

## Acts 8 - John Karmelich

1. Chapter 8 can best be summarized as "various works of the Holy Spirit".
  - a) Understanding the role and function of the Holy Spirit is a difficult subject for experienced Christians, let alone beginners or non-believers.
  - b) Part of the difficulty is that Jesus himself said we would not fully understand what the Holy Spirit does:
    - a) "Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it will go next, so it is with the Spirit. We do not know on whom he will next bestow this life from heaven." (John 3:8, The Living Bible).
    - ii) What Jesus is saying is that the Holy Spirit does *God's will, not our will*. Therefore, we don't always know what the Holy Spirit is up to.
    - iii) One of the functions of being a Christian is trying to daily discern what *God's will* is for our lives. This is why we read the Bible and one of the reasons why we pray, "*Thy will be done*" is a big part of the Lord's Prayer.
  - c) God gives special gifts to all people who become Christians. Part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to impart those gifts on who God wishes. We will see some of those gifts in action in tonight's lesson.
2. Chapter 8 also touches upon an important question. Just *who is* a Christian anyway?
  - a) We're going to meet a new character named Simon. Simon is a great example of somebody who *thinks* they are saved but is not. There are some great lessons there for us.
3. Mostly, Chapter 8 gives a number of examples of church growth and action. The key figure is not any individual, but the Holy Spirit himself.
  - a) The 1st part of Chapter 8 deals with the 1st great persecution of the church. We're going to learn *how* the Holy Spirit is behind the scenes using this action for God's glory.
  - b) Next we're going to learn about the Holy Spirit's role in baptism. Chapter 8 has one of the most controversial passages in the Bible on this topic.
  - c) Next we're going to look at this character Simon, and how Peter uses the Holy Spirit's gift of *discernment* to know that this guy is not really a believer.
  - d) Last, we're going to look at the Holy Spirit's role in *evangelism*, that is, the conversion of new believers. There are some great lessons here on how God works *through us* to bring new people into the family of God.
4. Before I begin, we need to remember where we left off last time. It is important to remember that the chapter divisions were not added until *centuries* after the original book was written.
  - a) Chapter 7 was Stephen's speech in front of the Jewish High Council, also known as the Sanhedrin. This was a body of 70 leading rabbis. They were the final word in all religious decisions. They had the power to put people in jail and/or fine them. The Roman government allows freedom of religion except in cases where it involved treason against the Roman Empire.
  - b) At the end of Stephen's speech, the Council was so enraged, so angry, they stoned Stephen to death. This was a violation of Roman law, but not Jewish law. They interpreted Stephen's speech as blasphemy, which calls for a death sentence.
    - i) Stephen's point near the end about seeing Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, and thus considering Jesus to be God & the Messiah, was probably the triggering point to the violent revolt.
    - ii) With that, let's start Chapter 8.

5. Chapter 8, Verse 1a And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.
  - a) Saul, of course, later had his name changed to Paul.
  - b) The Greek text states that Saul *voted* to give approval. This means that Saul, (or Paul) was one of the 70 voting members.
    - i) An interesting side note is that you are required to be married to be on the Sanhedrin. So what happened to Saul's/Paul's wife?
      - a) The answer is never stated in any of his letters, nor by historians.
      - b) Logical speculation would be that once he became converted, his wife was not willing to be a Jewish outcast and divorced him.
  
