

## Commentary on Acts, Chapter 8 by Chuck Smith 2.26.23

Pastor John Donovan, cell phone 508-380-0471

Pastor Terry Gerlarneau, cell phone 603-455-4399

Web site [todbc.org](http://todbc.org) email us at [opendoorbiblechurch@todbc.org](mailto:opendoorbiblechurch@todbc.org)

### February memory verse Luke 24:45 (NKJV)

And **He** opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the **Scriptures**.

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We are introduced now to one of the chief persecutors. A zealous young Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, whose name is Saul. And he was standing by, consenting to the death of Stephen, holding the coats of the fellows who were throwing the stones. No doubt, cheering them on. But I have no doubt, that what Stephen's death and his reaction to it had such a great effect on Paul that he never got away from it. And I believe that it was ultimately the background of Paul's conversion. For you remember, when Jesus finally apprehended Paul on the road to Damascus to imprison the Christians there, the Lord said, "Paul, it's been hard for you to kick against the goads" ([Acts 9:5](#)). And, the death of Stephen was something that was a goad for Paul. Hearing this young man, seeing his face like an angel, and no doubt, that witness that Stephen gave. "Hey, our fathers have been wrong. Joseph was rejected by our fathers, and yet, God had chosen him to be the ruler. Moses was rejected by our fathers, yet God had chosen him to be the ruler. Could it be that we are also guilty of rejecting God's ruler? And, of course, Peter had said, "The Stone that was set at nought by you builders, the same has become the head cornerstone" ([Acts 4:11](#)).

Saul was consenting unto the death of Stephen. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him ([Act 8:1-2](#)).

It is quite possible that these devout men are not Christians or members of the church. And the reason why I say that is because, "They made great lamentation over him." A true understanding of what happens to a child of God at death doesn't really provoke great lamentation. It provokes rejoicing for them, who are now there with the Lord in the Kingdom. It could be that some of the Jews, devout men... you see, it doesn't identify them as Christians at all. Just devout men, and the Jew was usually described by his devotedness. Had taken Stephen's body and perhaps they lamented that such a fine young man should be so mistreated by the radical crowd.

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And as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison ([Act 8:3](#)).

So Paul was empowered by the Sanhedrin to imprison those who called upon the Lord, and he was going to the house fellowships and just wrecking havoc among the early church.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word ([Act 8:4](#)).

And so, far from stamping out the witness of the church, all the persecution did was spread the witness all over the place. For everywhere they went, they were preaching the Word of God, and thus, the Gospel began to spread throughout Judea and Samaria.

Jesus had said to His disciples in the first chapter, (verse 8), "And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem... " And remember that they said, "You have filled this city with this Man's doctrine." "And in Judea and in Samaria." And so we find now the next movement of the church as it goes beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria as the result of this persecution. Paul being one of the chief persecutors of the church.

So Philip ([Act 8:5](#))

Now we are introduced to a second of the seven who was appointed to the task of waiting tables in the early church and overseeing the church's welfare program. God is taking another one now, filled with the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom and of good report and is using him now in the ministry of an evangelist. And later on we find, years later, that Philip is living in Caesarea. And he is called there, Philip the evangelist. And we are told that by this time he now has four daughters who possess the gift of prophecy. And as Paul is returning to Jerusalem, he stops and spends a few days with Philip in Caesarea. I imagine that Paul and Philip, as they were there, probably recounted some of the early experiences of Stephen, and of Paul's being there, because Philip was there and around the situation also. And how their paths had crossed earlier in life, only, then they were going different directions. And how God had brought them together in the communion of the Gospel here now, later on in Caesarea.

So Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them ([Act 8:5](#)).

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And remember the word "Christ" is the Greek word for "Messiah". So he preached the Messiah unto them.

The Samaritans were looking for the Messiah. You remember when Jesus met the women at the well there near Shechem, she said to Him, "We know that when Messiah has come He is going to teach us all things." They were looking for the Messiah. They knew the scriptures that related to the Messiah and they were looking for the Messiah. And you remember that the woman went into the town and started telling people, "Come and hear a man who had told me everything that I've ever done. Is this not the Messiah?" And they came out and they heard Jesus, and then they said, "Now we believe, not because of what you have told us, because we have heard and seen for ourselves." And so the seed was already planted in Samaria, and so Philip went to proclaim the Messiah unto them.

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voices, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and those that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city ([Act 8:6-8](#)).

The city of Samaria, the Gospel is now being preached, and the result of the Gospel, in the hearts of the people, is that of great joy. Always the result of the preaching of the Good News.

