

CONCERNING THE WAY

March 9, 2010

LESSON 94: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Chapter 8

In the last chapter Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church, filled with the Holy Spirit, gave a great speech to the ruling council of Israel in which he indicted them for disobeying God and murdering the Messiah. This infuriated the council and they immediately took him out of Jerusalem and stoned him to death. The text mentions that one of the men standing there holding the coats of the men throwing rocks was Saul, who was training to be a Pharisee.

Acts 8:1-2 And Saul agreed completely with killing him. Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. (2) Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.

The church had grown very large in the city by this time, numbering in the thousands. Stephen's death started a wave of persecution that scattered most of the believers to surrounding areas. The text says only the apostles were left, but we know that the Jerusalem church was active later on, so new believers continued to be added. We can only guess at why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem to endure the persecution while the rest scattered. It could be that the Sanhedrin was trying a new tactic – leaving the apostles alone while going after their flock, in order to scare them off.

All these thousands of believers in Jerusalem were doing well before this, enjoying each other's fellowship, sharing with each other, getting teaching from the apostles. It was a wonderful time. But Jesus had prophesied that they would be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but in Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. So far they were just staying put enjoying life, and something needed to happen to get them stirred up and to move out.

That's probably a good lesson for those who try to build big churches. Unless you want God to cause something to scatter your congregation to other areas, maybe you should think about splitting off some of those people into new smaller churches. Beware of complacency! If you're complacent you don't grow spiritually. If you don't willingly do the things you need to do to grow spiritually, sometimes God will force you to grow in ways that may be unpleasant.

Acts 8:3 But Saul was trying to destroy the church; entering one house after another, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Believers would have been meeting for worship in homes then, because there was no place they could meet that would have held hundreds of people, much less thousands. Church buildings wouldn't be built for worship services for about three hundred years, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Until then churches met in homes, usually in secret, because of persecution.

Saul, doing the will of the leaders of Israel, began to go after known believers in Christ, hunting them down in the homes where they were worshipping and dragging them off to prison. And for the first time women were being put in prison as well as the men.

Acts 8:4 Now those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word.

God always uses persecution to spread the gospel even further and grow the church. In this case he used the death of Stephen to force believers out of Jerusalem and into other parts of Israel, where Jesus had told them to go in Acts 1:8, and proclaim the good news.

How did these people proclaim the good news? They didn't have any New Testaments, and most would not have been able to carry around scrolls of the Old Testament. They were preaching from their hearts and minds. All they were doing was speaking of what Christ had done, His life, death and resurrection, and what He had done in their own lives.

Acts 8:5 Philip went down to the main city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them.

Phillip was the 2nd deacon chosen back in chapter 6 by the apostles. Samaria, as we have studied before, was the area in Israel populated mostly by "half-breeds", people who were of Jewish and Assyrian descent. They were mostly shunned and hated by Jews, but Jesus in His earthly ministry made a point to go through there and preach about the Kingdom (John 4), and there was a great response. So Jesus would have been known or heard of by some where Phillip went. After Jerusalem and Judea, this was the next area that Jesus had said the gospel would spread to in Acts 1:8.

Acts 8:6-8 The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the miraculous signs he was performing. (7) For unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed, and many paralyzed and lame people were healed. (8) So there was great joy in that city.

Phillip was given apostolic authority to perform miracles, which are said to be healings and casting out demons. As in all the miraculous signs we have seen, the purpose was to validate that the person performing them was from God and to validate the message He was proclaiming.

This was a very dark area spiritually, with much demon possession. It's interesting that there are reports of increased demonism in Israel these days.

Acts 8:9-10 Now in that city was a man named Simon, who had been practicing magic and amazing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great. (10) All the people, from the least to the greatest, paid close attention to him, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called 'Great.' "

Simon, as we'll see, apparently becomes a believer, but he had been a magician. And he must have been a pretty good showman, because he fooled "all the people" into thinking that his power came from God. In fact, that was his stage name, "The Great Power of God". But it doesn't look like he was just using tricks, but that he was actually using real sorcery. "Real" sorcery, you say? Yes, there is real sorcery, and its power comes from Satan. He does have great power in this world. We see sorcery used in the Bible (Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7, Acts 13:6-11). But Simon was about to encounter the real "Great Power of God".

There are many legends about Simon the sorcerer. It is said: (a) that he was the founder of the Gnostic heresies, (b) that he went to Rome and perverted Christian doctrine there, and (c) that he became involved in a miracle contest with Peter and lost. All we know for sure is that this Simon of Samaria did

practice sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. Sorcery was clearly condemned by God in scripture (Leviticus 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 17:2-5).

