

Acts Chapter 8

Notes on Chapter 8 beginning at vs 4.

This is the beginning of the church's mission beyond Jerusalem.

We hear in this passage another tale of one of the seven. Philip.

The apostles and the other followers of Jesus have been filled with the Spirit, given power and authority and been sent.

Vs4 The faithful are scattered- going from place to place, proclaiming the word.

So let's start with an understanding of the great antipathy between Samaritans, Jordanian Jews and the "mainline" Jewish people. They were impure, didn't keep Jewish laws, and politically treacherous. They had located their temple outside Jerusalem and had allowed other religious practices to become part of their faith.

Philip goes to Samaria and preaches the word, proclaiming the Messiah. We are told the people listen attentively (of one accord). They watch him closely. He is a prophet come to announce God's salvation.

He exorcises unclean spirits, a new sign for a new place. Philip finds success in his mission and is in a sense bringing a lost tribe back into the fold, however a different fold than Jewish tradition.

Beginning with vs 9 – Luke introduces us to Simon the Great. He apparently is a local magician. Both Simon and Philip are listened to eagerly. Another definition of the word used for Great in Simon the Great is Power of God. Simon the power of god.

Both then are listed as power brokers for God. Unlike Simon's magic, Philip has the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit gathers in the crowd to be baptized (even Simon).

Philip has developed a following.

Simon does what a lot of unbelievers do in Acts, Simon is amazed at the great miracles. Amazement usually comes before repentance.

Vvs 14-17

Peter and John decide to exercise their spiritual authority and visit the Samaritan congregation.

They intend to help.

The conversation around baptism in the Spirit is confusing. They are baptized in Jesus name but have not received the Spirit. The Spirit is necessary for full participation in the gifts of the Spirit.

Peter and John seem to come to impart the Spirit thus sharing the gifts equally in community. They do this through prayer and the laying on of hands. This is a similar act to what they did before sending the 7 to heal the divisions between the Hebrews and Hellenists.

Healing for Samaria and the nation of Israel.

But a lot of the attention is still given to Simon. Nothing in the text says Simon is excluded from the gifts of the Spirit. Simon, however, has political and personal power ambitions. The word translated power is *exousia* and denotes the legal authority of decision making.

Simon offers money to purchase *exousia*.

Peter exclaims May your money perish with you. The direction and purpose of God's Spirit are divine not earthly. Peter perceives Simon's action as degrading.

Simon recognized Peter's authority – saving recognition on the part of Simon. Peter is excusing Simon's ignorance. There is hope in God's forgiveness.

Simon has been attracted to the spectacular. He wants the spectacular for personal gain where the spectacular is meant to draw people to hear the word of God.

Vvs 26ff

This is the memorable story of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

A Eunuch would have been excluded from full participation in the covenant community of Israel. Thus one who deeply desires a more full knowledge of the word of God is unable to acquire such knowledge.

This is a man of means and power. He is dedicated to God. The prophet (Philip) is called on to include the excluded ones. The Eunuch symbolizes the outsiders who will be brought to faith.

This encounter between a God seeker and the prophet bring echoes of Elijah (1Kings 17 – 2 Kings 3)

Aside on Eunuchs and the Jewish people

As throughout the Orient in very ancient times, and more especially in Egypt and Assyria, where they seem to have held the most important offices, there were eunuchs in the kingdom of Israel. The reference to them in I Sam. viii. 15 (Hebr.) is general; but in other passages they are mentioned as attendants of the kings; for instance, Ahab (I Kings xxii. 9, Hebr.) and Jehoram (II Kings viii. 6; comp. ix. 32). No allusion to eunuchs in the kingdom of Judah occurs before the time of Josiah (comp. II Kings xxiv. 12, 15, Hebr.; Jer. xxix. 2, xxxiv. 19, xxxviii. 7, xli. 16). In II Kings xxv. 19, Hebr; Jer. lii. 25, a military officer taken captive at the conquest of Jerusalem is called a eunuch. Among the Jews, as among others, the existence of eunuchs was connected with polygamy, for in passages like II Kings xxiv. 15; Jer. xli. 16 (comp. II Kings ix. 32), they are expressly mentioned when reference is made to the women of the king's harem. Consequently there is no reason to interpret "saris" as applying to all royal offices in general.

It is questionable whether the eunuchs were Jews. A passage in Jeremiah (xxxviii. 7), in which the eunuch is an Ethiopian, indicates that they were not always natives of Judea, and it is probable that they were usually non-Jews, since in Deut. xxiii. 1 castration was forbidden the Israelites; that is, castrates might "not enter into the congregation of the Lord." Later regulations were milder, and the author of Isaiah (lvi. 3 *et seq.*) did not consider the fact of being a eunuch a reason for exclusion from the congregation. Eunuchs were more expensive than ordinary slaves, but there was no difficulty in obtaining them.

Josephus shows that eunuchs were important members of a regal household, especially under Herod the Great, the care of whose drink was entrusted to one, the bringing of his supper to another, and the putting of him to bed to a third, "who also managed the principal affairs of the government" ("Ant." xvi. 8, §, 1). Herod's favorite wife, Mariamne, was attended by a eunuch ("Ant." x v. 7, §, 4).

—In Rabbinical Literature:

The Rabbis distinguished two kinds of eunuchs: (1) "seris adam," a eunuch made by man; (2) "seris ḥamma," a eunuch made by the sun; that is to say, one born incapable of reproduction, so that the sun never shone on him as on a man. According to the Shulḥan 'Aruk, "seris ḥamma" means "castrated in consequence of fever." The Talmud gives various criteria by which the eunuch of the second kind may be recognized, and refers to various disabilities due to the state, especially as regards ḤaliṢah.

A seris adam is not allowed to enter into the assembly of the Lord (Yeb. 70a), as it is written (Deut. xxiii. 2 [A.V. 1]): "He who is wounded in the stones . . . shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord"; that is to say, shall not marry an Israelitish wife. Removal of or defect in either or both of the testicles disqualifies for admission to the assembly of the Lord.

A eunuch of either kind is not to be judged as a rebellious son (see Deut. xxi. 18) because he is not considered as a man (Yeb. 80b). As every Israelite is commanded to perpetuate his race, it is a sin liable to severe punishment to cause one to become a eunuch (Shab. 111a). Still there is a difference whether one castrates another with his own hands or causes him to be castrated. In the first case the punishment is "malkot," that is, thirty-nine stripes; in the second an indefinite number of stripes may be inflicted.

Finally, one whose only son is a eunuch has not accomplished the commandment to perpetuate the race.

So, Philip is sent down a wilderness rd. There appears to be a divine necessity for this encounter. We have an Angel and the Spirit all involved in the conversation.

The cited prophecy from Isaiah is from chapter 53. It is a perfect text to lead to a discussion of Jesus.

At the end we do not know what happens to the Ethiopian. But Philip is deposited in Azotus. Where he continues to go about from place to place.

Sign and wonder – again reminiscent of Elija in 1 Kings 18:12 and Ezekiel in Ezek 11: 24

Philip is snatched up , and moved to where “God wants him.