

Teaching Tips

October 16
Bible Study Guide 7

Words You Should Know

- A. “Stiff-necked”** (Acts 7:51) *sklerotrachelos* (Heb.)—Stubborn, hardheaded
- B. Witnesses** (v. 58) *martureo* (Gk.)—Those who confirm or give confirmation

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Paying the Price. Stephen’s criticism of the religious establishment and his exaltation of Christ enraged the religious leaders, so they stoned him to death.

- A.** Pray for your students and lesson clarity.
- B.** Read and study the entire lesson.
- C.** Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

- A.** Have a student lead the class in prayer using the Lesson Aim.
- B.** Ask students to share their experiences from last week’s Application for Activation and tell what they learned from their Daily Bible Readings.
- C.** Have volunteers read the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A.** Use the Background, The People, Places, and Times, and the At-A-Glance outline to understand the Focal Verses.
- B.** Refer to the Search the Scriptures questions and discuss them.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A.** Use the Discuss the Meaning questions to help students discuss how today’s lesson applies to the practical situations they face.
- B.** The Liberating Lesson section will also help students see parallels with their present-day situations.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A.** Summarize the lesson with the Keep in Mind verse.
- B.** Challenge students to follow through on the Application for Activation assignment.
- C.** Encourage students to read the Daily Bible Readings.
- D.** Close the class with prayer, thanking the Lord for the love and mercy that He has shown to the students this week.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Stephen’s Martyrdom

Song: “Jesus Is All the World to Me”

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 6:13–20

Stephen's Martyrdom

Bible Background • ACTS 7:1–8:1A

Printed Text • ACTS 7:51–8:1A | Devotional Reading • EPHESIANS 6:13–20

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY the reasons for Stephen's martyrdom, REFLECT on our reactions when our beliefs are challenged, and WITNESS peacefully and candidly for Christ regardless of the cost.

In Focus

This was Angie's first time meeting Joanne, the woman who would soon become her mother-in-law. They were both shocked to realize that they taught at the same elementary school. The meeting, however, was not off to a great start. "Well, Angie," Joanne said, "I've heard that you are one of those 'shoutin' type of Christians. Is that true?" In a way, it seemed like a trap, but Angie realized it was an opportunity from God.

"I don't know what you mean by 'shoutin', but I am enthusiastic about Jesus because He is my Savior and I love Him," replied Angie. She could see the distaste for her answer all over her future mother-in-law's face.

Angie was glad for the opportunity to witness, but she knew that not all of these opportunities lead to a happy ending. And this time, it didn't.

"I'm glad you talked to Mom about your relationship with Jesus," her fiancé, Anthony, said to her later, "though I knew what her response would be."

Although Angie saw Joanne at school almost every day, she did not speak to Angie or Anthony for months. It hurt them both that she did not even come to their wedding.

Sometimes, even a life full of goodness and a very wise witness will not convince people. Are we ready to speak up for our Savior, no matter what the consequences will be in our lives?

Keep in Mind

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."
(Acts 7:59, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8:1a And Saul was consenting unto his death.

The People, Places, and Times

Blasphemy. The Greek word for “blasphemy” means “to slander” or “to speak lightly of the divine.” In the New Testament, blasphemy indicated a hostile attitude toward God. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul quotes Isaiah who stated that God’s name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews (Romans 2:24, Isaiah 52:5). This confirms the importance of believers living in ways that bring praise to God rather than contempt for Him. It is worth noting that both Jesus and Stephen were condemned to death under the false charge of blasphemy. This occurred because Jesus claimed the prerogatives that belong to God alone, and Stephen accused the unbelieving Jews of murdering the long-awaited Messiah.

Background

Jesus knew that the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached to all nations. He knew that truth, armed with the omnipotence of the Holy

Spirit, would prevail in the battle with evil and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers.

As Christ’s earthly ministry drew to a close, He knew He would soon leave His disciples to carry on the work without His personal supervision. He sought to encourage them and to prepare them for the future. He did not deceive them with false hopes. He knew He was about to be separated from them—to leave them as sheep among wolves. He knew they would suffer persecution, be cast out of the synagogues, and be thrown into prison for proclaiming Him as the Messiah. In speaking of their future, Jesus said some of them would be killed. He knew that in their coming trials they would remember His words and be strengthened to believe in Him as the Redeemer.

Are you prepared to stand up for your faith, regardless of the consequences as demonstrated by Stephen in today’s lesson?

At-A-Glance

1. The Conclusion of Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:51–53)
2. The Death of Stephen (vv. 53–8:1a)

In Depth

1. The Conclusion of Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:51–53)

The beginning of chapter 7 opens with Stephen's brilliant defense of what he believed, which was really a review of the history of the people of Israel. He begins by appealing to the memory of Abraham. He describes Abraham as a man of longtime faith who dared to change his life in obedience to God, leaving his country and even his father's house to go into a land he had never seen before. Though he was old and childless, Abram (renamed Abraham) believed God would give him descendants.

The next man on Stephen's list was Joseph. Joseph was a man of faith who obeyed God and had every one of God's promises to him fulfilled. Stephen contrasts Joseph with members of the Sanhedrin, who refused to obey God because they feared the changes that doing so would bring in their lives and in their levels of affluence.

Next, Stephen spoke of Moses, whom they had accused him of blaspheming. Stephen argued that Moses failed when he acted according to what seemed right in his own eyes and according to his own wisdom. But when God appeared, then instructed and empowered him, Moses went back to Egypt and became a ruler and deliverer. He answers their charge by quoting Moses himself: "God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people" (Acts 7:37, NLT; see Deuteronomy 18:15). In other words, Moses himself had said things would change. God was going to raise up another prophet who, like Moses, would teach the people

a whole new way of life in God. The prophet whom Moses spoke of was Jesus, the man they had put to death and were now rejecting.

Stephen answered the second charge regarding the Temple by quoting from Isaiah: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" (Acts 7:49–50, KJV; see Isaiah 66:1–2). No building can contain God. God is the Creator of all things.

After answering their charges, Stephen levels a charge of his own: "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!" (Acts 7:51, NLT). These Jews were stubborn—they would not bow to God's will. They had what the KJV refers to as "uncircumcised hearts," meaning their hearts were insensitive to the grace and glory of God. They refused to repent. Just as their forefathers had persecuted and murdered the prophets who prophesied of Jesus, these Jews had betrayed and murdered the Christ.