6. Verse 1b: On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
  - a) This event against Stephen changed the attitude of the Jewish leaders from that of passive resistance to one of violent warfare.
  - b) Remember in Acts 4, the number of believers were up to 5,000 people.
    - i) Prior to the persecution, the main group probably met somewhere near the Temple to hear the apostles speak, or in smaller groups in the City of Jerusalem.
  - c) Ever stop to think about what it would take to get *you* to abandon your home & work?
    - i) Jail sentence for practicing your religion?
    - ii) Death sentence for practicing your religion?
    - iii) Would you still confess Jesus publicly if you *knew* that being a Christian would make you an outcast of society, put you in jail, or worse, be killed?
    - iv) Give some credit to these early believers. They saw the miracles the apostles did. They heard the word preached. Some of them may even have seen Jesus alive during the 40 days that Jesus was seen after his resurrection (Acts 1:3).
    - v) They were scared enough to abandon their homes,
      - a) *But not scared enough to deny their faith!*
  - d) Verse 2 also marks a transition, that was part of the premise of the Book of Acts:
    - i) Jesus said in Chap. 1, Vs 8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses (1) in Jerusalem, and in (2) all Judea and Samaria, and (3) to the ends of the earth." (NIV, numbers added)
    - ii) OK, we haven't gotten to "the ends of the earth" yet, but the persecution *did* get Christians out of Jerusalem and into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria. (For those who don't know, those 2 territories encompass, more or less, what we know of as Israel today.)
    - iii) One of my premises for this chapter is that it is about the "works" of the Holy Spirit. Are you telling me the Holy Spirit is responsible for this persecution to get people off their fannies and unto Part 2 of Jesus marching orders? ☺
      - a) Yes, and no.
      - b) God still holds the people who persecuted the Christians accountable.
        - (1) God is sovereign and will not violate our free will.
      - c) God *knew* this was going to happen, and used that action to spread the Gospel, as Jesus wanted.
      - d) The lesson to be learned? Sometimes we don't understand horrible things God allows in our life. Often, there is a greater purpose than we can see from our perspective. God does *allow* Christians to suffer, but it is always for the greater good, although we can't always see it.
  
7. Verse 2: Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.
  - a) Verse 2 answers the question "Gee, what about Stephen, did they just leave his body there to rot?"

- b) The verse is not clear as to whether the people who buried Stephen were Christians or just Jews who disagreed with the killing/stoning of Stephen.
    - i) My view is that these were Jewish (non Christian) people. This verse is "very Jewish". As a Jew, you were not allowed to have a funeral for a man condemned to death. You were permitted to "mourn deeply", but that's about it.
    - ii) I further speculate that Stephen had an effect upon people. Most people don't convert to Christianity in one moment. It is a long process of thinking about the facts, various incidents, and then coming to the realization that Jesus is the Messiah and you *do* need him for your salvation.
    - iii) I suspect, but obviously can't prove, that these men were experiencing "Step 1" of the conversion process. They listened to Stephen's sermon. They knew the truth of the Israelite's' pattern of rejection of God's will and would consider that Jesus may be the Messiah. Their burial of Stephen was a chance to mediate on the facts and show the Sanhedrin that they did not approve of the actions.
      - a) Nothing further is said about these men, so one can only speculate.
8. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.
- a) The original Greek language describes Saul's action as comparable to a wild animal tearing at its prey.
  - b) I suspect Saul, at this point of violent anger was at a point of confusion in his life. There was probably something in his conscience that said Stephen had a lot of truth in his statement. But it went *so* against everything he learned about Judaism, the only way he could react at this point was extreme violence.
    - i) I've seen mild reactions to Christianity the same way. Deep down, people realize there is a lot of truth to Christianity. But people are so *unwilling* to change their lifestyle, that struggle in the conscious causes violent reactions.
    - ii) Examples include: "Who do you think you are, Mr. Holier-than-thou? You think you're a better person than I am? or "God knows the way that I am, and I'm not going to change" or "Heaven doesn't want me and Hell's afraid I'll take over the place."
      - a) If any of these have familiar rings, you've encountered a "mild" "Saul"!
  - c) Oh, and Saul just wasn't just putting people in prison. He also ordered the *execution* of some of the people he captured.
    - i) (References, Acts 9:1, 22:4, 26:16)
    - ii) Like I stated earlier, it usually takes *a lot* for a person to be uprooted out of his home and move elsewhere out of fear. This would do it!
9. Verse 4: Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
- a) You got to love this. The "scattered" didn't run into caves and hid. They ran to avoid jail and death, *but they still witnessed for Jesus!* They knew that the scope of Saul's persecution was limited to Jerusalem. They had the freedom to preach elsewhere & did.
  - b) "Preached the word" was not carrying around Bible scrolls and reading out loud in public squares. I believe it was more like testimonials. "Let me tell you about Jesus and how he changed my life". Nothing different than what you & I can do.
  - c) That' the application for us. God does not want quiet-Christians.
    - i) "Christianity is not a spectator sport" Chuck Missler.

