

Chuck Smith:

Let's turn tonight to Acts chapter 7.

In the early church when a dispute arose among the Grecians--that is, those Jews of the Grecian culture. They were actually Jews, but they had followed the Grecian culture, which was a universal culture as the result of Alexander the Great's conquest of the world. He left little pockets of Greek culture in the major areas and in Jerusalem. There were many who were no longer kosher. No longer following the Hebrew culture. But had adopted the Grecian culture, though they were still Jews. They felt that their widows were being slighted when the church was doling out its welfare program. And so they complained to the apostles, who said, "Let us appoint seven men that are of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to take care of this ministry of administering the church's welfare, in order that we might give ourselves continually to fasting and prayer." And so Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, was chosen as one of the seven, as also was Philip. Now these men were chosen for the task of waiting tables. However, the Holy Spirit had other plans for them. But, I do believe that their faithfulness in those little things is what qualified them for the greater ministry that God had.

We really don't start at the top in our ministry for the Lord. You have to start off with the little things. You have to start off with a plain, simple task. And as Jesus said, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things, now I will make you ruler of many." And I think that this is the process that the Lord does follow. Our faithfulness in the little things. So often a person comes and says, "I want to get into the ministry". And I say, "Go to the Sunday school department and volunteer, that's the best place to start in the ministry." If you can learn to relate God's truth to children then you can relate it to anybody. It's important that we get started in the Sunday school or some other small task in order that we might develop our own abilities as well as test to see if this is what God has actually called us to.

So many times when people say, "I want to go into the ministry," they expect me to dismiss Romaine and put them in his place on the staff. And there have been those that have requested that we do that. But I'm convinced that every church needs a Romaine.

So Stephen was one of those that was chosen, full of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit, and of a good report. But Stephen soon got into trouble. Not with the church, but because the Lord was working mightily through his life with great wonders--that is, the works of God that would cause people to wonder at them and miracles that he was doing. And so there were those of the synagogue of the Libertines who called him and challenged him. And they were not able to really deal with the Spirit of wisdom by which he spoke. So they hired some men to bear false witness against Stephen. And as Stephen was standing there in the counsel to face these charges, they all saw his face as though it was the face of an angel, that shining beautiful glow of the Spirit upon Stephen.

And so that brings us to chapter 7. As we noted, chapter 7 is really just a continuation of chapter 6, and you can't really start straight off in seven, you've got to have the background from six to understand the beginning.

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? (Act 7:1)

You see, you've got to have chapter 6 where they accuse Stephen of blaspheming God, of saying that the temple was going to be destroyed, and of blaspheming Moses. Speaking against Moses and the temple. These were the false charges that were made--partially true. And, of course, a partial lie is probably one of the hardest things to fight. Partial truth, partial lie is extremely difficult to combat. An outright lie is no problem. But partial truth, partial lie is difficult to combat, and this is what he was facing. He, no doubt, had declared that Jesus was going to establish a new order. And that God was not met just in the temple, but God is now dealing with men everywhere in their hearts and lives. So the priest said, "Are these things so?"

And he said, Men, and brethren, and fathers, hearken (Act 7:2);

So now begins Stephens' defense before the counsel, which is going to lead to his death. He is going to so anger them that they are going to pick up stones and gnash their teeth against him and stone him. It is interesting that in his defense he is, first of all, the accused. They have made these accusations against him, but before he is finished with his defense, he becomes the accuser and he accuses them. And his accusations of them was something that they couldn't handle, and they took up stones and killed him. So he starts his defense in recounting their history. And as he recounts their history, going back to their father Abraham, whom they all acknowledged as the father of their nation, how that God had called him out of the land of his fathers to come to a land that God would ultimately give unto him and unto his seed for a possession. How that he

journeyed to Haran until his father died, and then came on to the land that God had given to him. However, though God had promised him the entire land, he did not personally gain any inheritance in the land. Except that when his wife died, he bought a cave to bury her in, and that was the only part of the land that Abraham ever possessed--the burial cave that he had purchased from the people of the land. But then God had told Abraham that his seed was to go into a strange land where they would dwell for four hundred years. At which time God would deliver them from that land, and at that time He would give to them the land that He had promised unto them. And, that God would then judge the nation that had made them serve in such terrible bondage.

