

Church History - Session 1 (The Book of Acts 1)

by Edgar F. Parkyns

The sermon explores the beginnings of the church, its transition from being limited to Jews to being inclusive of Gentiles, and the significance of the day of Pentecost.

Duration: 1:00:28

Scripture: Isaiah 49:6, Acts 3:24, Acts 6:7

Topics: "Church History", "Apostolic Era"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the book of Acts and its three sections. The first section, chapters one to seven, focuses on Peter as the great preacher emphasizing the Gospel to the Jews. The second section, chapters 13 to 28, introduces Paul as the great preacher who emphasizes the Gospel to the Gentiles. The sermon highlights the transition from a narrow-minded focus on the Jews to the revelation that anyone, regardless of their background, can partake in the blessings of Christ. The preacher also mentions the persecution of Stephen and his vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God before being stoned by the angry crowd.

Transcript

Church history is our topic. Two words requiring definition. History.

And I like to think of history as his story. God working in history. Church.

Now that's another thing altogether. How do we define church? The word is ecclesia and usually means a gathering of people called together. And of course in the New Testament sense it attains a significance far beyond anything that the Greeks ever knew.

The church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said I will build my church. And it is the history related to that church that we shall be looking at.

But when did the church begin? Hmm. There are two major viewpoints on this. One is the conservative viewpoint that the church began with God's elect from the very beginning.

The other that the church began on the day of Pentecost. Now I've looked at both and I can't decide which is right. I'm sorry about that.

I haven't come... I hope before I'm through I shall know. But up to the present I can't be absolutely sure. I guess most of you are of the opinion that the church began at the day of Pentecost.

Or didn't Jesus say where in his ministry in Matthew 16 is I will build my church. Suggesting that it was future. And moreover we don't meet the word church again until we come into act after the day of Pentecost.

So most folk picking up the scripture by one spirit we are all baptized into one body regard the church as beginning at the day Pentecost. But don't be sort of over dogmatic about that. For instance did Nicodemus have any chance of being born again when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ before Pentecost? When Jesus said to him he must be born again was he offering something that he couldn't enter into? And if he was born again and he was born again of the spirit of God.

And John the baptist was filled with the holy ghost from his mother's womb. Was he in the kingdom or wasn't he? David cried or in the church or wasn't he? David cried create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. And take not thy holy spirit from me.

And doesn't the bible tell us that we are blessed with faithful Abraham. And that we enter into the blessings that were promised to Abraham. And that the branches of the olive tree were broken off that we might be grafted in.

So you see there's quite a bit that might suggest to us that although the full revelation of the church had to wait perhaps for the apostle Paul for its perfection in revelation. Nevertheless it is not impossible that we shall sit down in the kingdom of God with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and find that we are sharing their blessings. That Abraham rejoiced to see this day Christ's day and was glad.

And that they by faith and hope didn't obtain the promises but are made one with us. They looking forward in hope and we looking back to the to the promise of God in Christ Jesus. So that's that was the old-fashioned view and I really am not quite sure which one is right.

But for the purposes of our study we will assume that the more popular one that is the popular among the Pentecostal folk is that that the church began with their Pentecost. We'll work on that assumption. And so our beginnings start with the book of Acts.

And we'll get a foundation out of the book of Acts. And don't sort of get all discouraged because you know it all. Because I'm rather hoping that there's someone here who hasn't quite seen yet what I want to share tonight out of the book of Acts.

Now you will have noticed in your studies in the Gospels that our Lord's ministry was strictly limited on earth to the house of Israel. When a little Syrophoenician woman came running after him wanting a flavor. When he and his disciples were on holiday by the seaside and he didn't want anybody to know that they were there.

When she came running after him and addressed him as though she was a Jew and had some right to his blessing. And she said that Jesus thou son of David have mercy on me for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. Jesus didn't answer her.

And the disciples were very pleased that he didn't answer. And they all trotted along on the sidewalk or whatever it was. All righteous Jews in the foreign land and took no notice of the woman who kept on crying

out.

But as she persisted Jesus said the disciples said send her away. But she cried after us. He said I was not sent but unto the lost chief of the house of Israel.

His was a strictly limited ministry. You may read all about that in Isaiah 49. It was a strictly limited ministry.

And that was typical of his nation. The people of his day didn't regard the Gentiles, the rest of the world, as having any right or share in the great promises of life and salvation. And when the church first came into evidence and being with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it was very definitely composed of Jews and Jews only.

