

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts8_Philip's Mission Journeys)

Introduction

In **verses 1-3**, Luke gives us a brief synopsis of the activities of Saul (later Paul). Saul is pictured as a wild ravaging boar attempting to destroy something that had irritated it.¹ The church (*ekklesia*) here is not the Body of Christ. We are still within the Age of Israel at this point during which the offer of the Kingdom is extant to Israel (see Acts 3:19ff cf. 1:3-8; 2:17-21). [We will study the term *ekklesia* separately and through the process of induction, we will derive a more correct understanding of the term “church” as used in Scripture.]² For now however, please note that this “church” (*ekklesia*) at Jerusalem was not the same as the Body of Christ of which Paul speaks in his epistles. It is no more the Body of Christ than was the “church” or “congregation” (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness at Mount Sinai of which Stephen speaks in Acts 7:38 where the same word is used. Also, just because Paul uses the term “church” (*ekklesia*) in Philippians 3:6 when he refers to his history of persecution of the “church” does not mean that this is the same as the “Body of Christ.” We must keep in mind that the word *ekklesia* simply means “assembly” – nothing more, nothing less. It is the context that determines the content of the faith of the particular “assembly” to which it refers. Also, it is not helpful that we have used the phrase “church age” to describe this dispensation of the Body of Christ since the term “church” (*ekklesia*) is not a term exclusively applied to this Body of Christ alone as we have seen and will see. It is just as much of a misnomer as is the commonly used phrase “unlimited atonement” to describe the universal, global and all encompassing “expiation” accomplished by Jesus on the Cross. Atonement is a term that should only be applied to the effect of the sacrifices and means simply that the sins were “covered” or passed over until the payment could be accomplished. That payment for sin has now been accomplished, thus sins are no longer “covered” by Jesus’ death – they have been completely set aside or “expiated” – something the sacrifices could not accomplish.

An aside: By staking this position, I am not saying, as some might think, that there were two different “Bodies of Christ,” nor am I saying that there were different means of salvation. The means of salvation has always been through belief in Christ. I also reject the description of this position as “ultra” or “hyper” dispensational. This is a very subjectively defined and applied term that seems to be leveled against anyone who may not believe that the Church Age Body of Christ began in Acts 2 with Pentecost. There is no consensus on the definition of the terms. Just because there have been a few radicals on the fringes who are also non-Acts 2 dispensationalists does not mean that I endorse their particular variant of views no more than I embrace every single point and position held by any theologian. Every great theologian (e.g. Lewis S. Chafer, J. Dwight Pentecost, John F. Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Alva J. McClain, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., etc.) has had their share of “know just enough to be dangerous” fringe group of followers who have distorted their teaching and thereby gave their detractors ammunition.

¹ See the footnotes to Earl Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1832.

² Induction is defined as the process of reasoning or logic whereby conclusions are developed from an analysis of all of the particulars. Inductive reasoning proceeds from the particulars to the general. See Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume 1, 117-118 and Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 498.

An aside (continued): To those who would attempt to associate my position with such fringe elements (e.g. multiple ways of salvation), I would ask that you “be objective and analyze the facts as presented.” Then, if you don’t accept the position I promote, fine. Just pray that God illuminate my mind with the Truth, that I be receptive to His work in my life and that I repent of my error. In the interest of the greater mission, we don’t need to be fighting each other over such non-essentials to the faith. Does it really matter that we know when the unique Age of the Body of Christ actually began? Or, is it more essential to a proper understanding of Scripture that we distinguish between the teaching relevant to the nation Israel and that which is relevant to the Body of Christ? I say the latter and I personally know representatives from the Acts 2 position and the non-Acts 2 position who believe this too. I also know representatives from both camps who go astray, in my opinion, as they attempt to apply this distinction in their interpretation of Scripture.

Introduction continued: Some interpret the events described in verses 1-3 as evidence that the Apostles were unwilling to carry out the Great Commission. Therefore, God sent a persecution to scatter them. However, it is interesting to note that the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem (v. 1) and were not scattered. So, if this assumption is correct, the persecution failed to accomplish its God-intended objective.

