

LESSON 4

PERSECUTION AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

ACTS 6:8–8:40

Introduction

The summary statement in Acts 6:7 indicates that the Christian movement was closely related to Judaism in the early stages. The Christians continued to participate in the synagogues and in Temple services. Probably the new doctrine was carried to many Roman provinces by the Jews who were present at Pentecost. However, the movement continued to be limited to Jews. Although the Sanhedrin had been disturbed by the political implications of the movement, there is no indication that the question of including Gentiles in the Church had arisen then.

The problem concerning discrimination against Grecian widows introduced a new issue into the Church and forced a change in the direction of her growth. Matthew's Gospel indicates that Jesus instructed the Apostles to go first to the house of Israel. The ministry of the Twelve continued primarily among the Jews. Their ministry centred in Jerusalem. Among the Seven who were selected to assist in the daily distribution of food were men who held universalistic convictions with regard to the Gospel. Each had a Greek name and was probably a Hellenist. After Luke introduces them by referring to the conditions of their selection and their ordination, he moves immediately to the new emphasis of their theology.

Accusation against Stephen

Acts 6:8-15

Luke introduces the new section by emphasizing the spirituality of Stephen. He repeats the statement of verse 5 that Stephen was a man "full of faith and power" (v. 8). Power is used in the place of Holy Spirit. Since Stephen introduced a new era in Christian history, Luke is careful to note that he was no less than the Apostles in doing "great wonders and miracles among the people." The Holy Spirit continued to work miracles through the lives of the disciples.

Stephen became involved in a debate with Jews from provinces outside Palestine (vv. 9f.). The nature of the "synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia" is not known. Leaders from five synagogues may have opposed Stephen, or they may have been a cosmopolitan group in one synagogue. It has been suggested that the Libertines were freedmen who had been taken to Rome by Pompey in 63 B.C.

The essence of Stephen's argument can be deduced from the charges made against him. He was accused of speaking against the Temple and the Law (cf. v. 13). His opponents were unable to match his wisdom and spirit. Apparently he was able to prove his points from the Old Testament. Being unable to defend their actions and customs in the debate with Stephen, the leaders of the synagogues employed the weapon of prejudice. They said he spoke blasphemous words against God and Moses (vv. 11f.). The people, the elders, and the scribes were disturbed by the accusation; therefore, they took Stephen before the Sanhedrin for trial and judgement.

The Gospel was spread throughout the Roman provinces by the _____ who were present at _____.

(Jews, Pentecost)

The ministry of the Twelve was primarily among the _____.

The Seven held more universalistic convictions with regard to the _____.

(Jews, Gospel)

Since Stephen introduced a new era in Christian history, Luke implies Stephen was no less than the _____.

(Apostles)

What were the accusations brought against Stephen?

(He spoke against the Temple and the Law.)

Again false witnesses were employed to charge Stephen with saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses (vv. 13f.). At the trial of Jesus, accusers had charged Him with saying that He was going to destroy the Temple (Mark 14:58). Jesus had informed His disciples that the Temple would be destroyed, but He was referring to the time when the Romans would invade the city to subdue the Jewish revolt in A.D. 70 (cf. Matt. 24). On another occasion, Jesus was referring to His body (cf. John 2:19-21). An age-old technique is to take the opponent's statements out of context and give them a different interpretation. Jesus stated that the day had arrived when the traditional worship of God at the Temple of Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim was no longer acceptable. God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:21ff.). The traditional worship at Jerusalem limited or excluded people who were not Jews from worshipping God. Proselyte Gentiles were permitted to stand in the outer court (Court of the Gentiles) during the Temple services, but they were prohibited from entering the Court of the Israelites which was nearer to the chamber representing God's dwelling place (Holy of Holies).

The Jewish approach to God had become ritualistic, legalistic, and formalistic. Their religious ceremonies had no effect upon their treatment of their fellow-man. Their religion was void of a personal relationship to God in which the Father controlled their daily lives. Their religion had exalted the Jewish nation and had excluded other people from the blessings of God.

Jewish national and religious life centred in the Temple and the Law of Moses. Threats to the Temple or to the Law were serious. Israel's national hopes were centred in the Temple which represented the presence of God. Israel expected her God to send a political Messiah who would bring about victory to Israel over her enemies. The Pharisees believed strongly that the Messiah would come when the Law was kept perfectly for one day by the Jews. The statement of Stephen discredited the claims of the Pharisees regarding the Law and threatened the national hopes of the Jews.