There was a deep deep prejudice against the idea that anyone else should share an iota of their blessing. Even those who became proselytes, if they had any association with the church, were assumed to need circumcision. For the church was regarded as a continuation of the elect of God out of the Old Testament.

So naturally those who wanted to share the blessing of Abraham would have to share the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, which was circumcision. So that right through Acts you had a strong party who were insisting that circumcision was an essential part of the gospel to make them members of the family of God and true children of Abraham. We need to understand how deep this prejudice was.

Peter got into a terrible row for eating with Gentiles. They pulled him up before the church board and he had to give an account of his misbehavior. Feelings were very very deep but when Paul came on the scene he had another picture.

A picture of a church which was composed of Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, all made one in Christ Jesus. And this transition from the narrow thought that only those who were children of Abraham by linear descent could come into the blessings, to the new revelation that whosoever will, from every nation, might be partakers of the same blessing and members of the same body. This revelation was particularly Pauline and Acts gives us the story of the changeover.

And I want us to have a look at this because it is important. It indicates two great streams of thought in the church which have existed in various guises until the present day. And so we'll just have a look at Acts.

How do I manipulate this thing and keep my voice near a microphone? I don't know. Acts falls into three sections. The first section, chapter 1 to 7, and you may summarize it with a little text in Romans, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first.

And who is the great preacher in Acts chapter 1 to 7? Peter. He was very keen on this theme of the gospel for the Jew. You'll be surprised to find how very keen and how very narrow-minded he was over this issue to the Jew first.

But in Acts 13 to 28, who was the great preacher? To the Gentile also. And the key man is Paul. I keep on thinking this projector is a microphone.

Paul. The city at the beginning of Acts was Jerusalem, the capital of Jury. The city at the end of Acts was Rome, the capital of the world.

So you see the progression of the book from its first limited message to its worldwide message. And the intermediate chapters, chapters 8 to 12, show in striking ways the development of the transition from the

limits of the gospel to the Jew to the wide outreach of the gospel to the Gentile also. And you know that whenever Paul was moving out preaching, he spoke in the synagogues first.

He always gave to his natural brethren the first opportunity to hear the gospel and receive Christ. And it was only when they rejected the message that he moved on to reach the Gentiles. You'll find that pattern working out.

So chapters 8 to 12 will mark the change. Now if you will connect that with Acts 1-8. With Acts 1-8 where Jesus gives the outline of the work they are to follow.

They come to him with their typically Jewish outlook and they say, Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. You must understand that these men are keen nationalists. To them Israel is the all-important nation chosen of God.

And looking back over the Old Testament they are as right as can be. And they could not conceive of folk like you and me entering into such divine favor. And so our Lord said to them it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the father has restored, which the father has put in his own power.

Our Lord was not very encouraging to those who wanted to prognosticate. My we've got dozens of prognosticators today. They write about the future in such certain terms as though each one had divine revelation on every detail of it direct from heaven.

The more unlikely their propositions are the louder they shout and the more their words are underlined and the louder the print. But Jesus didn't encourage very much that sort of prognostication. When he was talking about prophecy he usually used prophecy to show what had been fulfilled.

Notice that when he was talking to the disciples on the road from the road to Emmaus. He beginning at Moses and all the scriptures showed to them the things concerning himself. And he said ought not Christ Messiah that is to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory.

In other words prophecy truest function is to show that God's hand has been in history. Not to give you a wonderful eschatological program and I shall be pursuing that theme quite a bit. Because we are going to tackle an extra biblical subject.

That is a subject which is beyond scripture. Church history. And I'm not interested in church history except as it is related to the scripture.

And I believe the clearest light on church history comes from prophecy. So you're going to get some disturbances here. I think I'd better drop a little warning.

I'm a bit scared about taking this subject. Because in history we study not only the triumphs but also the failures. Not only the virtues but also the vices.

Not only the wonderful things that have happened but the sad mistakes and failures that have taken place. And I don't think that any church is impenetrable. And it means that some of the great historic churches will have to come under the scrutiny both of scripture and of history.

And this is going to be difficult for some. So if you are really tied to the historic concept of your church and it's going to hurt you then it's best well to know from the beginning and take necessary precautions like a bit of cotton wool to put in your ears. I shall be trying to stick to fact.