2. The Death of Stephen (vv. 53–8:1a)

Stephen's accusers and the religious leaders were so outraged by this truth that they could not stand it. "The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage" (Acts 7:54, NLT). In contrast to his accusers, who were driven wild by their passions, Stephen continued to look to God: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand" (v. 55, NLT). These words are almost identical to the words Jesus had spoken to these men just a few years earlier: "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand" (Matthew 26:64, NLT). When they heard this, they knew the issue was not Stephen but Jesus.

They had brought Stephen to trial, and he condemned them with the very Scriptures they professed to believe. Like the men of the synagogue, they could not argue with his testimony. Consequently, these enraged Jews cried out at the top of their voices and put their hands up to their ears in a vain attempt to drown out Stephen. When confronted with the truth of Christ, one must either submit or resist. The Jewish leaders and Stephen's accusers decided to resist. Like their forefathers, instead of heeding the words of God's prophet, they would kill him. The respectable Sanhedrin turned into an unruly mob, rushed at Stephen, and dragged him outside the city gates. They threw him down into a pit and stoned him.

The reference to the "witness" (Acts 7:58, KJV) suggests that the stoning was carried out as a legal execution. The penalty for blasphemy was stoning (Leviticus 24:16). According to Jewish Law, the witnesses would have to throw the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:7). Acts 7:58 says that these men took off their outer cloaks and laid them at the feet of a young Jewish Pharisee named Saul.

After the witnesses had thrown the first stones, the rest of the congregation picked up stones and hurled them at Stephen. If someone had a good aim and managed to hit Stephen in the head early on, he would lose consciousness and would not have to endure the prolonged agony. If not, his death would be long, slow, and very painful.

As the malicious and unforgiving crowd threw their stones down on Stephen, he first cried out in prayer for God to receive his spirit. Then, he dropped to his knees and uttered his final words, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" (Acts 7:60, NLT). Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr, died at the hands of the same people who had delivered Jesus to be crucified, and he died with a similar prayer on his lips.

The King James Version translates that Stephen "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60; also see John 11:11). Because physical death is temporary for the believer, death is referred to as sleep. The body sleeps, but the spirit goes to be with the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:12–19). God never wastes the blood of His saints. The persecution that began with Stephen's murder forced many in the Church to flee Jerusalem and take the Gospel to the furthest parts of the then-known world. And a young man named Saul, who gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), was so moved by Stephen's death that he never forgot it. Although Saul would become the greatest persecutor of the early Church, Stephen's death would always remain in his mind. There is little doubt that the Holy Spirit used Stephen's message and glorious death to prepare Saul for his meeting with the risen Lord on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Saul, later called Paul, would become the single greatest evangelist the world has ever known.

Stories of martyrdom are continually written today with tales of others who are called to lay down their lives for Jesus' sake.

Search the Scriptures

1. What physical response did the Jews make that demonstrated their passionate anger with Stephen (Acts 7:54)?
2. How does Luke describe the final moments of Stephen's life (v. 60)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. After studying the life of Stephen, how do you view the responsibilities of deacons and whether their duties begin and end with the business of the local church?
2. How much responsibility do deacons have to the community they serve and to unbelievers? What might be some examples of these responsibilities?

Liberating Lesson

Stephen is recorded as the first person to give his life to spread the Gospel. He was known as an outspoken leader and a man of great faith. He refused to compromise his beliefs and virtually spoke his own death sentence. In today's society, every day we are faced with issues that may compromise our Christian beliefs. The challenge for many Christians lies in whether we are willing to suffer persecution despite what others may think. Are we willing to stand on God's Word when it is not popular? Like Stephen, we as Christians must decide that regardless of what Satan brings against us, we will tenaciously stand on the Word of God.

Application for Activation

Stephen was willing to die for the cause of Christ. Maybe God has not called you to make this kind of sacrifice, but Christianity does require something from all of us. Look for ways to make sacrifices to God for the sake of the Gospel. This sacrifice can be time, money, or whatever you choose. Prepare to share your experiences next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 7:51–8:1a

51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Until this verse, Stephen had been preaching on the Old Testament history of God's chosen people. Now he gives the moral of the story in explicit terms. Stephen showed how the Jews rejected God's many calls to them through the prophets and how the very religious Jews he preached to were just as stubborn as their ancestors had been. In Greek, "stiff-necked" is *sklerotrachelos* (sklay-rot-**RAKH**-ay-los). The Hebrew word for stiff-necked is used by God to describe His people in Exodus 33:5, and now Stephen is applying the Greek translation of this word to his audience. "Stiff-necked" can also be translated "stubborn." We often call a stubborn child hardheaded.

Circumcision was the removal of the foreskin from Jewish males when they were eight days old. This was the outward sign that these men were people of God's covenant. But Stephen was pointing out that though every male present was probably physically circumcised, their hearts were not circumcised. In other words, they lacked a spiritual relationship with God.

The third accusation was that the people were resistant to God's Spirit. Although these Jews would certainly not believe that the Holy Spirit was the third member of the Trinity, they knew that the Old Testament frequently mentioned God's Spirit. In Isaiah 48:16, the prophet says, "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me." One can look at the mention of God's Spirit in the Old Testament and find numerous references. To be resistant to the Holy Spirit is indeed a terrible sin.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Again, Stephen reminded the people of the history of the Jewish people and how they persecuted prophets and even killed them. According to Jewish tradition, King Manasseh cut Isaiah the prophet in half, and Jeremiah was stoned by his own people (“shewed” is an old way of spelling “showed.”) The most important accusation is that although all the prophets foretold the coming of the Just One, the audience participated in His betrayal and murder. The Greek word for “just” is *dikaïos* (dik-AH-yos), which also means “innocent, holy, and righteous.” All these synonyms are used in the Old Testament to prophesy the coming of the Messiah. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1–2a in Luke 4:16–21. These words are often referred to as Jesus’ ordination speech. He quoted from Isaiah to articulate that as the Just One, He comes to restore justice and expects us to participate in justice-seeking causes.

As we read Stephen’s accusation of the crowd of Jews before him, we need to remember that not all Jews participated in the crucifixion of our Lord. In fact, Stephen himself was a Jew. Each of us, no matter what our race or other ethnic affiliation, is responsible before God as to what we are going to do with Jesus today.

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

They had not obeyed (Gk. *phulasso*, foo-LAS-so) or “kept” the Law they had been specially privileged to “have received” (Gk. *lambano*, lam-BAHN-o). They had received the Law “by the disposition of angels.” The term “disposition” or “command” (Gk. *diatage*, dee-at-ag-AY) means “through the mediation of angels” (see Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2).

