

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 8 — The Gospel Spreads Beyond Jerusalem

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 8 marks a major turning point in the spread of the gospel.

Until this point, the church has been centered primarily in Jerusalem.

Jesus had already told His disciples:

“You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Now that promise begins unfolding dramatically.

The catalyst is persecution.

Stephen has been killed.

Saul approves of his death.

A great persecution breaks out against the church.

Believers are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

From a human perspective, this looks disastrous.

But God turns persecution into expansion.

The believers who are scattered do not become silent.

They go everywhere:

“Preaching the word.”

Philip goes into Samaria and proclaims Christ.

The gospel crosses a major cultural boundary.

Samaritans believe.

People are healed.

Evil spirits are driven out.

And:

“There was great joy in that city.”

Acts 8 then introduces Simon the sorcerer.

Simon had amazed the people through magic and had gained a great reputation.

But when Philip preached the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, people believed and were baptized.

Simon himself professed belief and was baptized, but his later attempt to purchase spiritual power revealed that his heart was not right before God.

Peter tells him:

“Repent.”

The chapter then moves from a citywide awakening to one man traveling through the desert.

An angel directs Philip away from the crowds of Samaria toward a desert road.

There Philip meets an Ethiopian official reading Isaiah 53.

The Holy Spirit tells Philip:

“Go to that chariot.”

Philip hears the man reading Isaiah and asks:

“Do you understand what you are reading?”

The Ethiopian replies:

“How can I, unless someone explains it to me?”

Beginning with that very Scripture, Philip tells him:

The good news about Jesus.

The Ethiopian believes.

He is baptized.

And he goes on his way:

Rejoicing.

Acts 8 therefore shows the gospel moving:

From Jerusalem.

Into Samaria.

Toward Africa.

Across ethnic boundaries.

Across cultural boundaries.

Across religious boundaries.

And through both large public ministries and personal one-on-one conversations.

The central truth of Acts 8 is:

Persecution cannot stop the gospel, because the Holy Spirit directs faithful believers across human boundaries to proclaim Jesus Christ to people whom God has prepared to hear.

I. SAUL APPROVES STEPHEN'S DEATH

Acts 8:1 — Persecution Begins

“Saul agreed with the killing of Stephen. On that very day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Everyone except the apostles was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

Saul now becomes directly associated with the persecution of the church.

He approved Stephen's death.

Then persecution spreads.

Cross References

Acts 9:1

Saul continued breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord and went to the high priest seeking authority to arrest believers.

Matthew 10:23

Jesus said, “When people persecute you in one town, flee to another. You will not finish going through the towns before the Son of Man's purposes move forward.”

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Spiritual Principle

The persecution intended to destroy the church.

Instead, it helped fulfill Acts 1:8.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What Satan intends to use for destruction, God can redirect for gospel expansion.

II. STEPHEN IS BURIED

Acts 8:2

“Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.”

Stephen was victorious spiritually.

But that did not mean his death brought no grief.

The believers mourned.

Cross References

Genesis 50:10

When Joseph's family reached the place of mourning near the Jordan, they mourned deeply for Jacob and observed a period of sorrow.

2 Chronicles 32:33

Hezekiah died and was buried with honor, and the people mourned his death.

Genesis 23:2

Sarah died, and Abraham went to mourn for her and weep.

Spiritual Principle

Christian hope does not forbid grief.

Believers can mourn deeply while still believing in resurrection.

III. SAUL TRIES TO DESTROY THE CHURCH

Acts 8:3

“But Saul began destroying the church. He went from house to house, dragging out men and women and throwing them into prison.”

Saul's persecution was intense and personal.

He entered homes.

Men and women were arrested.

Cross References

Acts 9:1

Saul continued threatening the Lord's disciples and seeking authority to capture them.

Galatians 1:13

Paul later said, “You have heard about my former way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it.”

1 Timothy 1:13

Paul later wrote, “I was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man, but I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”

Spiritual Principle

No one is beyond the reach of God's transforming grace.

The persecutor Saul will eventually become the preacher Paul.

IV. THE SCATTERED BELIEVERS PREACH

Acts 8:4

“Those who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the word.”

This verse is remarkable.

They lost:

Homes.

Security.

Community.

Normal routines.

Yet they carried the gospel with them.

Cross References

Acts 11:19

The believers scattered by persecution traveled into other regions and continued spreading the message.

Philippians 1:12

Paul said, “I want you to know that what has happened to me has actually helped advance the gospel.”

Acts 5:42

Day after day, publicly and from house to house, the believers continued teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution scattered the believers geographically but could not silence them spiritually.