Acts 8:11-13 And they paid close attention to him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. (12) But when they believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women. (13) Even Simon himself believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed close to Philip constantly, and when he saw the signs and great miracles that were occurring, he was amazed.

Simon's demonic sorcery may have been convincing, but it wasn't on the level of miracles from God, and even he became a believer because of the miracles Phillip was performing. Now, was this true belief or just belief because of the miracles? Opinions are divided on whether or not Simon was really saved. We can't be sure either way, and only God knows.

Notice Phillip was proclaiming the "good news about the kingdom of God". They were preaching the Messianic Kingdom, where Jesus would come back and rule from Jerusalem on David's throne. They were not preaching about some spiritual kingdom that would come, but a literal Kingdom that would last forever. All of these people, both Jews and Samaritans would have understood that, it's what they were looking for. It's the same message Jesus and John the Baptist preached.

You know, people just love signs and miracles. They are fascinated by something that even has the appearance of the supernatural. That's why there are so many TV shows and movies about supernatural happenings. Simon was fascinated by these real supernatural miracles Phillip was doing, and followed him around, wanting to see more.

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. (15) These two went down and prayed for them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. (16) (For the Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) (17) Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Remember that Acts is a transitional book – it is moving from the Old Testament administration of God into the New. It is about the establishment of the Church and the postponement of the Kingdom.

First of all, why did Peter and John have to come down from Jerusalem to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit? Well, you have to realize that this was a huge deal for the Jewish believers, there is an important (to them) ethnic boundary being crossed. So the first thing that was discussed among the apostles in Jerusalem when they heard about what was happening in Samaria was "Is their belief real? Is this really from God? Is God really working among the Samaritans?" So Peter and John went down there to check it out and if it was real, then give their endorsement of it. Peter was the apostle that Jesus had designated as the one with the "keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19). So he is the one that the Holy Spirit is using to "open" salvation to each new people group. We saw it at Pentecost, we see it here with the Samaritans, and we'll see it later when salvation is extended to the Gentiles.

"It was necessary for the apostles in Jerusalem to commission Peter and John to Samaria for several reasons. Normally the Holy Spirit baptizes, indwells, and seals at the moment of faith, but in this instance the delay served several purposes: (1) Peter and John's prayer (for bestowing of the Holy

Spirit) and their laying on of hands (resulting in the coming of the Spirit) confirmed Philip's ministry among the Samaritans. This authenticated this new work to the Jerusalem apostles. (2) Also this confirmed Philip's ministry to the Samaritans. This message Philip had preached was validated by the coming of the Spirit, a mark of the coming kingdom (cf. v. 12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:23-27; Joel 2:28-32). (3) Perhaps the most important aspect of God's withholding the Spirit till apostolic representatives came from the Jerusalem church was to prevent schism. Because of the natural propensity of division between Jews and Samaritans it was essential for Peter and John to welcome the Samaritan believers officially into the church." John Walvoord

When we get into Paul's epistles, which were written later on, you'll see that the Holy Spirit is given immediately at the point of belief. That's not so in the book of Acts because it is a book of transition. Things happened in this book that would never happen again, because there is a big shift taking place. A shift in God's covenants – from the Mosaic to the New. There is a shift in salvation being presented to only the Jews to it being offered to the Gentiles. And we see later in Acts that the nation of Israel as a whole rejects the gospel and the focus then shifts to the Gentiles and the Kingdom is postponed.

Remember that the key to Bible study is context and observation, observation about what is happening in the text. We observe a difference between Acts and Paul's epistles. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. This letter was written to the most carnal church in the Bible, but Paul says they all received the Holy Spirit. So, you don't receive the Holy Spirit later on when you are more holy.

This was a different time. Some things only happened when an apostle was present, they had a unique authority then that no believers have today. Why? Because they were literally walking scripture. They were the New Testament of the time. Today we have the completed Bible, and that is our authority. And the Word of God takes precedence over anything any believer says, even pastors and elders. In those days the apostles were THE authority of God.

So the believing Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. Notice there's no indication that they spoke in tongues, but it's possible that they did as a sign of the event. There would have been no practical reason for that gift to manifest, as there were only Samaritans there who all spoke the same language, unlike at Pentecost where there were people from all over the Empire who spoke different languages.

Acts 8:18-19 Now Simon, when he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, offered them money, (19) saying, "Give me this power too, so that everyone I place my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."