Luke notes that the Council looked on Stephen, and they saw his face was like that of an angel (v. 15). The face of Moses reflected the presence of God when he came down from Mount Sinai. An angel is a messenger of God, and Stephen was God's messenger who had been in the presence of his Heavenly Father.

The Message of Stephen

Acts 7:1-53

God is not limited to the Temple

It has been suggested that the points of Stephen's message were irrelevant to the accusations brought against him by the Sanhedrin. Luke's abbreviated account of the controversy fails to clarify the obvious points of contention. A study of the message reveals, however, that Stephen was dealing with the charges. The accusers charged Stephen with speaking against the Temple, the Law, and God (cf. 6:11, 13).

The Jews believed that there was only one God. The one true God dwelt in Jerusalem in the house which had been prepared for Him. Jerusalem was known as the Holy City because of the presence of God in the midst of His people. If Gentile nations wanted to worship the only living God, they must come to

Stephen was charged with saying _____
would destroy the _____ and change the
customs of _____

(Jesus, Temple, Moses)

The traditional worship at Jerusalem excluded people
who were not _____ from worshipping God.

(Jews)

Jewish nationalism and religious life centred in
the _____ and the _____ of Moses.

(Temple, Law)

Jerusalem, meet Jewish ceremonial requirements, and become a proselyte to the Jewish religion in order to have access to Yahweh. Stephen refuted that claim. When the High Priest questioned him concerning the accusations made against him, Stephen preached a sermon in which he showed from the Old Testament Scripture that God had revealed Himself in places other than the Temple. God was not a national God of the Jews but a universal God of all people.

God's presence in Harran and Egypt (vv. 4-15).—Yahweh appeared also in Harran and guided Abraham into the land of Canaan. Although Abraham was promised the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 12:1ff.), Stephen pointed out that Abraham did not actually possess the land. Abraham received the promise that his descendants would inherit the land. Before the fulfilment of the promise, the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt for approximately 400 years. Stephen described the circumstances which led to the enslavement of the Israelites. The introduction of the Egyptian slavery was to emphasize that God was able to bless Joseph even under adverse circumstances in a foreign country (cf. v. 9).

God's approval of Samaria (v. 16).—Stephen used another country which was disliked by the Jews to illustrate the universality of God. Stephen summarized and combined the Genesis account of the burial of Joseph and Jacob. Jacob actually was buried at Machpelah in a cave which Abraham bought from Ephron (Gen. 50:13). Joseph was buried at Shechem in a field which Jacob purchased from the sons of Hamor (Josh. 24:32). If the land of Judaea and the city of Jerusalem had possessed a special sanctity, it appears that the Patriarchs would have been buried there. Instead, they were buried, with the approval of God, in the despised land of Samaria.

God's presence in Midian (vv. 17-37).—Stephen continued the history of God's appearances to His people in lands other than Judaea by referring to the experiences of Moses. The one through whom the Law was given was born in Egypt. God did not appear to Him in Jerusalem but in the wilderness of Mount Sinai (the land of the Midianites or Arabia) in the flame of a burning bush (cf. v. 30ff.). The place was regarded with a special sanctity.

God's presence in the wilderness (vv. 38-50).—Stephen next used the example of the portable Tabernacle as an illustration that God is not limited to the Temple of Jerusalem. In the time of Joshua, the presence of God was symbolized by the Ark which enabled the Israelites to drive the enemy from Canaan (vv. 45ff.). Several hundred years later, the dwelling place for the God of Jacob, the Temple, was constructed in Jerusalem by Solomon (v. 46ff.).

Apparently Stephen implied that Yahweh could be found in other nations, and Gentiles did not have to become proselytes and journey to Jerusalem to come into the presence of Yahweh. The belief and preaching of Stephen lessened the importance of the Temple. The opponents of Stephen were unable to withstand his wisdom and spirit for he quoted Scripture in supporting his position. He pointed out that God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?" (vv. 48f.). The one God who crea-

Stephen showed from Old Testament Scripture that God had revealed Himself in places other than the _____ God is a _____ God.

(Temple, universal)

God appeared to Abraham in _____ and to Joseph in _____

(Harran, Egypt)

God approved of the burial of Jacob and Joseph in _____

(Samaria)

God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of _____

(Midian)

God's presence was symbolized by the _____ in the Wilderness.