So he gave to Abraham the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him (Act 7:8-9),

The Jews not only lived in the present, they also lived in the past. Their history is extremely important to them. They have great reverence for the dead. And there is a feeling among the Jews that if you want to be near to God then you should be near the body of His saints. So they have a common practice of going to the graves of the patriarchs to pray. So at the cave of Mek Pela there in Hebron, you'll find the Jews coming there by the hundreds to pray there at the burial cave where Abraham and Jacob were buried. You'll find in Jerusalem on Mount Zion there is a place called the "Tomb of David". And anytime of the day, you can go in there and find the older men, as a rule, praying there by the tomb of David. The same is true of the tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem. And they go to the graves of righteous people to pray because they have a feeling that the Spirit of God still remains around the graves of righteous people, and that's a good place to get close to God. They prided themselves in their fathers and they were always talking about "our fathers" and always with great pride.

Stephen, in his address, is going to be showing them where the history of their fathers isn't as illustrious and glorious as they would like to believe. Their fathers for envy sold Joseph into Egypt. They rejected Joseph. Sold him as a slave to Egypt, but God was with him. And He delivered him out of all of his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh the king of Egypt, who made him the governor over Egypt and all of his house.

Now there came a dearth over the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance (Act 7:11).

You notice "our fathers", but Joseph has been cast out by them.

But our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first (Act 7:11-12).

He's really building the case on "our fathers". He's showing them that Judah and Levi and all these rotten brothers are actually their fathers.

And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers; and Joseph's family was made known to Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and his family, seventy-five all together. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died there, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph (Act 7:13-18).

He passes over from Joseph, who was rejected by their fathers, his brothers sold as a slave. That's the first example he's going to give of a mistake that their fathers made of a God-ordained leader. The second example that he is going to bring to them is that of Moses. And so he jumps right into Moses.

This Pharaoh dealt subtly with our family, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end that they might not live (Act 7:19).

That is, the Pharaoh, you remember, ordered that all of the boy babies be slain and the girl babies be kept alive. And so he is making reference to that order of the Pharaoh.

In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding beautiful, and he nourished up in his father's house for three months: and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son (Act 7:20-21).

Actually, they were ordered to cast their children into the Nile River. Moses' mother hid him for three months, and then when she cast him into the Nile River, she had made a little ark out of the bulrushes. And so she kept the order of the Pharaoh, she put him in the river, but in this little floating basket. And the Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nourished him for her own son.

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was a full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers the children of Israel. And when he saw one of them suffering wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and he killed the Egyptian: for he supposed [interesting he supposed] that his brothers would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they did not understand (Act 7:22-25).

Now when Moses came down to his brothers, he just felt, "Surely they will know that God put me in this position in order that I might deliver them." But they did not understand this.

And so the next day when he showed himself again to them as they were fighting among themselves, he said, You fellows are brothers; why are you wronging each other? But he that was doing wrong to his neighbor thrust him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Will you kill me, as you did the Egyptian yesterday? Then Moses fled at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and he drew near to behold it, and the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and dared not to behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off your shoes from your feet: for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I am come down to deliver them (Act 7:26-34).

That, to me, is very comforting as God says to Moses, "I have seen, I have heard, and I've come to help." What is true of God's people at that time is true of God's people always. God sees, God hears, and God has come to help. God sees your affliction, God sees your trials, God hears your cry, God hears your call, and He responds. God has come to help.

And now, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush (Act 7:34-35).

In their fathers, they have two classic examples of their fathers putting out God's anointed. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave. They rebelled against Joseph's dream. You remember, he had a dream where the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. He had a dream where his brothers and he were tying up their sheaves and his brothers' sheaves all bowed down to his. In these dreams, it was declared that God had ordained Joseph as a ruler over his brothers, but they rebelled against that and they tried to get rid of him selling him as a slave to Egypt. And yet, God did exalt him and make him a ruler there in Egypt, and they came under his rulership later.

Now the same is true with Moses. They cast him out. Moses thought that they would know that God had ordained that he would be a ruler and leader among them, but they did not know. And they cast Moses out. But forty years later, God brought him back as a ruler and a deliverer for the people.

And so he uses these two examples of the mistakes that their fathers made of recognizing God's ordained plan and God's ordained ruler. There's a pattern that exists in this nation.

