

## ***Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries***

### ***Gifted for Service: Philip***

Lesson #12 for September 20, 2008

Scriptures: Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11,27-31; 1 Timothy 3:8-12.

1. This lesson is about the deacon, Philip, and the impact he had on the early Christian church. Jesus Himself told His disciples to begin their work in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, then to Samaria, and finally, to the uttermost parts of the world. (Acts 1:8) How many people besides Philip do we know about who witnessed in Samaria? Didn't Jesus witness to the Samaritan woman at the well and convert many from that town? (John 4) Was Philip originally chosen to be a missionary? Other than the disciples, were Philip, Paul, and Luke the "major players" in the early church of the New Testament?
2. Briefly review the highlights of the life of Philip. He was chosen as one of the first deacons (Acts 6), served widows (Acts 6), watched one of his closest associates—Stephen—stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60), with his family, fled from persecution (Acts 8:1-5), confronted a sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), healed the sick (Acts 8:5-8), cast out demons (Acts 8:5-8), carried the gospel to rich foreigners (Acts 8:26-39), was "whisked away" by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:39,40), was father of four "prophetesses" (Acts 21:8,9), and repeatedly served as host to apostles and missionaries. (Acts 8:14; 21:8)
3. If called by the Lord, would you be willing to do what Philip did? What can we learn from his example?
4. Philip was chosen as one of the first deacons. What was a deacon? What does the word "deacon" mean in Greek? "Deacon" refers to a person who serves another person or a cause. It often refers to service in a religious context. It may refer to the general followers of Jesus as His "servants."
5. Philip was one of only two of the early church leaders that we know for certain was married—Peter was the other—and the only one whose children are specifically mentioned.
6. What event led to the choosing of seven deacons? (Acts 6:1-6) Were the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora really not being treated fairly? Was that because of prejudice? Or were the Jewish church leaders taking care of "their own" first? Was it a coincidence that the deacons had Greek names?
7. In order to grow, any group that wants to remain somewhat organized must learn how to appoint new leaders and how to delegate responsibility. What was the primary responsibility of the seven new deacons? Did they deal with all sorts of communal issues in addition to caring for widows?
8. Philip and six others were chosen to be deacons because they were all known to be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." What does that imply to you? (Acts 6:3) How would one know that a person was "full of the Holy Spirit"? People chosen to be church leaders and to resolve differences between groups must be led by the Spirit of God and also be wise in their methods of dealing with controversy.
9. Try to imagine what it would have been like to live and work among the earliest believers after Pentecost. They met together every day, they were respected by all around them, and they

shared virtually everything together as a group. Did they believe that Jesus would be coming back at almost any time? How did they decide to live that kind of a life? Were their experiences thought to be an extension of the discipleship training program that Jesus had established earlier? Was this a result of the outpouring of the “early rain”? Will the same thing happen again in the “latter rain”?

10. After the stoning of Stephen and the beginning of a major persecution of Christians in the Jerusalem area, Philip fled to “the principal city in Samaria.” (Acts 8:5, *GNB*) He soon received much attention because of his capacity to heal the sick and perform miracles. (Acts 8:6-8) Why do you think God doesn’t give church members those capacities today? Or does He?
11. Have you ever considered leaving everything behind and going to a new area to do God’s work? Would you ever consider moving to another city primarily for the purpose of spreading the gospel there?
12. What would you do if the persecution of Christians started in your city or area?
13. Was Philip officially commissioned or officially sent to Samaria? Or did Philip go there on his own? Did he go there to escape from persecution in Jerusalem? How many missionaries do you know that have gone on their own without being sent by a church organization? Could one be a “missionary” without being sent by a church organization?
14. Do you feel a sense of mission to spread the gospel today? Why, or why not? In our day, does someone need to be employed by the church in order to be an effective missionary?
15. Did God allow persecution of the church members in Jerusalem specifically so that they would leave Jerusalem and thereby spread the gospel to other areas? Could that happen to us in our day? Why do you think they had not begun to spread out before the persecution? Do we need persecution in order to leave the Adventist “ghettos” and spread the “Larger View” to the rest of the world? Do we need to leave “Jerusalem” and go to “Judea” and “Samaria” and then to the rest of the world? (Acts 1:8) Or have we already gone to the “rest of the world”?
16. When Jesus sent out His disciples in the early stages of their missionary work, He sent them two by two. Later, Paul often traveled with at least one companion as he was moving to new areas and spreading the gospel. On the other hand, Philip seems to have worked alone. Was that a good idea or was it just a matter of necessity? By working in Samaria, did Philip remove himself completely from the possibility of persecution? How far was it from Jerusalem to Samaria? (About 40 miles/60 kms)
17. Read Acts 8:26-39. This is a unique story in the Bible. Why do you suppose God chose Philip—rather than one of the apostles—to speak to the Ethiopian eunuch? Were the apostles too busy? Did Philip understand the Scriptures better? Did Philip have less prejudice against foreigners? Since the Holy Spirit apparently transported Philip miraculously, He could have chosen any apostle from anywhere to do the job. Why didn’t the Holy Spirit transport Philip along with an associate (“two by two”) to interact with the Ethiopian?
18. Was Philip chosen because he was the “most ready” to witness? Would we be ready to be used by God if we were called by an angel right now?
19. What very effective method did Philip use to enter into conversation with the eunuch? Is asking a question always a good “opening wedge”? Was picking up hitchhikers safer in those days than it is today?
20. Should Philip have required the Ethiopian eunuch to wait a few months to make sure he was

