



# Philip: In Samaria and Beyond!



This week, we see an exciting new phase in the young body of believers. They are treated very harshly and forced to spread out into the towns and countries around them. This is a powerful time, as the Good News of Jesus spreads throughout the land.

## Day #1: Persecuted

Last week we read the heart-breaking story of Stephen, a godly man who was killed for proclaiming the truth about who Jesus was. The Bible tells us that many people wept greatly over Stephen's death (Acts 8:2). But, Stephen was joyfully welcomed to his home in heaven by Jesus. In the story of Stephen's death, we are introduced to a young Jewish man named Saul. Acts 7:58 tells us that while the men were throwing stones at Stephen, they laid their coats, "at the feet of a young man named Saul."

**+** *Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. - Acts 8:1a NLT*

Saul was a well educated young man. He was taught by the highly respected Pharisee, Gamaliel (Acts 5:33, 22:3). Saul was very well trained in the law of God. The Bible says Saul was zealous for God. Zealous means very devoted or extremely passionate about something. Saul did not believe that Jesus was God's Son. Saul truly believed that all the people who followed Jesus were wrong, and that they were sinning against God when they taught in Jesus' name. Saul was passionate about stopping these people.

*But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. - Acts 8:3 NLT*

What do you think would happen if someone let a poisonous snake loose in a room full of people? The people would scatter! Similarly, when Saul and the other men began their open attack on the believers in Jerusalem, the believers scattered.

*A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. - Acts 8:1a NLT*

**\*** This week, we will once again see the amazing power of our heavenly Father. He can make something wonderful come out of the plans men have to cause harm. Know that the God we trust has the power to turn anything in your life into something great for His kingdom!

## Day #2: Scattered

Saul and many other religious leaders began to openly persecute the followers of Jesus. Believers were dragged from their homes and put in jail. The new believers who had all been living in Jerusalem were forced to scatter throughout the region. What would you expect these persecuted believers to do? Would they keep quiet about their faith in Jesus now?

**+** *But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. - Acts 8:4*

They would not keep quiet! They told people about Jesus wherever they went. Picture a feather pillow. The pillow is a cloth cover that is filled with hundreds of tiny lightweight feathers. When you hold the pillow, you are in control of the feathers. Now, imagine going to a busy city on a windy day. Picture ripping open the pillow and shaking it in the wind. What would happen to the feathers? The hundreds of feathers would be scattered in every direction! They would catch the wind and blow far, far away. They would stick to cars that whiz by. They would swoosh down drain pipes and cling to people. Now, imagine trying to collect every one of the feathers. It would be impossible! Indeed, the men who were trying to stop the Gospel from spreading would have been better off to let the people remain huddled together in Jerusalem. Instead, the new believers, full of truth and full of the Holy Spirit, were scattered. There would be no controlling them now!

In Acts 8:1 we are told that, "All the believers **except the apostles** were scattered." Jesus' original group of disciples did not scatter. These original men are the men we often think of as the "most qualified" to spread the truth about Jesus. We are about to see a new era in the body of believers - the era in which each believer spreads the Gospel.

**\*** If you have put your trust in Jesus - **YOU** are one of these believers. You can tell people about Jesus wherever you go. Discuss the places you go and who you can tell. (School, ball field, dance class, relatives' homes)

## Day #3: The Gospel

The Bible says that Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:9). Those who do not know about Jesus are living in darkness. If you have a globe at home, shine a flashlight on the city of Jerusalem. This light represents the truth of Jesus' sacrifice and forgiveness. Hold your light very close to the globe so that it is only a small dot of light on the city, because the only people in the whole world who knew the truth about Jesus were all together there. The rest of the world was in darkness, until the believers were scattered. As they left their home town, they took their light with them. Now pull the flashlight back, spreading lighting to all the towns around it. The light spread and grew. In fact, the light is still spreading and growing to this day.

We must look at what it was the believers were telling people as they went. The Bible calls it the **Gospel**, or the Good News of Jesus.

### Day #3 continued:

The Gospel is this:

- We were enemies with God because He is perfect, but we each choose to do wrong, or sin (Colosians 1:21).
- God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to save us from the punishment of our sin (1 Peter 3:18).
- Jesus was buried, but God raised Him from the dead on the 3rd day (Acts 10:40).
- Anyone who believes in Jesus and places his or her trust in Him will be saved from eternal punishment. He or she will be given new life and will live in heaven forever (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:15).