Therefore, they were the real lawbreakers, not Stephen. The accused had become the accuser, using the same language as Moses and the prophets (Exodus 33:5; Deuteronomy 10:16; Isaiah 48:4; Jeremiah 4:4).

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

Stephen’s speech made them furious, particularly his accusation about them not being true observers of the Law of Moses. They “were cut to the heart” (Gk. *diaprio*, dee-ap-REE-o), which literally means, “to saw through” and denotes being infuriated and fiercely annoyed (see Acts 5:33). They “gnashed” (Gk. *brucho*, BROO-kho) their teeth at Stephen viciously as wild beasts leaping with rage on their prey (see Job 16:9–10; Psalm 35:16–17). They were full of hatred toward Stephen.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Stephen, “being full of the Holy Ghost,” had a vision of the glory of God. He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Why was Jesus “standing” (Gk. *histemi*, HIS-tay-mee) instead of sitting at God’s right hand (see Psalm 110:1; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:34–35)? It must be observed first that both expressions are symbolic of the authority given to Christ. The vision of Jesus standing evokes many possible interpretations. One is that Stephen testified that Jesus had arrived in the presence of God and had received all authority, thus fulfilling the vision of Daniel 7:13 (see also Matthew 28:18; Acts 13:33). Another is that Christ was standing either as Stephen’s advocate or to welcome him into His presence. The “right hand” means the place of honor (see Matthew 20:21; 1 Kings 2:19).

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Stephen told them what he was seeing. He saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Daniel 7:13; Mark 14:62). The expression in Acts 7:56 “Son of man” (Gk. *huios*, hwee-OS) is a title for Christ quoted from the Book of Daniel (see Luke 6:22).

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

They “cried out” (Gk. *krazo*, KRAD-zo) loudly, determined to silence him. They “stopped” or “held together” (Gk. *sunecho*, soo-NEKH-o) their ears so that Stephen’s words, which they regarded as blasphemous, could not be heard (see Matthew 26:65). Reading the NLT of Acts 7:57, they “rushed” (Gk. *hormao*, hor-MAH-o) at him “with one accord.” The use of the aorist tense here shows how fast things went out of control as soon as Stephen identified the figure of the Son of Man in glory as Jesus.

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.

They seized him and “cast him out” or “threw him out” (Gk. *ekballo*, ek-BAL-lo) of the city and began to “stone” (Gk. *lithoboleo*, li-tho-bo-LEH-o) him to death. Death by stoning was the punishment for blasphemy (see Leviticus 24:14). It is not clear, however, whether Stephen’s death was the result of judicial action by the council or mob lynching. (Similarly, in Jesus’ trial and death, the Romans had taken away the Jews’ right to capital punishment; see John 18:31) The actions all happened fast: “cried aloud,” “stopped,” “rushed,” “cast out,” and “stoned,” indicating a repeated and continued

action. Yet, these events had some semblance of legality if the “witnesses” (Gk. *martureo*, mar-too-REH-o) here were the first to start the stoning as specified by Law (see Deuteronomy 17:7; John 8:7).

They laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul (see Acts 22:20; 26:10). Acts 7:58 is the first mention of Saul in Acts. The term “a young man” (Gk. *neanias*, neh-an-EE-as) gives no indication of his age. According to Joseph Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, *neanias* can be applied to a person up to 40 years old (see Matthew 19:20, 22).

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

As they stoned him, Stephen was “calling upon” (Gk. *epikaleomai*, ep-ee-ka-LEH-om-ahee) God. His prayer was very similar to Jesus’ prayer on the Cross (see Luke 23:46). While Jesus committed His Spirit to the Father, Stephen committed his to Jesus. This is certainly a testimony to Christ’s divinity.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen “fell to his knees” (Gk. *tithemi*, TITH-ay-mee) and cried out, “Lord, do not remember this sin against them” (literally, “fix not this sin upon them,” Acts 7:60, NLT; see Luke 23:34). Stephen did not pray for his own vindication. He prayed for mercy (see Matthew 5:38–48; 6:12, 14–15; James 2:13). In Acts 7:60, the phrase “he fell asleep” (Gk. *koimao*, koy-MAH-o) is characteristic of the New Testament expression for death (Matthew 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 13:36). The same Greek word is also used to refer to sleep, rest, lying down, or death (Gk. *koimesis*, KOY-may-sis).

8:1a And Saul was consenting unto his death.

Where do we get this information concerning the sermon of Stephen, the appearance of his face shining like an angel, and the keeping of the coats of his executioners? Gamaliel, Saul's teacher, advocated a soft approach toward the Christians (Acts 5:34–39). But Saul, just as Stephen did, concluded that Christianity could not exist side-by-side with traditional Judaism. At the time of this event, Saul was beginning his vigorous persecution of the Christians, but perhaps after his conversion, the martyrdom of Stephen was in the back of his mind. Everything Stephen lived for, said, and died for was in direct opposition to the beliefs of Saul (later to be known as Paul).

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Say It Correctly

Disposition. dis-puh-ZISH-un.
 Uncircumcised. un-SUR-kuhm-sized.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Equipped to Speak Boldly
 (Ephesians 6:13–20)

TUESDAY

The Promised Fulfillment Draws Near
 (Acts 7:17–22)

WEDNESDAY

I Have Come to Rescue Them
 (Acts 7:30–34)

THURSDAY

The Rejection of Moses
 (Acts 7:35–39)

FRIDAY

The Rejection of God
 (Acts 7:39–43)

SATURDAY

The Inadequacy of the Temple
 (Acts 7:44–50)

SUNDAY

You Are the Ones
 (Acts 7:51–8:1a)

Teaching Tips

October 23
Bible Study Guide 8

Words You Should Know

- A. Used Sorcery and Bewitched** (Acts 8:9) *mageuo kai existiemi* (GK.)—Practiced magic
- B. Had Regard** (v. 11) *prosecho* (GK.)—Denotes paying attention

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Power Brokers. When Simon the magician tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter plainly laid out the fatal consequences for those who think the Spirit can be bought or sold.