Now there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and he bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one ([Act 8:9](#)):

There was this fellow, probably a warlock. He used sorcery. He had the people convinced that he had great mystical, magical powers.

And all of the people had given heed to him, from the least of them to the greatest, saying, that this man had a great power of God. And to him they had regard, because for a long time he had been bewitching them with these sorceries. But when they believed Philip and the preaching of the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women ([Act 8:10-12](#)).

They were freed from the bewitching of this Simon and they were brought to the Gospel and baptized.

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Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John ([Act 8:13-14](#)):

Peter and John, interesting companions in the Gospel records. Men of different temperaments. Yet, brought together and very closely associated with each other. But it is interesting that this is the last mention of John in the book of Acts. Peter comes in for further mention. The attention will, of course, later on, turn to Paul and to Barnabus and to others, but this interestingly enough, in the book of Acts, is the last mention of John. Now John did outlive the rest of the disciples. And, of course, in the later years wrote his gospel, his three epistles, and the book of Revelation. But later on, as we are dealing with the church in Jerusalem, and the issues that come up before the church counsel, John strangely is not mentioned in any type of a role. The witness is silent concerning John. And I really don't have any real suggestion for that, except that it's just not there, and I don't know why. But as John said in his Gospel, "I suppose that if everything were written that should be written, all of the books in the world could not contain the things that should have been written about these things."

So when the church or the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Now that would take away the idea of Peter being the pope, because he was sent by the apostles. He was sent by them. It didn't say, "He had the pontifical authority and was giving the orders." But that he was sent by the apostles.

Who were, when they had come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) ([Act 8:15-16](#))

Now it is interesting how that this has been a problem to so many Bible commentators. The fact that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. That He had not fallen upon them as yet. It is commonly acknowledged that a person is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. And no man can call Jesus Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. And the moment a person receives Jesus Christ and is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes into their lives. We know that you cannot receive Jesus without receiving the Holy Spirit into your life. And so this poses a great problem to the majority of Bible commentators when we find that the people in Samaria had believed and were baptized in water, and yet, the apostles sent them down that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen upon any of them. I am surprised that with all of these scholars, who are so problemed over this particular text, that they have not noted the Greek preposition. You remember Jesus said concerning the Holy Spirit to His disciples, "For He is with

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you and shall be in you." But later Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Now this is the same Greek preposition *epi* that is used here. The Holy Spirit had not yet fallen, *epi*, upon them. So the commentators have difficulty trying to say, "Well, they were not filled with the Spirit; this was some special case in Samaria, because this was the first time out of Jerusalem and all." And they really wrestle and do all kinds of foolish things with this text. Because they do not want to acknowledge that there is an empowering experience of the Holy Spirit apart from conversion. But yet, that is exactly what the text does prove. That yes, we do receive the Holy Spirit in us when Christ comes into our lives. But there is an empowering experience subsequent to our salvation, where our lives are endued with the power of God's Spirit, as He comes upon us, anointing us for power to serve God. And it's a very simple, obvious solution, but it is one that most of the Bible commentators really stumble heavily over this. And I am amused at the various explanations they try to give of this particular text when the answer is so simple.

They had received Jesus Christ; they were baptized, so obviously the Spirit was dwelling in them. But they had not had an empowering experience like the apostles experienced on the day of Pentecost. For He was not yet fallen upon any of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 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 also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit ([Act 8:17-19](#)).

When Simon saw that through the laying on of hands that the Holy Spirit was imparted, there must have been some kind of visible or audible evidence that they were being empowered with the Holy Spirit, or else, why would he ask for that power? If they would just lay their hands on them and say, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," and there was nothing visible, or audible to signify that the gift was being imparted, there wouldn't be this great desire by Simon to possess the same kind of power. No doubt, there was some kind of evidence that these people were receiving an empowering of God's Spirit upon their lives. And I really do not doubt but what they were speaking in other tongues, and perhaps, prophesying, as was the case in Ephesus in the nineteenth chapter. So it is not here declared, I personally feel that this probably was the case. And that is why Simon desired to purchase this power. Now his desire to purchase this power, or a position in the church, is where the name for that evil which later permeated the church was originated-simony. That is, the purchase of a position within the church. And unfortunately, the church went through a very dark period of history where positions in the church were auctioned off to the highest bidder. And there were times where the pope and his position was actually auctioned and

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purchased by the highest bidder. That awful evil known as simony, that did come into the church. That purchasing of position or authority.

