

## ***THE WITNESS IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA – ACTS 8-12***

**Rev. D.P. Cassidy**

**Redeemer Presbyterian Church**

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- The basic outline of the Book from 1:8
    - Witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1-8:3)
    - Witness in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:4 -12)
    - Witness to the remotest parts of the world (Acts 13-28)
  - It is the journey from Jerusalem to Rome, from the upper room to Caesar's household
  - The "Message" – Christ, his Kingdom, the Resurrection, and Forgiveness of Sins (note as well Acts 8:12)
  - The first section introduces us to the primary "players" in this unfolding drama – Peter, John, Barnabas, Stephen, Philip, and Saul/Paul. In fact, the book can be seen as the witness of Peter (1-12) and the witness of Paul (13-28).
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### I. Breaking into the Wider World – Part One, from Jerusalem to the Samaritans

#### A. Persecution as Vehicle for the Gospel's Spread

1. Outbreak of "great persecution": "scattered" (like seed) around Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-5; 11:19-2)
2. The scattering did not result in hiding but in bold proclamation accompanied by signs (note Hebrews 2:1-4).

#### B. The Ministry of Philip the Evangelist

The potential of the child is always greater than the womb in which the child is conceived.

1. Philip among the Samaritans
  - The ancient division of the Jews and Samaritans (note John 4)
2. "Conversion" of Simon (There are "false conversions": this is especially noted when the person views Christ as a means of personal gain (Jude 1-16; Matthew 7:15-23)
  - "Simony" – the sale/purchase of church offices
3. "Delay" in the reception of the Holy Spirit among the Samaritans – re-unification with Jerusalem
  - a. Not a separate "movement", but one foundation and one people
  - b. Jewish Apostles as well had to grasp the same truth
  - c. Thus they continue to minister among the Samaritans (Acts 8:25)

### II. Lessons on the Desert Road: The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-35)

#### A. Who the Ethiopian was

1. "Court Official" – very wealthy and powerful
2. God-fearer – A Gentile who believed in Yahweh, but was not Jewish
3. Ethiopia – "ends of the earth;" beginning of Luke's account of the Gospel reaching the whole world (the *oikonomia* – see also Luke 2:1; Colossians 1:23)

#### B. "Eunuch Theology" (Deuteronomy 23:1; Isaiah 56:3-5)

- That's why he was reading from that particular scroll – maybe there is a hope for me to be fully part of the people of God.
- Just then, Philip is approaching him.

#### C. Philip's "Approach"

1. Bold - He "ran up" to the chariot (Acts 8:30)
2. He asked questions rather than making assertions (Acts 8:31)
3. He "evangelized" him (Acts 8:35)
4. Believe and baptized – correct response to the Gospel

#### D. Philip in Azotus – a city of the Philistines, and then on the Caesarea

#### E. "Breaking into the Larger World"

Philip begins in Jerusalem in an exclusively Jewish-Christian community, a people who in some cases evidently interpreted the "Great Commission" as a mission to diaspora Jews! He "breaks out" serving among the Samaritans, to an Ethiopian, and then among the descendents of the Philistines.

He has gone “into the river” (Ezekiel 47). We find him finally in Caesarea, raising his four “prophetess” daughters (Acts 21:7ff).

F. This sets the table for what will become the dominant theological controversy of the book – how does the Church embrace the influx of the Gentiles, how do the Scriptures speak of this movement, and what does it mean?

G. Other Matters:

1. Perspicuity (Acts 8:30-31)

- This is the doctrine that teaches the clarity of the Gospel. It is an aspect of *sola scriptura*, often misunderstood by evangelicals and Protestants, with the misunderstanding held forth by Roman Catholic apologists as the actual teaching and summarily demolished.
- What many teach today is not *sola scriptura*, but what Keith Mathison has called “*Nuda Scriptura*.”
- We do not teach that all parts of the Bible are equally clear, but rather that the Gospel is clear, and that all of Scripture can be understood properly when studied correctly and that this involves teachers as well.
- We do not therefore teach that evangelists or pastors or teachers are unnecessary. On the contrary. What we reject is the idea that the Magesterium of the Church is above Scripture and the only proper interpreter of Scripture.

2. Necessity of Baptism

Again, we tend to downplay baptism in many evangelical circles, thus resulting in multiple baptisms. It is part of the right response to the Gospel by individuals and households, and marks the transition to the community of God’s people. Imagine someone refusing baptism, or what baptism means to this day in, say, the Islamic or Hindu world.