



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH" THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 8

Acts chapters 1-7 cover the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem. Chapter 8 marks the beginning of the church being scattered outside of the city into Judea and Samaria. The death of Stephen caused an outbreak of persecution to the Church, forcing them out into the regions that would fulfill the Great Commission. Remember, in Acts 1:8 Jesus told them to "be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The persecution caused the church to scatter like a bullet.

In our lesson this week, we again meet up with Saul, who was found in Acts 7, watching Stephen being stoned. We also read about Philip, one of the first deacons that were named in Acts 6. Simon the sorcerer comes onto the scene, along with the Ethiopian eunuch, who was traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza. It's gonna be a great week! Pray for ears to hear all that God has for you!

First Day

1. Read Acts 8:1-40. List any observations or facts you find about each man. What can we tell about their character?
 - a. Saul
 - b. Philip
 - c. Simon
 - d. Ethiopian eunuch
2. Read Acts 8:1-4. Describe the situation in Jerusalem.

3. What was the result of the persecution? (Acts 8:4)

4. Did the apostles leave Jerusalem? (Acts 8:1) Why not?

Acts 8:1 tells us that Saul was "**consenting**" to the death of Stephen. This word comes from the Greek word "suneudokeo" and means to think well of, to approve of, or to vote for. Many scholars believe that this phrase indicates that Saul was a voting member of the Sanhedrin. If this was true, he would have been married, for marriage was a prerequisite for occupying a seat on the council. His wife is never mentioned in Scripture. Most think that she either died or left him after his conversion.

5. What else do we know about Saul's background? Read the following verses and write any information you find regarding Saul.

- a. Acts 22:3-4
- b. Acts 22:25-28
- c. Acts 23:6
- d. Acts 23:9-11, 16
- e. Galatians 1:14
- f. Philippians 3:5-6, Acts 26:4-5

6. What was Saul doing to the church? (Acts 8:3, Acts 22:4, Acts 26:9-11, Philippians 3:6)

The word "**havoc**" in Acts 8:3 speaks of brutal cruelty. This word literally refers to a wild boar, ravaging a vineyard, or savaging a body.

We know that Saul never forgot the pain he caused the church in Jerusalem. In his letter to Timothy, Paul called himself a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man (1 Timothy 1:13). Romans 15:26 says that Paul often took up collections when he traveled for the "poor saints in Jerusalem." Did he feel responsible for some of their poverty? Did he feel responsible for making many of them widows and orphans?

7. Read 1 Timothy 1:13. Why does Paul say that he obtained mercy?

We know that Saul (later called Paul) was separated from his mother's womb (Galatians 1:15), to be a preacher, apostle, and a teacher to the Gentiles (2 Timothy 1:11). We will read about the conversion of Saul next week. How thrilling it is to see a once violent, savaging man turn into a surrendered, humble servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. Who buried Stephen? (Acts 8:2)

The phrase "**devout men**" in verse 2 means "God fearers." These men could have been either believers or Hebrews. The text doesn't tell us any more about them, but we know that they had no need to lament, because Stephen was in a much better place (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Philippians 1:23).

This ends our lesson for today. John Phillips said, "All Satan accomplished by this violence was to scatter the glowing embers of the church's fire far and wide, so that wherever they settled, new fires might spring up. This persecution by Satan simply accomplished the Holy Spirit's purpose. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him."

Let's Rejoice that God is in control -- of everything!

Memory Verse of the Week: "And there was great joy in the city." Acts 8:8.

Second Day

Review your memory verse. Is there great joy in your heart?

Today we will see how God used a man named Philip to win a spiritual victory for the city of Samaria.

1. Read Acts 8:1-8. Then read verses 5-8 again. What is the main point of this section?

Philip was one of the first deacons chosen in Acts 6. God had given him the task of waiting on tables, and Philip was faithful to that call. God honored that faithfulness and moved him on to bigger things! Philip was a very diligent, obedient servant of the Lord.

The Lord sent Philip to preach in the city of Samaria, which is between Judaea and Galilee. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews, and their quarrels were centuries old. Because of this, I would venture to say that Samaria would not have been a popular mission field.

2 Kings 17 tells the story of when the Assyrians invaded Israel in 721 B.C. The ten northern tribes were carried off into captivity before the Assyrians claimed the north central part of Israel. Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom. The inhabitants of the land had been carried off to exile, and the land was settled with people from other regions of the Assyrian empire. These "heathens" began to intermarry with the impoverished Jews who were left behind. This resulted in a race of "half-breeds"; half Jew and half Gentile.

