

Acts # 18

4-21-24

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Last time, at the end of chapter 7, we saw the stoning of Stephen: they took Stephen ... *'And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.'*⁵⁹ *And they stoned Stephen, (he), calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*⁶⁰ *And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.'*

Acts 8:1: *'And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.'*

Up to this time, the True Church, situated in Jerusalem, had grown by the many thousands; we read that *they enjoyed favor with all the people*; even the Jewish leadership, the priests, Pharisees and Sadducees had, for the most part, let them grow in peace; in fact, many priests had believed the Truth and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for Salvation but now, with the martyrdom of Stephen the mob's bloodlust was unleashed resulting in great persecution against Christians, against all Christians: men, women and families.

To this time, the Church was born and remained in Jerusalem; they enjoyed being able to meet together in Solomon's Porch of the Temple complex as well as in many house but that all came to an abrupt end. Now, led by Saul/Paul, life in Jerusalem, for the Believers, became unbearable.

The last thing Jesus said to His small group of followers, before He was taken up into Heaven: *'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'*⁹ *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.'*

When Jesus said, *'... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria...'* it was not so much a command but, rather, a prophecy. He knew they would choose to stay in Jerusalem as long as it was easy but He also knew that He would, finally, as is done by many bird species, force them out of their warm, dry and comfortable nest.

And notice how Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled: *'... and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.'* Only the Twelve remained in Jerusalem; the rest spread out in fulfillment of Jesus' Word.

Verse 2: *'And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.'*

You can understand their great lament; who could have imagined such a thing! One of their own, Stephen, just a humble servant... murdered for simply telling forth the Truth of God! Seemingly overnight, they went from enjoying favor with all the people to being murdered for no crime whatsoever! *'If they'll murder someone like Stephen, none of us are safe!'* And so, they began to scatter throughout Israel... all according to God's Plan.

Verse 3: *'As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.'*

The Greek word for Haling is syro/soo'ro; it means to drag, as in: off to prison...

Saul/Paul made it his personal mission to destroy the Church! The Greek word translated, havock, is: lymaino/lu-min'o. It means: to affix a stigma to, to dishonor, spot, defile, to treat shamefully or with injury, to ravage. devastate. ruin.

He was given legal means to enter every house, to root out Christians everywhere.

What we see the Jewish leadership doing, here, is exactly like what we've seen in movies when the Gestapo would break into a house and drag Jews into trucks and then to cattle cars and on to concentration camps and death. The irony is thick!

In the next chapter, we'll read: *'And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of*

the Lord, went unto the high priest, ² And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.' Acts 8:1

Christians would meet in synagogues; they thought of themselves as still being part of Judaism: the next and final logical step of Judaism but the Jews would have none of it!

Remember in Daniel 9, the 70 Weeks of Daniel Prophecy: '*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity...*' Dan 9:24 This Prophecy involved 70 ea. 7-year periods, 70 'weeks-of-years.' 490 years. 69 'week-of-years,' 483 years, was completed on the day the Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem and hailed as King but the Jewish leadership rejected and crucified Him with 7 years remaining to be fulfilled. Shortly thereafter, they sought to destroy His Church. Since they rejected Him, crying out: '*His Blood be upon us and on our children!*' their children have been paying the price for that terrible sin for nearly 2000 years and it will be far, far worse during the final, 70th 'week of years,' the 7-year Tribulation.

Because they rejected their rightful King, God paused the fulfillment of that great prophecy; He inserted a certain period of time between the end of the 69th week of years and the beginning of the 70th 'week' which will be the 7-year Tribulation. This inserted period of time is that within which we live... the time when God had always planned to call out to Himself the Bride for His Son... the True Church, the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. When this time is completed, at the moment God had always planned, he will send His Son to retrieve His Bride in the Rapture... then His Prophetic time clock will begin for the fulfillment of that final 7-year week: the Tribulation, ruled by the Antichrist... it could happen today!

When this great persecution began in Jerusalem... did the believers all scatter and hide like they did when Jesus was arrested and crucified? No, they did not!

Verse 4: '*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.'*

And these weren't even the Apostles; these are all the new believers; remember verse 1: 'and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.'

The Apostles stayed in Jerusalem, facing the persecution; they were the leadership; they were the examples tasked, by God, with standing strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. The Church at Jerusalem remained the main Church from which leadership and doctrinal decisions did emanate.

This was the beginning of what would typify the True Church until the Lord Jesus Christ removes us in the Rapture: whenever the True Church is persecuted, she is strengthened by the Holy Spirit as the Gospel spreads out even further. That was the history of the birth of this nation; the True Church in England and western Europe were persecuted by catholicism and the church of England and, so, this nation was born which God did use, mightily, in spreading the Gospel all around the World... but we can certainly see those days and years are coming to a swift and sure cessation.

Verse 5: '*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*

This is Philip, the Evangelist, not Philip the Apostle. This is the same Philip from Acts 6 when he, Stephen and 5 others were chosen to oversee the ministrations to the Hellenist widows. And, like Stephen, we see Philip, also, performing miracles, used by God to confirm the Gospel which Philip was preaching; he knew the Hebrew Scriptures well with the ability to see the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and to then be able see His fulfillment in the Gospel... as we will soon see.

Why do you suppose the entire city of Samaria would, as we will see, with one accord, pay close attention to the Gospel through Philip? It wasn't just because of the miracles although that would most certainly demand attention...

