

Acts

Lesson #6

Moving Out from Jerusalem
(8: 4 – 40)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

Review

With the Church speeding ahead, increasing friction from within and unexpected bumps on the road threatened to spin the Church off track and destroy it. We read that “*certain members of the so-called Synagogue of the Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen . . . instigating some men to say, ‘We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God’*” (6: 9-12). The Sanhedrin promptly arrested Stephen, placing him on trial. His “defense” enraged the religious leaders: “*They cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together. They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him*” (7: 57-58). The Jewish leadership’s escalating opposition turned lethal.

When it did, we met the brilliant and ambitious Saul of Tarsus, the young man who leads the persecution with fanatical efficiency and white-hot zeal.

Preview

With the fierce persecution led by Saul, the believers in Jerusalem “*were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria*” (8:1). All those who had been in Jerusalem for Pentecost and remained there after the birth of the Church, fled home, taking the gospel message with them.

As the persecution rages on, Lesson #6 turns our attention to another of the original seven deacons, Philip, who leaves Jerusalem and heads north to Samaria. There he confronts Simon the “magician” who offers to pay Philip for the ability to drive out unclean spirits and to heal people, as he sees Philip do.

Moving on from Samaria, Philip turns south toward Gaza, where he meets an Ethiopian Eunuch, who will take the gospel deep into Africa.

Philip continues his missionary activity, but we won’t meet him again until Acts 21: 8-9, when we learn that he is living in Caesarea, is happily married and has four virgin daughters who are “gifted with prophecy” (21: 8-9)!



With the stoning of St. Stephen, a vicious persecution erupts under the leadership of Saul of Tarsus, who is striving mightily to destroy the Church, “*entering house after house and dragging out men and women . . . [and handing] them over for imprisonment*” (8: 3).

All those who had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem—as well as many of Jerusalem’s residents who had become believers—flee the city, as the persecution rages.



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

Acts 11: 18 tells us:

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that arose because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cypress, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but Jews."



Later, the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, a Syriac work written toward the end of the 1st century (around the time of *Revelation*), parallels Acts and pushes it outward, saying:

"I will scatter this people [the Jews of Judaea after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70] that they may do the Gentiles good."

(2 Baruch 1: 4)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“Now those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Thus Philip went down to [the] city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it **and saw the signs he was doing**. For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed and crippled people were cured. There was great joy in that city.”

(8: 4-8)



- Philip took the road north, down (in elevation) from Jerusalem to “[the] city of Samaria.”

Some manuscripts have the definite article τὴν (“the,”) while others’ don’t. If “the” is correct, then Philip went to the former city of Samaria, the capital of the old northern kingdom of Israel, renamed in New Testament times, Sebaste—modern-day Nablus.

- There he preached [κηρύσσω] and the crowds listened, as “signs” validated his preaching: unclean spirits came out of people, and many paralyzed and crippled people were healed.

