

73. How did Moses fit into the discussion?

74. Stephen discussed the tabernacle and God's relationship to it. Why?

75. Would the description in Romans 10:21 be applicable to the Jewish leaders, as Stephen saw them?

Outside the City Wall, 7: 58-60

58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

V. 58 - **young man** - The term was commonly applied to young men between the approximate ages of 24-40. The witnesses would probably be those who falsely testified against Stephen, and were to take the lead in such action, Leviticus 24:14; Deut. 17:7.

V. 59 - Here is the prayer directed at Jesus as Lord, though this is not a normal thing that is taught in the N.T. Of course, being stoned to death is not normal either. We are expected to address

our prayers to God, and recognize that Jesus is the mediator between us and God, especially in respect to our sins.

V. 60 - At least Stephen died with the right attitude of forgiveness, as should every Christian, Rom. 12:19-21. Stephen certainly followed in Jesus' footsteps at his death, both in his prayer for himself and request in behalf of others.

fell asleep - The term is equal to death as in John 11:11-14; I Cor. 11:30; 15:18; but is also used in the sense we use it, as asleep at night, etc. Jesus was asleep, Matt. 8:24; Peter also, Acts 12:6.

QUESTIONS

76. Was Stephen's appraisal of his auditors verified?

77. Where was Jesus in Stephen's vision of heaven? Do other scriptures verify the same fact about Jesus?

LESSON NINE

(8:1-40)

The Church in Judea and Samaria, 8:1 - 12: 25

The Dispersion, 8:1-4

8 *And Saul was consenting to his death.*

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul laid waste the church, and entering house

after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

V. 1 - **Saul was consenting** - The Greek term implies complete approval by Saul. One of the interesting facets of Saul is this: his schooling was under Gamaliel, who was a part of the “liberal” wing of the Pharisees, Hillel being its most illustrious rabbi. Yet such liberalism could not tolerate any disagreement over the fundamental tenets of their religion.

scattered - The term is seen in 11:19; also in John 7:35; James 1:1; I Peter 1:1. They were scattered like seed from a sower.

except the apostles - Luke may mean that the apostles did not leave, even though persecuted.

V. 2 - **great lamentation** - Mourning (beating the breast and weeping) was customary among Jewish people, but this may have taken on different meaning since devout men were involved in it. Simeon (Luke 2) and Ananias (Acts 22) and men in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) were described by the term “devout.”

V. 3 - **laid waste** - The Greek term was used to describe what armies did to the countries that they invaded, or what an angry king might do, such as having others scourged, etc., or what disease might do to someone having it. Christians were forced into prison by Saul. The persecution went on and on, evidently.

V. 4 - Saints were scattered as seed was scattered by someone broadcasting it; and they evangelized as they went, spreading the good news everywhere.

78. Saul was so sure that what he was doing was correct, and that he was obedient to God. Do you think that others might be like him?

79. Do you think the apostles failed to perceive that Jesus meant them in Acts 1:8?

80. Do you think that only men preached (though both men and women were scattered abroad)?

The Work of Philip, 8:5-13

5 Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. 7 For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city. 9 But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. 10 They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is that power of God which is called Great.” 11 And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

V. 5 - Philip, one of the seven in Acts 6, was apparently forced to move also, and went to Samaria, where he still was abiding years later, Acts 21. He too kept proclaiming the message of Christ. Part of his success is recorded for us.

QUESTIONS

V. 6 - The Samaritans continued to hear and heed what Philip was proclaiming to them, as is evidenced by the belief of many, v. 12, and the healing of some, v. 7. Jesus had preached previously at Sychar (John 4), and those who responded said at that time that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

V. 7 - The Gospel writers show that demon-possession was not necessarily equal to disease, though sometimes those demonized were also afflicted with disease. What was certainly recognized was the fact of demons, that people were possessed by them, and that demons could be cast out by powers stronger than they were (Matt. 12 is an example). Philip evidently continued in the activity begun by Jesus and the twelve.

V. 8 - **city** - The text indicates that Philip was in the capital city of Samaria, called Samaria. The city was first established by Omri in the 8th century B.C., and named Samaria. It was built on a hill, located on the main route from points north to Jerusalem, some 42 miles south of it. The place is still the worship center for the Samaritan Jews of today.

V. 9 - Simon was a common name, but he seemed uncommon to many, because of his activities. He is described as one who used magic with which he amazed people. The term from which “magic” comes means to practice sorcery or magic, etc. A term related to it is in Matthew 2, describing the wise men.