- A.** Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.
- B.** Read and study Acts 8 in its entirety.
- C.** Research the previous persecution of the Christian in Jerusalem to place this particular event in context.
- D.** Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

- A.** Ask a student to open the class with a prayer, using the Keep in Mind verse.
- B.** Summarize the Background section.
- C.** Have the class read the Keep in Mind Verse and Lesson Aim in unison.
- D.** Summarize the In Focus story and have the class discuss it.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A.** Ask several students to take turns reading the Focal Verses.
- B.** Use the At-A-Glance outline to explore the In Depth section.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A.** Allow students to work in groups of two or three to answer the questions and discuss the point in the Search and Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning sections. Have them report back to the class when they finish.
- B.** Discuss the Liberating Lesson section.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A.** Go over the Application for Activation section.
- B.** Remind students to complete the Daily Bible Readings.
- C.** After receiving prayer requests, close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Simon Wants to Buy Power
Song: “I Surrender All”
Devotional Reading:
1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Simon Wants to Buy Power

Bible Background • ACTS 8:4–24

Printed Text • ACTS 8:9–24 | Devotional Reading • 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCUSS Simon's motivation to receive the Holy Spirit; REFLECT on any selfish desires for God's power; and CREATE a list of true and sincere motives for following Christ.

In Focus

Although it was not really much of a sacrifice from his salary as a successful corporate lawyer, Robert Jones put large amounts of money in the offering. He had been attending church and placing his money in the offering tray for missions every 1st Sunday of the month for years. When it was time to elect members to the various church committees, Mr. Jones thought he would easily be elected to his favorite committee: missions. After all, he gave plenty of money to this cause and everyone seemed to know it. But instead of electing Mr. Jones, the people of his church voted for Warren, a humble man who had already gone on a number of missions trips, including one where he dug up septic systems.

Mr. Jones was furious and thought, *'Don't these people know how much I am giving to the church, especially to the missions' ministry? What can Warren possibly give that I can't?'*

What do you think is Mr. Jones' motivation for running for leader of the missions committee? Why do you think the people did not vote for him? Do churches ever favor the wealthy people in the congregation? Can money buy a person's way into church power? In today's lesson, we will see how consequences come from thinking money can buy everything, especially the Holy Spirit.

Keep in Mind

"And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,"
(Acts 8:18, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

The People, Places, and Times

Sorcery. In *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, sorcery is defined as "the practice of the occult arts under the power of evil spirits or demons and has been common in all ages of the world's history" (1039). In this country, we are more familiar with a type of magic that is simply sleight of hand, using such tricks as hiding cards up the sleeve or drawing attention away from the hand doing the trick. But there is another magic that is drawn from the power of evil spirits. For example, the practitioner may actually do things that are not within the realm of the everyday laws of physics.

In today's Scripture, we will be reading about Simon the sorcerer, who called upon these occult arts to do such wonders that people held him in great awe. Simon took upon himself the title of "the great one."

In many traditional cultures in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe, sorcerers scare people. If people do not sacrifice chickens and other animals and items, the sorcerer invokes fear that evil spirits might hurt them. And all along, the sorcerer is getting rich from the sacrifices. All through the Bible, magical arts are condemned because of their connection with evil spirits and because they lead people to do terrible things out of fear, including sacrificing their own children.

Background

The Book of Acts is a book of history and faith. In addition to providing a transition between the Gospels and the Epistles, Luke, the writer of Acts gives us the vital historical facts of how Christianity began and spread. In Acts, selected events in church history are recorded that demonstrate Christian doctrine and practice. Clearly, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the men and women of God are able to testify that Jesus is the Christ. There is great emphasis on the connection between the Old Testament, the Jews, and Christianity. There is an even greater emphasis that salvation is not bound by a believer's race or ethnicity; rather, it is extended to all humankind. In Acts, it is clear that it is only Jesus, the Christ, who is able to fulfill the needs of the Gentiles and the Jews.

At-A-Glance

1. Introducing Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–11)
2. Many Turn to Christ (vv. 12–13)
3. The Believers Receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–17)
4. Simon Attempts to Buy the Power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 18–24)

In Depth

1. Introducing Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–11)

Today's Scripture passage begins in the midst of a great evangelistic campaign in Samaria. After the stoning of Stephen, believers, except for the apostles, scattered everywhere while spreading the Gospel. Philip, one of the deacons who was appointed along with Stephen, went to Samaria and began preaching and performing miraculous signs. Because of his witness, many came to Christ. Simon the sorcerer was among

the Samaritans who heard Philip's preaching and saw the accompanying signs and wonders. Simon had enjoyed tremendous popularity among the Samaritans. Scripture tells us that Simon had been practicing the magical arts and had deceived many with his false claims of greatness. Simon's abilities as a magician had "bewitched the people" (Acts 8:9, KJV).

Even today, people mistakenly believe that the only difference between magic and miracles is that the latter is more impressive and is practiced by Christians. The truth is far more important. Miracles clearly point to God, while magic manipulates and points away from God. Faith comes through hearing the Word and not through seeing miracles.

2. Many Turn to Christ (vv. 12–13)

The Samaritans had previously believed in Simon because of his magic. They had no faith in Simon; rather, their belief was predicated on his magical abilities. Through the preaching of Philip, the faith of the Samaritans was based on the Good News of Jesus, the Christ, and the kingdom of God. The Samaritans saw Philip's miracles as confirmation of the truth of the resurrection of Christ. The miracles aided—not caused—their faith. Now that faith in Jesus was the basis of their belief, they turned away from Simon. Even Simon himself believed and was baptized.

3. The Believers Receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–17)

When news of Philip's successful ministry in Samaria reached Jerusalem, the apostles immediately dispatched Peter and John to Samaria. That these two elder statesmen were sent to Samaria should not be misread. There was no lack of faith on the part of the church in Philip's ability to preach salvation. This fact is apparent when we see that Peter and John did not preach in Samaria.

Instead, they prayed and laid hands on the Samaritan converts. As a result, God gave the Samaritans the gift of the Holy Spirit. The sending of Peter and John is better understood in light of who the Samaritans were. They were a mixed-race people with some Jewish lineage but possessed an alternative style of worship. They shared some of the same beliefs as the Jews: They claimed an Abrahamic lineage and they were also awaiting a Messiah. By sending Peter and John, the church in Jerusalem was affirming its unity with the emerging church in Samaria.

The impartation of the Holy Spirit ensured the unity of the church. The Holy Spirit also provided a witness in the form of the apostles Peter and John. The apostles were credible and authoritative witnesses to the Jews that the acceptance of Samaritans into the church was equal to that of the Jews.

The fact that the apostles “laid their hands” on the Samaritan converts is no evidence that this was the only way for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). On the Day of Pentecost, there was no mention of laying on of hands, yet the Holy Spirit was imparted to all of the disciples who were present and believing. Additionally, when Peter preached to Cornelius’ household, there is no mention of laying on of hands to receive the Spirit (Acts 10:44).