making a sincere and honest decision and to go through additional lessons before he could be baptized? Should Paul have made the Philippian jailer and his family wait before being baptized? (Acts 16:33) Should we allow a person to be baptized the same day s/he makes a decision to follow God? Should new “converts” be integrated into the church and treated the same as “more mature” members? Or should all new “converts” take an intense and systematic book-by-book study of the Bible immediately upon “conversion”? Should all of us take part in intense and systematic study of the Bible?

21. Our lesson calls this Ethiopian eunuch the first Gentile convert to Christianity. Read Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39. Would you consider the two former demoniacs as converts to Christianity? Were they Jews or Gentiles? What did the demoniacs do after they were healed? Was it because of the witness and ministry of the former demoniacs that Jesus was so well-received when He returned to Decapolis? (Mark 7:31-8:10)
22. Philip seems to have worked very closely with the Holy Spirit. Did Philip receive a special “call” from the Holy Spirit that led him to move from being a deacon in Jerusalem to being an evangelist in Samaria? Or did Philip move from Jerusalem “on his own” or for “self-preservation”?
23. We know that the Holy Spirit “gifts” people with various kinds of capacities and abilities so they may spread the gospel more effectively. Read Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31. Compare Acts 8:4-8. Did Philip demonstrate more than one spiritual gift? Does God give people in our day more than one spiritual gift? Did Philip have the gift of preaching? Healing? Apostleship? Do you need more than one spiritual gift to be an effective missionary?
24. Read Acts 8:9-25. Why do you suppose the believers in Samaria had not received the Holy Spirit until Peter and John arrived? Was Philip waiting until the church leaders came before he talked to them about receiving the Holy Spirit? What did Peter and John add to the ministry of Philip?
25. How do you understand the story about Simon Magus? (Acts 8:14-24)
26. What do you think Simon Magus had in mind when he wanted to “buy” the power of the Holy Spirit?
27. Many so-called miracle workers today—even on television—perform unusual acts and then, claiming to have performed miracles, suggest that we should believe what they tell us. If we are convinced that someone has performed a miracle, is that proof that everything they say to us is true? Read Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 1 Kings 13; Revelation 13. Will the Devil perform miracles in the “last days”? Will the “healings” that he performs be removal of affliction that he has caused? Do we need to be “so settled into the truth” that we cannot be “moved”? (4SDABC 1161.6)
28. Why was Peter’s reaction to Simon Magus so swift and decisive? “To hell with your money! And you along with it.” (Acts 8:20, *Message*) Was Peter thinking about the time he was rebuked by Jesus at Caesarea Philippi when he made such a harsh statement?
29. Think about the early Seventh-day Adventist church leaders. Several were hardly more than teenagers. They had little money, and they had no social standing. Why do you think God chose such a “motley crew” to head up His modern-day church?
30. The SDA Church used to speak of “dark counties” referring to whole counties in the U.S. that did not have a single baptized SDA church member. Should we be looking for places like that

to move to and do a work like the work Philip did? Why are there so many “Adventist ghettos” around the world? Shouldn’t those who receive the “light” be doing their best to spread it to others? If we believe that the gospel must reach the whole world before the end can come, (Matthew 24:14) are we delaying the coming by not doing that? Considering the parable of the talents of the three servants, (Matthew 25:14-30) are we all expected to use all of our abilities in the service for God?

31. Only a very small percentage of SDAs seem to know about and espouse the “Larger View” that we believe in. Should we seek to be missionaries for the “Larger View”? Does the “Larger View” really “pull everything together” into a cohesive picture of God? Are people who have the “Larger View” and who understand the great controversy better missionaries than those who do not? Are they more savable? How many people have you spoken to about God and the great controversy over God’s character and government? Are you ready if the Spirit should call you as He did Philip?

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