V. 10 - Simon was like Elymas in Acts 13. From the account in Acts 19, many were either practitioners or followers of such people as these two men. Simon had a national following according to Luke. His conversion doubtless was a major victory for the Gospel message.

V. 11 - That people can be deceived is patently obvious from history and experience. What is not plain is that which Simon did for the Samaritans, other than the “miracles” he did. Perhaps he had no message - just miracles.

V. 12 - Philip’s preaching was about the kingdom of God (the church) in its relationship to Jesus as its king and Savior. This being believed by those listening, immersion was forthcoming as a natural response to their faith. Simon recognized that he could not do what Philip was doing, and so accepted the Gospel message, being immersed in obedience to Jesus’ command, Matthew 28:19.

Simon believed - The Greek text uses the same term to describe his conversion as it does for all others. There is no reason to disbelieve Luke’s statement on the matter. Some have decided that because his life was not letter-perfect after conversion that he did not believe, contrary to Luke’s statement. If conversion to Christ means that one never sins again, then Simon was not converted. If, however, one can sin even though a Christian, then Simon was like everybody else in this way. He had some growing up to do after his conversion.

he was amazed - The shoe was on the other foot!

QUESTIONS

81. Who had preached in the area of Samaria before Philip?
82. Many were healed by Philip. Did they automatically become believers when they were healed?
83. To what did the Samaritans give heed, v. 11?
84. Did Simon become a Christian?

The Work of Peter and John, 8:14-25

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; 16 for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name

of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." 24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." 25 Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

V. 14 - This verse is interesting in the connection with the relative greatness of the apostles. It has been pointed out that Peter and John were sent by the apostles, indicating that he was not first among equals as some hold. The point is well made.

V. 15 - This verse raises the issue of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the apostles, and to believers and in several ways. Some argue that the Holy Spirit as an indwelling factor was given by several different ways, as here, Acts 2, 19, etc. Others argue that differing manifestations of the Holy Spirit were (are) given, with every believer receiving the indwelling presence, while anything special comes by God's intervention and only through the apostles' hands, etc. The issue is settled according to the understanding of various passages, some choosing one text, others another. Doubtless, people will always differ.

V. 16 - This verse seems to assert that the Samaritans had duplicated the Jews actions in Acts 2, and had accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, being then immersed, and receiving the forgiveness of

sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in identical fashion. If so, then Peter and John were sent to pray for a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon them, even as Philip had manifested. This position is considered most likely.

V. 17 - One of the issues here is this: if the apostles could "give" special things to others by the power resident in themselves, why the prayers in v. 15? Their ability to impart such gifts may have been only possible as God permitted. Additionally, if that which the apostles were giving was all that the believers would receive (having received nothing earlier), then it is obvious that one can be Christian apart from any relationship to the Holy Spirit. Since this seems untrue, we hold as stated above in v. 16.

As nearly as we know from the N.T., the apostles were the only ones who could pass on special gifts through their imposition of hands. Such texts as this one seem to confirm that idea.

V. 19 - Simon obviously did not adequately comprehend the nature of the gift itself, or of the apostles to Christianity, or of Christianity itself. Perhaps we, if we knew him better, would have thought that his requests were rather natural for him, even if Christian. As stated above on v. 16,17, the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, such as the apostles had, is what Simon saw and wanted for himself.

V. 20 - Peter's response was rather clear and immediate. However, v. 22 is just as clear. There was time and opportunity to change from such thinking (i.e., repentance could be forthcoming) and he should do it.

V. 21 - The issue here: 1) Could Simon have actually had "part and lot" in the matter about which he inquired? or 2) If his heart (mind) was right with God, would it have precluded any such offer? Stated another way; "Simon, if you understood the nature of Christianity and the unique position of the apostles to it, you would not be

asking for what you are” was the gist of Peter’s statement.

V. 22 - The expression of Peter, in proper order, is this: (Simon) “If the thought of your heart is to be forgiven, repent and ask God for forgiveness.” Peter gave the command(s) first, the conditional clause (the “if” clause) last.

If we consider that Simon’s request was non-Christian, we might do well to consider what prayer requests we have made, or what deeds we have done of such nature even though being Christian. Stated differently, some of the things Christians ask for and attempt to do are like those of Simon. He, like every Christian, had some maturing to do. (Cf. James 4:4)

V. 23 - Simon’s state in v. 20 was described as taking him to destruction. Now it is more explicitly revealed as being in bondage and bitterness. Whether Peter meant that he was no longer Christian, or just “un-Christian” in this respect is a moot question.