In the 5th century B.C., the Jews were allowed to return and rebuild their shattered city under Ezra and Nehemiah. When they returned, the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild their city, but their help was refused because they were no longer "pure" Jews. This resulted in a bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

The Samaritans claimed to belong to the true stock of Israel, to worship Yahweh, observe the Sabbath, and to practice circumcision. They had built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which they regarded as sacred as the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. This didn't go over too well with the Jews! The Jews regarded the Samaritans as heretics and dogs and had no dealings with them (John 4:9). The Romans treated Samaria as an independent area.

No self-respecting Jew would go to Samaria. But Jesus did. In John chapter 4, Jesus spent time planting some seeds and tilling the ground! Philip followed in the footsteps of his Savior, and he was walking on fertile ground, watered by the Master Himself! Remember that Philip was a Hellenist Jew. Perhaps he didn't have as much prejudice as some.

2. Read John 4:1-42. To whom did Jesus preach? What was the result? How long did He stay there? What was the disciples' reaction?
3. How can John 4:36-38 apply to Philip?
4. In Acts 8:5, what was Philip preaching?

The word "**preaching**" in Acts 8:4 is from the word "euangelizo" which usually refers to the Good News proclaimed in the Gospel. The word "preached" in Acts 8:5 is the word "kerusso" which means to proclaim, or to be a herald.

Philip didn't preach about Judaism, or religion, or programs. He didn't tell them they needed to come and visit the church in Jerusalem. He preached Jesus!

5. What's your central focus when you share the Gospel with someone? Do you talk about your church? The programs it can offer? The benefits? Do you just try to get them into church so someone else can share with them? **Or do you simply preach Jesus?**
6. What else did Philip do? (Acts 8:5-7)
7. What was the result? (Acts 8:8)

Where Christ is, there is joy. Jesus brings joy to a diseased and dying world. He wants to bring joy to you.

8. Read the following verses about joy and answer the questions below:
 - a. Galatians 5:22. Is joy a work of our flesh? What is a "fruit of the Spirit?"
 - b. John 15:10-11. What does Jesus have to say about joy? Whose joy are we supposed to have?
 - c. Romans 15:13. Where do we get joy? What else can we have?
 - d. Habakkuk 3:17-18. What does Habakkuk say about joy during trials? Can we have it? What phrase is the key in this verse?
 - e. Psalm 51:12. What do we always have a reason to rejoice in?

Habakkuk tells us that we can have joy no matter what is happening in our life. Nehemiah says the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Paul calls joy a fruit of the Spirit. Paul also says that if we are in the Spirit, we are also to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

9. Are you walking in the Spirit? Is joy evident in your life? What circumstance or problem is keeping you from having a joyful heart? What will you do about it? Be honest in your answer, because God knows your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal anything that's hindering you from experiencing the joy of Christ!

If we allow God to fill us with HIS joy, there won't be room for self!

10. To end our section on joy, read Psalm 16:11. Where does David say we can find joy?
11. What does it mean to be "**in His Presence**"? How often are you there?

This ends our lesson for today. To sum it all up, Christ was preached and great joy was there. There is no true joy without Him!

Third Day

Review your memory verse. Is there joy in your home?

Today we meet Simon the sorcerer. He tried to buy God's power ... sorry, Simon, not for sale!

1. Read Acts 8:9-25. Write a brief character sketch of Simon.
2. Who received the glory from Simon's sorcery? (Acts 8:9)
3. Where did the people think Simon got his power? (Acts 8:10)

Simon was featured largely in the works of the second century Christian apologists as the first heretic, the arch enemy of Peter, and the founder of Gnosticism. He practiced "sorcery" or "magic." Vines Expository Dictionary says, "In sorcery, the use of drugs was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms and amulets. It is designed to impress the people with the mystical resources and powers of the sorcerer."

4. Where does the power to do these types of things come from? Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.
5. Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. What do we learn about satan in these verses, relating to our text?
6. What is satan's goal? Read 1 Peter 5:8.
7. What does Revelation 12:9 say about him?
8. James tells us to resist the devil. How? Read James 4:7-8.

Satan is still using the same old tricks he always has, isn't he? He is still trying to confuse people, instigate evil, and cause man to turn away from the Lord.