There is another plausible explanation of why they stayed in Jerusalem. Here is an explanation:

- The Apostles knew that they would form the new nation of Israel in the Kingdom should it arrive during their lifetimes (Lk 12:32).
- The Apostles knew that they would reign as judges over Israel (Matt 19:28 cf. 21:43. See also Rev 21:9-14 where the Apostle John is provided further revelation on this topic).
- They may have been waiting in Jerusalem for some kind of sign that God had officially recognized them as the leaders of that new nation since they knew nothing yet about the intercalation of the present dispensation of the “secret” or “mystery” kept hidden in the plan of God and which would be disclosed through the Apostle to the Gentiles – Paul.
- Paul, who would be the agent through whom God would reveal the Truths related to a new dispensation, had not yet been saved.
- They didn’t know the times and the seasons (Acts 1:6, 7), but they did know that a time of Tribulation would come (Matt 24:2-22; Lk 21:20-24).
- They may have thought that the persecution that believers were then experiencing was the beginning of the Tribulation

Philip’s Ministry in Samaria and Judea (8:4-40)

Ministry in Samaria (8:4-25)

In **verse 4**, we read that those who were scattered (all except the Apostles – v. 2) went everywhere preaching the Word. Is this evidence that God sent the persecution in order that they would be scattered and start preaching to the Gentiles? Not necessarily. In Acts 11:19, we read that those who were scattered as a result of the murder of Stephen and the persecution which followed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Every believer today must answer the question of whether this “preaching to the Jews only” was more of a consequence of progressive revelation (an Acts 2 position) or was it a correct understanding of God’s plan and commission on their part (the position of the non-Acts 2 dispensationalists)?

In verses 5-8, Luke documents the effect of Philip’s ministry in Samaria. Philip must have been an amazing evangelist and he was legitimate – unlike “healing” televangelists today. Note also how prominent demon possession was during the 1st Century in this region.

Some might ask – “Weren’t Samaritans Gentiles?” “And, if so, doesn’t this indicate that God had initiated the new, unique age of the Body of Christ?” Good questions. The answer to the first question is “not all were Gentiles.” The answer to the second question is “not necessarily.”

About 1000 years earlier, right after Solomon’s death the nation of Israel was divided into a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom (ten tribes) is sometimes referred to as “Israel” or “Ephraim” and the Southern Kingdom (two tribes) is sometimes referred to as “Judah.” Each had their own king and each eventually went different ways in terms of their center of worship, i.e. the Northern Kingdom eventually rejected Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Some inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were left in the land after the deportation to Assyria (ca. 721 B.C.) and some of those who remained eventually married Gentiles who had been imported into the land by the Assyrians. Evidently not all of the Jews were amalgamated into the Gentile community and at a minimum, many continued to practice the faith of the Jews. When Jesus visited the woman at the well in John 4:1-12, the woman asked Jesus – “Are you greater than **our father Jacob**, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself...?” It is possible that she was just referring to their common ancestry and that this is not concrete evidence of Jewish racial blood.

However, the real issue here is the faith being practiced, i.e. Judaism, not the purity of the blood line (see also Acts 2:10 where “proselytes” were among those who experienced the outpouring to the Spirit at Pentecost). The audience to whom the gospel was being preached is clearly stated to be the Jews (Acts 11:19) and the expansion of this gospel into the region that had formerly been the Northern Kingdom is consistent with teaching in the Hebrew Scriptures on the subject of the Kingdom. The prophets are full of predictions that when the Messiah returns, He will establish a Kingdom that will include all of Israel – all twelve tribes. Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones represents the whole of the house of Israel) is just one passage and it reconciles nicely with John the Apostles’ Revelation (Rev 7:1-8; 21:12) ; however, it is clear that Gentiles were beginning to benefit as well from this spread of the gospel (see Acts 10:44-48). This is all perfectly consistent with the kingdom gospel message – to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. Gentiles will definitely be a part of the Kingdom of which Israel is the focal point and hub. The fact that Gentiles are being included in the benefits of this Kingdom message is totally consistent with all Hebrew Scripture on the subject and does not indicate ipso facto that the new dispensation of the Body of Christ was now being formed or promoted.