Three years before this time, Jesus sat down at a well in Samaria, in the city of Sychar; He spoke with a woman who believed on Him and who then went back and brought many of the townspeople back out to see Jesus. Many believed on Him but that doesn't mean they were saved; they could not have yet trusted in His finished work on the Cross but they had been prepared and made ready to hear and respond to the Gospel when it

was finally brought to them by Philip.

Verse 6: *'And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city.'*

In Philip and Stephen, we see God using them to accomplish mighty miracles, healings and casting out of evil spirits. The Lord Jesus Christ did all these things; the Apostles after Him did all these things and now we see that even some of the next 'generation' of Christians, those taught by the Apostles, did so, as well. This confirmation, this proof of God's Word continued but lessened until God's Word was written down in the Gospels, in The Acts of the Apostles, in the Epistles of Paul, Peter, James and Jude, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and finally, in The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John.

This is that to which Paul alluded in writing:

'Charity never faileth: (love never fails) but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.' 1 Cor 13:8

Verse 9: *'But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰ To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹ And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.'*

Simon is a sorcerer but the word used here is not the same as in other places where the Greek word is pharmakeia which involves the use of drugs to interact with evil spirits. Here, the Greek word for sorcery is mageuo/mag-yoo'-o; it means to practice magical arts. He could, apparently, do amazing things through magical spells, potions and incantations so much so that everyone in the city gave him heed saying, 'This man is the great power of God!' This would be accomplishing wonders through the operation of demonic spirits.

Remember, during Biblical times, demons were very active. Later, we'll read of Paul's ministry in Ephesus: *'And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. ¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.'* Acts 19:18

These in Samaria had been bewitched by Simon for a long time. The Greek word is: existemi/ex-is'-tay-mee. It means: to amaze, astonish, astound.

Verse 12: *'But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.'*

Everyone believed and they were all baptized. They believed the things Philip preached concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. Philip had none of the New Testament. All he had was his knowledge of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures and all that he had learned from the Apostles regarding their time with the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip taught them what he knew of the coming Kingdom of God and how the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all the Law and Prophets and that He, alone is the only door to that Kingdom... but that's it! No New Testament Scriptures; he was living and helping to create the teaching of the New Testament. But, what he did have, God multiplied greatly in his understanding and in his teaching. Just as Jesus Christ had multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed 5000, He was doing the same thing here in the beginnings of the True Church, with the bread of His Word; He had recreated in Philip a fisher of men!

'From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ¹⁸ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁹ And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Matt 4:17

Notice! From the very beginning of His Earthly ministry, Jesus preached: 'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (The Gospel of the Kingdom) It was 'at hand!' He offered the Kingdom of God and His Righteous Kingship but the people rejected His offer; they crucified Him. The offer of His Kingdom being 'at hand' was rescinded but the same offer will once again be given to Israel by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists during the Tribulation while they all preach 'The Gospel of the Kingdom.'

Jesus would spend the next 2000 years, building the True Church, His Bride, while Israel would spend all that time during this gap of time between the 69th and end of the 70th Week of Daniel: '*...to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity...*' Daniel 9 Now, we preach the 'Gospel of Grace.' We are saved by God's Grace; no other sacrifice is ever necessary again; Jesus paid it all!

Verse 13: '*Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.*'

It would be natural for someone newly saved to want to hitch himself alongside the evangelist who brought the message of Salvation; after all, Philip knew far more about all of this than anyone in Simon's city. But perhaps his heart wasn't really right before the Lord; Luke makes the point of telling us that he '*wondered*' as Philip performed miracles and signs. The word used for wonder is existemi/ex-is-'tay-mee... remember where we just saw that same word... '*because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*'

Simon's response to the miracles, done through Philip, was to see them in the same light as he saw his own sorceries with which he had long bewitched the people. Perhaps here was a way to be saved while remaining the town's only superstar... seems like the same goal of many today...

Maybe Simon wasn't really saved yet; he had believed and he'd been baptized but that doesn't equal Salvation; he still had not come to repentance... a few verses later, we'll see this is true...

Verse 14: '*Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: ¹⁵ Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:*'

This was a big deal! The Apostles had stayed in Jerusalem with the persecution; as far as they understood, The Gospel of Salvation was only meant for Jews: it was the natural culmination and apex of Judaism. Didn't Jesus only preach to Jews, except that one Samaritan woman? That the Gospel had been received by Samaritans was, itself, so amazing that the top leadership had to go and see for themselves if this thing be true.

After Solomon, Israel was split into the Northern Kingdom, Israel, who worshipped at Mt. Gerizim, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, who worshipped in Jerusalem with the Temple. Both kingdoms had their own sets of kings, both kingdoms fell into wickedness and sin.

In 586 B.C. the Southern Kingdom fell to the Babylonians. 70 years later, they were allowed to return home and rebuild their Temple.

Previously, In 721 B.C., the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians who took many Jews as slaves and then planted captives from other Gentile nations into Israel. The Jews intermarried with the Gentiles becoming a mixed race people but in the eyes of Judah, a mongrel race, spiritually corrupt, even worse than Gentiles. They continued to worship at Gerizim; they held, sacred, the Law, the Pentateuch: Gen. thru Deut. but rejected all the Prophets and Jewish traditions.

So, for these to have received Salvation was, to the Apostles, pretty Earth-shaking but soon, it will be even more difficult to swallow when it's the Gentiles who finally begin to receive the Gospel, that God would actually want to save not only Samaritans but Gentiles!

And aren't we blessed and glad that He did !!