The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary
on the Acts of the Apostles
in easy-to-read English
Written by Fred Morris

Saul blinded by light from Heaven on the road to Damascus

Acts Unit 4 of 12

Chapters 7:52-9:19

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Unit 4: Chapters 7:52 to 9:19.

Stephen is Killed.

Stephen told the Jews that they were like their ancestors, long ago, who killed the prophets. The prophets spoke about the coming Messiah, God's own special messenger. Then Stephen told them that they killed the Messiah (7:52). He meant Jesus Christ, God's Son, their Messiah.

Stephen's words made the Jewish leaders very angry. They shouted at him and dragged him out of the city to throw stones to kill him. While they threw the stones, Stephen prayed for them (7:60).

A Jewish leader called Saul watched. He agreed that Stephen should die (8:1). Saul was a clever and dedicated Jewish leader. He knew the Old Testament very well but did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

ACTS CHAPTER 8.

The Church suffers then spreads to Other Places.

While Jesus was with His disciples He told them "You will be handed over to be badly treated and put to death…" (Matthew 24:9). They were persecuted. After Stephen's death, the persecution of believers began in Jerusalem. At that time, Saul tried to stop people from believing in Jesus. He put some believers in jail, and killed others. Many other believers left their homes in Jerusalem and went to live in other places.

They talked about Jesus everywhere they went (8:4). This persecution helped to spread the Good News to other places.

Christians are treated badly, that is persecuted, in many countries today. Jesus said, "If they persecute Me, they will persecute you" (John 15:18). We should not be surprised if we are persecuted. We must be brave. We must pray that those who are persecuted will not give up.

What happened in Samaria.

The Good News of Jesus Christ began to spread from Jerusalem to other countries. Jesus said, "You will be my messengers in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and … from one end of the Earth to the other" (Acts 1:8). In Acts chapter 8 we read how the Good News reached Judea (8:1), Samaria (8:1,5,25), Ethiopia (8:27) and other parts of Judea (8:40).

Philip was a leader in the Jerusalem church. Jews did not like Samaritans, but Philip went to Samaria and preached about Christ, the Messiah, in their city. God was with him and he did many miracles in the name of Jesus (8:7 to 8). The instruction of Jesus to preach the Good News in Samaria as well as in Jerusalem caused much rejoicing because of the miracles performed.

A man named Simon the Magician lived in Samaria. He showed the people evil magic. They called him 'the great power'. But people began to believe in the name of Jesus (8:12). Simon said he believed in the name of Jesus, so Philip baptised him with others who were sorry for their sins. They repented and believed.

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to see what had happened in Samaria. The apostles prayed for the new Christians and put their hands on them 'and they received the Holy Spirit' (8:15 to 17). Miracles followed and Simon saw what happened. He wanted this power for himself.

He wanted to pay money so that he could do miracles, too (8:18 to 20). But Simon's thoughts were wrong and evil.

"Do you think you can buy God's gift with money?" Peter asked. Simon had not truly repented and he did not have true faith. Peter told him that both he and his money should be destroyed!

God does not want anyone to be punished. He wants all people to repent and turn to Jesus (8:21 to 23; 2 Peter 3:9). Simon begged Peter to pray for him that he might be spared from the wrath of God for his sinful mistakes.

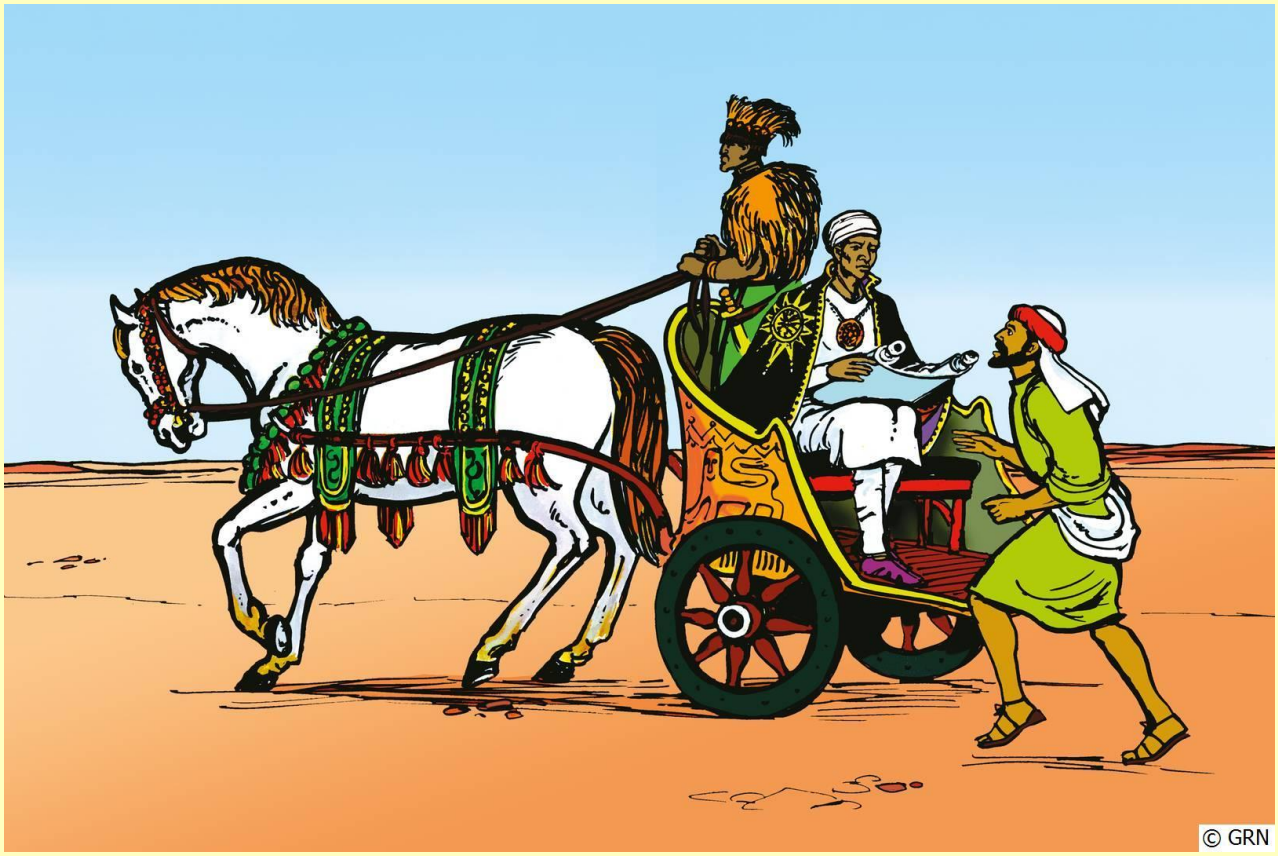
If your old life still controls you, it is a good thing to ask the church leaders to pray for you. You must also repent (James 5:16 to 20).

