

God used the martyrdom of Stephen as a catalyst for the persecution of the early church in order to give it the push it needed to start spreading the gospel beyond Jerusalem into the surrounding regions. The result was that the word of God began to spread into the areas where these disciples fled. The chapter then turns its focus to how God used Philip as an early evangelist to preach Jesus Christ in Samaria.

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

“And Saul was consenting [approved of; pleased with; to applaud] unto his death” – He heartily approved and applauded the stoning of Stephen. Saul demonstrated his approval of the stoning by his presence and by the fact that he guarded the outer garments of those that performed the stoning (Acts 7:58). Stephen’s stoning apparently inspired/motivated Saul to aggressively persecute those in the church (v. 3).

“And at that time [day] there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem” – From that very day a persecution began that was led by Saul (v. 3), who must have been emboldened by Stephen’s death to go after all those who believed in Jesus Christ. Once the line of killing Christians had been crossed at the death of Stephen, Saul was apparently eager to pursue believers and kill those who were unwilling to recant their faith in Jesus.

“and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria” – These believers fled from Jerusalem into the region surrounding Jerusalem (Judea) and farther north into Samaria. God apparently allowed the Jerusalem church to be scattered in order to spread the gospel beyond Jerusalem (v. 4).

“except the apostles” – The apostles apparently did not believe that God wanted them to abandon Jerusalem, so they remained to continue to evangelize that city.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

“And devout [reverencing God] men carried Stephen to his burial” – Commentators do not agree if these devout men were from the church or if these were devout Jewish men who did not approve of the stoning of Stephen. These men apparently believed that a good man had been unjustly killed because they retrieved Stephen’s body and gave him a proper burial, something not typically done for those who had been stoned.

“and made great lamentation [to beat the breast] over him” – Stoning was usually a punishment for a crime and so lamenting for that person was not allowed. The fact that these men made a great lamentation over Stephen’s death indicates their grief over his unjust death.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

“As for Saul, he made havock [ravage; devastate; ruin] of the church” – Saul aggressively tries to destroy the church. This is the persecution mentioned in v. 1.

“entering into every house, and haling [to pull or drag] men and women committed them to prison” – Saul started going to every house where someone was reported to follow Jesus Christ, dragging them out of their homes and taking them to prison. The “charge” is not mentioned nor did it matter since Saul’s motivation was a combination of hatred for Christians and a zeal for the Jewish religion. **John 16:2** (Jesus warning the disciples) “*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*” **Phil. 3:6a** (Paul describing why he had more reason to glory in the flesh) “*Concerning zeal, persecuting the church...*”

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” – “They that were scattered” refers to the believers that had fled Jerusalem to avoid being arrested and thrown in prison by Saul. These also do not include the apostles, who have remained in Jerusalem (v. 1). Notice that even though these believers have fled to avoid Saul’s persecution, they are still preaching the gospel wherever they go. This result is apparently the reason why God allowed the martyrdom of Stephen to trigger the persecution by Saul. God was still in control even though it might have looked otherwise to the human eye.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Philip was one of the men chosen to be a deacon (Acts 6:5) and apparently God led him into the role of being an evangelist (**Acts 21:8** “*And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him*”). Philip goes to the capital city of Samaria begins preaching the gospel to them. Most orthodox Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9), but, like Jesus (John 4:4), Philip understands that they also needed to hear the gospel and obey Jesus’ command to be a witness to them (Acts 1:8).

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake” – The people of Samaria were hungry for the word of God, as evidenced by their response of faith to the gospel that Philip preached.

“hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” – The people responded not only because they heard the gospel, but the Holy Spirit authenticated the truth of what they were hearing through miracles performed through Philip.

“For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*” – Those with demonic possession were set free.

“and many taken with palsies [paralysis], and that were lame, were healed” – Those with physical infirmities were healed.

“And there was great joy in that city” – The people rejoiced in the salvation they received through the gospel of Jesus Christ and also because of the physical benefits (freedom from demonic possession and healing of diseases).

Verses 9-25: A con man named Simon, who had pretended for years to be a man of great supernatural power, recognized that the miracles that Philip was performing were genuine and not fake. Simon “believed” but it seems that his faith was not in the gospel that Philip preached but in the miracles being performed, as evidenced by his fascination with them (vs. 13, 18-19). When the apostles came to Samaria in order to pray for the new converts to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon tried to bribe them to give him the power to give the Spirit by laying hands on people. Peter rebuked Simon, saying that he had no part in this matter and that he needed to repent because his heart was not right with God and still in the bond of iniquity. This statement scared Simon, who asked for Peter to pray for him. After this, the apostles return to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages on their way back home.

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.

Philip is still in the capital city of Samaria when God sends an angel to instruct him to head south and to the road that runs through the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza, a city near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the border between Judea and Egypt. God was not sending Philip to Gaza but to keep a divine appointment with a certain man who would be on that road.

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.

“And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia” – Philip obeys and when he reaches the road he encounters a “man of Ethiopia,” a nation south of Egypt on the African continent. Many have assumed that this man was of African descent, but it’s quite possible that this man was a Jew who was living in Ethiopia. Otherwise, Peter would have been mistaken when he said that God had used him to be the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7 – Peter speaking of his trip to Cornelius’ house recorded in Acts 10).

“an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure” – This man had great influence and authority, serving as the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia. The word “eunuch” is not always used to describe a man who has been emasculated in order to be trusted to oversee a harem, but eventually came to refer to any trusted government official.

“and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet” – The man was either a Jew or a proselyte, for he had made a long pilgrimage from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship and was now reading scripture on his way home.

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?

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” – The Holy Spirit prompts Philip to interact with the man in the chariot, thus providing Philip the opportunity to witness to him.

“And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?” – Knowing that it was God’s will, Philip hears the man reading from Isaiah and strikes up a conversation with him.

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.

God had already prepared the man’s heart to be receptive to what Philip will have to say. The man admits his frustration at understanding a passage from Isaiah and his need for someone to help him. He apparently takes Philip’s question as evidence that Philip did understand what was being read and so he invites Philip to join him in the chariot.

Verses 32-34: The man was reading Isa. 53:7-8, a Messianic prophesy predicting the suffering of Christ, but the man doesn’t understand and asks Philip if the prophet Isaiah was speaking about himself or someone else.

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?

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” – Philip was more than ready to explain that this passage from Isaiah was referring to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah of the Jews.

“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?” – Either Philip included baptism in his description of the gospel or the man was already familiar with the Jewish practice of baptism. When they encounter a body of water that was large enough, the eunuch expresses his desire to be baptized as soon as possible.

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.

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” – This statement shows that faith is a prerequisite of baptism; baptism does not bring salvation but is a result of it. Also, Philip knows from personal experience the danger of following Christ, so he wants to be sure that the eunuch’s faith is genuine and whole hearted.

“And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” – The man unhesitatingly affirms his belief in Jesus Christ.

“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” – The man stops the chariot at the water and Philip baptizes him.

Verses 39-40: Philip is supernaturally taken away from the presence of the eunuch and is later found preaching his way up the Mediterranean coast from Azotus all the way to Caesarea. The eunuch continued home rejoicing and likely brought the gospel to Ethiopia.