But you know history is a queer thing. For instance I'll just ask in the name of this fellow. When we deal with the war of American Independence in American schools you've all heard of John Paul Jones.

But we scarcely hear of him in England. He doesn't exist in our history books. Except for one or two piratical attempts you know.

The English histories and the American histories looking at the same event have an entirely different story to tell. You speak of the triumphs of the colonial fathers and we speak of and we acknowledge that the taxes were unfair and that King George was imbecile and that we had the French on our hands to fight and we couldn't spare the time to look after our colonies. But you see it's a different outlook altogether.

And similarly when it comes to studying church history it just depends where the historian sympathies are as to what kind of history he will produce. So it's not just as straightforward as all that to study church history. At any rate as far as the book of Acts is concerned here we are on sound and solid ground.

What wonderful days they were when the Holy Spirit was outpoured. Why some people tell us that that the Lord turned his back on the nation of Israel when they crucified his dear son. But that's not true.

God loved them and he still had favor for them even after they had done that terrible thing. So the people was able Peter was able to say on the day of Pentecost I want that through ignorance she did it as also your rulers. And so he was able to promise them upon the conditions of yielding to the demands of the gospel the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all who would repent and believe at the word of God.

And three thousand souls who were Jews were brought into salvation that day. Why that was a bigger favor than the nation had received during all the ministry of Jesus Christ. For his converts didn't stick didn't they.

They ran away in crowds and bunches and among the last few who were left one betrayed him and another denied him and the rest ran away. His was a disappointing ministry as the prophets foretold it would be. But after Pentecost my word three thousand converted and filled with the Holy Ghost were able to stand and five thousand a few days later and more miracles happening through the hands of the apostles than had ever happened in the ministry of Jesus.

The promise that greater works than these shall you do was already being fulfilled soon after Pentecost but still to the Jews only. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been there in those days of such revival that when the authorities put the apostles in prison the angel of the Lord brought them out again and said you go back into the temple and preach the words of this life. Don't you see how God loved that nation? Listen to what Peter had to say to them in his second great sermon after the lame man had been healed in at the gate beautiful of the temple.

Here we are in Acts chapter 3 in verse 24. Yes says Peter and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after as many as have spoken have likewise foretold of these days that is after the cross ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our father saying unto Abraham and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed and to you first God having raised up his son Jesus send him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. No wonder Luke at the opening of his book says the former treatise have I showed you oh have I made O Theophilus of all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day that he was taken up.

That is the gospel was only the beginning of his work and when he rose and ascended on high he sent the Holy Spirit back into Jerusalem and from the very temple that the Jews loved the gospel first emanated under the power of the Holy Ghost and the first audience was a Jewish audience. See God was favoring them unto you first says Peter God having raised up his son Jesus sent him to bless you. That's why Peter was always conscious that Jesus was with him and was able to say to Aeneas the paralytic Aeneas Christ Jesus make it thee whole.

Jesus was there in act just as much as he was in the gospel praise the Lord and he's still with us today the same yesterday today and forever just because we don't see him that doesn't make any difference he's right here praise the Lord. But notice what a tremendous change has taken place less than 20 years after. Take you to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 reading verse 14 to 16.

This is less than 20 years after the day of Pentecost. The epistle to Thessalonians written very near A.D. 51. For ye brethren became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen even as they have of the Jews who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us and they please not God and are contrary to all men forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved to fill up their sins all way for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

That's a change isn't it in 20 years. In the beginning of Acts Peter is saying God sent his son to you first to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. Less than 20 years after Paul can record events which have been happening for some time and he says they've turned against God they've turned against the gospel they are filling up their sins always for wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

A tremendous change has taken place between Acts 3 and 1 Thessalonians 2. That is in a brief period of 20 years and I want us to see how that change developed. For these first seven chapters we find the favor of God upon the nation. The word of God increases let's have a look at chapter 6 for instance.

Verse 7 and the word of God increase and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem that is Jews being converted and the great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. There they are the sons of Levi spoken of in Malachi. Do you remember how Malachi invaded against the sons of Levi for their hypocrisy and he said the Lord the messenger shall suddenly come to his temple and purify the sons of Levi.

Some of us some folk are still looking for it to happen. It hasn't. Prophecy has passed into history and at the very beginning of his ministry Jesus the messenger of the covenant whom they should delight in came and began to purify the sons of Levi with a whip and they didn't like it.