9. In what ways does satan still disguise himself today?

10. What comfort and hope do we find in 1 John 4:4 and 1 John 3:8b?

11. In Acts 8:12, what happened when the people heard about Jesus?

Simon's focus was on himself. Philip's focus was on Christ. Simon boasted of himself, while Philip preached about Jesus.

12. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Compare Paul's attitude with Simon's.

13. What happened in Acts 8:13?

14. Who was sent to Samaria and why? (Acts 8:14-18)

I don't believe that Peter and John came to Samaria to "check up" on Philip and his work. They weren't trying to make sure he was doing his job. We must remember that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen "upon" anyone else besides the Jews. The new believers in Samaria were indwelt with the Holy Spirit, but had not yet been empowered (Acts 1:8). Peter and John came to bridge the gap between the Jews and the Samaritans.

There could have been the danger of a new, distinct denomination starting, which would continue the separation of the Samaritans and the Jews. By sending Peter and John, the church in Jerusalem was, in fact, welcoming them to the body of Christ. It is interesting to note that John once had wanted to call down fire from Heaven on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54), but now he comes as part of the welcoming committee.

15. When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was imparted by the laying on of hands, what did he ask Peter? (Acts 8:18-19)

This is the first time that someone had tried to buy power in the church. This practice later became known as "simony," which refers to the buying and selling of offices and privileges in the church.

16. How do you see this practiced in the church today?

17. What was Peter's response? (Acts 8:20-23)

18. How did Simon respond back? (Acts 8:24)

We don't know for sure whether or not Simon's conversion was real, although evidence tends to tell us that it was not. Peter responds with much anger, using very strong words. Simon's request betrayed the attitude of his heart. "Neat trick Peter ... can I buy it?" He was more concerned with what the Holy Spirit could do for him. Verse 13 says that Simon believed, but believed in what? What kind of faith did he have? James tells us in James 2:19 that even the demons believe. Simon's "belief" did not seem to regenerate his soul. He doesn't even ask God for forgiveness or a change of heart. He asks to be protected from judgment.

19. One last question. What's the most important thing you learned in today's lesson? What can we learn from the story of Simon?

Our lesson ends with Peter and John preaching in many villages in Samaria on their way back to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25). See you tomorrow!

Fourth Day

Recite your memory verse.

Times were exciting in Samaria. There were many new converts to disciple, along with numerous evangelistic opportunities. Philip had great success in his ministry. Many people were healed and delivered from unclean spirits. Philip was probably having the time of his life! All the while, God was preparing a providential meeting for three on the road to Gaza: Philip, the eunuch, and Himself. God calls Philip from ministering to the multitude to a ministry involving one single man searching for the truth.

1. Read Acts 8:26-40. What would you title this section? Answer the following:
 - a. Where did the angel of the Lord tell Philip to go? (Acts 8:26)
 - b. What was Philip's response? (Acts 8:27)

c. Did Philip hesitate? (Acts 8:27)

2. Philip responds immediately! What does his obedience tell us about his character? About his relationship with his Lord?

Philip knew his Scriptures. He also was sensitive to the leading and directing of the Holy Spirit. He walked closely with God, desiring to be in the center of His will.

3. How quick are you to respond to God's voice? How often do you hesitate?

4. Whom did Philip meet on the road? (Acts 8:27)

The phrase "**and behold**" is often used by Luke to emphasize sudden and providential occurrences. (Refer to Acts 1:10, 10:17, 12:7)

Gaza was an ancient Philistine city south and west of Jerusalem near the Mediterranean coast. Old Testament Gaza was destroyed in 93 B.C., and the city was rebuilt on a site nearby in 57 B.C. This road is probably the road which proceeds through this desolate country.

The term "**eunuch**" was used in two senses. In Matthew 19:12 it is used of physically castrated men or of those who are born without sexual capacity. Such persons often served as harem keepers in the ancient world, and some rose to government positions. However, the same term is used in reference to Potiphar who was married (Genesis 39:1), and hence the sense of "court officer" must be intended, without the idea of physical impairment. One cannot, therefore, be certain whether or not the Ethiopian was a physical eunuch. (Jerusalem to Rome, Studies in Acts)

This eunuch did have high authority. He held a position of great power and trust. He was the treasurer for the Queen. The name Candace was more of a title that all Ethiopian queens bore, rather than her proper name.

