

CHAPTER 5

The Good News Goes Forth (Acts 8-9)

The Samaritans are Saved

Following the death of Stephen, there was a great P_____ against the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). It was no longer safe to remain in Jerusalem because men and women were being thrown into P_____ (Acts 8:3). Because of this persecution the believers were forced to leave Jerusalem, and they went into the regions of J_____ and S_____ (Acts 8:1). Can you find these regions on a map of Palestine? Can you also locate the city of Jerusalem?

As the believers left the city of Jerusalem, what did they do (Acts 8:4)?

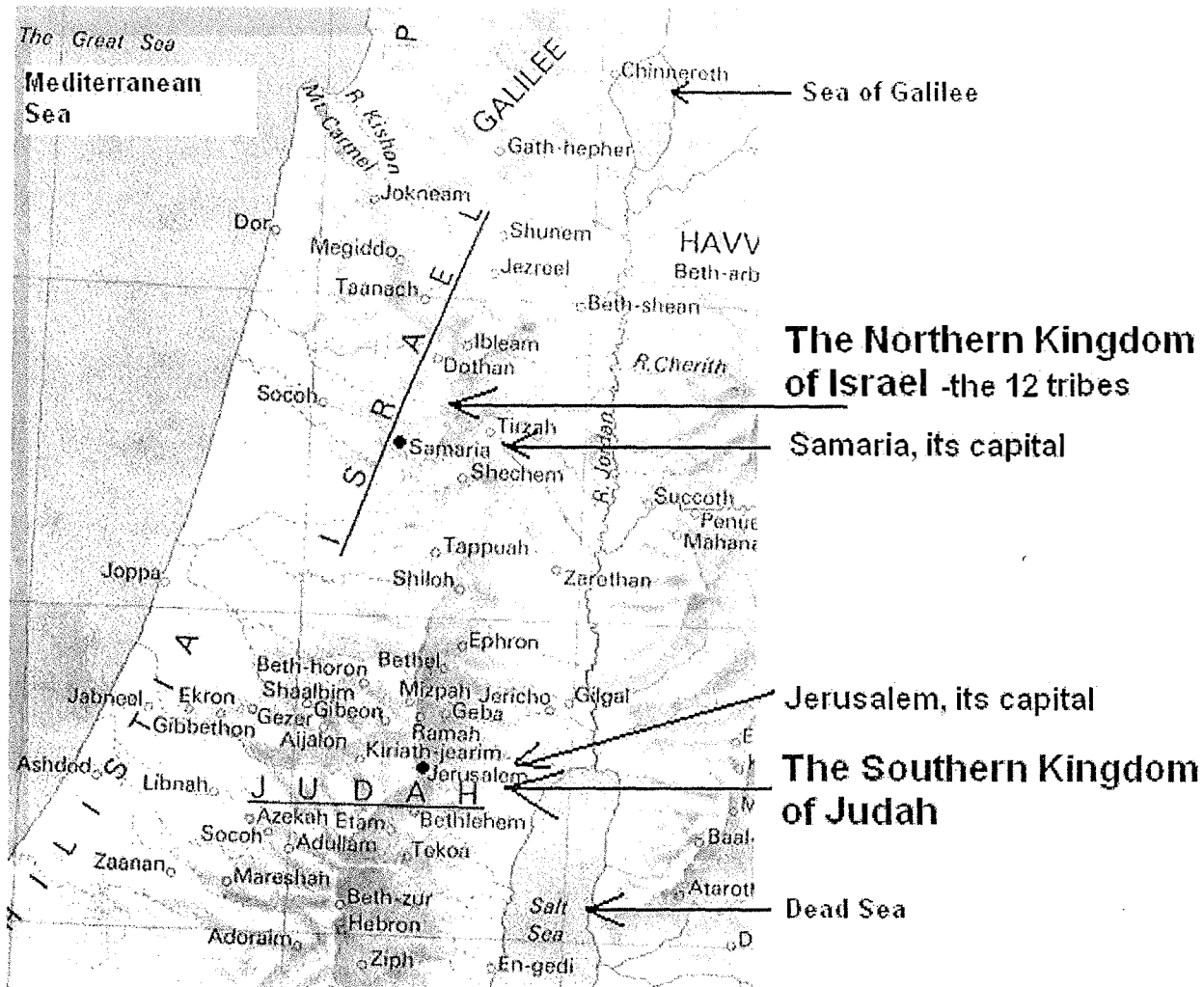
- a. **They went everywhere complaining because of the great persecution.**
- b. **They went everywhere preaching God's Word.**
- c. **They wept and moaned because they were forced to leave their homes in Jerusalem.**

One of these preachers was Philip (Acts 8:5). He was one of the seven men chosen to help the widows (Acts 6:5). Like Stephen, God also worked through Philip to perform some amazing miracles (Acts 8:6-7). Philip preached God's Word in the city of S_____ (Acts 8:5). The people in this city were known as the Samaritans.