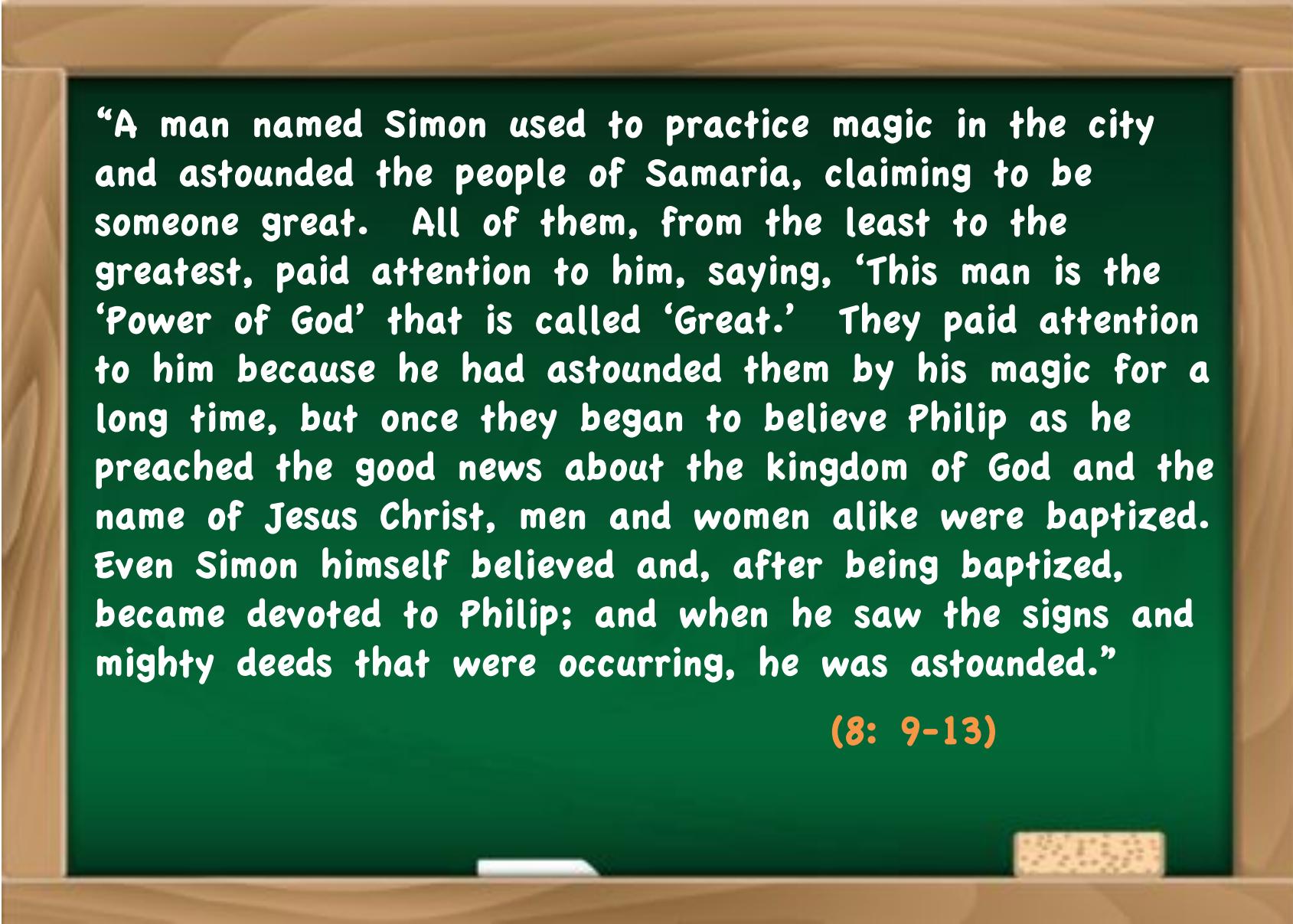
As we noted previously, when the Apostles consecrated the 7 deacons, they delegated their apostolic authority to them, including the power to heal and to work “wonders.”

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem



“A man named Simon used to practice magic in the city and astounded the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, paid attention to him, saying, ‘This man is the ‘Power of God’ that is called ‘Great.’ They paid attention to him because he had astounded them by his magic for a long time, but once they began to believe Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike were baptized. Even Simon himself believed and, after being baptized, became devoted to Philip; and when he saw the signs and mighty deeds that were occurring, he was astounded.”

(8: 9-13)