He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and the Red sea, and in the wilderness for forty years (Act 7:36).

So Moses' life, divided up into three forty-year periods. Forty years in the schools of Egypt, becoming something. Forty years in the wilderness, finding out he was nothing. Forty years leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, finding out that God could take nothing and make something out of it. And so, the forty-year divisions of Moses' life.

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; and him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake unto him in Mount Sinai (Act 7:37-38),

The church in the wilderness. The word church, ekklesia in Greek, literally means "the called out ones". Israel was never called the church in the land, but they had been called out of Egypt, and thus, in the wilderness were known as "the called out ones". The church today are those that God has called out of the world to be a special people, a peculiar nation unto Him.

there on Mount Sinai, with our fathers: he received the living oracles which he gave unto us (Act 7:38):

That is, the oracle, is a spokesman of God's Word, and there God gave to Moses the law, His Word.

To whom our fathers (Act 7:39)

You talk about your fathers, God gave them these living oracles but they would not obey them.

but they thrust him out from among them, and their hearts turned back again to Egypt (Act 7:39),

You talk about your fathers, "Oh, our fathers this and our fathers that." Your fathers rejected the law of God. They again cast Moses out and in their hearts they returned back to Egypt.

Saying to Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what's become of him (Act 7:40).

He had been forty days up in the mountain, the people became impatient, and they came to Aaron and said, "We're going to go back to Egypt. Make us gods that will lead us back to Egypt. We don't know what's happened to Moses."

And so they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which you made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus (Act 7:41-45)

Now Jesus... there is a reference to Joshua in the Old Testament. I've told you over and over again that the name Jesus is the Greek for the Hebrew name Joshua. And because he is talking to them and it is translated here into the Greek, the name is given in Greek. But this is a reference to the historic man Joshua, who took over Moses' place and led the children of Israel into the land. "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Joshua"...that is, the tabernacles of witness that were made in the wilderness. They brought it into the land.

whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit (Act 7:45-48)

Now, he was accused, you remember, of saying things against the temple. Solomon built Him a temple, however, he said,

the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet (Act 7:48),

And, of course, you can go back to the Old Testament and you can find that they say that the Lord doesn't dwell in temples made with hands, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. And so, Solomon is saying, "I have no illusions that this is going to be Your exclusive dwelling place. The heavens of heavens cannot hold You, how much less this house that I have built. But Lord, we want this house as a place where we can just come and meet You."

For the Lord said,

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what house will you build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my abode? Hath not my hand made all these things? (Act 7:49-50)

I think of that whenever I think of giving to God. Because anytime I ever give to God anything, I'm only giving

back to Him that which is His anyhow. Didn't He make everything? He lets me be a steward of His goods, and in my giving to God, I'm only really giving that which is His anyhow.

Then he now gets to the application of the points that he has been subtly making. He presses now the application very directly.

You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so are you guilty [you're doing the same thing]. Which of the prophets have your fathers not persecuted? (Act 7:51-52)

And if you go back into their history, you'll find that their fathers persecuted every true prophet of God. Isaiah was persecuted and was sawn in two, ultimately. Jeremiah, thrown into the dungeon for speaking in the name of the Lord. Elijah and Elisha had real problems because they spoke out against the evil kings. "Your fathers? Tell me now which of the prophets did they not persecute?"

and they have slain those, which showed them before of the coming of the Just One (Act 7:52);

In other words, these prophets who were telling them of the coming of the Messiah, these true prophets of God, they had killed these prophets who had prophesied of the coming of the Just One, the Messiah.

of whom ye now have been now the betrayers and murderers (Act 7:52):

"I mean, you're worse than your fathers. They killed all of the prophets that came to them who were telling them of the coming of the Messiah. But you killed the Messiah!!" What a charge. "Because you were the betrayers and the murderers."

You have rejected the law by the disposition of angels, you have not kept it (Act 7:53).

He was accused of speaking against the law of Moses. He said, "Look, you haven't kept it; you've rejected it."

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God (Act 7:54-56).

"Your fathers rejected Joseph; God made him a ruler. Your fathers rejected Moses; God made him the ruler. You have rejected Jesus Christ; God has made Him the ruler. I see heavens opened and I see the Son of Man standing there on the right hand of God."