Did the Jews get along well with the Samaritans (John 4:9)? _____ The Jews hated these people. It was a great insult to be called a Samaritan. In fact, the Lord's enemies called Jesus a Samaritan--see John 8:48. The Samaritans were a MIXED RACE of people. They were HALF-JEWS and HALF-GENTILES. How did such a "MIXED" people come about? Here is the history of the Samaritans in brief:

A) During the days of the Kings of Israel, the city of SAMARIA was the capitol of the Northern Kingdom or the kingdom of the ten tribes of Israel. Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern Kingdom or the Kingdom of Judah.

[see the map on the following page]



[The above map is adapted from *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Places*, John J. Bimson, editor (Intervarsity Press, 1995), p. 240].

B) In 722 B.C. God judged the Northern Kingdom of Israel by allowing the Assyrian army to defeat the city of Samaria and to carry away the people as CAPTIVES (2 Kings 17:5-6). Why did God allow this terrible judgment to fall upon them (see 2 Kings 17:7-18)?

C) Not all of the people of Samaria were taken away in the captivity. The Assyrians probably carried away most of the chief men--men of wealth and importance. Many of the poor and common people were allowed to remain in the land.

D) These Jews who were allowed to remain in the region of Samaria soon **intermarried** with Gentiles (heathen people), and this mixed race became known as the _____ (John 4:9).

Philip did an amazing thing. He preached God's good news to a people that most Jews hated. He brought God's message of salvation and forgiveness to these people. Did they believe the gospel message that Philip preached (Acts 8:6,12)? _____ Were they baptized in water (Acts 8:12)?

Was it right for Philip to preach the gospel to these Samaritan people? Answer these questions by underlining either **True-False**:

True or False:	Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone except the Samaritans (Mark 16:15).
True or False:	Jesus told His disciples to be His witnesses everywhere except in the land of Samaria (Acts 1:8).
True or False:	Jesus told His disciples to teach all nations except for the Samaritan nation (Matthew 28:19).

Did the Lord Jesus ever talk to the Samaritans about eternal life and salvation (John 4:4,5,7,9,14,39-42)? _____

In the early days of the United States there was a group of people who were looked down upon even as the Jews looked down upon the Samaritans. These were the African American people who had been taken from their African homeland and made slaves in America. Although some of the slave owners were kind to their slaves and treated them well, there were many African Americans who were treated shamefully and often with outright cruelty. Many believed that the African American person occupied a place in life somewhere above the animals but also somewhat below the human. Many of the preachers in America were not even willing to take the gospel to these people. To neglect any group of people is shameful.

Just as God sent Philip to the Samaritans, so also God sent a preacher to the slaves in American. About the year 1740, a great English preacher, George Whitefield, came to America to preach the gospel and to build a home for orphans. Whitefield knew that the gospel message was to go to all men, including African Americans. He was concerned about the way some of the slaves were being treated. He he wrote a letter to the people of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, in which he rebuked the slave owners for mistreating their slaves. This angered many people. The truth sometimes hurts!

Whitefield was one of the first preachers to send forth the message of salvation to African Americans wherever he went. At the close of one of his messages, he said these words to the slaves who were in his audience:

"I must not forget the poor negroes. No, I must not. Jesus Christ has died for them, as well as for others...In Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond (slave) or free; even you may be the children of God, if you believe in Jesus. If you believe you shall be saved."

Many did believe. On one occasion nearly fifty African Americans came to the place where Whitefield was staying. They wanted to give thanks to God for what He had done for their souls! Many of the slaves would return to their work with their burdens lightened. They would think about the wonderful truths that Whitefield had told them. As they would toil in the fields they would repeat over and over again some phrase they had heard from the preacher's lips. They would even begin to sing the words and add to them and repeat their song over and over. These songs became known as *Negro Spirituals*. George Whitefield has been called the first great friend of the American slaves.

