

Thoughts on Acts Eight

Three to four years after Christ arose from the tomb, an event occurred, moving the new church to complete the tasks Jesus left to His disciples. He had instructed them to *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"* (Mark 16:15). But the disciples are still in Jerusalem during the events of Acts chapters six and seven. People remaining where they were after being told to go is not new to the scriptures. God told Noah, *"Be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it"* (Genesis 9:7), but Noah's descendants stayed in a small area. *"They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'"* (Genesis 11:4). God forced them to move by confusing their language into many languages. The LORD said, *"Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them"* (Genesis 11:6-8).

The apostles were not unwilling to spread out into the world. The multitudes coming into Jerusalem, however, provided a constant need to teach the Gospel there. But heavy persecutions began with the murder of Stephen and a zealous student named Saul of Tarsus who was convinced that teaching Jesus must be stopped (Acts 8:1-3). Jesus had told the apostles, *"You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). Finally, as the persecutions came, the disciples carried the Gospel through Judea and Samaria, and on to the world. We can look at Acts 8 as being the start of a new portion of both Acts and the spreading of Faith in Jesus.

With Christians scattering through the nations, the need for men, *"filled with the Spirit and wisdom"* (Acts 6:3), to serve in Jerusalem changed (Acts 6:3-6). Therefore we read of Philip performing wonders and preaching just as Stephen had. *"Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them"* (Acts 8:5). This Philip is the one named in (Acts 6:5). Had it been the apostle Philip (Acts 1:13), there would be no need for Peter and John to follow after him. Interestingly, Philip started North, into Samaria, as Jesus did in John 4. He found the people eager to hear and obey just as Jesus had done. *"The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city"* (Acts 8:5-8). To ensure the entire Gospel would be revealed, Peter and John went to Samaria to "lay hands on" those chosen by the Spirit to receive the miraculous gifts of prophecy and interpretation (Acts 8:14-17).

As the Gospel was taught in new territories, the number of believers increased proportionally. The church's development presents changes to both the Jewish and Roman worlds. Luke discusses many of the changes in the remainder of Acts, including the method of expansion that changed with the changes in world politics. One such change was from the large numbers converted on Pentecost and the months following to individual and small group conversions. The large group obeying in Samaria paved the way for expansion into Antioch and Damascus, Syria, to the North and East. In contrast, one individual's conversion will start the Gospel entering the West and South. *"An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.'"* (Acts 8:26).

The meeting between Philip and an Ethiopian was not a random, chance event. It was preplanned to send the Gospel to a group of Jews who were very religious. The knowledge about The God of Israel was with the Ethiopian people since Solomon's days, and many remained faithful to the journey to Jerusalem for God's feast days. The man Philip met was *"An Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship"* (Acts 8:27). Reading and studying a scroll of Isaiah would provide the prophecies and visions of the Christ and His Gospel. But to understand the scroll's contents, the Ethiopian treasurer needed guidance. Today, we have the New Testament to guide our understanding of (Isaiah 53: 7-8) which the Ethiopian was reading. We read that *"Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him"* (Acts 8:35). The result of this preaching was *"They both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him"* (Acts 8:38).

Can each Christian begin at any point in the scripture today and teach Jesus?