If Simon was truly a believer, he was obviously still very carnal in his thinking. He didn't get it yet. Believers can get messed up in their thinking, especially a new one who is immature in the faith and not grounded in the Word. Believers can get it wrong, it can happen to all of us if we depart from the Word of God.

Luke included this incident with Simon to show the superiority of Christianity over the occult and demonic signs. Several times this kind of conflict took place in Acts, and Christ was always the Victor (13:6-12; 16:16-18; 19:13-20; 28:1-6).

Acts 8:20-21 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money! (21) You have no share or part in this matter because your heart is not right before God!"

This is a strong curse – God’s gifts cannot be bought. This is a tremendous lesson. The Church is not to be an organization that runs on worldly monetary principles.

Simon had a heart problem. A person who trusts Christ for salvation does not get up the next morning being perfect. He may have a great desire to be like Christ, more so than many of us who have walked with Jesus for many years. But it doesn’t happen overnight. Believers have to learn and grow through the work of the Holy Spirit, and it takes time. There may be big leaps of maturity, some setbacks, some small gains, etc. Some believers never grow, and stay immature and carnal their whole lives. Growth in Christ ALWAYS corresponds to study of the Bible. There is no growth without knowledge of the Word.

Any time our thoughts or actions are in rebellion against God, our “heart is not right”, and we must repent, which is what Peter tells him to do next.

Acts 8:22-23 **Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart. (23) For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin."**

Can a believer can be in bondage to sin? Yes. Does Jesus free us from bondage to sin when we trust Him for salvation? Yes, of course he does. But we can put those chains back on ourselves if we choose to. See what did it with Simon? It was bitterness and envy that dropped him back into bondage to sin. He wanted the same power that the apostles had.

It’s interesting to see the phrasing of what Peter said – “repent of this wickedness of yours”, and “pray to the Lord”, and “he may perhaps forgive you”. John 1:9 says “But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” So Peter was probably saying to Simon that if he repents, God would forgive him, otherwise there would be no forgiveness.

Acts 8:24 **But Simon replied, "You pray to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."**

Is Simon truly repenting here? It is unclear whether he really did. He apparently didn’t have the confidence to pray for himself, so he asked the apostles to do it for him.

Acts 8:25 **So after Peter and John had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went.**

Peter and John took advantage of their little trip by preaching the gospel anywhere they could on their way back to Jerusalem. Samaria had been “softened up” or prepared for the gospel by the personal visit of Jesus and perhaps even John the Baptist, and now the fruit of those first witnesses was being harvested. Keep in mind that when you witness to someone about Christ, you may not see any results. But you may be softening their heart and someone else coming along after you may bring them to faith. God is using you, even if you don’t see any results. When we get to heaven we will see how everything we did for Christ helped bring people to Him and it all fit together in God’s plan.

Acts 8:26 **Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)**

This is a coastal road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Gaza was the last settlement before the desert wasteland stretching to Egypt. This was the road most travelers took to Africa.

Gaza, of course, is pretty well known by most now because it is the little section of Israel that was given to the Palestinians for their own land. It was meant by Israel as a gesture of appeasement in response to the Palestinians wishes, but it has been a disaster. The area was taken over by the terrorist organization Hamas, and it is just been a place where violence against Israel has been launched from. Israel has had to go back into Gaza and root out the terrorists, so it was a bad idea from the start and isn't likely to get any better.

Acts 8:27-28 So he got up and went. There he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) and was returning home, sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah.

This is not the country of Ethiopia as it is today – the Ethiopia of those times was the kingdom of Nubia in what is today northern Sudan. Candace wasn't a personal name, but a title. Historians write about several queens of Nubia who had the title Candace. This one was probably Amantitere, who ruled from A.D. 25-41.

A eunuch normally was a man who had been castrated, but not always. Most male royal court officials who served a female ruler were castrated, in order to allow a close working relationship without any potential for romantic involvement. This man must have been a high official, because he was in charge of her treasury.

It says he had come to Jerusalem to worship, so he could have been a proselyte, a Gentile convert to Judaism. It's also possible that he was actually a Jew, as there was a Jewish presence in that general area of Africa then. In any case, he worshipped God and read the scriptures. He was wealthy enough to actually have a scroll of Isaiah, which most people did not have.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

God was speaking directly to the apostles and deacons in that time. It's interesting that an angel told Phillip to go down this road, and the Holy Spirit tells him to go speak to this man. God wants this man to hear the gospel and be saved. Not because he is a Gentile, but because he will go back and proclaim the gospel in Nubia, in the court of the queen there. He has influence there and the gospel will be spread in Nubia, which would have been considered to be about the southernmost point of the known world at the time (the "farthest parts of the earth" in Acts 1:8).