10. The story changes in Verse 5. Here we get reintroduced to a guy named Philip. First of all, one of the 12 disciples was named Philip. This is a different guy. *This* Philip was one of the 7 deacons mentioned in Acts 6 along with Stephen. These deacons were to oversee the charity functions of the church.
11. Verse 5: Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.
- a) A little background on Samaria. After King Solomon, the Israelites split into two countries, known as the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Well, the Northern Kingdom went into idolatry pretty bad, and God allowed the Assyrians to conquer the Northern Kingdom. (The Southern Kingdom lasted for about another one hundred years, before it was captured by the Babylonians.)
    - i) When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom (2nd Kings, Chapter 17), they displaced the middle and upper classes throughout the kingdom and left some of the poor in the area. They then brought in other conquered people into the same territory, where they intermarried with the local Jews.
    - ii) Samaria was the capitol of the Northern Kingdom, and thus the people had that name. The first King of Samaria (Jeroboam ) figured out "Gee, if I let these people go down to Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom for every major holiday, they may rebel against me. Therefore *another temple*, similar to the temple in Jerusalem was built in Samaria.
      - a) They still practiced Judaism, but with different rules.
      - b) We would look at Samaritans the same way Christians look at Jehovah Witnesses. A group that is "half-right", but missed some of the key doctrines that makes one a Christian.
      - c) Thus Samaritans are sort of "half-breed" Jews.
      - d) The Jews looked down on Samaritans as lower-class citizens.
  - b) OK, enough of the History lesson, why all this background and what does it have to do with my life today?
    - i) Every culture has groups that culture looks down upon. In modern American history, we looked down at others based on skin color, other religions, or money status, or an undesirable occupation.
    - ii) The question is "What is *our* Samaria that we need to witness to?"
12. Verse 6: When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. <sup>7</sup> With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was great joy in that city.
- a) An interesting thought: Satan *also* knew God's plan was to go from "Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria". Since Satan *thought* he was winning the battle by having Saul persecute Christians, was he now "sending his troops" into Samaria?
    - i) Were these the evil spirits being exorcised? Just a thought!
    - ii) If you ever heard a testimony about evil spirits, you would know it is no laughing matter. There is far more to the world than meets the eye, and some of the scariest stories I've ever heard from people I respect involved exorcisms. If you *ever* want proof of the validity of Christianity, read more on this topic!
      - a) If you didn't know, the movie The Exorcist was based on a number of actual case studies, except in real life, the child was exorcised & healed.
  - b) Imagine being someone in Samaria.
    - i) They knew *something* of Jesus by the stories of the miracles
    - ii) In John, Chap.4, Jesus *spoke* to "the woman at the well" who was a Samaritan.
    - iii) Samaritans believed in a Messiah, but it was a King Messiah one who would set up a kingdom and overthrow Rome.

- iv) Now here was this guy Phillip, claiming Jesus to be the Messiah.
    - a) Paralytics and cripples were healed.
    - b) Demons were shrieking as they were leaving bodies.
    - c) I don't know about you, but I'd be impressed!
  - v) Missionaries today to 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries will often share stories that are similar to the ones here. I find God works his greatest miracles in locations where they have no other access to Christianity. You don't see it much in this country because we have too many churches, Bibles, Bible radio, etc.
  - c) I stated that *each section* of this story talked about the working of the Holy Spirit.
    - i) You are seeing it here through the miracles and Philip's preaching.
    - ii) Both are done *through* the Holy Spirit.
    - iii) I doubt Philip practiced his sermon's and rewrote things. He simply stated how Jesus rose from the dead, how Jesus changed his life. The miracles were simply validations to call people's attention to Phillip's speech.
13. New topic. Now we meet "Simon the Sorcerer". Verse 9: Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,<sup>10</sup> and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power."<sup>11</sup> They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.
- a) One of the important things to know about signs and miracles is that they can be produced by *demonic magic*. That is what is being taught in this message. The Bible is real clear on this.
    - i) In Exodus, Pharaoh's magicians could replicate some of Moses' first plagues.
    - ii) The Antichrist also will be full of deceptive, miraculous signs.
      - a) "The coming of the lawless one (Antichrist) will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders," (2 Thessalonians 2:9 NIV)
  - b) The secret of course, is listening to the *message*, not the messenger.
    - i) But even if we *or an angel from heaven* should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8 NIV)
  - c) Why does God allow Satan, and his followers such power?
    - i) This comes down to our free will. God wants us to choose him out of our free will. God needs to make the other choices "enticing enough" that we need to make the conscious decision that God's way is the best way for our lives.
  - d) This leads us back to ""Simon the Sorcerer".
    - i) This guy had demonic power as the text states.
    - ii) His focus was on *himself*, not God.
    - iii) The desire to *have* this power is enticing to the ego, as it gives one power and makes other people admire or worship *you*.
      - a) This is something to keep in mind when you see "miracle workers" on TV. Watch them carefully. Is their focus on themselves, or on God?
14. Verse 12: But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.<sup>13</sup> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.
- a) The last sentence sort of tells it all. Simon was *astonished* by the miracles.
    - i) Simon wasn't convicted of his sins.
    - ii) Simon just wanted the power to perform miracles like Phillip.
    - iii) Simon figured, "OK, I want in on this. All I have to do is believe in Jesus and be baptized, and this power is mine."