The Ethiopian Eunuch is Saved

George Whitefield was not the only one who preached to Africans. Hundreds of years earlier God sent Philip to preach to a man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-27), a country in northern Africa. It is very likely that this Ethiopian man was dark-skinned. The Greek word "Ethiopia" (Acts 8:27) means "BURNT-FACE" which indicates that the people from this African country of Ethiopia were dark-faced. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah had once asked this question: "Can the _____ change his _____, or the _____ his _____?" (Jeremiah 13:23). What is the answer to these questions? _____ It would take a miracle for the leopard's spots to change into stripes like a tiger! It would take a miracle to change the color of the Ethiopian's skin, but it would take even a greater miracle to change his heart. God did such a miracle in Acts chapter 8. Philip preached unto him J _____ (Acts 8:35). Did he believe the message (Acts 8:37)? _____ Was he baptized in water (Acts 8:36-39)? _____ Did God change the heart of this African? _____

When Philip first came to this man, he was reading the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:30), but he did not understand what he was reading (Acts 8:31). Was Philip able to help him (Acts 8:35)? _____

Suppose one of your unsaved friends was found reading in the gospel of John, in the third chapter and the sixteenth verse (John 3:16). What if your friend were to say, "I do not understand what I am reading. Please help me!" Would you be able to help your friend? What would you say?

What should be true about a person before he (or she) should be baptized in water (Acts 8:36-38)? _____ Are little babies able to believe in Christ? Should little babies be baptized? _____ Why or why not? Have you believed in Christ and received Him as your Saviour? Have you been baptized? If not, why not?

Saul is Saved

Who was the great enemy of the church who did everything he could to throw Christians into prison (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1)? _____ Later in this man's life, by what name was he known (Acts 13:9; Romans 1:1)? _____ Was this man present when Stephen was stoned (Acts 22:20)? _____ What did Saul do to those people who believed on Christ (Acts 22:19)? _____

One day Saul decided to go to the city of Damascus so that he could continue to hunt for believers. But as he traveled on the road to Damascus, God did an amazing thing (please do the following MATCHING problem):

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|----------|---|-------------|
| 1) _____ | God blinded Saul. | A. Acts 9:3 |
| 2) _____ | God made a bright light to shine from heaven. | B. Acts 9:4 |
| 3) _____ | God spoke to Saul. | C. Acts 9:8 |

The risen Lord appeared unto Saul (see 1 Corinthians 9:1). When Saul asked, "Who art thou?" Jesus answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Saul was persecuting the church (believers), but Jesus said, "You are persecuting ME!" What did the Lord mean by these words? In Colossians 1:18 we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the "H_____ of the body" which is the church. Jesus is the Head, and believers make up the body. If someone were to step down hard on your toe, would your head feel it? Whenever the body is hurt, the head feels it (pain always travels to the brain by way of the nerves). You can't hurt the body without hurting the head. In the same way, you can't hurt the church without hurting the Head of the church. Saul was persecuting the body (the church) but the Head also felt it! What one does to the body he is also doing to the Head.

After this amazing event on the road to Damascus, God spoke to a believer named A_____ (Acts 9:10) and told him to go to Saul and bring him a message. If you had been Ananias, would you have been afraid to do this (see Acts 9:13-14)? _____ Did Ananias obey God (Acts 9:17)? _____

One of the things Ananias told Saul was how many things he would **suffer** for Jesus' sake (Acts 9:16). The Christian life is not an easy life. For Paul it meant a life of suffering. What were some of the sufferings that Paul went through (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28)? Was Saul willing to suffer for Jesus (Acts 20:22-24; 21:13)?

Saul was baptized by Ananias. Following his baptism, what was one of the first things he did (Acts 9:20)? _____ He began preaching the faith which he once D_____ (Galatians 1:23)! Were the people who heard him amazed and surprised by this (Acts 9:21)? _____ The Great Persecutor had become the Great Preacher!

The unbelieving Jews now wanted to kill Saul (Acts 9:23-24)? The HUNTER was now being HUNTED! The church's greatest enemy was now the church's greatest friend, and the unsaved Jews did not like this. How did Saul escape (Acts 9:25)?

Saul then headed to the city of Jerusalem where the twelve apostles were. When Saul first arrived, did they believe he was a true believer (Acts 9:26)? _____ Perhaps they thought that Saul was just pretending to be a follower of Christ so that he could get to know believers and then harm them. Finally the believers in Jerusalem could see that the change in Saul's life was real. God had done a wonderful thing. The church's greatest enemy was to become the church's greatest apostle and missionary! There was a time when Saul wanted to destroy as many Christians as possible. But after he was saved, Saul was willing to travel everywhere and anywhere to preach the message of salvation to as many people as possible!

Is God able to change your life in a wonderful way? As with Saul, the change must begin with salvation: "If any man be in Christ he is a _____ creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things are become _____" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Things are different now, Something happened to me
When I gave my heart to Jesus;
Things are different now--I was changed it must be,
When I gave my heart to Him!
Things I loved before have passed away,
Things I love far more have come to stay.
Things are different now--something happened that day
When I gave my heart to Him.

-Stanton W. Gavitt

The Divine Lift Needed By Man