(Ark)

ted the heavens and the earth cannot be circumscribed within one Temple. He is a universal God and can be found in every nation. It is not necessary for true worshippers to pilgrimage to Jerusalem for participation in the religious ceremonies and sacred festivals.

A rebuttal to the accusation of speaking against God

It is not unusual for religious devotees to claim a monopoly of the knowledge of God's will. The Pharisees denounced and crucified Jesus in the name of God and for His cause. They were convinced that all who disagreed with them were in error and under the wrath of God. The Pharisees considered themselves instruments of God to bring about the punishment of those who opposed their position which they claimed to be sanctified by God. Frequently men appoint themselves as the authoritative interpreters of the will of God. Their religious zeal often is motivated by their pride instead of a genuine moving of the Spirit of God. Pride often leads one to the position, "I am right and you are wrong" or "God is on my side because I am right." Jewish pride caused the Pharisees to adopt that position with regard to Jesus and Stephen. Stephen pointed out that the sinful pride of the Israelites dated from the time of the Patriarchs.

The betrayal of Joseph by his jealous brothers was an example of the rejection of Jesus by his people (v. 9). The fact that God was with Joseph during his Egyptian enslavement proved that Joseph was not "against God." Joseph was actually within the plan and will of God, but his brothers were in error. The Jewish leaders could not fail to understand the implication intended in the parallel between Joseph and Jesus. God rescued Joseph from his afflictions which were brought about by his brothers. God delivered Jesus from death which was brought about by His opponents.

Stephen used Moses as a second example of the rejection of God's anointed by the Israelites. When Moses attempted first to deliver his people, they turned against him (cf. vv. 24ff.). Moses assumed that the Israelites understood God was granting them deliverance through him. Moses intervened and killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. The next day, he saw two Israelites fighting and attempted to restore peace between them, but he was rejected, perhaps because of their jealousy of him. Like Moses, Jesus was the appointed Deliverer by God, but the Jewish leaders rejected God and His plan by crucifying Jesus. Moses had come to be highly regarded as a great deliverer, but he was rejected by his people when he first attempted to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. In a similar manner, Jesus was rejected by His own.

Moses had written that "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear" (v. 37). The Jewish leaders treasured the writings of Moses and were looking for a prophet like Moses. The people refused to follow the great leader Moses during the wilderness journeys. They determined to return to Egypt. They were punished because they had rejected the leader which God provided for their deliverance. The historical incident was repeated in the day of Stephen by the Jewish leaders who rejected the prophet like Moses (vv. 37ff.).

The repudiation of the accusation of speaking against the Law

The Pharisees placed great confidence in the Law. Stephen traced the history of Moses through whom the Law was given. Moses was not born in the sacred land nor did he receive the Law

God is universal and can be found in every_____

(nation)

The Pharisees denounced and crucified Jesus in the name of_____ and for His cause. They were convinced all who disagreed with them were in error and under the_____ of_____.

(God, wrath, God)

at Mount Zion. He was born and educated in Egypt (v. 22). He spent forty years in the land of Midian and married a Midianite. According to the rabbinical interpretation of the Law, Israelites were not permitted to marry foreigners; however, the one through whom the Law was given married a foreigner. Stephen was convinced that the interpretation and actions of the Jewish leaders instead of his words were against the Law. Traditional interpretations of the Law segregated the Jews from Gentiles. Apparently Stephen had exposed the faulty interpretation and was accused of altering "the customs which Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:14 – NASB).

The climax to Stephen's sermon came in 7:51ff. He stated that they, not he, were "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears." They were the true children of their fathers who had rejected previous leaders who were chosen by God. Their fathers had persecuted the prophets who had warned them of God's judgement of their sins. The people had justified their sins and rejected the prophets. Stephen pointed out that their fathers had slain the prophets who had revealed the coming of Christ (v. 52). The contemporaries of Stephen looked for the coming of the Messiah, but when He had appeared they had rejected Him. History was repeating itself. Stephen was a prophet who warned the people of their errors, but they rejected and murdered him instead of repenting. Those who boasted of keeping the Law which states "thou shalt not kill" were about to transgress the Law again.

The Death of Stephen
Acts 7:54-60

The Jewish leaders followed the example of their fathers. They became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. The emotional trauma of the Sanhedrin prevented justice from the court. Stephen was taken outside the city and stoned to death.