Jesus, in the book of Revelation, promises to those overcomers in the church of Thyatira, that they will be granted to sit on their thrones in His kingdom. Stephen sees Jesus, not sitting on the throne next to the Father, but he sees Him standing. And I believe that it is significant. I believe that Jesus has stood to receive into heaven His first martyr in the early church. The first one of millions who would give their lives for the testimony of Jesus Christ. And I believe that as Stephen was ready to be martyred, the Lord stood to receive him into that heavenly kingdom. "The Son of Man is standing there at the right hand of God."

And they cried out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears, [they did not want to hear the truth], and they ran upon him with one accord, and they threw 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. And they stoned Stephen, [and as they were stoning him] he called upon God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 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 (Act 7:57-60).

We find in the martyrdom of Stephen much of what we saw in the crucifixion of Jesus, in that number one, he was praying for those who were committing the crime.

You remember Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Stephen is saying, "Father, don't lay this sin to their charge." Praying for the persecutors. As Jesus said, "Pray for those who spitefully use you." And thus, Stephen, following the example of Jesus.

Secondly, we find that Stephen here is commending his spirit to God, even as Jesus, when on the cross, commended His Spirit unto God. And so, following the example of the Lord in His crucifixion, Stephen is now

martyred and the first blood of the church has been shed. And as the result, they did not silence the witness of the church; they only spread the witness all over the place. For then began a great persecution against the church.

Chapter 8

We are introduced now to one of the chief persecutors. A zealous young Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, whose name is Saul. And he was standing by, consenting to the death of Stephen, holding the coats of the fellows who were throwing the stones. No doubt, cheering them on. But I have no doubt, that what Stephen's death and his reaction to it had such a great effect on Paul that he never got away from it. And I believe that it was ultimately the background of Paul's conversion. For you remember, when Jesus finally apprehended Paul on the road to Damascus to imprison the Christians there, the Lord said, "Paul, it's been hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). And, the death of Stephen was something that was a goad for Paul. Hearing this young man, seeing his face like an angel, and no doubt, that witness that Stephen gave. "Hey, our fathers have been wrong. Joseph was rejected by our fathers, and yet, God had chosen him to be the ruler. Moses was rejected by our fathers, yet God had chosen him to be the ruler. Could it be that we are also guilty of rejecting God's ruler? And, of course, Peter had said, "The Stone that was set at nought by you builders, the same has become the head cornerstone" (Acts 4:11).

When I was speaking at a congress in Jerusalem, in which the purpose was to express the evangelical Christian's support for the nation of Israel, at that congress, before I had a chance to speak, I received a letter from one of the rabbi's from the Mea shureem. They're the ultra orthodox radicals. And the letter was a severe rebuke to me for being involved in a congress that was seeking to promote the peace of Jerusalem. And that's what the congress was called, "The Peace of Jerusalem Congress". This rabbi said, "Israel has no right to exist as a nation. We have no right to exist as a nation until we have our temple again. This nation is not a true nation." And he went on, really coming down on me for supporting the nation of Israel. I have been witnessing to many Jewish people over there who have become friends of the family, and so I took this radical hate-filled letter and I showed it to one of my friends. I said, "Look what one of your rabbis has sent me." And as he read the letter he got all upset. He said, "Don't pay any attention to it; they're crazy. They're a bunch of radicals. They're crazy." I said, "But they are rabbis." "Oh yeah, but they're crazy." And I said, "They are the religious rulers. They are the rabbis." "Oh, it doesn't matter, they're crazy, they're nuts. They don't know what they're talking about." I said, "That is very interesting. Have you ever stopped to think that it was perhaps men, just like these, who rejected Jesus Christ? Radicals, crazies. And you are still following their crazy, radical conclusions?" He didn't have anything to say.

Saul was consenting unto the death of Stephen. 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 Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him (Act 8:1-2).

It is quite possible that these devout men are not Christians or members of the church. And the reason why I say that is because, "They made great lamentation over him." A true understanding of what happens to a child of God at death doesn't really provoke great lamentation. It provokes rejoicing for them, who are now there with the Lord in the Kingdom. It could be that some of the Jews, devout men... you see, it doesn't identify them as Christians at all. Just devout men, and the Jew was usually described by his devotedness. Had taken Stephen's body and perhaps they lamented that such a fine young man should be so mistreated by the radical crowd.