V. PHILIP PREACHES CHRIST IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:5

“Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ there.”

This is a major development.

Jewish-Samaritan hostility had existed for generations.

Yet Philip crosses that barrier.

Cross References

John 4:39

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the testimony given about Him.

Acts 9:31

The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace, grew stronger, and increased through the encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8

Jesus said His witnesses would carry the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel crosses barriers people consider permanent.

VI. THE CROWDS LISTEN TO PHILIP

Acts 8:6

“Crowds paid close attention to what he said when they heard him and saw the miracles he performed.”

Philip's message and ministry drew widespread attention.

Cross References

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out preaching, and the Lord worked with them, confirming the message through accompanying signs.

John 6:2

A large crowd followed Jesus because they saw the miraculous signs He performed for the sick.

John 7:31

Many people believed in Jesus and said, “When the Messiah comes, will He perform more signs than this man has done?”

Spiritual Principle

Signs should confirm the message, not replace the message.

Philip's central work remained:

Proclaiming Christ.

VII. PEOPLE ARE DELIVERED AND HEALED

Acts 8:7

“Many evil spirits came out of people, screaming loudly, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.”

Philip's ministry demonstrates Christ's authority over both spiritual oppression and physical suffering.

Cross References

Mark 1:26

The unclean spirit shook the man violently, cried out loudly, and came out of him.

Mark 5:13

Jesus gave the evil spirits permission to leave the man, and they entered the pigs.

Matthew 4:24

People brought to Jesus those suffering from diseases, severe pain, demonic oppression, seizures, and paralysis, and He healed them.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus Christ has authority over powers that human beings cannot control.

VIII. GREAT JOY COMES TO THE CITY

Acts 8:8

“So there was great joy in that city.”

The gospel produces joy.

Cross References

Acts 13:52

The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 2:10

The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.”

Nehemiah 8:10

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Spiritual Principle

Where Christ brings freedom, forgiveness, healing, and hope, joy follows.

IX. SIMON THE SORCERER

Acts 8:9

“In that city there was a man named Simon, who had practiced sorcery and amazed the people of Samaria. He claimed to be someone great.”

Simon had built a reputation around himself.

He amazed people.

He wanted people to think he was great.

Cross References

Exodus 7:11

Pharaoh called his wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians performed signs through their secret arts.

Deuteronomy 18:10

Israel was forbidden to practice sorcery, divination, witchcraft, or other occult practices.

Acts 13:6

Paul later encountered a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual-sounding power is not automatically from God.

Every claim must be tested by truth.

X. THE PEOPLE CALL SIMON “THE GREAT POWER”

Acts 8:10

“And all the people, from the least to the greatest, said, ‘This man is the great power of God.’”

The people were spiritually deceived.

Cross References

Acts 14:11

When people saw Paul's miracle, they shouted that the gods had come down among them in human form.

Acts 12:22

The crowd shouted concerning Herod, “This is the voice of a god, not a man!”

Acts 28:6

After Paul survived a snakebite, the people changed their minds and began saying he was a god.

Spiritual Principle

Crowds can wrongly attribute divine power to human personalities.

Popularity is not proof of divine approval.

XI. SIMON'S MAGIC HAD CONTROLLED ATTENTION

Acts 8:11

“They followed him because he had amazed them with his magic for a long time.”

The people were impressed by extraordinary experiences.

Cross References

Revelation 13:3

The world was amazed by the beast and followed after him.

Deuteronomy 13:3

Israel was warned not to follow false spiritual claims merely because a sign occurred.

Galatians 3:1

Paul asked the Galatians who had spiritually confused or bewitched them away from the truth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never allow amazement to replace discernment.

Something spectacular is not necessarily something holy.

XII. PHILIP PREACHES THE KINGDOM AND JESUS

Acts 8:12

“But when Philip preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, many men and women believed and were baptized.”

The contrast is clear.

Simon magnified himself.

Philip magnified Jesus.

Cross References

Mark 16:16

Jesus taught that the one who believes and openly identifies with Him should be baptized.

Acts 2:38

Peter called the people to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples among all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry directs attention away from the messenger and toward Jesus Christ.

XIII. SIMON ALSO BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED

Acts 8:13

“Simon himself believed and was baptized. He followed Philip everywhere, amazed by the great signs and miracles he saw.”

Simon responds outwardly.

He professes belief.

He is baptized.

He follows Philip.

Yet Luke emphasizes something concerning Simon:

He remains fascinated by:

Signs and miracles.