Questions have been raised concerning the legality of the sentence passed by the Sanhedrin. The Jews recognized they did not have the power to put Jesus to death, but in their rage they stoned Stephen to death. Perhaps sufficient Roman forces were not present to prevent the mob action of the Jews against Stephen. The Romans were not nearly as concerned with maintaining justice as peace in Palestine. They may have avoided reprisals against the offenders because of the fear of agitating the Jews to additional violence.

Luke notes that Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit." The Spirit gave him the strength to demonstrate the attitude of Christ before his opponents and persecutors. Stephen was strengthened at his death by the heavenly vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (v. 56). The Lord had promised to be with His prophets to deliver them (Jer. 1:8, 19). When the three Hebrew children were thrown into the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person in the midst of the fire who was like "the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25). The three servants of God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were miraculously delivered from the fire. In a night vision, Daniel saw "One like a Son of Man" who came with the clouds of heaven to the "Ancient of Days and was presented before Him" (7:13–NASB). He was given an everlasting kingdom by the Ancient of Days or God. The Son of Man was a heavenly, divine being who could approach God. He was called Son of Man because He had the form and appearance of a man. The Jews knew that God could not be seen. The One who was sent from God to establish an eternal kingdom could be seen because He had the body of a man. The vision of Daniel was repeated to Stephen. The heavens were opened and Stephen saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Traditional interpretations of the _____ segregated the _____ from the _____ .
Stephen exposed this incorrect interpretation, and he was accused of changing "the _____ which _____ handed down to us."

(Laws, Jews, Gentiles, customs, Moses)

Why was Stephen's death not legal? _____

(The Jews did not have the power to put to death.)

His position at the right hand of God indicated authority. The fact He was standing indicated His intense concern for His servant who was being stoned.

Stephen is the only one who referred to Jesus as the Son of Man, other than Jesus Himself. Jesus preferred this title to 'Messiah' which had the wrong concepts connected with it. Most scholars believe that the title the Son of Man emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. The emphasis in Daniel appears to be on the heavenly nature of the Son of Man. Since God could not be seen, He was represented in His Kingdom by a divine being who had the form of a man. Stephen could not see the invisible God, but he could see the divine Son who had been born as the Son of Man with a human body.

According to the vision in Daniel, the Son of Man was given an eternal Kingdom; however, the Kingdom was not described in terms of political and military power but in terms of divine power. The Kingdom was not limited to the Jewish people, but all nations would be brought under the dominion of the heavenly Son of Man. The "people of the saints of the Highest One" (Dan. 7:27) would be victorious when the Ancient of Days intervened in history through the Son of Man.

Stephen participated in the movement of world conquest in which the dominion of the Son of Man was being established over all nations. Jesus had returned to heaven and had imparted the Holy Spirit who gave power to the servants in establishing the Kingdom. The two messengers, at the time of Jesus' ascension, promised the disciples that He would come again from heaven "in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The disciples were to proclaim to all the world the Gospel by which the Kingdom would be established. Stephen was not facing defeat in his death. The heavenly vision enabled him to see the glory of God and His victorious Servant-King-Son at His right hand. Since the Kingdom was not limited to an earthly or physical organization, death could no longer destroy the movement nor its citizens. This hope and the presence of the Spirit of God gave Stephen strength, enabling him to say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." His last words were true to the character of Kingdom citizens: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." His death was not his defeat and destruction but his rest from toil and persecution—"he fell asleep."

The Introduction of Paul Acts 7:57; 8:1-3

Saul is the Hebrew name of the person who is more commonly known by his Roman name Paul. Luke indicates that he had much religious zeal. The fact that "the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" indicates that he was the leader of the group which stoned Stephen (7:58). Saul was in complete agreement with putting Stephen to death (8:1). The emotions of pride and anger blind a man to truth. Saul was a Pharisee who prided in keeping the Law; yet he joined other Pharisees in breaking the Sixth Commandment by murdering Stephen.

Saul was a native and citizen of Tarsus, capital of Cilicia (Acts 9:11, 22:3). He was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). He was named after the first king of Israel who was also a Benjaminite.

Greek was the language on the streets in Tarsus. Saul's religious interests account for his knowledge of Aramaic and Hebrew. He enjoyed the heritage of both Jewish religion and Roman citizenship (Acts 22:2, 28).