And as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison (Act 8:3).

So Paul was empowered by the Sanhedrin to imprison those who called upon the Lord, and he was going to the house fellowships and just wrecking havoc among the early church.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word (Act 8:4).

And so, far from stamping out the witness of the church, all the persecution did was spread the witness all over the place. For everywhere they went, they were preaching the Word of God, and thus, the Gospel began to spread throughout Judea and Samaria.

Jesus had said to His disciples in the first chapter, (verse 8), "And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem... " And remember that they said, "You

have filled this city with this Man's doctrine." "And in Judea and in Samaria." And so we find now the next movement of the church as it goes beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria as the result of this persecution. Paul being one of the chief persecutors of the church.

So Philip (Act 8:5)

Now we are introduced to a second of the seven who was appointed to the task of waiting tables in the early church and overseeing the church's welfare program. God is taking another one now, filled with the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom and of good report and is using him now in the ministry of an evangelist. And later on we find, years later, that Philip is living in Caesarea. And he is called there, Philip the evangelist. And we are told that by this time he now has four daughters who possess the gift of prophecy. And as Paul is returning to Jerusalem, he stops and spends a few days with Philip in Caesarea. I imagine that Paul and Philip, as they were there, probably recounted some of the early experiences of Stephen, and of Paul's being there, because Philip was there and around the situation also. And how their paths had crossed earlier in life, only, then they were going different directions. And how God had brought them together in the communion of the Gospel here now, later on in Caesarea.

So Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Act 8:5).

And remember the word "Christ" is the Greek word for "Messiah". So he preached the Messiah unto them.

The Samaritans were looking for the Messiah. You remember when Jesus met the women at the well there near Shechem, she said to Him, "We know that when Messiah has come He is going to teach us all things." They were looking for the Messiah. They knew the scriptures that related to the Messiah and they were looking for the Messiah. And you remember that the woman went into the town and started telling people, "Come and hear a man who had told me everything that I've ever done. Is this not the Messiah?" And they came out and they heard Jesus, and then they said, "Now we believe, not because of what you have told us, because we have heard and seen for ourselves." And so the seed was already planted in Samaria, and so Philip went to proclaim the Messiah unto them.

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

The city of Samaria, the Gospel is now being preached, and the result of the Gospel, in the hearts of the people, is that of great joy. Always the result of the preaching of the Good News.

Now there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and he bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one (Act 8:9):

There was this fellow, probably a warlock. He used sorcery. He had the people convinced that he had great mystical, magical powers.

And all of the people had given heed to him, from the least of them to the greatest, saying, that this man had a great power of God. And to him they had regard, because for a long time he had been bewitching them with these sorceries. But when they believed Philip and the preaching of the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Act 8:10-12).

They were freed from the bewitching of this Simon and they were brought to the Gospel and baptized.

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John (Act 8:13-14):

Peter and John, interesting companions in the Gospel records. Men of different temperaments. Yet, brought together and very closely associated with each other. But it is interesting that this is the last mention of John in the book of Acts. Peter comes in for further mention. The attention will, of course, later on, turn to Paul and to Barnabas and to others, but this interestingly enough, in the book of Acts, is the last mention of John. Now John did outlive the rest of the disciples. And, of course, in the later years wrote his gospel, his three epistles, and the book of Revelation. But later on, as we are dealing with the church in Jerusalem, and the issues that

come up before the church counsel, John strangely is not mentioned in any type of a role. The witness is silent concerning John. And I really don't have any real suggestion for that, except that it's just not there, and I don't know why. But as John said in his Gospel, "I suppose that if everything were written that should be written, all of the books in the world could not contain the things that should have been written about these things."

So when the church or the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Now that would take away the idea of Peter being the pope, because he was sent by the apostles. He was sent by them. It didn't say, "He had the pontifical authority and was giving the orders." But that he was sent by the apostles.