There is also little scriptural evidence that the twelve apostles were the only men empowered to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. When Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was converted, it was Ananias who laid hands on him so that Paul might be healed and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17–18). Ananias was neither an apostle nor a deacon. Instead, the laying on of hands and the receipt of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritans at the hands of the apostles marked a critical breakdown of religious and racial barriers. Philip had already baptized the believing Samaritans; thus, they were already saved. The

apostles now witnessed the inclusiveness of the church. They saw that God was giving these Samaritans the exact same gift of the Holy Spirit that He had given to the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem. There was no barrier between the believing Jews and the believing Samaritans. There was one faith, one baptism, and one Spirit (see Ephesians 4:4–6).

4. Simon Attempts to Buy the Power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 18–24)

Superstitious Simon wanted to be able to impress people again with his magical powers, but he did not understand that the gift of the Holy Spirit is freely given to all who believe. Earlier, we read that Simon believed and was baptized. At this point, we wonder whether his profession of faith was genuine. When Simon saw Peter and John laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit, he wanted this same power for himself, and he was ready to pay for it.

Peter saw through Simon right away. This was definitely not a genuine desire for spiritual power. In his heart was a desire to have center stage, and this is the opposite of what God desires to see in us. God wants us to give Him preeminence. Many people today are confused about paying for spiritual blessings. God is not like the waiter who gives you better service if you tip better. Even our good works will not open the door of heaven for us. In Ephesians 2:8–9 (KJV), we read: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Every gift we receive from God is just that—a gift! Even our spiritual gifts are free from our heavenly Father (Ephesians 4:7–13).

We would like to see a happy ending to this story recorded in Acts 8, but it’s not there. Instead of Simon praying to God in deep repentance, he asked Peter to pray for him that the punishment for his sins would not fall on

him. In other words, Simon was not sorry for his sins; he just wanted to get off the hook from the punishment.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Simon doing to amaze the people of Samaria (Acts 8:9)?
2. How did the Samaritans respond to Philip (v. 12)?
3. What terrible thing did Simon try to do (vv. 18–19)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Peter gave Simon a warning. Why do you think what Simon did was so terrible?
2. Name some other times when the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of hands. What are some similarities in these cases? What are some differences?

Liberating Lesson

Simon reminds us of some preachers who seem to be in the ministry primarily for fame and fortune. What are some signs of authenticity or insincerity you can see in some preachers?

Application for Activation

It may be easier to see false motivations in others than ourselves. Finish today's lesson by creating as a list of true and sincere motives for following Christ. Now examine your heart to see how you measure up, and then ask God to help form your attitudes and motives to be true and sincere.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 8:9–24

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

For some time before Philip arrived in Samaria, the town had been “bewitched” (Gk. *existemi*, ex-IS-tay-mee) by a man named Simon. He practiced witchcraft or “sorcery” (Gk. *mageuo*, mag-YOO-o) which means “the practice of magic.” Simon used his magical skills to persuade the people of Samaria that he was someone great (see 5:36).

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Everyone—“the least” (Gk. *mikros*, mik-ROS) and “the greatest” (Gk. *megas*, MEG-as)—crowded around Simon saying that he was in some way the special channel of the power of God or the supreme emanation of God Himself.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

For a long time, the people “had regard” (Gk. *Prosecho*, pros-EKH-o) or were devoted to Simon because he had used witchcraft to bewitch or influence them.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God,

and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Philip did not preach about himself. Philip was “preaching” (Gk. *euaggelizo*, yoo-ang-ghel-ID-zo), “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.” The Samaritans “believed” (Gk. *Pisteuo*, pist-YOO-o) and “were baptized” (Gk. *baptizo*, bap-TID-zo).

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Simon believed and was baptized. He followed Philip everywhere, captivated by the great signs and miracles he saw. After having amazed others with his magic practice, he himself was amazed.

While the text says that Simon believed, the question remains: did his belief lead to repentance and salvation?

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

In Acts 8:14, we read that when the apostles (Gk. *apostolos*, ap-OS-tol-os) “heard” (Gk. *akouo*, a-KOO-o) that Samaria “had received” (Gk. *dechomai*, DEKH-om-ahee) the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to investigate. The Greek words for “sent” (Gk. *apostello*, a-pos-TEL-lo) and “apostle” have the same root meaning, literally “the sent ones.” On one occasion, James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven to consume a Samaritan city (Luke 9:51–56). It was fitting that one of them should be part of the delegation that now went to welcome the people of Samaria into the church.

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

When they arrived, they discovered that although the people of Samaria had believed and had been baptized into the name of Jesus, they had not yet received the Holy Ghost. So they prayed for them that they might “receive” (Gk. *lambano*, lam-BAHN-o) the Holy Ghost.

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Acts 8:16 says that the Holy Ghost had not yet come “upon” (Gk. *epi*, ep-EE) any of the Samaritans. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This statement raises some questions that have caused much perplexity and division: How did the apostles know that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Ghost? In light of Acts 2:38, how could the Samaritans have believed and been baptized and not received the Spirit? There are two general approaches to these questions. One is that here, as in Acts 2:41 and Acts 10:44–48, it was a new departure in line with what Jesus said in Acts 1:8. Thus, we should see it as an abnormal rather than a normal experience of the Christian life. Another view is that the Samaritan Christians’ experience is a typical experience of the Christian life. Becoming a Christian is a two-stage process consisting first of conversion and water baptism, and second of the gift or baptism of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul argues against the latter view in Romans 8:9, NLT. He states, “those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.” In other words, any person who is saved has the Holy Spirit.

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

In addition to praying for them, Acts 8:17 says that the apostles “laid” (Gk. *epitithemi*, ep-ee-TITH-ay-mee) their hands on them. This identifies the people for whom they prayed as

the rest of the church, particularly the mother church in Jerusalem. In answer to their prayers, the believers received the Holy Ghost.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

The "Ghost" in "Holy Ghost" is *pneuma* (PNYOO-mah) and means "a breath of air." While the KJV uses the term "Holy Ghost," all subsequent English translations use Holy Spirit instead because of the modern connotations with the word ghost.