- iv) If you think I'm reading too much into these verses, read further in the text and it will become obvious that Simon's heart wasn't in it.
  - v) It is surprising how many people become Christians because it is "socially, the right thing to do", or "it is good for business contacts", or "it looks good on my resume if I run for political office".
  - b) This verse has major implications:
    - i) Do you mean one can confess Jesus, *even be baptized* and not be saved? Yes!
    - ii) The key is your *heart*, not your head!
      - a) "Some people miss eternal salvation by 18 inches", John Curson, referring to the distance from your heart to your brain!
    - iii) Christianity is about "putting your money where your mouth is"
      - a) A good analogy is an elevator. You may *believe* an elevator will hold your weight, and will get you to the top floor.
        - (1) *Faith* is actually stepping *in* the elevator!
      - b) Christianity is *not* about going to church every Sunday, although that is a "sign" you are walking by faith.
      - c) Christianity is *not just* about being baptized, again, although that is a *sign* of your obedience.
    - iv) When the Christians were persecuted early in the chapter, they ran for their lives, but they didn't stop preaching Jesus. "That's walking by faith!"
    - v) A good measure of Christianity is how you react during difficult times. God *constantly* is asking Christians, in one form or another "Do you really trust me?"
15. Verse 14: When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- a) Here is one of the most controversial set of verses in Acts.
  - b) In Verse 12, Phillip preached the gospel, miracles were done, people were saved *and* were baptized.
    - i) Yet verse 14 clearly states that the "Holy Spirit didn't come upon them"
    - ii) Does that mean there were two "comings of the Holy Spirit in this case?"
      - a) (I told you tonight's lesson will be on the Holy Spirit! ☺)
  - c) The commentaries I read were "all over the place" with explanations.
    - i) The Roman Catholic Church uses this as one of their arguments for baptism at birth, and then confirmation later in life.
    - ii) The Pentecostals use this for their argument that the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer *later* than when they first get saved.
  - d) To me, the Holy Spirit *was* at work the first time. The Bible is real clear that a function of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of their sins, and lead them to Christ.
    - i) So what does verse 15-16 mean when it says the Holy Spirit did not come upon them yet?
    - ii) There are lots of opinions and theories. All have their good & bad points.
    - iii) The *consensus* opinion, which I agree with, has to do with unification.
      - a) Here is an important verse to consider: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many." (1 Corinthians 12:13-14 NIV)

- iv) Remember that we are dealing with Samaritans. A group *hated* by the Israel-based Jews. Suppose it was the apostles themselves who went to Samaria and preached. Would Peter and John, who have an Israeli based background, be accepted by Samaritans?
  - a) Phillip was a "Hellenistic-Jew", or Greek-cultured Jew. This group was *also* second-rate citizens in the eyes of religious Jews.
  - b) I suspect, but can't prove, that the Samaritans were *more* accepting of Phillip preaching the Gospel than if one of the apostles did. Phillip was a "fellow outcast"
  - c) The application is not everybody can be a good witness *to* everybody. Sometimes people are only willing to listen to someone who they can *relate to*, or are looked upon the same way.
  - d) Back to the baptism. I believe Peter & John went to publicly demonstrate that *everybody* has equal standing as a Christian. The public demonstration of the baptism of the Holy Spirit *here*, was about unifying all believers into one body, as stated above in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12.
  - e) Were the believing Samaritans "saved" prior to Peter & John's baptism? Yes! Was the Holy Spirit there, albeit in a limited role prior to Peter & John? I would again argue yes.
    - (1) I believe the *whole* purpose of this exercise to take 2 groups that historically have hated each other, and so that *through* Jesus Christ, we can all be united into one body of believers.

