

Philip the Evangelist

I am Philip, sometimes called Philip the evangelist to distinguish me from Philip the apostle. I was one of eight deacons, selected to deal with the distribution of food. That would have been a great enough honor in that it freed the Apostles to study, pray and teach. But the Holy Spirit gave other gifts. Now before you get jealous, I will remind you that the first deacon, Stephen, got stoned to death by the Sanhedrin for “blasphemy.”

After that event, when we scattered, I went to Samaria, by the grace of God, to preach, heal and free people from demons. By the way, I want to make it clear that what I am talking about is not another name for what you might call mental illness. There were many unclean spirits active especially at the time. The enemy was active because of what the Savior had done. Jesus Christ appeared on earth, died as the ultimate Lamb of God and rose again in victory. Satan and his legions of disobedient spirits failed to stop it but now tried to prevent the spreading of that good news of “The Way”.

When the apostles heard that many Samaritans had believed and were baptized, they sent Peter and John from Jerusalem. The two apostles prayed that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. As seemed to happen among each new group to join our fellowship, there was a dramatic event resembling what had happened on Pentecost. Here we saw without a doubt that Jesus’ Kingdom included the Samaritans.

Among the converts was a sorcerer named Simon. His conversion had seemed genuine, but the spiritual power shown by Peter and John was a great temptation to him. He offered money for the gift and earned the wrath of Peter who said, “To hell with your money! And you along with it.” Simon repented and begged them to pray for him.

I guess I was to become an itinerant preacher. I walked to Samaria and had a successful ministry. Then I was told by an angel to go south until I met the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. En route I met a high official of the Ethiopian government. He was treasurer to Queen Candace.

I need to mention that he was an eunuch. We Jews had been taught that eunuchs “shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord.” Castrating boys destined to be royal officials or harem guards was done in pagan cultures but was forbidden to Israelites. In the present case, I was sent by an angel to bring the gospel to this influential man.

What an opening! Even without the angelic direction, how could I fail to take the opportunity? As I walked alongside the chariot, I heard him reading from Isaiah, “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of

his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." That immediately reminded me that it was Isaiah who foreshadowed the opening of God's kingdom to eunuchs.

This was a Jewish convert who studied the Scriptures and was asking for the gospel! Have you ever had such an open door? He immediately believed, saw a body of water (maybe the only one for miles around) and asked to be baptized. As we came up out of the water, I was taken by the Spirit of the Lord far away and showed up in Azotus, also known as Ashdod. I did not have time to wonder if I should call for Peter and John to pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon him. But it was clear that the Kingdom was growing in numbers and diversity: Samaritans and now eunuchs!

My ministry continued, although most of it was not recorded by Dr. Luke in his history. But years later, while I was living in Caesarea, I was visited by Paul and Luke. They were on their way to Jerusalem and I introduced them to my four daughters, who were all prophets.

The church had been persecuted through those years and many were killed. Yet, the Lord had given me a long and fruitful ministry. He also gave me a family, who all loved the Lord. For these blessings I am constantly grateful.

Acts 8, 21:7-8, Deuteronomy 23:1, Isaiah 53, 56:3