

Acts 8.²⁶⁻⁴⁰

To the ends of the earth

Background

Luke's careful account of the continuing ministry of Jesus after His death and resurrection tracks the growth of the church down the lines which Jesus Himself had laid down – “.. *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” ([Acts 1.8](#)).

This particular study in the present series focuses on what is really a pivotal moment in the progress of the gospel, the shift from Samaria ([Acts 8.1-25](#)) to what will prove to be ‘the ends of the earth’. The following chapter will narrate the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the man who will spearhead the taking of the gospel to ‘the nations’, and the Lord’s very specific call on his life ([Acts 9.15](#)): thereafter, through the rest of the book of Acts Luke will show the remarkable spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

This encounter with the Ethiopian official sets the scene for what is to follow – for this man, having come to faith in Christ, will take the gospel back with him to a whole new continent. Luke’s detailed narrative at this point serves to highlight a number of significant truths in relation to the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world.

For one thing, it was always in and through the power of the Spirit. Jesus underlined that truth for His first disciples, and Luke flags that up right at the outset in [Acts 1.8](#) – the connection between the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the power of the Spirit of God.

Nor is it just the *power* of God by His Spirit that Luke is concerned to highlight – it’s the sovereign *purpose* of God as well that he means his readers to recognise. The work in Samaria is set against the backdrop of the persecution of the believers in Jerusalem which had driven them out and away: a painful experience, but one through which, in the providence of God, His people were moved on from the thrilling things which had been happening in the capital and out into the unfamiliar and historically unfriendly territory of Samaria.

And Philip himself, thriving surely, on all that the Lord was doing in Samaria, must have been as perplexed as he was surprised when directed by the Lord right away from that ‘action’ to a lonely spot on a ‘desert road’.

The Lord, however, knew well what He was doing! The ends of the earth was always what He had in view. But that was not going to be through some magic waving of His heavenly wand: rather it would be through innumerable person-to-person encounters such as this where God’s Word was explained and applied to a person clearly looking for meaning and purpose and hope in life.

‘Days’ (1) and (2) give the background in Samaria, while the remaining ‘days’ focus on the encounter Philip had with the Ethiopian official. I suggest that the ‘days’ on which to concentrate are (3), (4) and (5) [although you may want to consider, too, the whole issue of ‘response’ on ‘day’ (6)]. As ever, there are some additional questions in relation to those 3 ‘days’.

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1) Monday 23rd May – trials

Read [Acts 8.1-3](#)

“.. all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria ..” (Acts 8.1)

What must have seemed a ‘bad day’ for believers would prove, with the benefit of hindsight, to have been a significant forward step in the progress of the gospel. Hold on to the hand of the Shepherd through dark times: He knows what He’s doing!

Looking back, can you see how circumstances which seemed perplexing and painful at the time have been worked together by God for good ([Rom.8.28](#))?

How have the trials you’ve faced developed character in you ([Ja.1.2-3](#))?

Prayer: *O God, give me the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what can be changed, and the wisdom to know the one from the other.*

2) Tuesday 24th May – growth

Read [Acts 8.4-8](#)

“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there ..” (Acts 8.5)

The gospel message was spreading, in line with the commission of Jesus (see [Acts 1.8](#)): and Philip’s ministry was enlarging – the deacon in Jerusalem ([Acts 6.1-7](#)) became something of an evangelist in Samaria. God graciously grows His work and His people!

In what ways have you experienced ‘growth’ in your own walk with the Lord?

How ready are you to step outside your ‘comfort zone’ and assume fresh and more challenging responsibilities in the service of Jesus?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the privilege of sharing with You in Your work. Use me today in expanding Your kingdom and bringing life and healing to others.*

3) Wednesday 25th May – follow

Read [Acts 8.26-28](#)

“.. and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official ..” (Acts 8.27)

The Lord wonderfully orchestrates His work: sometimes His ways are surprising and baffling! Why take Philip away from a vibrant work in Samaria to a desert road in the south? Follow where He leads and trust Him – He knows what He’s doing!

