in Samaria. If HE had come as He did in Cornelius' house without any human instrument the Samaritans might have considered that they had been given a Samaritan Christianity in ~~contrast~~ distinction to the Judean Christianity. Just as they had set up a rival worship to Judaism. Thus the infant church would have been split before it had spread beyond the borders of Palestine. But by using the intermediate means of the hands of the apostles from Jerusalem in the giving of the Holy Spirit, God assured church unity. Just the opposite was necessary in the case of Gentiles, for God did not use human instrumentality to show the Jews that Gentiles were being received on an equal basis. The rivalry of centuries may very likely have been the reason for delay in the gift of the Holy Ghost.

After the record of the discovery of the true character of Simon the account of this particular incident in Samaria closes in a most wonderful way: "And they . . . returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (vs. 25). The apostles are ever at their business of proclaiming Christ wherever they went. Samaria was receiving the gospel not only through Philip but also through Peter and John. The early church still has her one track mind!

### \* III. ROAD TO GAZA (8\*26-40)

The third scene in this chapter is set on the road to Gaza.

Gaza was a strong fortress, two miles from the sea, at the extreme south of Palestine. As the Egyptian traffic passed through it, it had for a long time been a flourishing city in spite of many reverses, such as that in the 4th century B. C. when on his march into Egypt Alexander the Great had sacked it after two months' siege. In B. C. 96 however the Maccabean prince Alexander had utterly destroyed it: and after this it remained desert. Nevertheless, under the favour of the Romans it revived, but the new city, distinguished by the name of 'maritime,' was built on the coast, leaving the old Gaza still in ruins. The direct road to Egypt would run through the old Gaza, and this is the point of the remark at this, viz. the old city, is desert(ed). Rackham, pp. 121-22.

On this road was "a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship" (vs. 27). Although it is possible that this man was a Jew who was born in Ethiopia (which was all of Africa south of Egypt), it is more likely that he was a descendant of Ham. He was a eunuch and an official of the queen of Ethiopia whose title was Candace. He had been to Jerusalem and evidently was a proselyte of the gate (cf. Deut. 23:1). Now he was returning home and reading from the Septuagint of Isaiah, which copy he may have bought in Jerusalem. Under these circumstances he ~~was~~ converted and thus the gospel is preached to one who belongs to the third part of the great commission.

But the story is not of the eunuch; it is of Philip. His work, though different from that in Samaria, is still in view. This is the first record of personal work in the book of Acts and it is in this connection that we consider the narrative.

#### A. Freedom of the Spirit

In the Old Testament the sovereign work of the Spirit is in some ways more evident than in the New Testament, for He came and departed at will. It is nonetheless true that, although there are abiding ~~results~~ <sup>ministries</sup> of the Spirit in the believer today, His work is done at will today (Jn. 3:8; 1 Cor. 12:11). Here is another example of the freedom of the Spirit in His workings--to take a man who was doing a successful work among many people and send him to preach to one lone man. Neither was this merely a temporary interruption of Philip's previous work, for when he had preached to the Ethiopian he was not allowed to return to the place from which he had been taken, but was caught away to Azotus. We know not how, where, or to whom the Spirit may choose to direct us; therefore, recognizing this fundamental fact, there must also be a second prerequisite to effective personal work.

## B. Fellowship with the Spirit

In order to recognize the outworkings of the freedom of the Spirit there must be continuous fellowship with Him. This may mean to hear Him tell us to do the normal, natural thing; on the other hand, it will mean such intimate contact with Him that when He does work in the abnormal, unnatural way we will also hear just as certainly. Abnormal does not mean <sup>dis</sup>orderly, for where the Spirit leads there is order (1Cor. 14:40), but too many believers assume that God's will is always the normal, common sense way, ~~because~~ to assume that is ~~to~~ ~~exist~~. ~~It costs something to~~ Was there anything reasonable about Philip's leaving a city-wide revival in which there was great blessing and many souls saved to go to a deserted place? When the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip he simply said "Go". He did not say why or with what expected results (vs. 26). Philip's fellowship with the Spirit was so close that he knew without doubt that this was a message from the Lord. It was unusual but it was God's way. To assume the normal pattern of living is easier because it is less costly. Fellowship with the Spirit costs everything you have--that is the reason so many believers know nothing of it. It is much easier to have your own way about some things and then to live in a normal pattern of life, for giving up all is too costly a price, some believe, for the sweetness of the consciousness of His presence to guide into the normal or ~~abnormal~~ <sup>unusual</sup>. Thus there must be a third factor in personal work.

## C. Faithfulness to the Spirit

Fellowship <sup>is unbroken</sup> ~~abides~~ as faithfulness abides. The Spirit said "Go". Philip "went" (vs. 27). Because he obeyed, the Spirit spoke again and said "go" in a more specific way (vs. 29). Philip "ran" and again because he was obedient he was not at a loss for words as he spoke to the eunuch. Do not miss the fact that ~~the~~ Philip did not presume upon the Spirit. When he was told to go to the desert that is all that he did. He did not assume that the first



chariot that came along was his man. Indeed we cannot be sure whether Philip understood that he was sent to the desert to witness. Several chariots may have passed by, but Philip's faithfulness to the Spirit was rewarded with explicit instructions concerning testifying. It is often just as important to remain silent as to speak, but when the Lord says "Go and speak" then like Philip we should run. ~~Oh, how specific and detailed is the leading of God to a faithful man.~~ x One wonders if some of the high pressure methods used today are not a substitute for fellowship so intimate that He can direct us as He did Philip. Oh, how sweetly explicit and detailed is God's leading of His obedient children. But it costs.

#### D. Fearlessness in the Spirit

When one is being led in this way then he can be fearless in the Lord. Actually to run up to an important man like this and to ask him if he understood what he was reading was a very bold act. It intruded upon his privacy and it may have been taken to question his intelligence. But Philip was being led of the Spirit and he could be sure that Someone had prepared the way for him. Yet for all his aggressiveness he was extremely wise and tactful. He was wise in that Philip arrested the eunuch's attention by a play on words in his first question "Understandest thou what thou readest?" (Understand in Greek is ginosko and read is anaginosko). He was tactful in that he did not pounce upon the man but did not even sit with him until he was asked so to do (vs. 31). He was further wise in that he could answer the eunuch's question concerning the Scripture. He was reading from Isaiah 53: 7-8 and Philip simply showed that the prophet was speaking of Jesus Christ who was this Jesus of Nazareth of whom the eunuch had probably heard a great deal in Jerusalem. Evidently Philip also instructed him concerning baptism for

when they came to water the eunuch requested it. Verse 37 is not in the best manuscripts and therefore should not be used as a formula for salvation. The language of verses 38 and 39 indicate immersion and there is no doubt that this was the general practice of the early church.

After this the Spirit miraculously caught Philip away and he is found at Azotus. There he again takes up his privilege of preaching and continues until he comes to Caesarea where he evidently settled and made his home (cf. Acts 21:28). The fact that Philip doubtless never saw the eunuch again ~~reminds~~ underscores all that has been said--there must be such close fellowship with the Spirit that He may direct us to the ones of His choosing in the ~~passing~~ ~~crowd day by day.~~ crowd that passes by day after day. The work in Samaria reminds that ~~that~~ a man may be baptized and not redeemed; the incident on the road to Gaza, that a man may be a church member and not redeemed. If the record in Samaria is a record of mass evangelism, the eunuch reminds us that God's primary concern is always for the individual whether he be alone or one in a mass. Both the incidents conclusively demonstrate that He is the sovereign Lord of the Church directing ~~His body~~ the members of His body explicitly and in detail.