Before the formerly rebellious ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom could be incorporated into the Kingdom, there must be true repentance on their part. They had to be given the opportunity just as Judah and Jerusalem had been given the opportunity. As we will eventually see, Peter and John will go to the Gentiles, including those to whom Philip ministered and baptized in water (Acts 8:12 cf. 8:14-17). These believers did not receive the Holy Spirit at the time of Philip’s preaching, yet later, when Peter and John came and laid hands on them, they did. Peter and John, who both had Apostolic authority, had to go to Samaria in order to receive the Samaritans (descendants of the former Northern Kingdom) into one fold consistent with the Kingdom gospel and the teaching in the Hebrew Scriptures regarding the Kingdom. There is no other occasion in the Apostle’s preaching where the Holy Spirit was withheld from believers who had been kingdom-baptized until the Apostles had laid hands on them and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

This subsequent receipt of the Holy Spirit by these believers does not mean that they were not saved during the interval between their water baptism and the laying on of hands and receipt of the Holy Spirit. If we are truly still within the Age of Israel at this point as I believe, then their relationship to the Holy Spirit was consistent with that age. Believers in the Age of Israel did not have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and were only endued with the Holy Spirit for acts of service. It is not recorded in this chapter exactly what these believers did in the way of service after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17); however, we do know that activities consistent

with the temporary spiritual gifts were occurring during this transition phase of the 1st Century (e.g. prophesying, tongues, miracles, etc.) based upon Paul's teaching. Eventually, as Paul documents, these gifts began to cease and fade away.

In verses 9-25, we see the story of Simon Magus unfold. Luke records the fact that Simon had deceived the people of Samaria for a long time into believing that he possessed the power of God. Such egomania does not occur overnight and does not evaporate overnight either. In fact, I believe that Simon simply professed faith and was water baptized simply because he wanted the power he saw demonstrated by Philip and the Apostles. He was not saved or a true believer. He just wanted what he perceived to be a greater magical power than he possessed and was willing to leverage any source to obtain it. He was a man full of bitterness and envy (Acts 8:23) after his alleged "belief" and Peter's statement in verse 20 seems to insinuate or imply that even Peter didn't believe him to be a believer – "you have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God."

Simon's attempt to buy the power demonstrated by the Apostles eventually gave rise to the term "simony" – a reference to the sale of ecclesiastical offices, a practice prevalent in the medieval church. According to the writings of the early church fathers (e.g. Justin Martyr, Jerome, Irenaeus, Epiphany, and Hippolytus) Simon eventually withdrew from the early church movement and initiated a movement of his own which was a mixture of Christianity and pagan ideas. He even made claims that indicated that he believed he was god.³ He is one of the first illustrations of those who use the faith of others in Christ for their own personal gain and elevation of status in this world.

Ministry to the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40)

The Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon is thought to have come from Ethiopia (2 Chron 9). Some tradition or legend believe that she even had a son by Solomon; however, that is not necessarily an historical fact. Perhaps as a result of her visit to Solomon and her possible conversion there, the faith in Yahweh persisted in Ethiopia down through the centuries. It is therefore very likely that this eunuch was either a proselyte to Judaism or actually a Jew.⁴

- ✓ Ethiopia is mentioned nineteen times in the Old Testament and seven more times it is referenced as Cush
- ✓ Ethiopians are mentioned twenty-one times.
- ✓ Moses married an Ethiopian woman (Num 12:1)
- ✓ An Ethiopian by the name of Ebed-melech saved Jeremiah from death (Jer 38:7-13).
- ✓ Zephaniah 3:10 makes it evident that some Jews were dispersed into Ethiopia
- ✓ Therefore, it is possible that this eunuch from Ethiopia whom Philip met was a Jew

The revelation that Christ, the Messiah, died for the sins of the world is not new truth with Paul. The promise and hope for a redeemer goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15 and can be traced in greater detail through the progress of revelation in such passages as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 – the passage the eunuch was reading. While it is true that God desired to channel His blessings to Gentiles through Israel, it is clear in Scripture (Old Testament and New) that Christ died for the sins of all mankind (Jn 1:29 cf. Isa 45:22) and his death was not limited to Israel alone. However, Paul goes into much more detail and shows the special relationship of the death of Christ to the Body of Christ in this dispensation – the mystery dispensation.

³ See Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 47. See also Earl Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1832.

⁴ Baker, *Acts*, 48.

Baptism was a ceremonial or ritual washing historically in Judaism and merely pictured something spiritual (Heb 9:10). It is my belief that all such ceremonial or ritual washings ceased with the suspension of God's covenant dealings with Israel once the new age was begun. This is why baptism was not a specific part of Paul's commission (1 Cor 1:17) as it was for the Twelve Apostles to Israel.