Malachi 3.1 Malachi 3.1 when Jesus came in his first coming as the messenger of the covenant he won't come as the messenger of the covenant at his second coming. He won't come to preach he won't be a messenger he'll be king. Malachi definitely had his first coming in view and he worked on those sons of Levi as the gospel of John tells us.

Time and time again coming down to Jerusalem and upsetting them all sending letters down to the priests to go through the mosaic ritual of cleansing getting them all fed up and annoyed when the letters confessed that Jesus had made them whole until they got so mad they crucified him. He was purifying the sons of Levi and here at last in Acts chapter 6 they came of age and a great company of the priests the sons of Levi were obedient to the faith. Wouldn't it have been a wonderful day I would have liked to have

been there to see the persecutors and the persecuted embracing one another, forgiving one another, tears of joy and pardon, tears of discovery at the revelation of Jesus Christ to their hearts.

Wonderful days why it looked as though God was just pouring out favor upon favor on Israel and the 12 disciples were as happy as larks, happy as school boys or children making sand castles. They thought this is just it this will go on forever and ever but if only they had read more carefully Isaiah 49 they would have known it doesn't go on forever. Let's turn back that just a moment a wonderful messianic chapter.

Mattiah answers to the Lord then I said I have labored in pain I have spent my strength and naught and in vain yet surely my judgment is with the Lord and my work with my God and now saith the Lord that called me from the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob again to him though Israel be not gathered yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord and my God shall be my strength.

Yes the the nation to whom he was sent rejected him and crucified him his mission appeared to be a failure but he was glorious and the Lord was his strength God raised him from the dead to be a prince and a savior and he said it is a life thing that thou should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth praise the Lord way back in Isaiah folks say the church dispensation wasn't in due in the prophet well there it is the Gentiles brought him and there are lovely words there listen to them oh thus saith the Lord in an acceptable time my son have I heard thee in a salvation have I helped thee and I will preserve thee that is the father speaking

to the son and give thee for a covenant of the people to establish the earth the cause to inherit the desolate heritages that thou mayest say to the prisoners go forth to them that are in darkness show yourselves they shall feed in the ways on their path mercy on them shall lead them even by the springs of water shall he guide them and I will make all my mountains away and my highways shall be exalted behold these shall come from far these from the north and the west and these from the land of Sinai maybe China so there it is right back in Isaiah very clearly outlined the failure of God's prince in Israel the Israel within the Israel the failure of Messiah to gather Jacob back to God and God said it's all right I know that mission is a failure I know you're a man of sorrows and acquainted

with grief but look I will give you a light to the Gentiles hallelujah so there it is in in prophetic all view 10 to 6 then acts chapter 6 still the blessings are there the 12 apostles are very pleased that Jerusalem is in such favor everybody's happy the church is enlarged but God's program is moving on time is running out the divine appointment written way back in the prophets the very year being indicated is drawing near when the favor showed to Israel will be turned to the rest of the world and in association with that the nation of Israel had to be told that she was rebellious against God as the prophets had told her as Jesus had forewarned it wasn't all going to be blessing not all honey and cream but there was a day of judgment coming when the nation from afar would surround

Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed not one stone left upon another but do you think the apostles wanted to preach that not a bit of it they wanted to preach blessing for Israel they were so keenly nationalistic and when the Lord Jesus from heaven wanted someone to preach that message he could not find among all the 12 one who could carry it but happily just before this there had been a little argument in the church about the Grecian widows that is the widows who had some Gentile connections probably they had married a Gentile and then you know the husband had died rather like Naomi and now they were widows and they were neglected in the daily ministrations that's how narrow-minded that early church was

hear that they weren't perfect but she married a Gentile she's not coming in on

this and the complaints got back to the apostles and so they said look here you you this isn't our business we're here for the word of God and pray you thought out seven honest men among you full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom and set them to see that things are done fairly and the early church had was sufficiently tender-hearted to repent of their rotten attitude to the widows and so they chose seven men all with Greek names not Jewish names that was nice wasn't it here they are Stephen Philip Greek name Prochorus Nicanor Timon Parmenas Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch he wasn't a Jew at all he was only a proselyte so there you are they chose to sort out this matter men with a Gentile bias who weren't so dyed in the wool Jews as the apostles were and Stephen um went beyond his commission