- 16. Meanwhile, back to Simon the Sorcerer: Verse 18: When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup> and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
  - a) This verse makes it pretty clear where Simon's heart is.
  - b) Simon wanted the power & benefits of being a Christian. He wanted control.
  - c) On a more limited role, we all have been guilty of this.
    - i) We want God to do *our* will, not his. Our ego gets carried away as we want God to work *through us*, and not as how God might desire.
    - ii) Non-Christians will try to make deals with God in exchange for obedience.
      - a) "God is not here to lower your golf score" Hank Hanegraaff.
  - d) Early church historians speak of a Simon who went on to lead a new-age "gnostic" movement. Many believe this is that same Simon. Whether it is or is not is difficult to prove. The point is that there is the *danger* of wanting God to do things *our way*. The basis of many of the new age movements is that "you are God" and he wants to do "your will".
- 17. Verse 20: Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."
  - a) Phillip's translation of Verse 20 is close to the original:
    - i) "To hell with you & your money"
  - b) One of my main themes of Chapter 8 is the work of the Holy Spirit.

- c) One of the spiritual gifts one can be given by the Holy Spirit is the gift of *discernment*.
    - i) This is the special ability to be able to comprehend one's intention, or to be able to know when somebody is lying to your face!
      - a) (Never play poker with somebody who has this gift! ☺)
    - ii) Peter had it a few chapters back when Ananias & his wife Sapphira lied to Peter about how much they sold their land for as a donation (Acts 5:2-3)
  - d) Notice Peter's tact. It wasn't "hey this is a new Christian, give him a break". It wasn't even a passive "you know, that isn't how we do things here in the church"
    - i) Peter just said in so many words: "Repent, you sinner!"
      - a) That was Peter's style. Some people witness in a more subtle manner, and some people, like Peter, just go forth with boldness.
      - b) Before we get too tough on Peter, some people *need* that type of preaching. I know an evangelist who is *very* outgoing and preaches a very similar style, *and people come to the Lord through Him*.
        - (1) With some people, that type of boldness is necessary in order for them to accept Jesus.
        - (2) An interesting word-study in the Bible is "boldness". It is emphasized heavily in the New Testament.
      - c) Again, it comes down to the spiritual gift of *discernment*. Some people need the brash style, others require a softer touch.
18. Verse 24: Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."
- a) Simon turned to Peter & John and said "Pray to God for me that nothing will happen"
    - i) Was Simon repentance at this point? I'd argue no, but it's debatable.
    - ii) I still detect in Simon's voice the attitude of "hey, you guys have got this special power. I get that part. Put in a word for me to this Jesus guy to not let that happen to me and I won't mention the money thing again".
    - iii) It's the attitude of "hey, I just want the power and benefit of being a Christian". Sorry I offended you. I still have no intention of changing my lifestyle.
    - iv) Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but I do sense that from reading the text.
    - v) A majority of commentaries I read also take this view.
  - b) Looking at the big picture, why is this story of Simon included?
    - i) Part of it was because he was "reverend" in Samaria. The author Luke wanted to show God's power is greater than those who use "black magic".
    - ii) Part of it is to show that Christianity requires a change of heart, and not just head-knowledge.
    - iii) Also, that growth in Christianity means growth in the opposition. First Satan tries persecution, like Saul's band in Jerusalem. The second method is "compromise", like this Simon character.
19. Verse 25: When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.
- a) As a side note, this is the last we read of John in Acts. John went on to write other parts of the Bible (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> John, the Gospel of John, Revelation), but this is the last we read *about* him.