Cross References

John 2:23

Many people believed in Jesus' name when they saw the signs He performed.

Matthew 13:20

Jesus described seed received with immediate joy but lacking deep root.

John 12:42

Many leaders believed certain things about Jesus but were afraid to confess Him openly because they valued human approval.

Important Observation

Simon becomes a warning that outward response does not automatically prove inward transformation.

Later Peter will say:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

XIV. JERUSALEM HEARS THAT SAMARIA HAS RECEIVED THE WORD

Acts 8:14

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”

This was historically significant.

Samaritans were being incorporated into the expanding people of God.

Cross References

Acts 11:22

When news of gospel growth reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate and encourage the believers.

Acts 11:1

The apostles and believers in Judea heard that Gentiles also had received God's Word.

Acts 15:2

Later major questions concerning Gentile believers were brought before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel creates one people of God across old ethnic and cultural divisions.

XV. PETER AND JOHN PRAY FOR THE SAMARITANS

Acts 8:15

“When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Acts 19:2

Paul asked certain disciples whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

Acts 10:44

While Peter was preaching to Cornelius' household, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who heard the Word.

John 7:39

Jesus spoke about the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive after He was glorified.

Spiritual Principle

The inclusion of Samaritans into the church was visibly confirmed by God's Spirit.

XVI. THE HOLY SPIRIT HAD NOT YET COME UPON THEM

Acts 8:16

“Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

This is an unusual transitional event in Acts.

The sequence here differs from Acts 2 and Acts 10.

Cross References

Acts 19:5

When certain disciples heard the full message about Jesus, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 2:38

Peter connected repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19

Jesus commanded baptism in the triune name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Important Observation

Acts records several transitional moments as the gospel moves from:

Jews.

To Samaritans.

To Gentiles.

The delay here likely highlights apostolic confirmation that Samaritan believers belonged fully to the same church rather than forming a separate Samaritan Christianity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ did not create a Jewish church and a Samaritan church—He created one church.

XVII. THEY RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 8:17

“Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

Cross References

Acts 19:6

Paul laid his hands upon certain believers, and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Hebrews 6:2

The laying on of hands is included among basic teachings familiar to early believers.

Acts 9:17

Ananias placed his hands upon Saul and told him that the Lord had sent him so Saul might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God publicly demonstrated that Samaritan believers were fully included in His redeemed people.

XVIII. SIMON OFFERS MONEY

Acts 8:18

“When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the apostles’ hands, he offered them money.”

Simon's old way of thinking resurfaces.

He views spiritual power as something that can be purchased.

Cross References

2 Kings 5:16

Elisha refused payment from Naaman for the healing God had provided.

Matthew 10:8

Jesus told His disciples, “Freely you have received; freely give.”

Numbers 22:7

Balaam was approached with payment connected to using supposed spiritual power for selfish purposes.

Spiritual Principle

God's gifts cannot be turned into merchandise.

XIX. SIMON WANTS THE POWER FOR HIMSELF

Acts 8:19

“Saying, ‘Give me this power also so that everyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Notice Simon's concern.

He does not ask:

“How can I know God better?”

He asks:

“How can I possess this power?”

Cross References

Numbers 22:17

Balak offered Balaam great honor and reward if he would use spiritual power for his desired purpose.

Matthew 7:22

Jesus warned that people may point to dramatic spiritual works while still lacking a genuine relationship with Him.

Acts 19:13

Some people later attempted to use Jesus' name as though spiritual authority were a technique they could possess.

Spiritual Principle

A desire for spiritual power can itself become sinful when the heart seeks influence rather than God.

XX. GOD'S GIFT CANNOT BE BOUGHT

Acts 8:20

“But Peter said, ‘May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God!’”

Peter responds strongly.

Cross References

2 Kings 5:27

Gehazi's greed concerning Naaman's healing brought severe judgment upon him.

Matthew 10:8

Jesus said, "Freely you have received; freely give."

Isaiah 55:1

God invites the thirsty to come and receive what He provides without money and without price.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace cannot be purchased because grace, by definition, is God's gift.

XXI. SIMON'S HEART IS NOT RIGHT

Acts 8:21

"You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God."

This statement reaches the central problem.

Not merely his money.

Not merely his words.

His:

Heart.

Cross References

Psalms 78:37

Israel's heart was not steadfast toward God, and they were not faithful to His covenant.

1 Chronicles 12:17

David warned men approaching him that God knows the heart and judges hidden motives.

Psalms 51:10

David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a faithful spirit within me."

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual problems are ultimately heart problems.

XXII. SIMON IS CALLED TO REPENT

Acts 8:22

“Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you.”