Acts 8:30-31 So Philip ran up to it and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. He asked him, "Do you understand what you're reading?" (31) The man replied, "How in the world can I, unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This must have been a larger chariot that had a driver and seats in the back for more than one person to sit. This is very important what the man said. He needed someone to explain the scriptures to him. He couldn't understand it, and he knew he needed someone to teach it to him.

We need teachers, people who come alongside you and help you understand what you're reading. I'm teaching you, but I am taught by some of the best Bible teachers who ever lived, including some who are Jewish. It is important to understand the Jewish background of so many of the books of the Bible to truly get what's going on.

Acts 8:32-33 Now the passage of scripture the man was reading was this: **"He was led like a sheep to slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (33) In humiliation justice was taken from him. Who can describe his posterity? For his life was taken away from the earth."**

What a great passage for this man to be studying! This is Isaiah 53:7-8, and that chapter that they were reading is one of the most powerful passages in the Old Testament about Jesus Christ, and how he would be the "suffering servant" of God and be our substitute for us at the cross. It is obviously about Jesus, but in their current state of blindness most Jews explain that chapter as being about the nation of Israel as the suffering servant of God. Before Jesus came the Jews understood this passage to be about Messiah. Pretty interesting, hmmm? Even though it is obvious, most Jews deny it is about the person of the Messiah now. This chapter has even been removed from synagogues' liturgical cycle of public readings.

All Jews knew that their sins were placed upon a lamb, and that lamb would die in their place for their sins. They knew it was innocent, and it had to be a spotless lamb. A Jewish family would bring their lamb to the temple, and a priest would place his hand on the head of a lamb, and the sins of the family would be transferred to the lamb. The lamb would then be taken in to the altar where it would be sacrificed. It took their place of punishment by the wrath of God.

Acts 8:34-35 Then the eunuch said to Philip, **"Please tell me, who is the prophet saying this about – himself or someone else?" (35) So Philip started speaking, and beginning with this scripture proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him.**

You can see that the man didn't understand what he was reading by his question. He didn't have the Jewish education to understand the doctrine of the Messiah, for one thing. He also may not have understood the symbolism of the lamb. But most importantly, he needed someone to teach him why this passage was speaking about Jesus. So Phillip started telling him about Jesus and about all the ways he fulfilled that scripture.

Isaiah 53:2 He sprouted up like a twig before God, like a root out of parched soil; he had no stately form or majesty that might catch our attention, no special appearance that we should want to follow him.

The Messiah would have no attractiveness or impressive appearance. He didn't look like a king, he looked just like anybody else.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by people, one who experienced pain and was acquainted with illness; people hid their faces from him; he was despised, and we considered him insignificant.

Although some followed Jesus because of the miracles He did, most people ended up despising and rejecting Him, approving of His crucifixion. He experienced great pain, not only at the cross but at other times in His life. Some have said that for Jesus, walking around in this sin-infested world, it must have been painful every moment of every day. His human and divine senses must have been insulted

and assaulted continually. And yet, He loved people and had compassion for them. And yet, most hid their faces from Him when He was crucified, and He was considered to be just another criminal being executed. Even today the majority of the world despises Him and considers Him to be insignificant .

Isaiah 53:4 But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain; even though we thought he was being punished, attacked by God, and afflicted for something he had done.

Jesus intimately felt people's pain and healed their sicknesses and diseases. The Jews thought He was being punished as a consequence of His own sin. But He was sinless. And He healed what was really wrong with us – sin.

Isaiah 53:5 He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed.

The Messiah was cruelly wounded and crushed for our sins, not His own. But through His suffering, all who turn to Him will be “made well”, or forgiven, forever. And Israel (the “us” in these statements by Isaiah) will eventually be healed and made well. This is the place in the Old Testament that tells us that the Messiah would not only suffer, but He would die.

Like a perfect, unblemished lamb killed at Passover, He would shed His blood for the redemption of the chosen nation.

Isaiah 53:6 All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the LORD caused the sin of all of us to attack him.

Because the sheeple had wandered off from God's path, they were vulnerable to attack; the guilt of their sin was ready to attack and destroy them. But then the suffering servant stepped in and took the full force of the attack.

Isaiah 53:7 He was treated harshly and afflicted, but he did not even open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughtering block, like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not even open his mouth.

He did not resist or open His mouth to defend Himself, but went willingly to the slaughter.