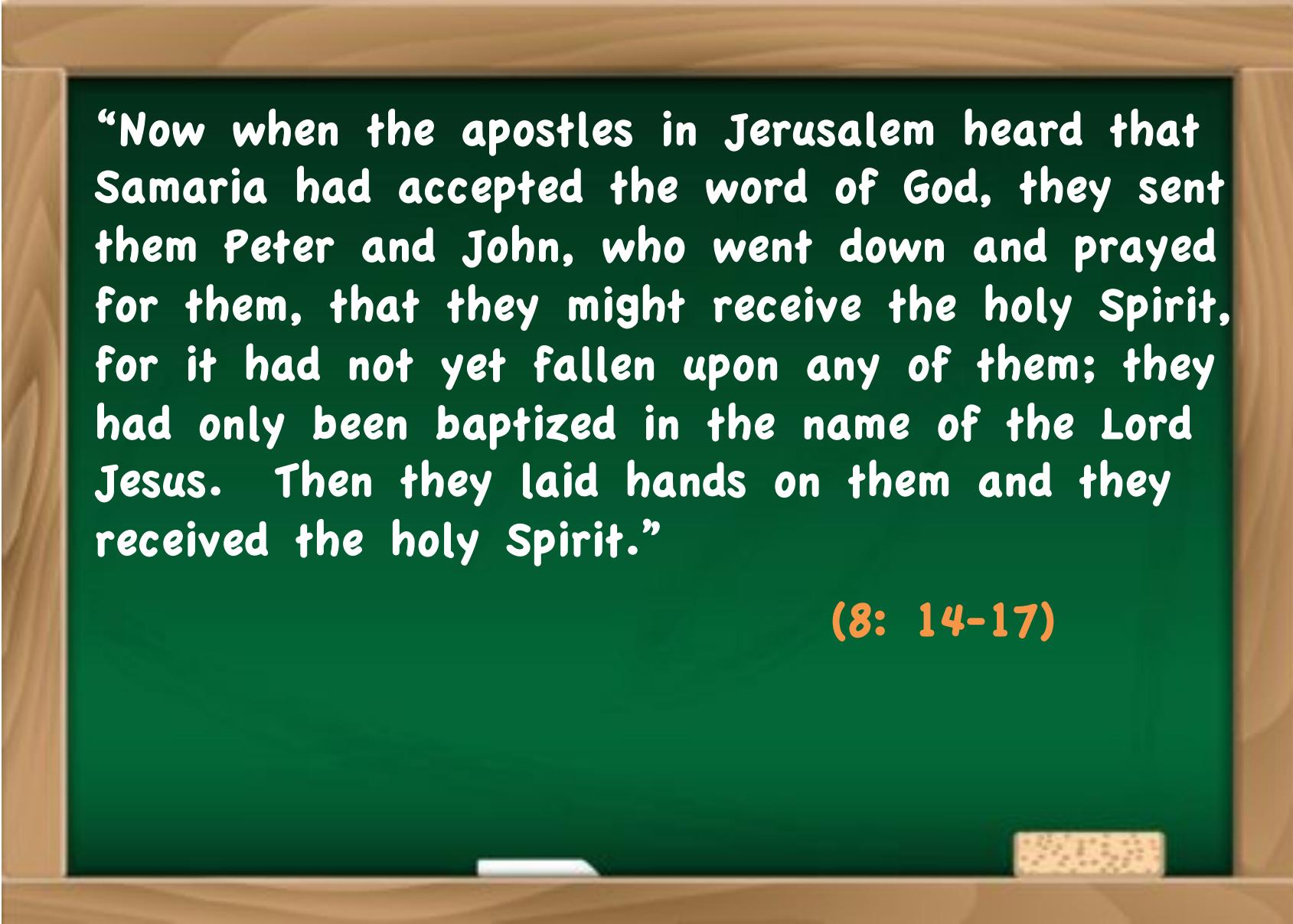
Logos BIBLE STUDY.com



- Here we meet Simon the “magician” or “sorcerer.” The Greek noun is μάγος (*magos*), referring to “magic” or “magician.”

Educated people in the Greco-Roman world, viewed magic as the art of the charlatan, only believed by gullible, ignorant people. Robert Parker, in his *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 122), writes: “*Magic differs from religion as weeds differ from flowers, merely by negative social evaluation.*” In the ancient world, magic could range from silly superstition to truly evil trickery.

- Luke includes the story of Philip and Simon, it seems, to make exactly that point. The resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the “wonders and signs” performed through the Apostles differ profoundly from the ancients’ view of “magic.”



“Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit.”

(8: 14-17)



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



That's right! The Samaritans were those people from the 10 northern tribes of Israel who went to war against the southern tribes of Judah in 930 B.C., after Solomon's death. After the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. the Assyrians took the northern population captive. When they returned under Cyrus, king of Persia in 539 B.C.—nearly 200 years later—they brought with them an adulterated form of Judaism that those in the southern kingdom viewed as totally corrupt. Remember Jesus saying to the Samaritan woman at the well:

"You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews."

(John 4: 22)

Even these people accepted the Gospel?

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Notice, too, that here and in Acts 10: 44-48 and 19: 1-6 Luke distinguishes between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Here, the Holy Spirit is conferred solely by the Apostles; whereas, in Acts (1: 5 and 11: 16) baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are more closely related.

“When Simon saw that the Spirit was conferred by the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, ‘Give me this power too, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your money perish with you, because you thought that you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no share or lot in this matter, for your heart is not upright before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your intention may be forgiven. for I see that you are filled with bitter gall and are in the bonds of iniquity.’ Simon said in reply, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’ So when they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem and preached the good news to many Samaritan villages.”