Peter does not flatter Simon.

He calls him to repentance.

Cross References

Acts 3:19

Peter said, “Repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped away.”

Isaiah 55:7

Let the wicked abandon his way and the sinful person his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, who will have mercy and freely forgive.

Joel 2:14

The prophet calls sinners to return to God, recognizing that He is gracious and compassionate.

Spiritual Principle

The proper response to exposed sin is repentance, not defensiveness.

XXIII. SIMON IS TRAPPED IN SIN

Acts 8:23

“I see that you are full of bitterness and trapped in sin.”

Peter diagnoses Simon's spiritual condition severely.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 29:18

Moses warned against allowing a root to grow that produces poisonous and bitter fruit through turning away from God.

Hebrews 12:15

Believers are warned not to allow a root of bitterness to grow and cause trouble.

Proverbs 5:22

The wicked person's own sins capture him, and he becomes held by the cords of his sin.

Spiritual Principle

Sin promises freedom but ultimately creates slavery.

XXIV. SIMON ASKS PETER TO PRAY

Acts 8:24

“Then Simon answered, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, so that none of these things will happen to me.’”

Simon expresses fear concerning judgment.

The text does not tell us clearly whether his heart ultimately changed.

Cross References

Exodus 8:8

Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron to pray that God's judgment would be removed.

Numbers 21:7

Israel confessed its sin and asked Moses to pray to the Lord for deliverance.

James 5:16

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.

Important Warning

A person can fear consequences without truly hating sin.

Genuine repentance seeks reconciliation with God, not merely escape from punishment.

XXV. THE GOSPEL SPREADS THROUGH SAMARITAN VILLAGES

Acts 8:25

“After Peter and John had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages along the way.”

The gospel's movement through Samaria continues.

Cross References

Luke 9:52

Jesus once sent messengers ahead into a Samaritan village.

John 4:40

Samaritans asked Jesus to remain with them, and He stayed there two days.

Acts 13:5

Paul and Barnabas later proclaimed God's Word in multiple cities as missionary work expanded.

Spiritual Principle

Yesterday's place of hostility can become tomorrow's mission field.

XXVI. GOD SENDS PHILIP TO A DESERT ROAD

Acts 8:26

“Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’”

Philip is experiencing successful ministry in Samaria.

Then God sends him away from the crowds.

Cross References**1 Kings 19:5**

An angel touched Elijah and gave him instructions during his wilderness journey.

Genesis 16:7

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the wilderness.

Judges 13:3

The angel of the Lord appeared and announced God's purpose concerning Samson's birth.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may lead a servant away from a crowd because one person matters to Him.

XXVII. PHILIP OBEYS IMMEDIATELY

Acts 8:27

“So he started out, and on the way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasury. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship.”

Philip does not argue.

He goes.

And God's purpose becomes visible.

Cross References

Psalm 68:31

Representatives from Egypt and Cush will stretch out their hands toward God.

Isaiah 56:4

The Lord promises special inclusion and blessing to eunuchs who honor His covenant.

Zephaniah 3:10

Worshippers from beyond the rivers of Cush will bring offerings to God.

Spiritual Principle

Obedience often reveals God's reason only after the servant begins moving.

XXVIII. THE ETHIOPIAN IS READING SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:28

“And on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah.”

He had worshiped in Jerusalem.

Now he reads Scripture.

God has prepared his heart for the gospel.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 17:19

God's law was to be read regularly so that the reader would learn to fear the Lord and obey His Word.

Nehemiah 8:8

The teachers read God's law clearly and explained its meaning so the people could understand.

John 5:39

Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and these very Scriptures testify about Me."

Spiritual Principle

God can prepare a heart through Scripture before the evangelist ever arrives.

XXIX. THE SPIRIT DIRECTS PHILIP

Acts 8:29

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'"

The angel directed Philip to the road.

Now the Holy Spirit directs him toward the person.

Cross References

Acts 10:19

While Peter was thinking about his vision, the Spirit told him that men were looking for him.

Ezekiel 3:12

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel and directed his prophetic ministry.

Acts 16:7

The Spirit later directed Paul and his companions concerning where they should and should not minister.

Spiritual Principle

Effective evangelism depends not only upon willingness to speak but sensitivity to God's direction.

XXX. “DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?”

Acts 8:30

“Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

Philip begins with a question.

He does not force the conversation.

He listens first.

Cross References

Nehemiah 8:8

God's Word was read clearly and explained so the people could understand its meaning.

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and the Prophets, Jesus explained what the Scriptures said concerning Himself.