- b) Getting back to a verse at the beginning of the chapter, it stated that when the persecution started, everyone "ran for the hills". Why do you think the 12 apostles stayed, (albeit "underground") in Jerusalem?
- i) I would speculate, that they remembered the Garden of Gethsemane. This was the place where Judas, along with a Roman legion, came to arrest Jesus. The Bible mentions the disciples were scared, and ran for their lives.
    - a) I, along with many commentators, suspect, but can't prove, that night stuck in their heads, and when they saw Jesus alive again, felt guilty for deserting him.
    - b) They were probably determined never to run away in fear again.
20. Now we get back to Philip. Philip was last mentioned leading a revival in Samaria. Now, God has a different assignment for Philip. Verse 26: Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."
- a) The first thing you need to know is God was sending Philip to the boondocks.
    - i) It would be like telling you to walk along a secondary highway in Death Valley.
  - b) Notice Phillip didn't know at this point what God had planned for him.
  - c) A lot of commentators point out that Phillip had a nice ministry going in Samaria. People were getting saved, and the church was growing.
    - i) Now God calls Phillip to abandon all this and go out to a deserted road.
    - ii) One has to wonder if Phillip questioned all this.
    - iii) The application is that sometimes God calls us to places we don't expect.
    - iv) This naturally leads to the next question: How does Philip, or us, for that matter, know when God is speaking to us?
      - a) First of all, if you are a believer, the Holy Spirit does dwell within us and guide us, if we are willing.
      - b) Second God will never ask us to do something that is contrary to the Bible. His commands may be illogical or confusing, but never contradictory to his Word.
      - c) Further, God will usually often give us some sort of validation, especially for difficult requests.
      - d) "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1 NIV)
  - d) As for Phillip, there may have been some sort of visible angel appearing. We don't know. (Hey, that would do it for me!). Then again, it may have been a "small, still voice" like the kind you & I might here. The angel mentioned in Verses 26 & 29 only spoke to Philip. There is no mention of any appearance.
21. Verse 27: So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,
- a) A little background would be helpful here.
    - i) A "eunuch" in that time era, referred to a government official, not somebody who mutilated a certain-body part.
    - ii) There was a good number of Ethiopians who were Jewish. Centuries earlier, King Solomon married and had a child with "The Queen of Sheba". When she left, she took with her a lot of the knowledge of Judaism, and (supposedly) a replica of the arc of the covenant.
      - a) When Israel was reformed as a country today, many Ethiopian Jews migrated to Israel.

22. Back to the Eunuch, the "Secretary of the Treasury of Ethiopia". Verse 28: and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.
- a) First of all, remember that one couldn't just walk into a bookstore and buy a copy of an Isaiah scroll. There were no printing presses. This is a major ordeal. (This is also the largest book in the Bible!)
  - b) Why did the Jews give this guy a copy of Isaiah?
    - i) I suspect, from reading the further passages, that his trip to Israel was not satisfying to him. He wanted to learn more. The leading Rabbi's probably gave him an Isaiah scroll, because there is a reference in there to Eunuch's not being excluded from salvation! Here is the reference:
      - a) "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant...I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off." (Isaiah 56:4b-5 NIV)
      - ii) Not being satisfied, I suspect the Eunuch was then "looking around" the scroll, and went back a few pages to Isaiah 52-53, which is what he quotes from below.
23. Verse 29: The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."
- a) Notice how God works "one step at a time". It doesn't say, "Walk up to this guy and start telling him to repent!"
  - b) That's a danger we do as Christians: jumping ahead of God's game plan.
24. Verse 30: Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. <sup>31</sup>. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.
- a) Based on the Eunuch's response in verse 31, most commentators take the view the man was not satisfied with his knowledge of Judaism to this point. He needs help to understand the Scriptures.
  - b) The Eunuch was cooperative with Philip. The Eunuch assumed, or learned that Philip was Jewish, and therefore, had the background knowledge to explain the verse.
  - c) There's a simple application to be applied. If you want someone to trust you to explain the scriptures,
    - i) First you must have the knowledge to explain it.
    - ii) Second, you must have enough authority that people will explain it. That doesn't mean you have to go to seminary! Just, as you grow as a Christian, learn the Bible to a point of being able to share it with others!
25. Verse 32: The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." <sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"
- a) The eunuch was quoting from is a quote from Isaiah 53:7-8. The translation is slightly different from the Old Testament because the man was quoting from the Greek, (the common language of the day). The differences are fairly irrelevant.
  - b) Isaiah 53 (and the last few verses of Isaiah 52) is a lecture all to itself. It is one of the greatest predictions of the crucifixion in the Bible, written hundreds of years *even before crucifixion was invented!*
    - i) Few Jewish commentators at that time saw this passage as being about the Messiah. They couldn't accept the thought of a Messiah suffering for their sins.