When Simon saw the apostles laying their hands on people as they received the Holy Spirit, it seemed like some very powerful religious magic. We read in verse 9 that Simon had proclaimed himself "the great one." Now he desired the power that he saw in the apostles so that he could continue to be the main practitioner of wonders. It's no doubt that he expected money when he performed his magic deeds, and he thought that he could buy the powerful "magic" that he saw in the apostles.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Simon completely misunderstood the power of God. It is not something that can be purchased like the magic of the sorcerer. Because of his attempt, the term "simony" has come to mean trying to buy spiritual gifts or purchase an ecclesiastical office. We may think at first that this was just a misunderstanding, but it was showing what was in Simon's heart. The reason he wanted the gift that the apostles

had was because he still wanted to be the one who could perform great miracles, the one everyone looked up to. He wanted to maintain his magical power over the people.

In verse 20, the Greek word for "purchased" is *ptaomai* (KTAH-om-ahee) and it is defined as "got, acquired, obtained, possessed, provided, or purchased." Everything we have is a gift from God and nothing is available through purchase. That Simon thought he could buy this spiritual gift revealed that he was still thinking that the gift of salvation was not truly a gift from God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Peter could see that the thoughts in Simon's heart were wrong. What is "gall"? The Greek is *chole* (khol-AY), and it means bile or poison. The English word has come to mean arrogance, but Peter is talking about something much worse. Bitterness is the opposite of sweetness; it is an attitude of anger, hurt, or resentment. All wrong actions are rooted in the attitudes of the heart. So Simon's request was not an innocent misunderstanding. Inside he was feeling bitterness because he would no longer be the big, important sorcerer. Now that people had the message of redemption, they would no longer be fooled by the spiritual void that the sorcerer used to his advantage.

To be bound up is literally to have shackles on. To be "in the bond of iniquity" is to be handcuffed to sin (v. 23). Simon was still not spiritually free. Peter commanded Simon to repent of the sin in his heart, but the next verse will show that he did not.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Although Simon was afraid of the judgment that Peter alluded to, he was not ready to repent. In fact, he was not even ready to pray. Instead, Simon asked Peter to pray for him—not for repentance and forgiveness but simply to pray for him that the bad things Peter talked about would not happen to him.

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Say It Correctly

Simony. **SI**-muh-nee.

Sorcery. **SOR**-suh-ree.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Who Can Understand God's Power?
(Job 26)

TUESDAY

Using the Name of the Lord
(Acts 19:11–20)

WEDNESDAY

Christ, the Power of God
(1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

THURSDAY

Faith Resting on God's Power
(1 Corinthians 1:26–2:5)

FRIDAY

The Works of the Flesh
(Galatians 5:16–21)

SATURDAY

The Fruit of the Spirit
(Galatians 5:22–26)

SUNDAY

What Money Cannot Buy
(Acts 8:9–24)

Notes

Teaching Tips

October 30
Bible Study Guide 9

Words You Should Know

- A. Eunuch** (Acts 8:27, 34, 36, 38–39) *eunouchos* (Gk.)—A state officer
- B. Esaias the Prophet** (v. 28) *Hesaias* (Gk.)—Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Erasing the Boundary Lines. Philip's sharing of the Good News about Jesus and the baptism of the Ethiopian man demonstrate the universal availability of the Gospel message.

- A.** Pray for your students and lesson clarity.
- B.** Read and study the entire lesson.
- C.** Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.
- D.** Secure a Bible map of Philip's missionary route.

O—Open the Lesson

- A.** Ask a student to pray, focusing on the Lesson Aim.
- B.** Have students read the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind verse in unison and then discuss each.
- C.** Ask a volunteer to summarize the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A.** Use The People, Places, and Times, Background, At-A-Glance outline, and In Depth sections to unpack the Focal Verses.

- B.** Allow your students 5 to 10 minutes to share any opportunities they had to share their faith in the past week.

- C.** Use your Bible map to show Philip's missionary route. Discuss.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A.** Use the Discuss the Meaning, Liberating Lesson, and Application for Activation sections to further explore the meaning of the lesson.
- B.** Have students jot down salient points in the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.

N—Next Steps for Application

- A.** Give the students a few minutes to silently reflect on today's lesson.
- B.** Remind students to complete the Daily Bible Readings.
- C.** After receiving requests, close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Philip and the
Ethiopian Eunuch

Song: "Where He Leads Me,
I Will Follow"

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 56:1–8

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Bible Background • ACTS 8:26–39

Printed Text • ACTS 8:26–39 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 56:1–8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXPLAIN** the connection between Philip’s sharing of the Gospel and its universal availability; **REFLECT** on our openness to people who differ from us; and **DEVELOP** strategies to make our churches more open and inclusive.

In Focus

Michelle loved meeting with her Bible study small group but lately she felt unsettled. The group had met faithfully for about five years and studied the Bible along with other Christian books that helped them apply God’s word to their daily lives. She was so grateful for the group and how it helped her grow in her faith, but now she felt God calling her to other things.

“I want to take all that I’ve learned and share it with others around the world, you know – missions,” she said to her small group leader one day after the group meeting.

The following Sunday at church, her small group leader introduced her to the leader of the Missions Ministry, and she began to go out with the group to share the Word of God and serve those in need.

In our lesson this week, we will explore how Philip used the Scriptures to explain salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Keep in Mind

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water:
and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”
(Acts 8:36, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

The People, Places, and Times

Eunuchs. Throughout the Bible, there are references to royal attendants appointed by kings as official caretakers of queens, harems, and women (Esther 2:3, 12–15). Those eunuchs, who served with distinction, were able to rise in rank within the royal households. The Assyrians and the pharaohs of Egypt were known to have minor officials in their court who often served as trustees of the royal assets. While the term is often literal, referring to men who have been physically castrated, this was not always the case. The term “eunuchs” was also used to denote officials who were assigned to duties in the courts of kings. Because the Ethiopian man referenced in today’s lesson was

a proselyte, or Gentile who has converted to Judaism, to the Jewish religion, we may deduce that he was not castrated because the Mosaic Law would not have allowed him to become a part of the congregation of God’s people (Deuteronomy 23:1).

Background

In the Book of Acts, the story of Philip’s evangelistic effort serves as a transition between the ministries of Peter and Paul. The account of Paul describes how God adds to the church through his bold and relentless preaching. Philip is in the middle of the record of these two great statesmen; Philip’s efforts add to the church soul by soul.

We see Philip first serving as an elected deacon in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5). His effective witnessing efforts are described in Acts 8:4–25, which shows how they fulfill Jesus' Great Commission to spread the Gospel from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

At-A-Glance

1. Philip Obeys the Spirit (Acts 8:26–29)
2. Philip Witnesses in the Spirit
(vv. 29–35)
3. The Ethiopian Confesses Christ
(vv. 36–39)

In Depth

1. Philip Obeys the Spirit (Acts 8:26–29)

Acts 8 focuses on two great missionary efforts by Philip. In the first, Philip, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, has preached Christ, which led to the conversion of the Samaritans. The receipt of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritans verifies his success with spreading the Good News from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria.