Luke 24:45

Jesus opened the disciples' understanding so they could comprehend the Scriptures.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Good evangelism often begins by listening for the question God is already placing in someone's heart.

XXXI. “HOW CAN I UNLESS SOMEONE EXPLAINS IT?”

Acts 8:31

“The eunuch replied, ‘How can I, unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

The man was willing to learn.

Cross References

Romans 10:14

How can people call upon One they have not believed in? And how can they believe unless they hear? And how can they hear without someone preaching?

Romans 10:17

Faith comes through hearing, and hearing comes through the message concerning Christ.

Nehemiah 8:8

God's servants explained Scripture so the people understood what was being read.

Spiritual Principle

God uses people to help other people understand His Word.

XXXII. THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH

Acts 8:32

“The passage of Scripture he was reading was this: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth.’”

The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to slaughter and remained silent like a sheep before its shearers.

John 1:29

John saw Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

1 Peter 1:19

Believers were redeemed through the precious blood of Christ, like that of a spotless and unblemished lamb.

Key Truth

Isaiah's suffering Servant finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

XXXIII. THE SERVANT IS HUMILIATED AND KILLED

Acts 8:33

“In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.”

Cross References

Isaiah 53:8

He was taken away through oppression and unjust judgment. He was cut off from the land of the living because of the sin of the people.

Philippians 2:8

Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.

Daniel 9:26

Daniel foretold that the Anointed One would be cut off.

Spiritual Principle

The cross was not evidence that Jesus failed. It fulfilled God's redemptive plan.

XXXIV. THE ETHIOPIAN ASKS THE GREAT QUESTION

Acts 8:34

“The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about—himself or someone else?’”

This is the opening Philip needs.

Cross References

Isaiah 53:1

Isaiah asks who has believed the message and to whom the Lord's saving power has been revealed.

John 12:34

People questioned Jesus about the identity and mission of the Messiah and Son of Man.

1 Peter 1:11

The prophets searched carefully concerning the person and time indicated by the Spirit of Christ as He predicted Christ's sufferings and the glories that would follow.

Spiritual Principle

God had prepared both the Scripture and the question before Philip arrived.

XXXV. PHILIP PREACHES JESUS FROM ISAIAH

Acts 8:35

“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”

This is the heart of the encounter.

Philip begins with:

“That very passage.”

And ends with:

Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained everything in Scripture concerning Himself.

Luke 24:44

Jesus said everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms had to be fulfilled.

John 5:46

Jesus said, “If you truly believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful Bible teaching should ultimately help people see how Scripture points toward God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

XXXVI. THE ETHIOPIAN ASKS TO BE BAPTIZED

Acts 8:36

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What would stop me from being baptized?’”

The Ethiopian wants to identify publicly with Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 3:6

People were baptized in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

Acts 10:47

Peter later asked, “Can anyone prevent these people from being baptized with water, since they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

Acts 2:38

Peter called believing hearers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Baptism follows gospel response as a public declaration of identification with Christ.

XXXVII. THE ETHIOPIAN CONFESSES FAITH

Acts 8:37

“Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

The confession is clear.

Cross References

John 20:31

These things were written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life through His name.

Romans 10:9

If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Matthew 16:16

Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Important Textual Note

Acts 8:37 is included in the Crawford Standard Bible text supplied here. Some ancient Greek manuscripts do not contain this verse, while it appears in later manuscript traditions.

Its confession is fully consistent with New Testament teaching concerning faith in Christ.

Key Truth

Baptism does not replace faith; it follows personal belief in Jesus Christ.

XXXVIII. PHILIP BAPTIZES THE ETHIOPIAN

Acts 8:38

“He ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.”

Cross References

Matthew 3:16

After Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water.

Romans 6:4

Believers are buried with Christ through baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised, they may walk in newness of life.

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted the message were baptized and added to the community of believers.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical faith is willing to identify openly with Jesus Christ.

XXXIX. THE ETHIOPIAN GOES ON HIS WAY REJOICING

Acts 8:39

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch did not see him again but went on his way rejoicing.”

Philip disappears from the encounter.

Yet the Ethiopian does not collapse spiritually because his faith was not centered on Philip.

His joy was in Christ.

Cross References

1 Kings 18:12

Obadiah feared that the Spirit of the Lord might suddenly carry Elijah somewhere unknown.

Ezekiel 3:12

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel and carried him according to God's direction.

2 Kings 2:16

The prophets wondered whether the Spirit of the Lord had carried Elijah to another place.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The goal of evangelism is not to make people dependent upon the messenger but devoted to Jesus Christ.