- ii) If you've never read it, stop and read this whole passage, it describes with great accuracy, the events that happened on the cross.
    - a) It almost sounds like the Gospels took this passage and wrote the narrative *based* on it. If it wasn't for other collaborating evidence, one could make this accusation.
    - b) The Jews for Jesus movement loves to take out full-page ads in newspapers that say "Attention Jews, why do you ignore Isaiah 53?"
  - iii) The common interpretation was that the passage was talking about Israel.
    - a) If you read this passage carefully, that would be a contradiction.
      - (1) "But he was pierced for our transgressions, (Isaiah 53:5a NIV)
        - (a) Who is "he" and "our"? There are two different people/groups being discussed here. It can't be about Israel suffering for its own sins or the world's sins.
26. Verse 35: Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.
- a) Philip used this verse as a "launching pad" to preach the Gospel.
  - b) The lesson for us is to watch for opportunities. God will lead us to people who *want* to know more about Jesus *if we pray for such opportunities to arise!*
27. Verse 36: As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"
- a) As an Ethiopian interested in converting to Judaism, the ritual for conversion was baptism. This is probably what the Eunuch thought it took to be a "completed Jew".
  - b) The other possibility is Philip explained Baptism.
28. Verse 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."
- a) This is one of those (relatively few) verses that may, or may not be in the original text. We're running late, and that is a whole topic unto itself.
  - b) No matter which baptism the Ethiopian had in mind, Phillip knew enough about the Gospel that he was convinced the Eunuch "believed with all his heart" and that was good enough for baptism.
  - c) There is a great similarity between what Philip preached and what Paul said about the Gospel in Romans 10:9
    - i) "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
    - ii) Again, the key is "heart", as opposed to head knowledge.
29. Verse 38: And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.
- a) This chapter is the last we read of the Eunuch. For all we know, he went back to Ethiopia and introduced Christianity to Ethiopia.
  - b) The Ethiopian gets baptized, and he becomes a disciple.
    - i) Well, so much for waiting for Peter & John to show up for the "official" baptism of the Spirit for this guy! ☺
    - ii) I think this verse further supports the argument a few pages back that Peter & John's "second baptism" for Samaria was about church unification.
  - c) Why do you think the Ethiopian was singled out for this story?
    - i) Possible it was written as a "typical" example of how God will work, through the Holy Spirit in unusual circumstances.
    - ii) Maybe the author Luke was so impressed with the "unlikeness" of all these events, he wanted to include it.

- iii) A 3<sup>rd</sup> theory I heard was also interesting. Consider this verse:
  - a) I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Romans 1:16 NIV)
  - b) Maybe because Ethiopia has a large percentage of Jews (like Samaria), God wanted to make sure they received a "special presentation" of the Gospel before it hit the Gentile (non-Jewish) world.
- 30. Verse 39: When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.
  - a) Commentators debate as to how Philip was "taken away". Some see it as a transportation miracle (ala "Scotty, beam me over to Azotus" ☺). Others see it as Phillip was so caught up in the excitement, that he ran/rode away, and the next thing he knew, Philip was miles away in another town.
  - b) I tend to lean toward the miraculous, as I like to take God at face value.
  - c) Remember the scripture study rule.
    - i) If the plain text makes sense, seek no other sense.
- 31. Well, I've overstated my 10 page limit once again, so let's end it here.
- 32. Let's Pray. Father, I thank you for these lessons on the Holy Spirit. As God moved through these mighty men, may you also use us in a mighty way for your glory. For those of us dealing with persecution, trials and difficulties, help us to remember the eternal perspective, that although we don't understand what we are going through, you have a greater purpose in mind and all things do work our for your glory. For we ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.