V. 25- The apostles, having completed the task for which they were sent, started back to Jerusalem (from which many had been driven by persecution), and utilized the opportunities presented to evangelize along the way. They undoubtedly had never imagined that they would have any dealings with Samaritans. Yet it is true that they would do this and yet not suppose that Gentiles were also in God’s plan - so Acts 10 is necessary for them.

QUESTIONS

85. What do you make of the apostles sending Peter and John?

86. Do you take the Acts 2 text as normative for every Christian anytime? If so, how do you understand v. 15-17?

87. Peter described Simon in several ways - did he describe a person who never had been a believer, or a person who had believed and then quit believing, or a person who was a believer but imperfect in understanding?

88. Was Simon in error to ask Peter to pray for him? (Have you ever asked anyone to pray for you?)

The Later Work of Philip, 8:26-40

26 But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert road. 27 And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture he read was this:

“As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth.”

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?” 35 Then Philip

opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. 36 And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the Gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea.

V. 26 - This text presents an interesting facet of God's dealing with Philip - an angel was used to direct Philip, but so was the Holy Spirit. Both are presented as actual personalities, distinct, and with abilities.

The road mentioned is perhaps the one leading to Gaza through Bethlehem and Hebron.

the south - The Greek term normally means "midday" as in Acts 22:6; so also in the LXX, except in Daniel 8:4,9, where the direction south is meant.

This is a desert road - Some think the reference is to the city of Gaza rather than the road leading there. The city of the O.T. had been destroyed in 93 B.C., and rebuilt some 2 1/2 miles south and near the sea. We must remember that "desert" in the Bible included places where no one lived, as well as what we call desert today.

V. 27 - Philip was not allowed to remain in Samaria for long, although he did much good work there. He apparently remained in Caesarea a long time (v. 40), since he is there in Acts 21:8, many years after this time.

Ethiopia was the general area south of Egypt known to us today as the general area of the Sudan. Most of the early history concerned Egypt, from which Ethiopia broke away about 1000 B.C. Sometimes the area was known as Nubia.

Eunuchs were common in the royal courts of the day. They could become proselytes to the Jewish religion. Doubtless in keeping with Luke's purpose, this account served as an illustration of how the Gospel spread to far-off regions of the world. (Candace was probably a title, like king or pharaoh.)

to worship - The fact that a person of such political stature and so far away came to Jerusalem shows the influence of the Jewish religion. It seems probable that some Jewish feast had been the occasion of his visit to the "city of peace."

V. 28 - **chariot** - Few people would be able to afford such a means of locomotion; hence, he was a person of importance. We will see later that Paul would be a bearer of good news to kings and those in high places, Acts 9:15.

was reading - Aloud, which was a common practice in those days. Another point of interest: few would be able to afford a scroll of a Bible book. (As a bit of information, one of the Bible books found in the Dead Sea area dating c. 100 B.C., was a scroll of Isaiah. It is, with but small differences, exactly like the Hebrew text from which we get our O.T.)

V. 29 - "The Spirit" - See other instances of the work of the Spirit in the lives of people, such as 10:19; 13:2; etc. The angel had directed Philip to the area, now the Holy Spirit does the directing.

V. 30 - Philip's question in Greek indicates some doubt as to what, if anything, the treasurer understood about the text he was reading.

V. 31 - The man, by his response to Philip, indicates much doubt concerning his potential comprehension of the text. Hence, he sought Philip to come up and help him.

guides - See Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; John 16:13; then Matthew 23:16, 24; Acts 1:16; Rom. 2:19.

V. 32 - This quotation is from the Greek (LXX) version of the O.T., and differs from the Hebrew, though not in general sense.

The Hebrew reads as follows:

53:7b He was being brought as a lamb to slaughter; silent as a sheep before its shearer, he was not opening his mouth.

53:8a Oppressed he was taken from justice, and who of his generation was considering that he was being cut off from the land of the living?

This section is from a context that views the Messiah from various perspectives. This particular section pictured him somewhat as to be pitied because of the tragic things that were to happen to him.

V. 34 - The question of the treasurer is still pertinent today. It is answered in various ways as meaning Jesus, or Israel, etc.

V. 35 - The identification of this text with Jesus is certainly the emphasis of the N.T., as is apparent in the answer Philip gave. He spoke of Jesus and how a person was to procure the salvation offered through Jesus.

V. 36 - Certainly the man asked the proper question, rather than 1,001 other questions possible (which is often the case). If the Gospel of Jesus is preached correctly, and people believe it, they should ask the same question as the treasurer. They should then be immersed, even as he was, if the Bible plan is followed.