XL. PHILIP KEEPS PREACHING

Acts 8:40

“Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

Philip immediately continues his mission.

Cross References

Acts 21:8

Years later Paul stayed in Caesarea at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven.

Joshua 15:47

Ashdod, later known as Azotus, was among the cities located in the coastal region.

Acts 10:1

Caesarea later becomes important in Acts through Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful evangelist keeps moving from one gospel opportunity to the next.

XLI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 8

1. Persecution Cannot Stop the Gospel

The believers were scattered.

But wherever they went:

They preached.

Principle:

Opposition may change the location of ministry without changing the mission.

2. The Gospel Breaks Human Barriers

Samaria receives Christ.

An Ethiopian hears Christ.

Principle:

Jesus Christ is not the Savior of one ethnicity, culture, or nation only.

3. Great Spiritual Power Cannot Be Purchased

Simon tried to buy the gift of God.

Peter rebuked him.

Principle:

Grace is received, never purchased.

4. The Heart Matters More Than External Religious Actions

Simon professed belief and was baptized, yet Peter said:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

Principle:

External religious participation can never substitute for a right heart before God.

5. Scripture Points to Jesus

Philip began with Isaiah 53 and proclaimed Christ.

Principle:

The Bible's redemptive message reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

6. Baptism Follows Faith

The Ethiopian believed and then was baptized.

Principle:

Baptism publicly identifies the believer with Jesus Christ.

7. The Holy Spirit Directs Gospel Witness

Philip was directed to Samaria.

Then to a desert road.

Then to a specific chariot.

Principle:

God knows where spiritually prepared people are and can direct faithful servants toward them.

XLII. PERSECUTION BECOMES MISSION

Acts 8 gives one of Scripture's clearest examples of God turning opposition into advancement.

The persecutors wanted believers scattered.

They were scattered.

But the believers took the gospel with them.

Jerusalem's Enemies Thought:

“Drive them out.”

God's Providence Turned It Into:

“Send them out.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The enemy may change your address without being able to change your assignment.

XLIII. WHAT PHILIP TEACHES ABOUT EVANGELISM

Philip gives us a remarkable model.

He Preached to Crowds

Samaria.

He Ministered to Individuals

The Ethiopian.

He Crossed Cultural Boundaries

Samaritans.

An African official.

He Listened to the Holy Spirit

He went where God directed.

He Used Scripture

He began with Isaiah.

He Proclaimed Jesus

Christ was central.

He Led Toward Public Faith

The Ethiopian was baptized.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful evangelism is Spirit-directed, Scripture-grounded, Christ-centered, and personally responsive.

XLIV. FROM A CITY TO ONE PERSON

Philip had been involved in a citywide spiritual awakening.

Crowds listened.

Miracles occurred.

People believed.

Then God told Philip to go to a desert road.

That might have appeared like a step backward.

But one person mattered.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God measures ministry by faithfulness, not merely by crowd size.

One Ethiopian official was worth Philip's journey.

XLV. SIMON AND THE ETHIOPIAN — TWO RESPONSES

Acts 8 deliberately gives us two very different men.

Simon

Fascinated with power.

Interested in signs.

Wants spiritual authority.

Offers money.

Must be confronted about his heart.

The Ethiopian

Reading Scripture.

Asking questions.

Willing to learn.

Hears about Jesus.

Believes.

Is baptized.

Goes away rejoicing.

Spiritual Principle

Two people can encounter Christian ministry while responding for completely different reasons.

One wants power.

The other wants truth.

XLVI. WHAT ACTS 8 TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Simon believed spiritual power could be bought.

Peter strongly rejects the idea.

Spiritual Gifts Are God's Gifts

Not human possessions.

Spiritual Gifts Are Not Commodities

They cannot be bought.

Spiritual Gifts Are Not Status Symbols

They are given for God's purposes.

Spiritual Gifts Must Never Become a Business

The gift belongs to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The moment spiritual ministry becomes a tool for personal glory, influence, or financial exploitation, the heart has moved away from the purpose of the gift.

XLVII. WHAT ACTS 8 TEACHES ABOUT SCRIPTURE

The Ethiopian had Scripture.

But he needed understanding.

Philip did not replace the Bible.

He explained it.

Then he showed how the passage pointed to Christ.

Principle

Biblical teaching does not merely repeat words; it helps people understand what God's Word means and how it points to His redemptive truth.

XLVIII. ISAIAH 53 AND JESUS CHRIST

The Ethiopian was reading one of the great Old Testament passages concerning the suffering Servant.