Although Saul was a Pharisee (a strict Jew) in his religious training, he was exposed to the Hellenistic spirit in Tarsus. In the

Stephen's vision was related to Daniel's _____, found in Daniel 7.
(night vision)

Stephen is the only one, besides Jesus, who referred to Jesus as the _____ of _____.
(Son, Man)

The Son of Man, in the vision of Daniel, was given an _____ kingdom.
(eternal)

TRUE OR FALSE? Stephen was not facing defeat in his death. _____
(true)

Tell which name was Hebrew and which was Roman.
Saul _____ Paul _____
(Saul—Hebrew, Paul—Roman)

Give three facts about Saul which you read in this paragraph.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
(Compare your answer with the text.)

commercial city of his youth, he became aware of the material blessings of the Roman Empire. He enjoyed the Roman roads, bridges, harbours, and peace. Saul's background was a strange mixture of religious conservatism and national liberalism. He had the characteristic of becoming fully involved in pursuing what he believed.

Perhaps Saul was about twenty when he attended the rabbinical school of the Pharisees under Gamaliel at Jerusalem. His alertness and zeal soon established him as a leader among the party. His teacher, Gamaliel, was a conservative Pharisee but not a narrow nationalist. Saul appears to have been influenced by the spirit of Gamaliel. He was fanatical and radical at the time of the stoning of Stephen, but his zeal contributed later to his effectiveness as a Christian witness.

The persecution of Stephen engendered a widespread persecution against the Church. When the Church in Jerusalem was persecuted, the members "scattered throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, *except the apostles*" (8:1—NASB). The new movement of liberating the Church from narrow Jewish nationalism was not the accomplishment of the Apostles but of other disciples, such as Stephen and Philip.

Luke notes the respect and sorrow expressed at the funeral of Stephen. Contrary to Saul's plan of destroying the new Christian movement, the death of Stephen and the persecution of the Church caused the movement to spread and gain strength. Saul was not a person to admit defeat. He began ravaging the Church, "entering into every house, and having men and women committed them to prison" (8:3).

The Effects of Persecution on the Church Acts 8:4-8

The fact that the persecution scattered the Church "except the apostles" (8:1) may indicate that persecution was directed against those who shared Stephen's view. The statement implies that the Apostles were preaching nothing which offended the Pharisees. Apparently the Pharisees were not offended by the preaching that Jesus was the Messiah and was raised from the dead. They objected, however, to the attack on their traditional interpretation of the Law which segregated Jews and Gentiles. They were sensitive also to the criticism of their legalistic interpretation of righteousness which was obtained by the meticulous observance of rituals and rules. Although Jesus had warned the Apostles concerning the "leaven of the Pharisees," they had difficulty distinguishing between legal righteousness and "the purity of the heart."

The disciples were persecuted and scattered, but they were not silenced. Philip, a Grecian Jew, preached in Samaria. It should be remembered that the Pharisees had no dealings with the Samaritans. Philip was not blinded by pride and prejudice. Other Jews discriminated against Samaritans because their blood was mixed through intermarriage with those outside Israel. Pride and prejudice had blinded the Jews to the fact that Moses married a Midianite; four of the twelve sons of Jacob, the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, were children of Zilpah and Bilhah, non-Israelites; Joseph's sons were born to Asenath, a daughter of the priest of On; David was a descendant from Ruth, a Moabitess; and Solomon was married to many foreign wives.

The conversion experience does not bring automatically a solution to all problems of prejudice and pride. Those who are raised within environments of less prejudice have less difficulty in dealing with wrong attitudes. Those who have been exposed to strong prejudice and national pride have greater difficulty in overcoming these problems. The indwelling Spirit offers power

List the three languages Paul knew.

_____ , _____ , _____

(Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew)

Saul was a _____ conservative, but he was a _____ liberal.

(religious, national)

When the Church in Jerusalem was persecuted, all of the members, (except, including) the Apostles, scattered throughout Judaea and Samaria.

(except)

What element in Christian preaching offended the Pharisees? _____

(The attack on their traditional interpretation of the Law which segregated Jews and Gentiles)

What good effect did persecution have on the Church? _____

(Persecution caused Christianity to spread.)

for controlling the sinful human attitude; however, the person has to recognize it, confess it as wrong, and trust the indwelling Spirit to express God's love through his life. Philip was a disciple who was filled (controlled) by the Spirit even as Stephen was.

