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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:1 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. **A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.** 2 (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) 3 **But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.** 4 **But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.** 5 Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. 6 Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. 7 Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city. NLT

2

The Acts of the Apostles

- The “Philip” in Acts 8 is not the Apostle Philip, but Philip the Evangelist.
- The “Philip” of Acts 8 is presumed to be Philip the Deacon of Acts 6 and Philip the Evangelist in Acts 21.

 The painting shows a group of people in a historical setting. In the foreground, a man with a white turban and a white robe is looking towards a man in a red robe who is holding a book. Other figures are visible in the background, some looking on. The style is characteristic of classical religious art.

3

The Acts of the Apostles

- The amount and intensity of persecution gets ramped up after the stoning of Stephen.
- Evidently when the Jewish leaders “got away” with murdering Stephen they were all the more emboldened, Saul, in particular.
- In the 1st century, and even today if you want to convert from Judaism to Christianity there will be a price to pay.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul was unleashed on the church and given religious authority to arrest and even kill all who believe that Jesus is the Christ.
- Again – why would the Jews be so vicious and hateful of this new message that claims the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for had come?
- Answer, it’s the same old song – their power, prestige, and most of all, money, was tied to their religious authority.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- One would think that if you have to compel someone to “not believe” what they believe that such a conversion would be rather hollow, and not a conversion at all.



I may be sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside!

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The Acts of the Apostles

- The contagion is spreading. ☺
- Acts 8:4 **But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.**
- Trying to suppress Christianity is going to prove to be an elusive task.



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The Acts of the Apostles

- We read in verse #5 that Philip was going throughout Samaria preaching the Good News that Messiah had come and his name is Jesus.
- People were being healed, demons were being cast out, and many were believing the gospel.
- “Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did” – the Samaritans, despised by the Jews are welcoming a Jewish Messiah!

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:9 A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. 10 Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.” 11 They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. 12 But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. 13 **Then Simon himself believed and was baptized.** He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed. NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Simon the sorcerer is introduced here – he was nothing more than a huckster, a charlatan, who made his living using magic.
- He was either doing tricks that appeared to be magic, or he was an agent of Satan using dark power to perform counterfeit miracles.
- Whatever the case, it seems he was not too wedded to it because when he sees the real power of God in Philip he quickly lays aside his old “gig” for what he seemed to hope would be his new “gig”.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- “Then Simon himself believed and was baptized” – as we will see later Simon’s conversion is a little suspect.
- Peter tells him he is behaving like a fraud and that “his heart is not right with God”.
- Simon was definitely captivated by the miracles and signs Philip was doing, but did he really want Jesus, or just what Jesus offered?

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Simon may well have been the first professor of Christianity – we will get back to him later.



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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there. 15 As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. 16 The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 **Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.** NLT
- The Assemblies of God believe that when Peter and John laid hands on these new Samaritan believers they were baptized in the Holy Spirit and showed the evidence of speaking in tongues.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- In Acts 2 we see the **believing Jews** speak in tongues on the day of Pentecost.
- In Acts 8 we see the **believing Samaritans** (half breed Jews) speak in tongues.
- In Acts 10 we see **believing Gentiles** speak in tongues.
- In Acts 19 we see **O.T. believers** speak in tongues.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- We have a tough piece of scripture here because in verse #12 we read, “the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”
- And then in verse #16 we read, “The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”.
- Add to this - Romans 8:9 “**those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.**” NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- And then add – Ephesians 1:13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. **And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit**, whom he promised long ago. NLT
- The scriptures tell us, “they believed what Philip was preaching”, and “they were baptized in the name of Jesus”, but they had not received the Holy Spirit.
- What are we to make of this? **We can only say that “narrative” is not necessarily normative.** For God’s own reasons these Samaritans believers had a different experience than the norm.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- The normal Christian experience is that we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe – the only other experience we see like this is in Acts 19 and these two incidents have something in common.
- In both cases, God was breaking what was thought to be new ground by saving mixed-race Jews (Samaritans) and in chapter 19 bringing O.T. type believers into the body of Christ.
- If only Acts 10, where God brings Gentiles into the church, was the same experience as the Samaritans and the Acts 19 believers, we would have a strong case, but that is not true in Acts 10. ☹

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The Acts of the Apostles

So the timing of the Samaritan conversions and the Acts 19 believers remains a mystery and we should learn to be okay with mysteries in the scriptures.