The Spirit then directs Philip on another mission. We are told that an angel of the Lord directs Philip to go down from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26, NLT). In Acts, the writer (Luke) presupposes that Jerusalem is ground zero for church activities, implying that Philip has returned to Jerusalem from Samaria. Philip was now directed southwest into the desert. Initially, Philip was not told what to do in Gaza. However, this lack of information did not stop him. He was obedient to the word from God and immediately obeyed. We should note that while Peter and Paul are noted for their great preaching ability, Philip was outstanding in the area of obedience. Whenever the Spirit directed him, Philip heeded. Because he was

so sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that prayer and the study of God's Word must have been integral parts of Philip's life. How much more effective would Christians be today if we were more sensitive and obedient to the Holy Spirit?

On the road, Philip encountered a fellow traveler. Scripture tells us four important things about this man. First, we are told that he was a man from Ethiopia. Native Ethiopians were Black people. The man was from a distant country located along the upper Nile. At this time in history, Ethiopia was located in the area we now know as Sudan. We then learn that he is a eunuch in the court of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, and "had the charge of all her treasure." Finally, we're told that he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

Biblical scholars provide varied interpretations of what it means that the Ethiopian man was a eunuch. One group takes the position that the term "eunuch" designates that he was a government official. They also say he was a circumcised Jewish proselyte. This group uses as proof the fact that he was in Jerusalem to worship. Temple worship dictated both his Jewish conversion and his circumcision. Others believed that because the man was in the service of a queen, the Ethiopian had been castrated. If this second theory were correct, Mosaic Law would have prohibited him from joining "the congregation of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 23:1).

2. Philip Witnesses in the Spirit (vv. 29–35)

The Gaza road was well traveled; certainly, other chariots had passed Philip. The Spirit directs Philip to "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (v. 29). This was no chance meeting. Philip was being purposefully led by the Holy Spirit to be with this man at this time. In this way, Philip was like Jesus. He did not mind leaving the crowds behind to deal

with one lost soul. Notice Philip's zeal: He ran to the Ethiopian's chariot. Philip recognized the seriousness of his missionary work. Do we move quickly to assist in the salvation of the lost?

Because the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from the Book of Isaiah, we can safely assume that this man took the religion of Judaism seriously. Ethiopia was one of the areas among which the Jews were scattered after the Babylonian conquest (Isaiah 11:11). The eunuch may have had contact with Jews in Ethiopia or in nearby Egypt, where a great many Jews settled. Similarly, the fact that he could read Greek could be explained by the fact that from the time of Ptolemy II (306–246 B.C.), the Ethiopian kingdom had become partially Hellenized, or made to reflect Greek culture.

The custom of the time was to read Scripture aloud. Upon hearing the Ethiopian man reading, Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. In Acts 8:31 he said, in effect, "How can I unless someone shows me the way?" The eunuch was confused by what he was reading and needed someone to explain the Scripture to him. The man's sincerity and willingness to learn were demonstrated by his invitation to Philip to come into the chariot and sit with him. Like many people today, the Ethiopian eunuch earnestly sought the truth, but he lacked saving faith in Jesus Christ and needed someone to show him the way. We must recognize that God could have allowed an angel to explain the Scripture to him but instead commissioned Philip. Similarly, Jesus has commissioned, ordered, and instructed each and every Christian to share the Gospel with others.

The Ethiopian had been reading from Isaiah 53, a passage describing the humiliation and suffering of the servant of God. He wanted to know, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" (v. 34, NLT). The Holy Spirit

had been preparing Philip for this very moment. Philip "opened his mouth, and . . . preached unto him Jesus" (v. 35, KJV). Philip explained that the prophet Isaiah was describing Jesus, the Christ. The eunuch had no doubt heard a great deal about this Jesus while in Jerusalem.

3. The Ethiopian Confesses Christ (vv. 36–39)

During his preaching, Philip had probably talked about baptism. As soon as they came to a body of water, the eunuch asked if there was any hindrance to his being baptized right on the spot. Notice that Philip did not drill the Ethiopian on his knowledge and understanding of the Scripture. Philip simply asked him if he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. In other words, did he have faith? Obviously, at least to Philip, there were no impediments to this man's baptism. Upon the Ethiopian's simple confession of faith, "I believe," Philip recognized the man was prepared to be placed under the lordship of Jesus and incorporated into the church (some early manuscripts do not have v. 37). Philip and the man entered the water, and the Ethiopian was baptized. At this moment, another prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled. This prophecy spoke of strangers, eunuchs, and other outcasts who would be given an "everlasting name" and called God's people: "The Lord GOD, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith; Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him" (Isaiah 56:8).

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was Philip on the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26)?
2. From where was the Ethiopian official returning when Philip encountered him (v. 27)?
3. Why did Philip approach the Ethiopian (v. 29)?
4. When they reached the water, what did the Ethiopian ask Philip (v. 36)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Read Acts 1:8. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Philip's evangelistic efforts?
2. Why do you think Philip was able to be so sensitive to the Holy Spirit's directives?
3. It's clear that the Ethiopian's faith was sincere. Yet, in reading Scripture and seeking truth, he was lost. Why?

Liberating Lesson

When Philip then was finalizing his successful missionary work in Samaria, the Spirit ordered him to go to Gaza. Instead of dragging his feet, Philip heeded the direction of the Holy Spirit and performed a life-saving evangelistic appeal to the Ethiopian official. Today's Christians would do well to follow Philip's example and get up and go! If we are to be witnesses for the Kingdom, we will have to maintain sensitivity to the Spirit rather than follow our own course of action. We will be more effective witnesses when we allow God to order our steps in every area of our lives.

Application for Activation

Commit to daily personal devotion, prayer, and Bible study. Select a quiet time and place to do an uninterrupted reading of and meditation on the Word of God. You may find that early in the morning or in the evening just before you go to bed is best. Start with five minutes of reading the first week and add three to five minutes each week. You can start with the Daily Bible Readings.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 8:26–39

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

Angels play a critical role in the narrative of Luke and Acts (see Luke 1:11–18; 2:9–15; Acts 12:7–10; 27). Because Jerusalem was built on a hill, any departure was considered “going down” from the city. Gaza was one of the five cities occupied by the Philistines in southwest Palestine. At the time Luke wrote, it was on a caravan route leading to Egypt that someone traveling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia would naturally take.