(8: 18-25)



Avanzino Nucci. *St. Peter's Conflict with Simon the Magus* (oil on canvas), 1620.



This story of Simon the “magician” who wants to pay St. Peter for the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the origin of the term “simony,” that is, the selling of Church positions and influence, a practice that later became endemic throughout the Church, from the local parish priest up to the Popes.

In the *Divine Comedy (Inferno, Canto 19)*, Dante places those church officials who practiced simony in the 8th circle of Hell, upside down, legs kicking, in pockets filled with human excrement and filth: Pope Nicholas III (Pope, 1277-1280) is one of them, and he mistakes Dante’s voice for that of Pope Boniface VIII (Pope, 1294-1303), who will be arriving shortly!



Botticelli. *Dante Alighieri* (tempera on canvas),
1495. Private Collection, Geneva.

Simon Magus! O scum that followed him!
Those things of God that rightly should be wed
to holiness, you, rapacious creatures,
for the price of gold and silver, prostitute.
Now, in your honor, I must sound my trumpet
for here in the third pouch is where you dwell.
We had already climbed to see this tomb,
and were standing high above it on the bridge,
exactly at the mid-point of the ditch . . .
From the mouth of every hole were sticking out
a single sinner's feet, and then the legs
up to the calf—the rest was stuffed inside.
The soles of every sinner's feet were flaming;
their naked legs were twitching frenziedly—
they would have broken any chain or rope.

Divine Comedy, “Inferno,”
Canto 19: 1-9; 22-27.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

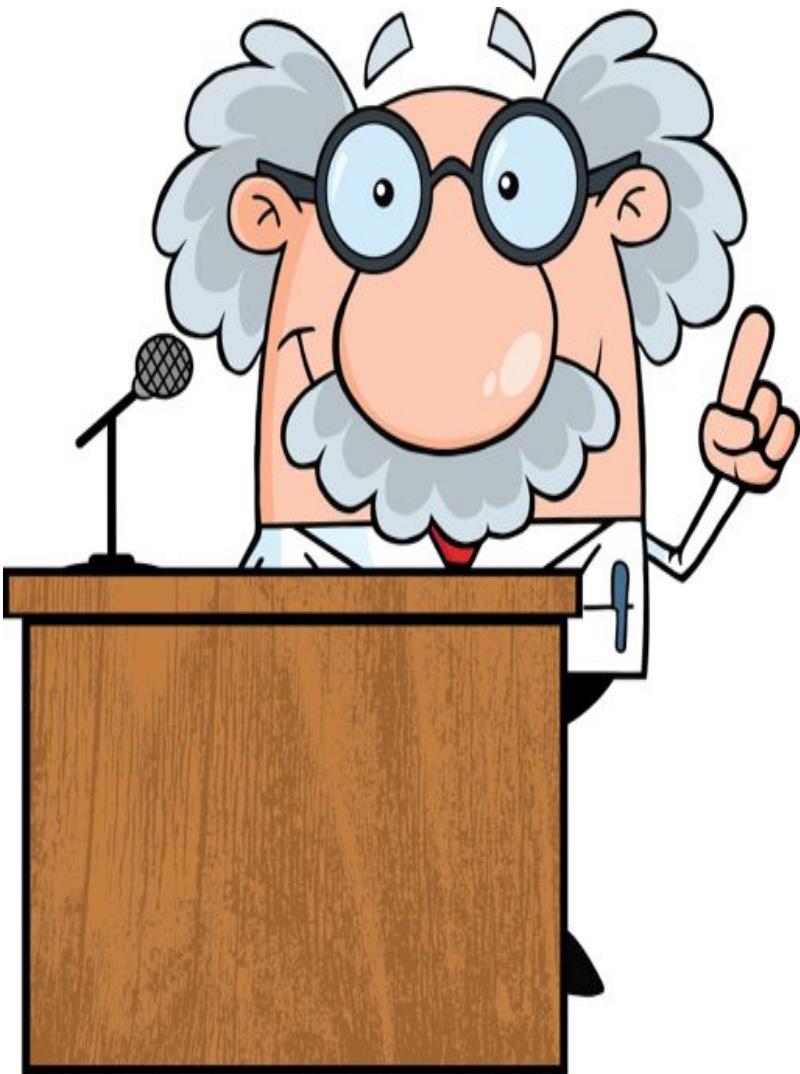


Dante's *Inferno* (manuscript illustration, Canto 19), c. 1472.
Vatican Library, Ms Urb. Lat. 365, fol. 95v.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

21



Philip then returns to Jerusalem, after preaching in many Samaritan villages. Once he returns he is told to:

"Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route."