The Jewish people knew that God was perfect and that He required a blood sacrifice to cover men's sins (Leviticus 17:11). The Jews in the Bible knew these facts very well, because they went to the temple to offer animal sacrifices over and over again. For those who would believe, it was incredibly great news that Jesus had come to be the final sacrifice!

 *I am not ashamed of the good news [or Gospel]. It is God's power. And it will save everyone who believes. It is meant first for the Jews. It is meant also for those who aren't Jews. - Romans 1:16*

 Today, we live in a time when some people know nothing about the perfection of God or the seriousness of sin. Unless they are told, they will not know that they need a Savior! Do not be ashamed to share the Gospel with them. You can **depend on the Holy Spirit** to help you understand the Gospel and give you the words to tell others (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). As you share, the light of Jesus continues to spread!

## Day #4: Spreading Truth

There was a whole world outside of Jerusalem that was full of people who needed to be saved from the punishment of their sin.

 *How can people have faith in the Lord and ask Him to save them, if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear, unless someone tells them? And how can anyone tell them without being sent by the Lord? The Scriptures say it is a beautiful sight to see even the feet of someone coming to preach the good news. No one can have faith without hearing the message about Christ. - Romans 10:14-15, 17 CEV*

The time was right, and the beautiful feet were on their way!

Just like Stephen, Philip was one of the seven men chosen to take care of the new believers, so the apostles could study and preach. Do you remember the characteristics of these men? Acts 6:3 says they were known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. When the severe persecution started, Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. Philip performed miracles. He cast out evil spirits and healed people. Crowds of people came to hear Philip. They paid close attention to every word he spoke (Acts 8:5-7).

*But Philip preached the good news of God's kingdom. He preached the name of Jesus Christ. So men and women believed and were baptized. - Acts 8:12*

### Day #4 continued:

Many people put their trust in Jesus. The Bible tells us there was great joy in that city (Acts 8:8)!

 Samaria was a place of outcast people, whose parents were a mix of Jews and non-Jews. It was well known that the Samaritans were not accepted by the Jewish people (John 4:9). Because the Jews were prejudiced against them, we may wonder how long it might have taken a new believer to go and preach to the Samaritans if the persecution had not taken place. Discuss some things we see in other people that may cause us to pre-judge them. (Different culture, different interests) Be sure not to let any prejudiced ideas about people keep you from sharing the Good News of Jesus with others. Like Philip, you may have the joy of sharing with those who have never heard!

## Day #5: Ethiopian Official

It was clear that Philip was right where God wanted him to be. Let's see where God would send him next.

 *An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. "Go south to the desert road," he said. "It's the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." - Acts 8:26*

When the angel spoke to Philip, he LISTENED and obeyed! On his way, he came across a man riding in a chariot. This man was from the country of Ethiopia. He was an important official. He was in charge of all of the money of the queen! He was on his way home from the temple in Jerusalem. The Ethiopian official was reading the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit told Philip to go near the chariot. Philip ran to the chariot and heard the man reading Scripture. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The official told Philip he needed someone to explain it to him, and asked Philip to sit with him (Acts 8:27-31).

*Here is the part of Scripture the official was reading. It says, "He was led like a sheep to be killed. Just as lambs are silent while their wool is being cut off, he did not open his mouth. When he was treated badly, he was refused a fair trial. Who can say anything about his children? His life was cut off from the earth." - Acts 8:32-33*

These verses are from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived long before Jesus came to earth, but he foretold all about Jesus. Jesus was the Lamb that Isaiah was referring to in this Scripture!

*The official said to Philip, "Tell me, please. Who is the prophet talking about? Himself, or someone else?" Then Philip began with that same part of Scripture. He told him the good news about Jesus. - Acts 8:34-35*

The Ethiopian man believed the Gospel message. He gave the order for his chariot to stop, and asked Philip to baptize him. He went on his way, full of joy (Acts 8:36-39). He returned to his country. We can just imagine what an impact this important man might have had when he shared his new faith with his friends, family, and even, perhaps, with the queen!

 God was already at work in this Ethiopian man's life. The Bible tells us that no one seeks after God. (Romans 3:11). No one can come to Jesus unless God draws the person to Him (John 6:44). God's Spirit was at work and God invited Philip to join in. Pray for God to invite you into His work. Then LISTEN for the Spirit's leading!