Who were, when they had come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) (Act 8:15-16)

Now it is interesting how that this has been a problem to so many Bible commentators. The fact that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. That He had not fallen upon them as yet. It is commonly acknowledged that a person is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. And no man can call Jesus Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. And the moment a person receives Jesus Christ and is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes into their lives. We know that you cannot receive Jesus without receiving the Holy Spirit into your life. And so this poses a great problem to the majority of Bible commentators when we find that the people in Samaria had believed and were baptized in water, and yet, the apostles sent them down that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen upon any of them. I am surprised that with all of these scholars, who are so problemated over this particular text, that they have not noted the Greek preposition. You remember Jesus said concerning the Holy Spirit to His disciples, "For He is with you and shall be in you." But later Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Now this is the same Greek preposition *epi* that is used here. The Holy Spirit had not yet fallen, *epi*, upon them. So the commentators have difficulty trying to say, "Well, they were not filled with the Spirit; this was some special case in Samaria, because this was the first time out of Jerusalem and all." And they really wrestle and do all kinds of foolish things with this text. Because they do not want to acknowledge that there is an empowering experience of the Holy Spirit apart from conversion. But yet, that is exactly what the text does prove. That yes, we do receive the Holy Spirit in us when Christ comes into our lives. But there is an empowering experience subsequent to our salvation, where our lives are endued with the power of God's Spirit, as He comes upon us, anointing us for power to serve God. And it's a very simple, obvious solution, but it is one that most of the Bible commentators really stumble heavily over this. And I am amused at the various explanations they try to give of this particular text when the answer is so simple.

They had received Jesus Christ; they were baptized, so obviously the Spirit was dwelling in them. But they had not had an empowering experience like the apostles experienced on the day of Pentecost. For He was not yet fallen upon any of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit (Act 8:17-19).

When Simon saw that through the laying on of hands that the Holy Spirit was imparted, there must have been some kind of visible or audible evidence that they were being empowered with the Holy Spirit, or else, why would he ask for that power? If they would just lay their hands on them and say, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," and there was nothing visible, or audible to signify that the gift was being imparted, there wouldn't be this great desire by Simon to possess the same kind of power. No doubt, there was some kind of evidence that these people were receiving an empowering of God's Spirit upon their lives. And I really do not doubt but what they were speaking in other tongues, and perhaps, prophesying, as was the case in Ephesus in the nineteenth chapter. So it is not here declared, I personally feel that this probably was the case. And that is why Simon desired to purchase this power. Now his desire to purchase this power, or a position in the church, is where the name for that evil which later permeated the church was originated-simony. That is, the purchase of a position within the church. And unfortunately, the church went through a very dark period of history where positions in the church were auctioned off to the highest bidder. And there were times where the pope and his position was actually auctioned and purchased by the highest bidder. That awful evil known as simony, that did come into the church. That purchasing of position or authority.

This is a common practice among magicians. If a magician has a good trick, other magicians will seek to buy that trick, how it is done. And there are those who are practicing that art of leger de main, the common practice of selling the tricks to one another. And so Simon, being a sorcerer, being a deceiver, bewitching the people, having in his past purchased various types of information thought that he could purchase now this gift of God.

But Peter said unto him, Your money perish with thee, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money (Act 8:20).

What a horrible thing.

You neither have part or lot in this matter: for your heart is not right in the sight of God (Act 8:21).

And so Peter exercising now this gift of discernment begins to really deal with the issue of Simon's heart.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity (Act 8:22-23).

Now, though he had followed Philip and was a great admirer of the works that he was doing, yet within in his heart there was the gall of bitterness. Probably bitter over the fact that he was no longer looked up to by the people as he had once been. Bitter over the fact that the people were now following a new leader, even Jesus Christ, whom Philip had declared unto them. And that his little crowd had turned from him unto another, and that bothered him deep down in his heart. Though outwardly he was there with Philip and followed Philip and was baptized. Inwardly it was eating away. The bond of iniquity, the gall of bitterness. What a terrible thing bitterness is. How sad it is that a person would harbor bitterness in their heart. Bitterness can only hurt you. It only does you harm. You really can't afford bitterness. And he was told, "Pray that God might forgive you of this, for down in your heart you have bitterness, the bond of iniquity."

Then answered Simon, and he said, Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things that you have spoken will come upon me (Act 8:24).

He asked for prayer, and I believe that he was sincere.

And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and they preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans (Act 8:25).

So John and Peter became evangelists. And as they were returning back to Jerusalem, they stopped in the villages of Samaria and preached the Gospel unto many.

And the angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 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, was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet (Act 8:26-28).