Note that Peter and John continued their preaching as they travelled back to Jerusalem (8:25).

The Good News for Ethiopia.

An angel came to Philip and said to him, "Go south … down to Gaza" (8:26). Philip left Samaria and went south towards Gaza along the road to Egypt and Ethiopia. A chariot came along the road pulled by horses. Philip saw an officer from Ethiopia sitting in it. He served in the royal palace of the Queen of Ethiopia. The man was reading a scroll containing part of the Old Testament.

"Go to the chariot and stay near it", God's Spirit told Philip. Philip heard the man reading aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-8).



God sends the apostle Philip to meet the Ethiopian official

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked him.

"How can I?" the man answered. "I need someone to explain it to me" (8:31).

Without the Spirit of God helping us, we cannot fully understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:14), so God gives us His Spirit to teach us His truth (John 16:13 to 14). When you read the Bible, always ask God to help you to understand His truth and enjoy reading it (8:36 to 39). Ask Him for others to help you understand and share in the joy.

God sent Philip to help this man. He told him that Isaiah wrote about the Good News of Jesus even though he lived 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

As soon as the officer understood this, he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. He asked Philip to baptise him. After Philip baptised him, the Holy Spirit took Philip away. The officer went on his way back to Ethiopia. He had an important job there in the Queen's palace (8:27,39).

This is the true story of the conversion of the Ethiopian who came seeking the one true God in Jerusalem and who read the Old Testament part of the Bible. He was not allowed to worship with the Jews because he was a eunuch but through conversion to Christ he returned to Ethiopia rejoicing in his salvation and baptism.

We believe that he was probably the first Christian in East Africa. He went back to his home country 'full of joy' (8:39) to tell others the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian came to faith through reading the words of God and receiving help to understand it.

ACTS CHAPTER 9.

Saul meets Jesus.

By this time Christian believers had travelled as far as Damascus in Syria. Saul, one of the Jewish leaders, asked for letters which gave him authority to put the believers in prison (9:2). They were afraid of Saul.

Saul was born in Tarsus (see map). He travelled north from Jerusalem to go to Damascus to find the Christians and put

them in prison. No one could stop him. It would take a miracle from God to stop him and also to change him.

On the road to Damascus, a miracle happened. A bright light blinded him, and he heard a voice from Heaven say, "Saul, why are you fighting against Me?" He fell down on the road (9:3 to 5).

"Who are you, Lord?" he asked (9:5).

The voice spoke again. "I am Jesus. I am the one you are opposing." Jesus then ordered Paul to get up and go to Damascus and wait to be told what to do (9:5 to 6). His friends ran to him and picked him up. Saul could not see, so they led him into the city of Damascus. For three days Saul was blind. He was shocked. He did not eat, but waited for Jesus to show him what to do.

Saul knew that he had worked against God. He knew that he should say that he was wrong.

Jesus spoke to a believer who lived in another part of the city him and told him to go to the house where a man from Tarsus named Saul was staying (9:11).

The believer knew that Saul had allowed Christians to be killed in Jerusalem so he was afraid. Then the Lord told him, "Go! I have chosen this man to work for Me. He will carry My name to people who are not Jews, and to their kings. And he will bring My name to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer in My name" (9:15-16).

These words agree with the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples in Acts 1:8. This also confirms God's plan to save Israel AND the rest of the world through repentance and faith in Jesus.

The believer found Saul, just as Jesus said, and prayed for him. "Brother Saul", he said. "The Lord Jesus, whom you saw on the road… has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." At once, Saul could see! He now believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah and the Son of God. He was baptised. Then he ate some food and was strengthened (9:17 to 19).

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