and instead of just counting the money as the offerings he went a bit further and being full of the Holy Ghost and power and wisdom he began to preach and he preached the message that Jesus wanted him to preach and which the apostles didn't like I'll prove to you in a minute they didn't like it a message of judgment a message that roused up opposition just when the church was settling down and escaping all persecution you know they were being accepted as one of the Jewish saints and everybody was happy then Stephen gets out no one told him to do it except Jesus and he began to preach judgment to his nation he said things aren't always going to go on like this if you harden your heart against God that which Jesus foretold is going to happen and he was soon in trouble and found himself uh

brought before the same council which had tried and condemned his master just over three years before and not one apostle stood with him conspicuous by their essence when they were on trial the man who was healed was there to back them up when Stephen was on trial not one stood with him his message was not popular in the early church act 7 is devoted to his address he was told to speak for himself and the heading in my bible says Stephen's defense some defense it was all a tag this is no way to get yourself off he magnificently and with wonderful wisdom drew again the familiar and ever popular picture and story of the history of the nation oh how they loved it it was like buttering on a hot toast to them they just delighted in hearing the grand old story again and again all the way from

Abraham right down through David David and Solomon and a temple oh how beautiful it was but there was an edge in everything he said and he showed how the fathers had rejected every messenger that God had sent how when Joseph was sent that the fathers had put him in a pit and when Moses was sent they wouldn't receive him and when the prophets were sent they persecuted and destroyed them and then he said you in your turn have been the betrayers and murderers of the son of God wow they were frozen in their seats i should think they gnashed on him with their teeth they couldn't find any words they came into a meeting respectable pharisees and Sadducees but now the wild beast nature in them was breaking through and they couldn't articulate their jaws were moving but no words were coming out

and Stephen looked above that miserable show and saw above the courtroom ceiling the heavens opened and Jesus hallelujah a man they rejected standing having risen from his holy seat standing looking down in approval from on high to Stephen his faithful witness and he said i see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God they stopped there he is and rushed upon him and dragged and pulled and got him out of the meeting room somehow dragged him through the streets and outside the city wall and could guess could guess his stop to form themselves in order to stone him why didn't they go to Pilate and say please sir may we have permission because they've lost all self-control and you remember that that tremendous hint at the end of the chapter they laid there the witnesses

laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul the change is on the way God is moving on now in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 Jesus gave them the outline which was beginning at Jerusalem let's put it down here there was the program which he had laid out for them except for one verse eight he shall receive power he shall be witnesses unto me beginning at Jerusalem and Judea and unto Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth and it was he didn't say you've got to witness he said you shall be if you're full of my spirit praise the Lord the great thing is to be filled with the Holy Ghost to be filled with the love of Jesus and this business about being a witness isn't a command it's a promise oh glory isn't it lovely to meet people who witness because their hearts are full

and isn't it disappointing when you meet people who witness because it's their duty yes there was the program and already the witness to Jerusalem and Judea had taken place for a period of about three and a half years uh if you want to know how i get that date i'll tell you takes a long time and uh now was the time to move on Saul was consenting to his death chapter 8 verse 1 and at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem now do you remember Jesus ever giving the apostles instructions about persecution when they persecute you in this city dig your heels in is that right when they persecute you in this city flee to the next definite instruction from the Lord Jesus and now i'm going to read verse 8 right through 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 Judea and Samaria except the apostles oh the very ones who had been told to use that signal as from God to move on were the ones who stayed behind did you think the apostles were all perfect did you think that they were sort of glass window saints with halos permanently tacked to the back of their heads oh no we know of course in the in the gospels that they um made lots of mistakes especially Peter but of course when they were filled with the Holy Ghost then well that was different they all became infallible did you when you received the Holy Ghost they were human people it's church tradition which has set them up so high the the bible

tells us very simply and plainly that not only did they make mistakes before Pentecost but they made some after as well and if you read Galatians chapter two you can read about some of their mistakes chapters one and chapter two yes and fleeing where remembering the instructions of Jesus should they have gone then Samaria but they didn't no I have no doubt that the Lord wanted to send them as he had told them but they weren't broad-minded enough to go to Samaritans Jews have no dealings with Samaritans the Samaritans worship worship in ashes head on Mount Gerizim we have nothing to do with them dogs of Samaritans keep away from that lot a mixed race worse than Gentiles the poor Samaritans were neither fish nor fowl they they couldn't be proper Jews all they wanted to be and the Gentiles