Now this is interesting in several respects. First of all, it is interesting because it gives us an insight into how God leads us by His Spirit. So many times I have people say, "I wish I knew what the will of God was for my life." And usually by that, they are saying, "I wish God would, sort-of, show me on a screen my future. I like to know what my future holds. I would like to know what God has planned for me. Then I can determine whether or not I want to do it." But in wanting to know the will of God, usually we want to know the next year, five years from now. We want our five-year program, our ten-year program, our twenty-year program. "Now, God, you know, lay it out." But God only said to Philip, "Go down to the road that is going from Jerusalem to Gaza, toward the desert." He didn't tell him anymore. That's the first step in the will of God.

God did not speak unto him again until he had taken the first step. So many times when God has given us the first step we don't want to go until He gives us the second step and the third step and the fourth step. We are prone to say, "Lord, why in the world do you want me to go to Gaza? There's nobody down there. That's a desert area, Lord. Why would you want me to leave this great meeting here in Samaria? Lord, you're making a serious mistake here. There are hundreds of people that are being saved. They're coming and they're listening to the Gospel. This is exciting, Lord. Why should I go to Gaza?" And I want the Lord to tell me why He has given me the first step. I want to know the whole plan, the whole program that God is doing. But God, so often, only gives us step one. And step two does not come until step one had been taken. And I am certain that, had he stayed in Samaria, arguing with God, seeking to have further clarification of this call, that he would have never received it. God would've sent someone else to meet that Ethiopian eunuch. One step at a time, that's how God usually directs our lives. That's how God has directed my life. Just one step at a time. It used to bother me. It used to bother me severely that God would only lead me one step at a time. Now I find it rather exciting. And I

always like it when it's God's move.

You know, when I make my move, and then I say, "Okay, Lord, it's Your move," I'm obedient to what the Lord told me to do and now I wait to see what the next instruction is from Him. I don't like it so much when it's my move. I have difficulty many times with my move. But it's always great when I've made my move and I turn and say, "Okay now, Lord, Your move again."

Philip obeyed the first move. He left. No doubt he had many questions in his mind, but he left Samaria, the great revival, and he went down to this area, from going from Jerusalem to Gaza to the desert place.

Notice that this man had been to Jerusalem to worship God and was returning, sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet. I believe that this man was a sincere seeker for God. In his heart he was really seeking after the Lord. For, no doubt, the Spirit had been drawing him. And in his search for God he came to Jerusalem, the center of the worship. Coming from Ethiopia they were familiar with Judaism. Because when the Queen of Sheba returned from her visit with Solomon, she took back to Ethiopia the Hebrew religion. There began then, in Ethiopia, the fillan jess movement. Those Ethiopians who were Jewish in their faith and practices. According to their traditions, the Queen of Sheba also took back to Egypt, in her womb, a son of Solomon. Who, they aptly called "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah." And Hal-e-so-lassie the... recently, a few years back, deposed leader of Ethiopia, did claim to be a direct descendent of Solomon and the king of Judah and the head over this faction in Ethiopia who followed Judaism. Thus, Judaism was well known in Ethiopia, and Jerusalem was the center of Judaism.

In the search of this man for God, it would only be natural that his search would bring him to Jerusalem. The tragedy is that while in Jerusalem, he did not find what he was searching for. And now he is returning to Ethiopia just as empty as he came. A heart still yearning after God. But God saw the yearning heart. I believe that God sees every yearning heart. And that God will take measures to bring His love and truth to every true seeker after God. If a person is genuinely seeking after God in his heart, I believe that God will reveal the truth even by miracles or whatever. And I think such is the case. God saw this man, and so He stirred the heart of Philip in the midst of the revival and said, "Go down to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, that desert place." When he got there, he saw the chariot, and the man sitting in the chariot, and the Lord said unto him,

Go near, and join yourself to this chariot (Act 8:29).

Step two, but step two did not come until he was fully obedient to step one.

And Philip ran up to him, and he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you read? And he said, How can I, unless some man should guide me? And he requested that Philip would come up and sit with him [there in the chariot]. And the place in the scripture where 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: in his humiliation his judgement was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth (Act 8:30-33).

Isaiah 53, that prophecy of Isaiah, of the Servant of God, who would be despised and rejected. The Servant of God whose life would be taken away. Who would be slain as a sheep without really responding to the charges.