Isaiah describes One who is:

Led like a lamb.

Silent before His oppressors.

Humiliated.

Denied justice.

Cut off from the land of the living.

Philip says:

This points to Jesus.

Key Truth

Jesus is the suffering Servant.

Jesus is the Lamb.

Jesus gave His life.

Jesus fulfills Scripture.

XLIX. THE GOSPEL AND RACIAL OR CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Acts 8 intentionally moves beyond Jerusalem.

Samaritans receive the gospel.

An Ethiopian receives the gospel.

The movement predicted in Acts 1:8 is underway.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel destroys the idea that any ethnic group or nationality possesses a monopoly on God's saving grace.

Christ's gospel moves toward:

Every people.

Every nation.

Every language.

L. THE JOY OF ACTS 8

Joy appears repeatedly in connection with the gospel.

Samaria experiences:

“Great joy.”

The Ethiopian goes away:

“Rejoicing.”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel brings joy because it brings people into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Circumstances may remain difficult.

But salvation produces a deeper joy.

LI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What happened after Stephen's death?

A great persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church.

Believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Rather than becoming silent, they preached the Word wherever they went.

Question 2

How did persecution help spread the gospel?

Persecution forced believers outside Jerusalem.

As they relocated, they carried the message of Jesus with them.

Human opposition unintentionally helped fulfill Christ's command in Acts 1:8.

Question 3

Why was Philip's ministry in Samaria important?

Jews and Samaritans had longstanding hostility.

The Samaritan response to the gospel demonstrated that salvation through Christ crossed deeply rooted ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Question 4

Who was Simon the sorcerer?

Simon was a man who practiced magic and had gained a large following in Samaria.

People considered him unusually powerful.

After Philip preached, Simon professed belief and was baptized, but later his attempt to purchase spiritual power revealed serious corruption in his heart.

Question 5

What was wrong with Simon offering money?

Simon treated the Holy Spirit's gift as though spiritual authority could be purchased.

Peter strongly rejected this.

God's grace and spiritual gifts cannot be bought.

Question 6

Why did Peter tell Simon to repent?

Peter said Simon's heart was not right before God and that he was trapped in sin.

Simon needed more than correction of behavior.

He needed genuine repentance at the heart level.

Question 7

Why did Peter and John go to Samaria?

They came from Jerusalem after hearing that Samaritans had received God's Word.

Their involvement helped publicly confirm that Samaritan believers belonged fully to the same church established through Christ.

Question 8

Why did God send Philip away from a successful ministry to a desert road?

God had prepared one specific man to hear the gospel.

The Ethiopian official was reading Isaiah and searching for understanding.

God valued that individual enough to redirect Philip.

Question 9

What was the Ethiopian reading?

He was reading Isaiah 53, specifically the passage describing the suffering Servant being led like a lamb to slaughter.

Question 10

How did Philip explain Isaiah 53?

Acts 8:35 says Philip began with that very passage and told the Ethiopian:

“The good news about Jesus.”

Philip interpreted the suffering Servant in connection with Jesus Christ.

Question 11

What happened after the Ethiopian believed?

He requested baptism.

Philip baptized him.

Afterward the Ethiopian continued his journey rejoicing.

Question 12

What does Acts 8 teach us about evangelism?

We should:

- Go where God leads.

- Notice individuals as well as crowds.
- Listen carefully.
- Use Scripture.
- Explain the gospel.
- Point people to Jesus.
- Encourage genuine faith.
- Trust God with the results.

LII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 8 asks several important questions.

How Do I Respond When Difficult Circumstances Disrupt My Plans?

The scattered believers kept preaching.

Am I Willing to Cross Cultural Barriers?

Philip went to Samaria.

Do I Seek Spiritual Gifts for God's Glory or My Own Importance?

Simon wanted power.

Is My Heart Right Before God?

External religious activity is not enough.

Am I Sensitive to God's Direction?

Philip obeyed when God redirected him.

Am I Willing to Leave a Crowd for One Person?

God values individuals.

Can I Explain Scripture Clearly?

The Ethiopian needed someone to help him understand.

Can I Show Someone How Scripture Points to Jesus?

Philip could.

Am I Willing to Speak When God Opens a Door?

Philip ran toward the opportunity.

LIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Scattered Does Not Mean Silenced”

The believers in Jerusalem experienced:

Loss.

Fear.

Displacement.

Persecution.

Yet Acts 8:4 says:

“Those who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the word.”

They carried the gospel wherever they went.

Principle

Your circumstances may change dramatically, but your calling to represent Jesus remains.

A believer can witness:

At home.