This is a common practice among magicians. If a magician has a good trick, other magicians will seek to buy that trick, how it is done. And there are those who are practicing that art of leger de main, the common practice of selling the tricks to one another. And so Simon, being a sorcerer, being a deceiver, bewitching the people, having in his past purchased various types of information thought that he could purchase now this gift of God.

But Peter said unto him, Your money perish with thee, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money ([Act 8:20](#)).

What a horrible thing.

You neither have part or lot in this matter: for your heart is not right in the sight of God ([Act 8:21](#)).

And so Peter exercising now this gift of discernment begins to really deal with the issue of Simon's heart.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity ([Act 8:22-23](#)).

Now, though he had followed Philip and was a great admirer of the works that he was doing, yet within in his heart there was the gall of bitterness. Probably bitter over the fact that he was no longer looked up to by the people as he had once been. Bitter over the fact that the people were now following a new leader, even Jesus Christ, whom Philip had declared unto them. And that his little crowd had turned from him unto another, and that bothered him deep down in his heart. Though outwardly he was there with Philip and followed Philip and was baptized. Inwardly it was eating away. The bond of iniquity, the gall of bitterness. What a terrible thing bitterness is. How sad it is that a person would harbor bitterness in their heart. Bitterness can only hurt you. It only does you harm. You really can't afford bitterness. And he was told, "Pray that God might forgive you of this, for down in your heart you have bitterness, the bond of iniquity."

Then answered Simon, and he said, Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things that you have spoken will come upon me ([Act 8:24](#)).

He asked for prayer, and I believe that he was sincere.

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And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and they preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans ([Act 8:25](#)).

So John and Peter became evangelists. And as they were returning back to Jerusalem, they stopped in the villages of Samaria and preached the Gospel unto many.

And the angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, 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, was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet ([Act 8:26-28](#)).

Now this is interesting in several respects. First of all, it is interesting because it gives us an insight into how God leads us by His Spirit. So many times I have people say, "I wish I knew what the will of God was for my life." And usually by that, they are saying, "I wish God would, sort-of, show me on a screen my future. I like to know what my future holds. I would like to know what God has planned for me. Then I can determine whether or not I want to do it." But in wanting to know the will of God, usually we want to know the next year, five years from now. We want our five-year program, our ten-year program, our twenty-year program. "Now, God, you know, lay it out." But God only said to Philip, "Go down to the road that is going from Jerusalem to Gaza, toward the desert." He didn't tell him anymore. That's the first step in the will of God.

God did not speak unto him again until he had taken the first step. So many times when God has given us the first step we don't want to go until He gives us the second step and the third step and the fourth step. We are prone to say, "Lord, why in the world do you want me to go to Gaza? There's nobody down there. That's a desert area, Lord. Why would you want me to leave this great meeting here in Samaria? Lord, you're making a serious mistake here. There are hundreds of people that are being saved. They're coming and they're listening to the Gospel. This is exciting, Lord. Why should I go to Gaza?" And I want the Lord to tell me why He has given me the first step. I want to know the whole plan, the whole program that God is doing. But God, so often, only gives us step one. And step two does not come until step one had been taken. And I am certain that, had he stayed in Samaria, arguing with God, seeking to have further clarification of this call, that he would have never received it. God would've sent someone else to meet that Ethiopian eunuch. One step at a time, that's how God usually directs our lives. That's how God has directed my life. Just one step at a time. It used to

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bother me. It used to bother me severely that God would only lead me one step at a time. Now I find it rather exciting. And I always like it when it's God's move.

You know, when I make my move, and then I say, "Okay, Lord, it's Your move," I'm obedient to what the Lord told me to do and now I wait to see what the next instruction is from Him. I don't like it so much when it's my move. I have difficulty many times with my move. But it's always great when I've made my move and I turn and say, "Okay now, Lord, Your move again."

Philip obeyed the first move. He left. No doubt he had many questions in his mind, but he left Samaria, the great revival, and he went down to this area, going from Jerusalem to Gaza to the desert place.

Notice that this man had been to Jerusalem to worship God and was returning, sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet. I believe that this man was a sincere seeker for God. In his heart he was really seeking after the Lord. For, no doubt, the Spirit had been drawing him. And in his search for God he came to Jerusalem, the center of the worship. Coming from Ethiopia they were familiar with Judaism. Because when the Queen of Sheba returned from her visit with Solomon, she took back to Ethiopia the Hebrew religion. There began then, in Ethiopia, the fillan jess movement. Those Ethiopians who were Jewish in their faith and practices. Thus, Judaism was well known in Ethiopia, and Jerusalem was the center of Judaism.