Jesus said, “I have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now”. ☺

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The Acts of the Apostles

• Acts 8:18 **When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power.** 19 "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!" 20 But Peter replied, **"May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! 21 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. 22 Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, 23 for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin."** 24 "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things you've said won't happen to me!" 25 After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News. NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Simon was no longer the "big man in town" once Peter and John arrived and the Samaritans believed on Jesus.
- In some sense Simon has a lot in common with the Sanhedrin – he lost his status, his means of income, and his power over the people.
- But Simon behaves much differently than the Jews – he wants to "join up" and be a part of this new thing that seems bright and shiny.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Were it not for Peter putting Simon in his place he may well have become the Kanye West of his time.
- We tend to elevate celebrity converts much too quickly and much too high than we should.
- Just because you had a talent that made you famous does not mean that you will be a celebrated Christian until and unless God celebrates you.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Then there is this regarding Simon – **“Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!”**
- Peter told Simon to repent – maybe he did!
- Many would say that the faith Simon had up to this point would be an example of a faith that does not save. (can that kind of faith save him? – James)

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Acts chapter 8 relates the [transition](#) of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Samaria. It comments on a good believer who was martyred, Stephen (v. 2), and a bad unbeliever who persecuted the church, Saul (v. 3), who later believes (Acts chapter 9). After the story about Simon, the end of chapter 8 relates the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who believes Philip's preaching of Christ (vv. 26-40). The stories show that the reach of the gospel is comprehensive; it saves those who are hardened (Saul) as well as those who are open (Ethiopian). These stories also seem to emphasize the various effects that the gospel has on these different people. One accepts martyrdom (Stephen), one becomes an apostle (Saul/Paul), one tries to personally benefit (Simon), and one goes on his way rejoicing in his salvation (Ethiopian). If Simon is not saved, he would be the exception in the narrative.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:26 **As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.”** 27 So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. 29 **The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”** 30 Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. **Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”** 31 The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” **And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.** NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Two times in this text Philip gets direction from the Lord.
- “Go south” and “Go over” – and Philip’s response both times was perfect, “So he started out”, and “Philip ran over”.
- Philip will play a role in the eunuch’s eternal destiny and his participation begins with a sort of blind obedience – “go south”.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- He didn’t know that “going south” was going to lead the gospel jumping to the African continent – he probably had nothing more in mind than just obeying what the angel said to him.
- We will see in this text the **sovereign work of the Holy Spirit** and the **submissive will one servant**.
- Philip obeys and in a very clear way we see here what it often looks like to be led by the Spirit – **one step at a time**. (thy word is a light to my path)

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26

The Acts of the Apostles

- Notice also that the initial steps Philip was told to take were not ones that would sound all that spiritual.
- “go down the desert road”, and “walk along side the carriage” - seemingly innocuous acts.
- If you are looking to do big things for the Lord, the “big” things just may begin with obedience in small things so that you are in the right place to do the right things.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Next, we read this, “he heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah” – and after that he simply did what came rather naturally.
- He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” – sometimes knowing what to say is to say the obvious.
- Asking the obvious question led to an invitation to speak the gospel freely – he didn’t have a strategy, he just went where the Spirit was leading.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus? John 3:8 “The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.” NLT
- Philip may have looked back at the conversion of the eunuch and thought “how did that happen?”.
- The Eunuch’s salvation, like the salvation of all people, was orchestrated by the none other than the Holy Spirit himself.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:32 The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: **“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. 33 He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”** 34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” 35 So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. NLT
- Philip does not start with his personal testimony, he starts with Jesus – what happened to us may be interesting, but **“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”**.

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30

The Acts of the Apostles

- Wow, wasn't Philip lucky? He goes south, he goes over to the carriage, and the man is even reading from a text that he knew. ☺
- We know this wasn't luck at all, "luck" (good or bad) is no more than a construct of man to many times obscure the goodness of God – luck is not a "thing" nor is it a force.
- Tradition tells us that the eunuch went back to Ethiopia and started a church – that's tradition, but it would not be hard to imagine God doing just that.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 8:36 As they rode along, they came to some water, and **the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?"** 38 He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39 **When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.** The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea. NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- More evidence that the eunuch was saved – he initiated his own baptism.
- This may indicate that seeds were planted in his heart way before he meets Philip – God had Philip prepared to preach to a prepared heart.
- In fact this Ethiopian, who was likely a Jewish proselyte, may well have been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- The timing of God is impeccable – it often seems as though he is playing a celestial game of three dimensional chess.
- As we witness the church expand and grow we will see God at work pushing the right buttons, and pulling the right levers of history to include the whole world in his redemption plan.
- Gal 4:4 **But when the right time came**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

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The Acts of the Apostles

• Romans 10:9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. 11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." 12 **Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect.** They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 For **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? **And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?** That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news! NLT (Philip had beautiful feet)

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Questions

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