

# **BIB204 Early Church NT2**

## **Unit 2b**

### **The Spread of the Gospel in Light of Persecution**

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So in this segment, as I said, I want to go ahead and discuss what that means, the ramifications, right? So let's start off with the rereading of verses 14 and 15. "The apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God (the gospel). They sent Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is a transitional period for Jews, for people of Jewish descent. On the day of Pentecost, however many there were, about 120 on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon those individuals and indwelt them. And they spoke with other tongues. We see this in Acts 2.

The Samaritans are the offspring of Jews and other people groups that were brought in by the Assyrians in the wake of the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. And they were there for generations. They followed the Law of Moses. They had their own Pentateuch. They figured that the holy mountain for them was Mount Gerizim. But they were never fully accepted. From the time of Ezra when the exiles returned from Persia, which used to be Babylon, they were never fully accepted. They weren't allowed to join in the building of the temple because they were not fully Jewish. They had different customs. They just weren't Jewish. There were ethnic differences.

So what the Holy Spirit is doing here, what Luke is conveying to us, is that the Samaritans have received the word of God. They have believed. But it needs to be made apparent to everyone that the Samaritans are now to receive the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Jews had received the Holy Spirit: through indwelling. So Peter and John are sent, and they must have laid their hands on hundreds, if not thousands, of people expressly for the purpose of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's the significance of this segment, this section here.

So verse 17, "Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" Because Simon, in watching Philip, has surmised that Philip is doing this by the power of the Holy Spirit. Who knows? Philip may have said something to him to that effect. "How are you doing all these things?" "By the power of the Holy Spirit," Philip may have said. May have said. We don't know for sure. And so he watches. He watches Peter and John lay hands on people. And all of a sudden, these people have the Holy Spirit, which means can they do what this Philip can do? No. Simon probably perceives differences. All that you have is the indwelling of the Spirit so that there's great joy. There is the personal inward knowledge of being redeemed, having received the word of God, the gospel.

And so Simon wants to go back to his old ways, so he offers Peter and John money. He says, verse 19, "'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.' And Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.'"

So we read earlier that Simon believed (verse 13) and he was baptized. But here Peter says, "Your money perish with you. Pray that the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. You're in the bond of iniquity, the gall of bitterness." Is this Simon a believer? Is he saved? Was he truly converted? We are

not told. He does say to Peter, “Please pray to the Lord for me.” That gives one reason to hope perhaps, but we are actually not told what happens afterward. There is a legend about Simon, this particular Simon. He is often equated with an individual by the name of Simon Magus. He leaves and he creates heresies that affect the church. But there is no actual historical verification of this Simon here in Acts 8 being that Simon Magus.

Verse 25, “Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.” So at this point, there is no need for the laying on of hands. Just this particular city that Philip evangelized, where they believed, Peter and John came, laid hands on these Samaritans, and they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So now the Holy Spirit has testified to the fact that Samaritans are also to be given eternal life, that God has judged them worthy of receiving eternal life. Not that they have any worthiness in and of themselves, but God has chosen them. So now, verse 25 speaks of normalcy. They testified. They spoke the word of the Lord. They returned to Jerusalem. They preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. At that point, belief is enough for indwelling and there is no need for laying on of hands.

Verse 26, “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’”

So we have an angel of the Lord saying to Philip, “Rise. Go to the south. Go to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” And we’re told by Luke, this is desert. So he goes and he finds an Ethiopian seated in his chariot. We’re told that this Ethiopian is a eunuch. He is a court official of Candace. Of course, the Greek says *Kandake*. So Candace, it reads like a proper name in the English, but it isn’t actually a proper name. Ethiopia, as we know, is in East Africa. This is Kush. At this time in history, well, sometime after this historical period, Kush would be called Axum. Well, something along those lines. But this is the Kush of the Old Testament. That’s the term that’s used from the Hebrew. So this guy, this individual is a Kushite. This man is a Kushite. He’s a court official of the queen of the Kushites, and the official title of the queen is *Kandake*. The term basically means queen. So there’s a bit of a redundancy there in English. It’s not actually her name. And we don’t know which queen this was because we don’t know very much about the queens because the Kushite king start it off, and then later in Kushite history, you had women who amassed political power and took on the mantle of royalty. They became what we now know as *kandakes*. So Candace is not a proper name. And this court official is in charge of all the treasure. He’d come to Jerusalem to worship, he was returning, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and he asked this individual if he understood what he was reading. And the official effectively asks for assistance. “How can I (verse 31), unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit. And the passage of Scripture is given to us. It’s from Isaiah 53.

Verse 34, “The eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.” So Philip, who is already living in the reality of what this eunuch was yearning towards, basically brings the eunuch into the present. The texts do point to Jesus, but Jesus has already come and gone. And Philip apprises the court official of this fact. Verse 36, “And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And so he commanded the chariot to stop (verse 38), and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.”

It’s a strange entry. We don’t hear of any other evangelizations of Kushites, but I’m sure that this individual probably had an impact back at home, or not. That’s a possibility. But how could he not have an impact? But he’s baptized, and as soon as he comes up out of the water with Philip, the Holy Spirit translocates Philip. He is moved from one location to the next in the blink of an eye. And of course, he’s found (verse 40) at Azotus, which is on the coast. “And as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.” And so that ends chapter 8. In chapter 9, we will be looking in the next segment at Saul’s conversion and the ramifications thereof.