(8: 26)

On this road Philip meets the Ethiopian Eunuch, like the Samaritans, very much an “outsider.”

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch has a strong supernatural patina, with an angel of the Lord telling Philip to go, the Holy Spirit instructing Philip to approach the eunuch’s chariot and Philip’s strange disappearance at the end of the story.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

23

“Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, ‘Get up and head south on the road that goes to Gaza, the desert route.’ So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candice, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go and join up with that chariot.’ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone instructs me?’ So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.”

(8: 26-31)



Menologion of Basil II (illuminated manuscript, Ms. Vat. Gr. 1613) c. 1000.
Vatican Library, Vatican City.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

25



This is a photographic copy of the Isaiah Scroll, housed in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The scroll was copied in the 2nd century B.C. and was found near the Dead Sea in Qumran Cave 1. It measures 730 cm (about 24 feet) long and 28 cm (about 11 inches) wide. It consists of 17 sheets of parchment, and it contains 54 columns of text. If the Ethiopian eunuch purchased a copy of Isaiah while in Jerusalem, it would have looked much like this.



- Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin emphasized that the presence of God was not limited to Jerusalem and the Temple; indeed, it was not limited simply to the Jews. As the Gospel will spread outward from Jerusalem, so it will spread outward from Judaism, ultimately reaching and penetrating the entire Gentile world.

- In this episode, the Ethiopian eunuch is outside of the Jewish mainstream:

- 1) he is a black African;
- 2) he is likely a Jew

Judaism made its way into Africa/Arabia by way of Solomon and the queen of Sheba, modern-day Yemen (1 Kings 10: 1-13);

- 3) if he was a Jew, he was excluded from full participation in the Temple rituals, given his physical deformity.



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

28

“This was the scripture passage he was reading:

‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent.
so he opened not his mouth.

In [his] humiliation justice was denied him.
Who will tell of his posterity?
For his life is taken from the earth.’

Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, ‘I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him.”

(8: 32-35)



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?’ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing. Philip came to Azotus and went about proclaiming the good news to all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

(8: 36-40)



**Rembrandt. *The Baptism of the Eunuch* (oil on oak panel), 1626.
St. Catherine's Convent Museum, Utrecht.**

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

Moving Out from Jerusalem

32



When we read that “*the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away*” (8: 39), it seems rather supernatural. The Greek verb is ἀπτάζω, meaning to suddenly “catch up” or “snatch away,” with a sense of speed and force.

It is the same word used by St. Paul when he says: “*I know someone who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven*” (2 Corinthians 12: 2). It is also the word used of those still alive when the Lord returns, who will be “**caught up** . . . to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4: 17), as well as the child in the “Woman and the Dragon” scene in Revelation who “*was caught up to God and his throne*” (Revelation 12: 5).

The word’s sense of mystery is very strong.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



Philip continues his work of proclaiming the Gospel, traveling to Azotus (or Ashdod, along the coast, about 20 miles north of Gaza), and then he moves on to Caesarea, where apparently he settles down.

Nearly 20 years later, when St. Paul completes his 3rd missionary journey, A.D. 54-57, he makes his way to Jerusalem. Traveling primarily by ship, Luke tells us:

"We continued the voyage and came from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed a day with them. On the next day we resumed the trip and came to Caesarea, where we went to the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. He had four daughters gifted with prophecy."

(Acts 21: 7-8)

Questions for discussion and thought

- 1. How is it that Philip has the ability to expel demons and heal people ?**
- 2. How is it that Simon the “magician” has the ability to perform “wonders and signs”?**
- 3. Why did Simon want the gift of the Holy Spirit? Do you think Simon’s conversion was genuine?**
- 4. Why do you think Luke adds a patina of the supernatural to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch?**
- 5. Why do you think Luke emphasizes the story of the Ethiopian eunuch?**

Copyright © 2015 by William C. Creasy

All rights reserved. No part of this course—audio, video, photography, maps, timelines or other media—may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval devices without permission in writing or a licensing agreement from the copyright holder.