If one was to accept Judaism and be circumcised, they would be called a proselyte. If they did not get circumcised, but continued to attend Jewish synagogues and read Jewish Scripture, they would be called a "God-fearer", or a "proselyte of the gate." This eunuch was probably a God-fearer, because eunuchs were not allowed to be full proselytes (Deuteronomy 23:1).

5. Why had the eunuch gone to Jerusalem? (Acts 8:27)

The eunuch traveled 200 miles to get to Jerusalem. It may have even been his first time there. It seems as if he was disillusioned with what he found. Was it the dead ritualism? The hypocrisy? This man seemed to truly want to know the truth. Hebrews 11:6 says that "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

6. How did Philip approach the chariot? (Acts 8:30)

The eunuch asked Philip to sit with him and explain the Scripture. He "**just happened**" to be in Isaiah 53. Imagine that!

7. Why was the part of Scripture he was reading so significant? Read Isaiah 53:5-8.

Philip used this opportunity and preached Jesus to him. He preached Jesus in Samaria and he preached Jesus on the road to Gaza. Oh, Lord, give us a heart for the lost like Philip.

Philip was a ready and willing vessel for the Lord. He was ready to go wherever God led him, without even knowing where or why. God led him one step at a time. Philip's attitude reminds us of the prophet Isaiah when he says, "**Here I am Lord, send me!**" (Isaiah 6:8)

8. Are you willing to leave a crowd to go and minister to the one? Has He ever asked you to do that?

9. Right now, would you say that you're in Samaria or Gaza? Are you content to be wherever He puts you, or are you anxious to be somewhere else?

We often think of being in the desert as a bad thing. Being in the desert can be a place of blessings, if it's in God's will.

God had planned this meeting before the foundations of the world. God has divine appointments and planned meetings for you too. We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as He gently points us toward those appointments. We need to be ready to preach Jesus at any opportunity that He gives us.

That's it for today. Do you have a "**Reason to Rejoice**" today?

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse. Did you experience the "fullness of His joy" this week?

1. Read Acts 8:26-40 again, concentrating on verses 36-40.
2. What did the eunuch want to do right away? (Acts 8:36)
3. What did Philip say was the prerequisite for baptism? (Acts 8:37)

In reference to verse 37, scholars say that most of the texts from which our New Testament is derived omit this verse. It was included at a very early date. The verse certainly doesn't contradict anything in Scripture, especially Romans 10:9.

The eunuch wanted to be baptized right away! Baptism is an outward sign of your inward conversion. You are publicly identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus. It is not a requirement for salvation. It is an act of obedience to the Word of God (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 10:46-48).

4. What happened when they came up out of the water? (Acts 8:39)

Acts 8:39 says Philip was "**caught away**." This word means to be snatched away, as used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 for the rapture of the church. The church will be "caught up" with the Lord in the air.

5. Where was Philip found? (Acts 8:40)

Philip disappears from the scene similar to the snatching away of Elijah (1 Kings 18:12, 2 Kings 2:16), while the eunuch continues on his way, rejoicing in his new found faith. Philip reappears in the city of Azotus, which is 20 miles north of Gaza. From there, Philip continues to preach as he walks six more miles to the city of Caesarea. Twenty years later, we find Philip settling in Caesarea (Acts 21:8), raising his family.

6. Read Acts 21:8-9. What were his daughters doing? How was Philip a great example to his kids?
7. What about you? Is your life an example to your kids? Are they following after your example?
8. What can we learn from Philip in the area of:
 - a. Obedience:
 - b. Witnessing:

c. Availability:

d. Diligence:

9. Contrast Simon's belief with the belief of the Ethiopian eunuch. How did they differ? (What were they searching for? What was their conversion based on? Why did they want to be believers?)

10. The eunuch was searching, and he found his answer in Christ. Are you searching for something outside of Christ? Do you believe that a relationship with Jesus is all you need? If something is missing in your life, could it be Jesus?

11. Are you praying for a passion for God, and for the lost?

12. How does it encourage you to know that God loved this one man enough to send Philip all the way to the desert to share with him?

13. Whom did God send to share with you?

14. What thought or Scripture ministered to you the most this week?

Philip was a great missionary and evangelist. Chuck Swindoll calls him the "Billy Graham of the New Testament." He had a passion that burned within him, like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:9). Philip is a great example of an ordinary man, who simply yielded to the Master's touch.

This ends our study of Acts chapter 8.

I pray that you looked for a
"Reason to Rejoice" each day.