Philip was involved in work which was impacting a city (Samaria): God had a country (Ethiopia) and a continent (Africa) in view! Are you being challenged by God to expand your horizons?

How does the Lord direct His people, and are you open to His leading?

As much as ever, amidst the complexities and uncertainties of today's world, people are hungry for meaning and purpose. How does that find expression?

What clues are there, indicative of that hunger, in the films people watch, the books people read, the music to which they listen, the activities in which they engage?

Prayer: *Keep me, Lord, from becoming complacent and settling into spheres of ministry with which I'm now comfortable. Use me as You will in advancing Your kingdom.*

4) Thursday 26th May – questions

Read [Acts 8.29-31](#)

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked ..” (Acts 8.30)

Philip's opening gambit was a question – which issued in a fruitful gospel conversation. Discerning questions are a key resource in all ministry, whether pastoral or evangelistic (see [Gen.3.9](#)). Listen carefully to others and ask good questions!

The logo which was deliberately chosen by, and which has now become synonymous with, the [Alpha](#) course is a question mark: what are the questions that society today is asking?

It can be too easy for the church to answering questions which no one is asking: how can that best be avoided?

Would you benefit from having someone 'sit with' you and work through the Bible with you? Consider asking someone to do so!

Think of those you're likely to meet or speak with today: what helpful questions might you ask?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those whom You have gifted to teach Your word and who have helped me to understand what I'm reading in Your Word: bless them today!*

5) Friday 27th May – Jesus

Read [Acts 8.32-35](#)

“Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him about Jesus” (Acts 8.35)

The questions which were exercising the mind of the official were the starting point for Philip. The answers and explanations which he gave the man directed the official clearly to Jesus. A believer's calling is simply to pass on the good news about Jesus!

Who helped you come to see the truth about Jesus and why He matters so much?

Paul's ministry in Athens ([Acts 17.16-34](#)) illustrates the same pattern of ministry in a context where people *aren't* reading the Bible: what can we learn from the way in which he was able, nonetheless, to point them to Jesus?

What are the questions exercising your friends today? How might you be able to take them on from there to show them the importance of Jesus?

What have been your experiences of conversations with those around you which have resulted in your speaking to them about Jesus?

Have you grown in your boldness and facility in telling others the good news about Jesus? How has that happened?

Prayer: Help me, Lord, in speaking with others about You. Often I find myself tongue-tied and fearful! Help me to speak and teach me what to say ([Ex.4.10-12](#)).

6) Saturday 28th May – response

Read [Acts 8.36-38](#)

“.. ‘what can stand in the way of my being baptised?’ ..” (Acts 8.36)

The Ethiopian official was hungry for God – his visit to Jerusalem was surely indicative of that. Having had the message explained and his eyes opened to the good news of Jesus, he was eager to respond immediately, openly and thoroughly.

Is there that same enthusiasm in the response you're presently giving to the Lord Jesus?

Are there aspects of your response to the Lord which you've yet to get round to? Don't put off any longer – act on these things today!

Prayer: Lord, today I want to renew my commitment to You. Stir in me again the fires of that [‘first love’](#) I had, that my whole life may be lived to Your glory.

7) Sunday 29th May – proclaimers

Read [Acts 8.39-40](#)

“Philip .. travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns” (Acts 8.40)

You don't stand still in the service of Jesus! *Following* Him means you're always 'on the move' in one way or another. The Spirit sovereignly leads you, taking you where He means you to be and empowering you to share Jesus with whoever you're with!

Are there new people in your fellowship whom you might make a point of speaking with today?

What has been your experience of the Spirit of the Lord 'taking' you to different places and people?

Prayer: *May the worship of Your people today, Lord, and the preaching of Your Word, see many, like the Ethiopian official, enabled to go on their way rejoicing.*