The people of Samaria were responsive to the Gospel which Philip presented. The Holy Spirit continued to perform miracles through him. Many unclean spirits were cast out and many paralytic and lame people were healed.

An Attempt to Pervert God's Power
Acts 8:9-13

Simon Magus was a magician who astonished the people with his alleged powers, gained a comfortable living by his deceitful acts, and created a reverent fear for himself through his magic. He was intrigued and amazed by the miracles accomplished by Philip. He "believed" but he was not "converted."

After the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had responded to the Gospel, they sent Peter and John to investigate. Those who had believed had not received the power of the Spirit. The Apostles prayed that the new disciples might receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The new disciples had been baptized to express openly their faith in Jesus, but they had not received the power for walking victoriously in the Kingdom of God. On this occasion, the Holy Spirit was bestowed through the outward sign of the laying on of the Apostles' hands. There is no indication that they were baptized again. In Acts 19, baptized disciples who had not received the Holy Spirit were instructed to believe in Jesus and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:1-6). The laying on of hands was again connected with the filling of the Spirit. On other occasions the Holy Spirit came upon believers apart from the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 10:44).

There was need for an outward manifestation of the spiritual renewal of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. There was also need for a manifestation of the spiritual birth of the Samaritans. Luke gives the implication that after the Apostles laid their hands upon the believing Samaritans, miracles were also performed through the believers. Simon was impressed that the power of God was transferable through the laying on of the Apostles' hands. He offered money for the power or the secret of their success. Perhaps he imagined how wealthy he would become if he had the ability to impart the power to perform miracles. The Church had already lost two members who perverted the purity of the fellowship. Peter informed Simon that he had committed a great sin in attempting to secure the Holy Spirit in order to gain personal wealth through His distribution. The "simony" of Simon revealed that his heart was not right with God. He had not repented. His interests were selfish. He desired to give self the place that belongs to God.

Peter confronted Simon with his wickedness and danger. Because of the awful fate of Ananias and Sapphira who had attempted deceit, Peter apparently had described some dreadful things which would come upon Simon. Simon asked Peter to pray that he would not fall victim to the punishment.

The Conversion of the Ethiopian
Acts 8:25-40

Luke has shown previously how the Gospel spread rapidly among the Jews and was taken to Samaria. The next step is to show how the Gospel was liberated to include proselyte Gentiles.

After Peter and John had investigated the revival among the Samaritans, they engaged in preaching the Gospel to many villages of Samaria. Philip received special guidance from the

Who were the two Apostles sent by the Jerusalem Church to investigate the salvation of Samaritans? _____, _____

(Peter, John)

Jews had no dealings with Gentiles; therefore, it was necessary for the Samaritans to manifest the presence of the _____.

Who was the magician who offered Philip and the Apostles money for their power? _____

(Simon, Spirit)

One who was scattered because of persecution went to preach to the Gentiles. Name him.

(Philip)

angel (messenger) of the Lord to witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch, a God-fearing Gentile, on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. The Ethiopian was a proselyte to Judaism and an "official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians." He had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship and was returning to his home. He was reading from the Prophet Isaiah on the return trip. Philip was guided by the Spirit to join the Ethiopian on his journey. As Philip approached him, he heard him reading from Isaiah 53. Philip asked if he understood what he read. The Eunuch responded that he needed an interpreter to explain the meaning of the passage. His question concerning whether the prophet spoke of himself or of someone else revealed his knowledge of two current Jewish interpretations. Philip's answer indicates that the early Church identified the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 with Jesus.