In the search of this man for God, it would only be natural that his search would bring him to Jerusalem. The tragedy is that while in Jerusalem, he did not find what he was searching for. And now he is returning to Ethiopia just as empty as he came. A heart still yearning after God. But God saw the yearning heart. I believe that God sees every yearning heart. And that God will take measures to bring His love and truth to every true seeker after God. If a person is genuinely seeking after God in his heart, I believe that God will reveal the truth even by miracles or whatever. And I think such is the case. God saw this man, and so He stirred the heart of Philip in the midst of the revival and said, "Go down to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, that desert place." When he got there, he saw the chariot, and the man sitting in the chariot, and the Lord said unto him,

Go near, and join yourself to this chariot ([Act 8:29](#)).

Step two, but step two did not come until he was fully obedient to step one.

And Philip ran up to him, and he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you read? And he said, How can I, unless some man should guide me? And he requested that Philip would come up and sit with him



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[there in the chariot]. And the place in the scripture where he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgement was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth ([Act 8:30-33](#)).

[Isaiah 53](#), that prophecy of Isaiah, of the Servant of God, who would be despised and rejected. The Servant of God whose life would be taken away. Who would be slain as a sheep without really responding to the charges.

And the eunuch said, I pray thee, whom is the prophet speaking this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and he began [at that verse] the same scripture, and he preached unto him Jesus ([Act 8:34-35](#)).

And as we pointed out this morning, it wouldn't have made any difference where the man was reading in the Old Testament, it would've been possible at that very scripture or to start from anywhere in the Old Testament and preach Jesus. For the Old Testament is the story of Jesus from beginning to end. Jesus said, "You do search the scriptures for in them you think you have life. But actually, they are testifying of me. I have come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, O Lord."

But he opened at that scripture and began to preach unto him Jesus. Jesus expounded to the disciples on the road to Emmaus all that Moses and the prophets said of the things concerning Himself. How He must suffer and die and rise.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And so he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both of them into the water ([Act 8:36-38](#)),

I guess he didn't just sprinkle him.

both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, that the eunuch saw him no more: but he went his way rejoicing ([Act 8:38-39](#)).

Philip had a ministry that brought joy to people. You remember in Samaria the result of the ministry. The city was filled with joy. Now he's ministered to this man who continues his journey, no longer searching. He has found, as a result of finding a real relationship with God, he is rejoicing. And from that time in history, there has always been a church in Ethiopia. He had, no doubt, a great influence

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on the establishing of the Gospel and the church in Ethiopia. "He went his way rejoicing."

Now here's an interesting thing about Philip: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." Now, by what means, I don't know. There have been times that I have wished that the Spirit of the Lord would catch me away. When I'm facing a long hike back and you're weary and tired.

But Philip was found at Azotus ([Act 8:40](#)):

It would appear from the language that it was sort of a miraculous catching away. That's what the language would indicate. But, of course, nothing is really mentioned as far as the methods. So to speculate is worthless. Why make guesses? Who knows? We don't!

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all of the cities, till he came to Caesarea ([Act 8:40](#)).

In a chapter or two, we're going to find Peter going down to preach to the church in Lydda and healing a certain man by the name of Aeneas who had been in bed for several years. And then we find that the church in Joppa, when they hear that Peter was in Lydda, sent to him a request that he would come quickly to Joppa because a certain woman, Dorcas, had died. And so Peter went then to Joppa and ministered to Dorcas. Now how is it that there was a church in Lydda and in Joppa? If you will look at that the map and find Gaza, and then Azotus, and we are told that he went from Azotus, in all of the cities preaching till he came to Caesarea. I believe that these churches in Joppa and Lydda were probably established by the evangelist Philip, because these are some of the cities that he would be passing through going from Azotus to Caesarea. I think that his ministry there resulted in the birth of these churches. In these same areas that Peter had come down and minister to.

It seems that when he came to Caesarea, that he made Caesarea his home. I can surely understand why. It is a beautiful seaport city, sitting on the Mediterranean. The water on the Mediterranean takes on a very special blue, the beaches are gorgeous, and if I had a choice of places to live, Caesarea wouldn't be a bad choice at all.

And so, Philip stayed there in Caesarea establishing his home there. Years later, Paul visited with Philip there in Caesarea, remaining with him there in his home before he continued his journey to Jerusalem.