At work.

In another city.

During hardship.

During transition.

During unexpected change.

The gospel is not tied to one location.

LIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Chase Power When You Should Be Seeking God”

Simon saw something extraordinary.

He wanted the ability.

Peter saw the real problem:

“Your heart is not right before God.”

That warning applies beyond Simon.

It is possible to want:

Influence.

Platform.

Gifts.

Recognition.

Miracles.

Authority.

Without truly wanting God.

Principle

God is not a means to spiritual power; God Himself is the treasure.

LV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Knows Where the Searching Heart Is”

The Ethiopian was traveling on a desert road.

He was reading Isaiah.

Philip did not know that when God first told him to go.

But God knew.

Principle

Before the evangelist arrives, God may already be preparing the hearer.

That should encourage believers to witness.

You do not know what God has already been doing in another person's heart.

LVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 8 begins with persecution.

It ends with preaching.

It begins with Stephen buried.

It ends with an Ethiopian rejoicing.

It begins with Saul trying to destroy the church.

It ends with Philip carrying the gospel toward new regions.

The enemies of the church thought scattering Christians would weaken Christianity.

Instead:

The gospel spread.

Samaria heard.

Villages heard.

An Ethiopian official heard.

The mission of Acts 1:8 was moving forward.

Acts 8 also warns us that not every religious response is the same.

Simon saw miracles and wanted power.

The Ethiopian read Scripture and wanted truth.

Simon asked:

“Give me this power.”

The Ethiopian effectively asked:

“Help me understand.”

One heart wanted spiritual influence.

The other heart wanted spiritual understanding.

Then Philip shows us what faithful ministry looks like.

He preached to crowds.

He spoke to one man.

He obeyed the angel.

He listened to the Spirit.

He knew Scripture.

He asked questions.

He explained truth.

And above everything:

He preached Jesus.

That is the great mission of the church.

Not merely to impress people.

Not merely to gather crowds.

Not merely to demonstrate religious activity.

But to help people understand:

Who Jesus is.

Why Jesus died.

How Jesus fulfills Scripture.

Why people must believe.

What it means to follow Him.

Acts 8 therefore calls every believer to remain available.

God may send you:

To a city.

To a neighborhood.

To a stranger.

To a coworker.

To one searching person.

The important thing is not the size of the audience.

The important thing is obedience.

Philip left revival in Samaria for one man on a desert road.

And because Philip obeyed:

One more person heard the gospel.

One more person believed.

One more person was baptized.

One more person went home rejoicing.

Never underestimate what God can do through one obedient believer who listens to His direction and opens the Scriptures to point someone toward Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that persecution cannot stop Your gospel.

Thank You that when believers were scattered, Your Word continued spreading.

Give us that same faithfulness.

When our plans change, keep our mission clear.

When circumstances become difficult, keep us from becoming silent.

Give us courage to proclaim Jesus wherever You place us.

Break down cultural, racial, social, and personal barriers that keep us from reaching people with the gospel.

Give us the heart of Philip.

Make us willing to preach to crowds.

And make us willing to speak to one person.

Keep us from chasing spiritual power, influence, recognition, or popularity.

Guard us from the heart of Simon.

Create in us clean hearts.

Teach us to treasure You more than spiritual gifts.

Help us recognize that Your grace cannot be bought and Your Spirit cannot be manipulated.

Thank You for the Ethiopian who searched the Scriptures.

Give us hearts that hunger to understand Your Word.

Make us faithful teachers who explain Scripture clearly and point people toward Jesus.

Open our eyes to people You have already prepared.

Help us listen when Your Spirit directs us.

Give us courage to approach the chariot.

Give us wisdom to ask the right questions.

Give us clarity to explain the gospel.

And keep Jesus Christ at the center of everything we say.

Thank You that He is the Lamb who suffered.

Thank You that He gave His life.

Thank You that Scripture points to Him.

Thank You for salvation through His name.

May people believe.

May believers be baptized.

May the gospel spread.

And may many go on their way:

Rejoicing in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

**“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”
— Acts 8:35**

Central Truth

God turns persecution into gospel expansion, breaks down cultural barriers through Jesus Christ, exposes false motives, and directs Spirit-led believers toward people whose hearts He has prepared to hear and understand His Word.

Acts 8 in One Sentence

As persecution scatters the Jerusalem church, the gospel spreads into Samaria and beyond through Philip's Spirit-directed ministry, exposing Simon's corrupted desire for spiritual power while leading an Ethiopian seeker from Isaiah's prophecy to faith, baptism, and joy in Jesus Christ.