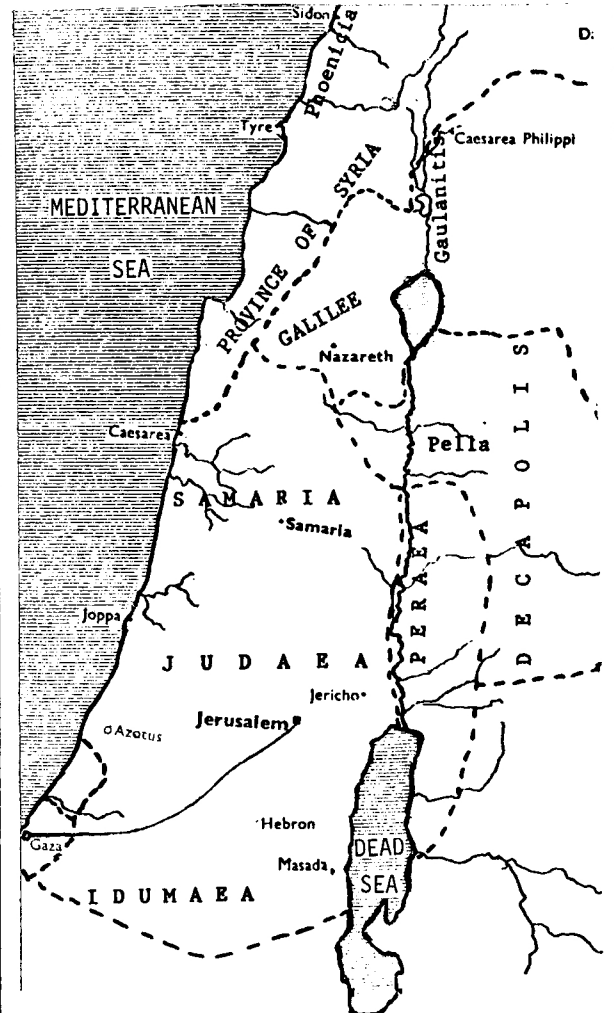
To carry out the commission of Jesus involved the spread of the Gospel beyond Samaria to the Gentile world. The first step was the conversion of a God-fearing Gentile, the Ethiopian Eunuch. Perhaps he desired to be a proselyte to Judaism, but his physical mutilation as a eunuch may have denied him the privilege. Nevertheless, he was attracted to monotheism and the high moral and ethical teachings of Judaism. After Philip had presented Jesus to him, he asked the searching question, "What hinders me from being baptized?" Judaism had hindered or limited him from full acceptance. He questioned whether his nationality and physical condition would also hinder him in Christianity. Philip assured him that he was "unhindered."

Apparently the Eunuch believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Verse 37 which states, "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," is missing from the earlier manuscripts. Luke does not attempt to record all that Philip shared with the Eunuch. The Ethiopian responded by requesting to be baptized. His request indicates that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah and he was ready to identify publicly with Jesus. Philip had the chariot stopped and baptized him. The Eunuch experienced a new life which brought great rejoicing (cf. v. 39).

Luke introduced the incident of the Ethiopian to show how the Gospel spread to the God-fearing Gentiles. No outward signs are indicated in the life of the Ethiopian to prove that he had genuinely been born into the Kingdom of God. These signs were reserved for the experience of Cornelius.

The first Gentile convert was a God-fearer. Who was he? _____

(the Ethiopian Eunuch)



What did the Ethiopian's request to be baptized indicate? _____

(He believed Jesus was the Messiah, and he was ready to identify publicly with Him.)

Home Study Assignment

Basic study (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. How did the Gospel spread throughout the Roman provinces so rapidly? _____

2. How did Stephen compare with the Apostles in Luke's opinion? _____

3. Name two accusations brought against Stephen. _____

4. What did Stephen probably say 'against' the Temple? _____

5. Why was Stephen accused of speaking against God? _____

6. Why was Stephen accused of speaking against the Law? _____

7. Was the death of Stephen legal? _____

8. To what Old Testament Scripture was Stephen's vision related? _____

9. What two unusual elements were in Saul's background experiences? _____

10. What effect did persecution have on Christianity? _____

11. What element in Christian preaching offended the Pharisees? _____

12. Why was it necessary for the Samaritans to manifest the presence of the Spirit? _____

14. Who was the first Gentile convert? _____

Supplementary activities (Levels 2 and 3):

1. Distinguish between Samaritans, God-fearers, proselytes, and Gentiles.
2. In what ways did the new Christians receive the Holy Spirit?

Advanced activities (Level 3):

1. Read pages 93–109 in *The Book of Acts* by Frank Stagg.
 2. Describe Stephen's attitude towards the Temple.
 3. Compare and contrast Stephen's concept of the Kingdom and that expressed in Daniel 7.
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Seminar Discussion

1. Is there any evidence that the Apostles had prejudice?
2. Was Stephen's sermon related to the accusations against him?
3. Ask a Level 3 student to describe Stephen's attitude towards the Temple.
4. What influence did Daniel 7 appear to have on Stephen?
5. How did the Christians and Jews differ in their understanding of the Servant in Isaiah 53?