And the eunuch said, I pray thee, whom is the prophet speaking this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and he began [at that verse] the same scripture, and he preached unto him Jesus (Act 8:34-35).

And as we pointed out this morning, it wouldn't have made any difference where the man was reading in the Old Testament, it would've been possible at that very scripture or to start from anywhere in the Old Testament and preach Jesus. For the Old Testament is the story of Jesus from beginning to end. Jesus said, "You do search the scriptures for in them you think you have life. But actually, they are testifying of me. I have come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, O Lord."

But he opened at that scripture and began to preach unto him Jesus. Jesus expounded to the disciples on the road to Emmaus all that Moses and the prophets said of the things concerning Himself. How He must suffer and die and rise.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized? 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. And so he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both of them into the water (Act 8:36-38),

I guess he didn't just sprinkle him.

both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, that the eunuch saw him no more: but he went his way rejoicing (Act 8:38-39).

Philip had a ministry that brought joy to people. You remember in Samaria the result of the ministry. The city was filled with joy. Now he's ministered to this man who continues his journey, no longer searching. He has found, as a result of finding a real relationship with God, he is rejoicing. And from that time in history, there has always been a church in Ethiopia. He had, no doubt, a great influence on the establishing of the Gospel and the church in Ethiopia. "He went his way rejoicing."

Now here's a interesting thing about Philip: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." Now, by what means, I don't know. There have been times that I have wished that the Spirit of the Lord would catch me away. When I'm facing a long hike back and you're weary and tired.

But Philip was found at Azotus (Act 8:40):

It would appear from the language that it was sort of a miraculous catching away. That's what the language would indicate. But, of course, nothing is really mentioned as far as the methods. So to speculate is worthless. Why make guesses? Who knows? We don't!

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all of the cities, till he came to Caesarea (Act 8:40).

In a chapter or two, we're going to find Peter going down to preach to the church in Lydda and healing a certain man by the name of Aeneas who had been in bed for several years. And then we find that the church in Joppa, when they hear that Peter was in Lydda, sent to him a request that he would come quickly to Joppa because a certain woman, Dorcas, had died. And so Peter went then to Joppa and ministered to Dorcas. Now how is it that there was a church in Lydda and in Joppa? If you will look at that the map and find Gaza, and then Azotus, and we are told that he went from Azotus, in all of the cities preaching till he came to Caesarea. I believe that these churches in Joppa and Lydda were probably established by the evangelist Philip, because these are some of the cities that he would be passing through going from Azotus to Caesarea. I think that his ministry there resulted in the birth of these churches. In these same areas that Peter had come down and minister to.

It seems that when he came to Caesarea, that he made Caesarea his home. I can surely understand why. It is a beautiful seaport city, sitting on the Mediterranean. The water on the Mediterranean takes on a very special blue, the beaches are gorgeous, and if I had a choice of places to live, Caesarea wouldn't be a bad choice at all.

And so, Philip stayed there in Caesarea establishing his home there. Years later, Paul visited with Philip there in Caesarea, remaining with him there in his home before he continued his journey to Jerusalem. We'll come back to Philip's house in Caesarea later on in the book of Acts. We'll return to his house, and we'll visit for awhile with Paul. That's why I emphasize his house in Caesarea, because we are coming back to this house before we're through with the book of Acts.

As we go on into chapter nine next week, we will get to the conversion of Paul, and the interesting aspects of his conversion. Then, Peter's visit to Lydda and to Joppa, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in chapter ten on the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, where Philip ends up. It is interesting that God would call Peter for this work. It could be that Philip was not in Caesarea at this time, or it could be that again he had planted seed, and that's why Cornelius was such a devout man.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word and the excitement that it has generated in our hearts when we see men so used of the Holy Spirit. And we realize that they are just common men like us. And so, Lord, we desire that our lives be used by the Holy Spirit to share the love of Jesus Christ with the world around us. Lord, we offer You tonight our lives, our bodies as living sacrifices that we might, O God, be instruments in Your hands doing Your work, touching the needy world around us. O Lord, we recognize that we need that power of Your Holy Spirit to do any work that is truly effective. So Lord, anoint us with Your power in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Commentary on Acts 7-8

May the Lord bless and give you a beautiful week, fill you with His love and Spirit, and may He use your life as His instrument accomplishing His work, in Jesus' name.