These added remarks need to be made. Insisting that baptism is by immersion only is simply following the original meaning of the Greek term which still means the same thing today. Any deviation is not biblical, nor is it necessary. A second point: insisting that immersion is the consummating act that brings one into Christ does not denigrate initial faith or initial repentance, nor does it teach that one believes in water regeneration. The people who believe in water regeneration are people like the Roman Catholics, who baptize (sprinkle) a baby at birth to make sure,

if the baby dies at that time, that said baby will go to heaven rather than elsewhere. Most people who throw up the term “water regeneration” do so through ignorance of the matter, or because they have labeled immersion as a work. The Scripture does not do so. If anything could be labeled “work” it would be faith, since Jesus so spoke in John 6:28-29. Now, this writer does not think that Jesus meant that faith is a work (Rom. 4:16 affirms it is not) in the sense that term is commonly used (i.e., as something done to merit salvation), but it is simply and only what is to be done to receive the salvation God gave by grace, which salvation (grace) no one merits. In the same way, to argue that changing one’s mind (repentance) and immersion are necessary to appropriate God’s free gift of Christ is not arguing any more for these than it is for faith. All three are God’s ordained responses to obtain what he gives in Christ, freely, to all. This writer believes that it is impossible to be saved by anything one does, in the sense that we, by “doing” (i.e. working) can earn/deserve it. We simply do what God requires to receive what he freely gives. See Rom. 4:1-5 where Paul expresses our “belief” in this matter. If God had not provided redemption through Christ, anything or all things we could do would not avail. We believe that our willingness to accept Jesus as the Messiah, to change our minds (= repent) and to be immersed into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27) are the human responses through which God grants salvation in Christ. So then we believe we are saved only and solely through God’s grace, apart from anything we do. In this sense, salvation is of God and not of man. Our willed response to God’s grace by His stipulated acts of obedience (faith, repentance, immersion) is simply receiving Christ for our sole and whole salvation. Anything else other than this position makes Christianity a law system by which we merit (earn) our salvation. The problem with any law system is this: we cannot keep it, and thus become sinners. The wages we get (= earn) is death, Rom. 6:23. We choose rather to trust in Christ through the faith system, by which we can stand justified, uncondemned, and at peace with God, Rom. 5:1; 8:1.

V. 37 - This verse is one of the few in Acts with textual problems. There is little internal evidence in the book itself for it - though many early commentators show that they knew about the problem. There is little or no reason why it would be left out by anyone copying the book - so it is doubtful if we should quote it as Scripture. However, the point of doctrine is the same: the one considering immersion must first have faith in Jesus, or the act of immersion is foolish. We judge that someone wrote in the margin of some copy of Acts what the early practice of the church was, and someone else incorporated the marginal reading in the text itself.

V. 38 - This verse teaches rather clearly the “mode” of baptism - which, of course, no one in N.T. times had difficulty with. Only those of later years have problems with immersion; some insisting, rather ludicrously, that one can immerse by sprinkling or pouring.

V. 39 - Just how Philip was “caught up” is not said - only that the two men were separated at that point in time, one beginning a new life, the other laboring in another place.

V. 40 - Azotus was known in the O.T. as Ashdod, one of the five Philistine cities. It was about 20 miles north of Gaza, halfway between Gaza and Joppa, along the seacoast. Caesarea was about 30 miles north of Joppa, and an important city, since it served as the main port of entry of Judea, as well as being the city where the Roman officials normally stayed while in Judea.

QUESTIONS

89. Have you considered how many different ways the Holy Spirit is presented as a personality?
90. Was the Jewish religion widespread?
91. Do those of us who possess the books of the new covenant have an advantage in interpretation of the books of the old covenant? Why?

92. Why would the treasurer ask about immersion and not about faith or repentance?

93. Do the N.T. authors ever argue that baptism is immersion or that Christians ought to be immersed?

94. After the treasurer was immersed and had started on his way, of what church do you think he was a member?

LESSON TEN (9:1-31)

The Conversion and Early Labors of Saul, 9:1-30 At Jerusalem, 9:1,2

9 *But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

V. 1 - As Acts 26:11 shows, Saul was exceeding mad against the Christians. It is worth contemplating this man, zealous for the things of God, who was quite ungodly in his attitude, violating command #6 (one of the “top ten!”) about murder. It needs to be impressed upon our own consciousness that we may often do things ungodly (i.e., un-Christian) because of our ignorance of what God really wants of us.

but Saul - resuming the story from Acts 8:3.