Isaiah 53:8 He was led away after an unjust trial — but who even cared? Indeed, he was cut off from the land of the living; because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded.

Here the illegal trials of Jesus are prophesied, where they used false witnesses against Him. And again in this verse it says that He will be killed (“cut off from the land of the living”).

Isaiah 53:9 They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man's tomb, because he had committed no violent deeds, nor had he spoken deceitfully.

Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, instead of an unmarked grave where criminals were normally buried.

Isaiah 53:10 Though the LORD desired to crush him and make him ill, once restitution

is made, he will see descendants and enjoy long life, and the LORD's purpose will be accomplished through him.

It was the Father's will that He suffer and die for the sins of the world. After that restitution is made, this passage says that He would be resurrected and be restored to God's favor. Having numerous descendants and living a long life are standard signs of divine blessing. All those who trust Christ's work on the cross are His spiritual descendants.

Isaiah 53:11 Having suffered, he will reflect on his work, he will be satisfied when he understands what he has done. "My servant will acquit many, for he carried their sins.

Because of His willingness to carry the people's sins, the Messiah is able to declare them innocent, or "not guilty".

Isaiah 53:12 So I will assign him a portion with the multitudes, he will divide the spoils of victory with the powerful, because he willingly submitted to death and was numbered with the rebels, when he lifted up the sin of many and intervened on behalf of the rebels."

The servant is compared here to a warrior who will be richly rewarded for his effort and success in battle. Because He took the penalty for the sins of many, He has justified His people and gained the victory. And all of His people will share in the spoils of that victory. The murdered Messiah will be raised up, exalted, and glorified.

Phillip used the "suffering servant" prophecy, and most likely the entire "Servant of the Lord" set of messianic prophecies (Isaiah 42:1-6, 43:8-13, 49:1-13, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3), to witness of the good news that Jesus was God's promised Messiah.

Acts 8:36-37 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (37) [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

To put it in today's language, the man was saying, "I should get baptized, right?"

Verse 37 is not in some versions. It is believed by many scholars to not be a part of the original text of Acts, most likely added by a scribe in the early church. Some important manuscripts do not include it. But at least it shows us what the early church considered to be a confession of faith.

Baptism is an expression of your repentance, a spiritual cleansing. It is not required for salvation, but is important as an expression of your turning from unbelief to belief in Jesus. Notice the man was not baptized in a church. Some churches insist that you must be baptized in their church, which is ridiculous. That's theology by tradition, by church denomination, and not by the Bible. It doesn't matter where you are baptized – that's not important. This was out in the middle of nowhere.

Acts 8:38-39 So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. (39) Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any more, but went on his way rejoicing.

Phillip is snatched away! We don't know why God did this. Maybe God knew that the eunuch would try to get Phillip to come back with him to Africa. It might have been tempting to Phillip to do that, so God just decided to force the issue and separate him from this new convert. This man had to go home by himself and continue to study the Bible on his own. But now he had the help, the illumination of the Holy Spirit. And who knows how many people in Africa were saved because of his testimony?

There will be a far greater "snatching away" of believers at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). The same Greek word is used in both passages. So Phillip was raptured away, but he's not the only one it has happened to. Enoch (Genesis 5:24), Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-16), and Ezekiel (11:24) all had rapture experiences.

Some believe that this was the first Gentile conversion, but Acts 10:45 – 11:2 identifies Cornelius as the first Gentile believer, and that actually sent the church into a tizzy, as we'll see next week. Who would have thought that God would save Gentiles!

I see two possibilities here. It could be that this eunuch was a Jew, as I mentioned before. Or, because he was a proselyte, somehow this "didn't count" as a Gentile conversion. After all, we have already seen that there was at least one proselyte in the church in Jerusalem – Phillip's fellow deacon Nicolas (Acts 6:5). Proselytes were Gentiles, but had adopted Judaism. The early church didn't seem to have a problem with a Gentile who had converted to Judaism and then became a Christian. But wait and see the reaction of the church when Peter comes back to tell him that God was saving Gentiles in our next lesson.

The point that the Holy Spirit is making here, regardless of the background of this man, is that God was extending salvation to all people, Jews, half-Jews (Samaritans) or Gentiles, white or black (Ethiopians).

Acts 8:40 Philip, however, found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through the area, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Phillip was dropped off by the Holy Spirit about 20 miles away at Azotus, a city on the coast of southern Palestine, and it was known as Ashdod (a city of the Philistines) in Old Testament times. Caesarea was a city in northern Palestine, also on the coast. So as he goes up the coast he is preaching the gospel in all the towns he goes through.