wouldn't receive them either they were halfway between the two speckled birds indeed and and so no fear the apostles weren't interested in that they were probably holding a prayer meeting in Jerusalem hear me Lord bring back the revival again remember this corner of my vineyard dear Lord we pray for the peace of Jerusalem they shall prosper but lovely go round about Jerusalem counter towers mark of bulwarks my they must have had a fine prayer meeting only nothing ever happened for God was moving on and when when Philip Stephen's friend also with a little bit of Gentile blood in him godless pharaoh Samaria before they could tell him not to hallelujah before the committee got on to him he began to preach Jesus and God was with him the hand of the Lord was with him and the Samaritans began

to turn by the thousand to Christ uh the people with one accord look at that gave need to the things which Philip spake and seeing the miracles which he did for unclean spirits crying with loud voice came out of

many that were possessed of them many that were taken with pulses and that were lame were healed there was great joy in that city and Simon heard him preach concerning the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ that's what an evangelist preaches about the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ you know that an evangelist preaches the kingdom it doesn't require a special dispensation of this teacher in in an elite bible school to teach the kingdom an ordinary evangelist does it hallelujah in fact preaching the kingdom is almost the same thing as preaching the gospel that's

why in the very end of Acts you'll find that Paul in his own hired house preached the things concerning the kingdom of God which is not meat and drink but righteousness peace and joy in the holiness and so Stephen was preaching and there's a tremendous movement of God up in Samaria God was moving on while the apostles were still hanging around and not moving so the news got back to Jerusalem which after all isn't very far away just about a day's march away and so the apostles discussed the matter and I guess they said something like this well our master did go you remember to Samaria and he did say something when he talked to that horrible woman at the well uh about the fields being white already for harvest so perhaps we ought to go and see what's happening now the Lord had kindly

withheld the Holy Spirit from the Samaritans wasn't that kind of him so as to give Peter and John a chance to have a share in the matter and so they came down and when they saw the blessing of God and they realized what was happening they had the temerity or courage or whatever it was or grace to lay holy Jewish hands on the heads of dogs of Samaritans and the Holy Ghost the same Holy Ghost that was on them filled the Samaritans all glory to God Jerusalem you dear Samaria Peter John you see God is moving on a little bit faster than you but he's saying come on now come on and catch up with me what's the next thing on the program yeah the uttermost part of it but where did they go back to Jerusalem to the prayer meeting dear Lord bless this corner of thy vineyard send back the good old days

Lord do it like you did at the beginning no answer now when in in Genesis how are we doing for time Jim are we going to have a rest or something we'll break up in five minutes all right when in in Genesis Abraham was called as the father of the elect nation just before he was called we have the account of the overspreading of the earth by the sons of Noah and there's a little risk given of the way the nations moved out from Mesopotamia and we had Shem Ham Jacob and by and large I think you might say in broad terms Ham went this way this is not exact but it's broad Shem went to Asia Jacob went to Europe for as you know Palestine and Jerusalem is the center of the three great continents of the old world God's seat of government and those of us who believe in a millennium imagine or believe

that it will indeed in the future yet be God's seat of government for the world and we have seen then that God has turned from the Jewish nation who have as a nation rejected the gospel message and the indication the first indication that he has turned is that Samaria has so obviously come into the place of divine favor now what does God do and what does the Holy Spirit instruct Luke to do as he writes the account of Acts it is what he does he chooses three men one from Africa one from Asia one from Europe in Acts 8 and 9 and 10 each man is a religious man each man is a bible reading man each man is a praying man we may say that they are the best representatives of their different divisions of the human race but each man needs Jesus their religion does not save them they need Jesus

there's much to commend them but they still need Jesus hallelujah and these three conversions are told in great detail more detail than any other conversions in the whole of the book of Acts angels are involved heavenly intervention all sorts of wonderful things take place in the conversion of these three men as though God is saying look this is what I intend to do I'm no longer restricting my blessings to Israel I'm

going out to Africa to Asia to Europe to bring in those whom I have foreknown from the ends of the earth for the church shall not be just an Israel church here Jew and Gentile barbarian Siban bond and free shall all be one a new thing coming in so here in these three chapters we are shown individual conversions notice that God is laying emphasis here in the middle of the