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Nubia (Ethiopia) bordered Egypt to the South of Israel and was known in the Bible as the ancient land of Cush (Genesis 2:13; 10:6; 1 Chronicles 1:8; Isaiah 11:11; Ezekiel 38:5). It is important to note that “Ethiopian” meant “Black person” and “Ethiopia” meant “land of Black people” and was used in various ways by Greeks to refer to Arabians, Indians, Nubian and actual Ethiopians (Axumites). But here, given the reference to Candace (Kandake), it

clearly meant Nubia/Kush. Kush referred to in antiquity is now called Sudan.

Kush did not worship the true God (Isaiah 20:3–5; 43:3; Ezekiel 30:1–9; Nahum 3:9; Zephaniah 2:11–12), and its people were among those foreigners who would be converted and acknowledge the true God of Israel. For example, Kush figures prominently in a text of Isaiah concerning the restoration of the people (Isaiah 11:11–12; Zephaniah 3:10).

It was not uncommon for eunuchs (castrated males or government officials) to hold positions of importance in royal courts in the region. Yet, according to Deuteronomy 23:2, this condition meant a rejection of full participation in the Jewish assembly. According to Leviticus 21:20; 22:24, an emasculated male was physically blemished and in a permanent state of ritual impurity. Some eunuchs were not castrated but were simply those set apart to serve the government. Though Isaiah prophesied that a time would come when “eunuchs [would] keep my sabbaths,” “take hold of [his] covenant,” and would be given a place in God’s house (Isaiah 56:4–5).

The Kushite eunuch held a high position in the Kushite government. He was in charge of the entire treasury of the Candace. According to ancient writers Pliny the Elder and Callisthenes, Candace, queen of the Kushites, was a dynastic rather than a personal name. That is, it was used to refer to a royal line of queens over various generations (e.g., “the Candace”).

The Kushite eunuch’s Jewish affiliation is made evident by the fact that he came to Jerusalem to worship and was reading Isaiah in Hebrew.

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

The angel of the Lord delivered the original message. Here, the Spirit of the Lord further instructs Philip. The point is the same: God is directly guiding Philip. When the Spirit told Philip to go and join up with the “chariot” (Gk. *harma*, **HAR**-mah), he obeyed. As he came near, he heard the eunuch reading Isaiah. It was customary in the ancient world to read aloud, even when alone. This was especially the case with lengthy scrolls where there was no separation between words; it had to be read syllable by syllable to detect the word divisions.

In Acts 8:30, Philip asks the eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip’s question derives from the conviction that the prophetic writings contained deeper meaning for the future.

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

In verse 31 (NLT), the eunuch replies, “How can I (understand), unless someone instructs me?” “Guide” as the KJV reads (Gk. *hodgego*, ho-day-**GEH**-o) literally means to lead along a road (see Jesus’ use of the term “blind leaders” and “blind lead the blind” in Matthew 15:14). Here “guide” gains the transferred sense of “leading” in righteousness or wisdom similar to its use in passages such as Psalm 5:8; 73:24; John 16:13.

The eunuch invites Philip to get in and sit with him under the assumption that he will be able to explain the passage in Isaiah. Traditionally, the Jews applied the concepts of suffering and humiliation in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 to the Nation of Israel or to the unrighteous Gentile nations. This passage must have been unclear to the eunuch.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his

shearer, so opened he not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

The passage the eunuch is reading from is Isaiah 53:7–8. The Greek word for “humiliation” (Gk. *tapeinos*, ta-pi-NOS), used in Acts 8:33 provides a possible allusion both to Luke’s theme of “humbling the haughty and exalting the humble” (Luke 1:52; 3:5; 14:11; 18:14), and to the humiliation of Jesus as described by the Apostle Paul as having “made himself of no reputation” (Gk. *kenoo*, ken-O-o); see Philippians 2:7.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

The eunuch’s question is the pertinent one. The traditional understanding of this passage did not address his deep spiritual hunger.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

After having been invited into the Kushite’s chariot, Philip explains the Isaiah passage by beginning with the same text, and shows him that Jesus is the focus of the Scriptures. In Luke 24:13–35, the risen Jesus teaches the two on the road to Emmaus how to understand the Scriptures: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (vv. 25b–27).

The Scripture passage in Isaiah that the eunuch is reading focused on the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah. Similarly, Acts 8:32–33 refers to Jesus generally and to

His humiliation and exaltation in particular (“his judgment was taken away,” v. 33). This interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah is also seen in other New Testament Scriptures. In Romans 10:16, Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1 and applies it to his own ministry; in John 12:38, Jesus quotes Isaiah 53:1 and applies it to His ministry.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

After hearing the Scripture explained and being shown how it pointed to Jesus, the eunuch asks, “What hinders me from being baptized?” “Hinder” (Gk. *koluo*, ko-LOO-o) is also used in Luke 11:52, where Jesus accuses the lawyers of preventing (“hindering”) others from entering the Kingdom. Similar circumstances are seen later in Luke’s account.

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Because there was no reason for his exclusion from other followers of Jesus, the Kushite eunuch orders the chariot to stop. Philip and the eunuch both entered the water, and Philip baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

The Old Testament often portrays the Spirit (Gk. *pneuma*, PNYOO-mah) moving prophets around in this fashion (Ezekiel 11:24; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16).

In Acts 8:39, we read that the eunuch continued on his way “rejoicing” (Gk. *chairō*, **KHAH-ee-ro**), an appropriate response to salvation. Frequently in the books of Luke and Acts, joy or rejoicing is a noted response to God’s work in the world (Luke 1:14; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; Acts 5:41).

***Acts 8:36** Some manuscripts add verse 37, “You can,” Philip answered, “if you believe with all your heart.” And the eunuch replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

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Say It Correctly

Shewed. **SHOWED**.

Stiff-necked. **Stiff-nekt**.

Uncircumcised. uhn-**SUR**-kuhm-sized.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Blemishes That Exclude
(Leviticus 21:16–24)

TUESDAY

Lifting Up the Downtrodden
(Psalm 147:1–6)

WEDNESDAY

Gathering the Outcasts
(Isaiah 56:1–8)

THURSDAY

Changing Shame into Praise
(Zephaniah 3:14–20)

FRIDAY

A Ruler Who Seeks Justice
(Isaiah 16:1–5)

SATURDAY

A Champion for the Needy
(Job 29:2–16)

SUNDAY

The Good News about Jesus
(Acts 8:26–39)

Notes