book of Acts and in the exact middle of the New Testament they check that sometime they count the pages in your New Testament and you'll and divide it in two and you'll come right into this area Acts 8 9 and 10 they're right in the in the middle of Acts he's laying emphasis on individual conversion elsewhere we've seen them coming in crowds but here in Acts 8 9 and 10 uh they're coming as individuals God in mercy reaching down the Lord Jesus intervening from heaven as he marks out one man from each of the great racial groups you may remember that something similar happens in Acts 16 where the gospel breaks over the boundaries of the Asian world and comes over into Europe once again you get three representative conversions you know there's tremendous pattern in Acts and in Acts 16 you get

first of all Lydia whose heart the Lord opened that's one kind of conversion and then you get the girl possessed of a python spirit who has delivered another violent kind of conversion and then you get the Philippian jailer a more tremendous conversion still once again a three-fold testimony but we shall be looking just for when you when we start again at these three conversions which are the center of the New Testament and mark this great change from Jew to Gentile all right five minutes okay we're looking at these three men who might almost be the pivotal persons in the book of Acts but not quite we shall see in a little while some other persons who are much more important as a pivot in the book of Acts where they move and shift from the Jewish to the Gentile world but in the meantime

we'll pause and look at these three first of all the man from Ethiopia the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying arise go to the wall of the south and to the way that goes down from Jerusalem and to Gaza which is desert he arose and went and behold the man of Ethiopia a eunuch of great authority and a Candace queen of the Ethiopians who had the charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem port of worship was returning and sitting in his chariot read Isaiah the prophet he was a man who traveled over a thousand miles to find God he has a hungry heart he has come not on his own of course he will have a caravan with him without riders and guards he's an important officer in the Ethiopian court but all he's hungry for God and evidently he arrived at Jerusalem after the church has

been scattered and the apostles have gone into hiding for although he's come to the city of God he can find no help there and all that he can come away with is a purchased copy of a handwritten role of the prophet Isaiah and he's so hungry for God that he's reading the role of Isaiah sitting in his chariot that takes some doing for the chariot did not have pneumatic tires it is very doubtful if it had any kind of springing the road was not smooth it wasn't tarmac it was rough the book he held was not a nice little bible like you had but a great big role which had to be home to read the book nor could even wait till night time but as he was rocketing and racketing to and fro in his chariot he was struggling to read the sacred page hungry for God good to God we had that same kind of

hunger among the people today oh how he longed and what a disappointed heart he must have had he had prayed no doubt but there was no answer and then suddenly Philip was there what a mercy and the voice that came up from beside the chariot understandest thou what thou readest and the man looked down he didn't God didn't send the angel direct to the Ethiopian I'm glad he didn't do that he just sent Philip praise the Lord the gospel isn't committed to angels it's committed to ordinary folk like you and me the angels have to stand back they'd love to do it but they're not allowed you and I have to be brought in

so although the angel had spoken to Philip it was Philip who had to carry the message understandest thou what thou readest and he called Philip up into the chariot they sat together

in that rocking vehicle as they went on southward down to the Gaza Strip and the place that he read was that which we know as Isaiah 53 he was read as a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb before his hero so open he not his mouth in his humiliation his judgment was taken away who shall declare his generation his life is taken from the earth I pray thee of whom speaketh the prophet this of himself or some other man and fill it over his mouth oh what a thrill it is to be in the will of God open his mouth not sorry at all he's left the great congregation in Samaria opens his mouth and beginning at the same scripture preached unto him Jesus amen the words of an eyewitness who was able to say I saw it happen only a few years ago a man of whom the prophet spoke suffered these very things how

thrilling must have been that exchange how the African heart must have warmed within him as the structure opened up almost like this spring swishing on with the light you know opening up his heart and he was on fire with the glorious revelation for had not the sin burden been upon him all that way and he was wondering whether it was possible that not only for Jew but also for him a gentile and a black man was there room for him in this great atonement hallelujah and Philip was sufficiently broad-minded to say yes there's room for you glory to God and they came perhaps to that wadi that divides the Gaza Strip from Egypt and there he said see here is water what of him to me to them be baptized something that verse 37 was put in by an enthusiastic Baptist brother I don't know whether it was

as Philip said if thou believest with all my heart thou mayest and he answered and said I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God he commanded the chariot to stand still and they went both into the water both Philip and the unit and he spilled a little water on his head and they came out again and when they will come I'll have a look thanks

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