

Biblical Missionaries

Philip as Missionary

Lesson #10 for September 5, 2015

Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 4:18; Acts 2:44-47; 4:34-37; Acts 8; 21:7-10.

1. This lesson focuses on events connected to Philip who was first chosen as one of the seven deacons and later became an evangelist to Samaritans and Gentiles.
2. Don't you wish we knew more about what happened between resurrection Sunday and the ascension, 10 days before Pentecost? In those 40 days, Christ met the disciples in several different locations and gave them a number of challenges. See Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:5-8. In actual fact, those commissions were not only for those first disciples and other followers but also for the Christian church for the rest of human history. What do you think those first disciples thought Jesus had in mind when He said they would go from Jerusalem to Samaria to the uttermost ends of the earth?
3. What does it mean to take the gospel to the whole world? Does that mean that we need to have at least a few Seventh-day Adventists in each country of the world? Or, does it mean in our modern days of communication that some part of the gospel message will reach every citizen—every man, woman, and child on planet earth? Would that even be possible?
4. What do we know about Philip? The name *Philip* means “horse lover.” There are four people mentioned in the New Testament with the name Philip. Two of them were members of Herod's family. The other two are of more interest to us. The first, Philip of Bethsaida, was one of the early disciples who followed Jesus and called his friend Nathaniel to become a disciple as well. Nathaniel apparently also went by the name Bartholomew. (John 1:43-46) The other was Philip the evangelist on whom we are focusing this week.
5. During the final week of Jesus's ministry, some Greeks approached Philip the disciple and said that they wanted to see Jesus. We do not know exactly who those people were or how they heard about Jesus. It is quite possible that they heard about the triumphal entry. It is also very possible that they heard all the whispering of all the other people coming to Jerusalem with the hope that Jesus would become the new king. Philip went to Andrew, and the two of them apparently took the Greeks to see Jesus. (John 12:20-21) It is very interesting to read through John 12:32 to see the interaction between Jesus and His Father which happened on that occasion. Why do you think the question raised by those Greeks led to that response?
6. The Philip that we will focus on in this lesson who was sometimes referred to as Philip the evangelist is first mentioned as one of the seven men chosen to be deacons. (Acts 6:2-5) We do not know how much time passed between the events of Acts 5 and the events of Acts 6. We also do not know how much time passed from the time they chose the seven deacons until Stephen was arrested and stoned in A.D. 34. As we know from Acts 7:57-8:1, the stoning of Stephen led to a period of intense persecution of Christians. That persecution was led apparently by Saul of Tarsus. Many Christians were jailed, and some were killed. What we do know is that Philip apparently left Jerusalem and traveled to Samaria, probably with his wife and children.

It was Philip who preached the gospel to the Samaritans; it was Philip who had the courage to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. For a time the history of these two workers [Philip and Paul] had been closely intertwined. It was the violent persecution of Saul the Pharisee that had scattered the church at Jerusalem and destroyed the effectiveness of the organization of the seven deacons. The flight from Jerusalem had led Philip to change his manner of labor, and resulted in his pursuing the same calling to which Paul gave his life. Precious

hours were these that Paul and Philip spent in each other's society; thrilling were the memories that they recalled of the days when the light which had shone upon the face of Stephen upturned to Heaven as he suffered martyrdom flashed in its glory upon Saul the persecutor, bringing him, a helpless suppliant, to the feet of Jesus.—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 204.1. [Content in brackets is added.]

7. Try to imagine being a part of the Christian group starting out at the time of the Pentecost and growing until the time of Stephen's stoning. Read Acts 2:44-47 and 4:34-37. It was a time of great community, fellowship, and sharing of almost everything. Thousands of people joined the group of Christians. They met regularly in the temple and in private homes. But, sooner or later, there was bound to develop some disagreements among them. Read Acts 6:1-7 and 15:5. The Greek-speaking Jews thought their widows were being discriminated against in favor of the Aramaic-speaking widows.
8. In order to deal with that problem, the disciples asked the entire Christian group to choose seven suitable men to take charge of the distributions. It is interesting to note that all seven of those who were chosen had Greek names. Of course, we know there were many people in those days who had both a Greek name and a Hebrew or Aramaic name. One of those who was chosen was Philip. Thus, Philip's first job as a Christian deacon was to take care of the business of the church.
9. But, it was not long before Stephen was arrested and stoned and a terrible persecution against Christians began in Jerusalem. (Acts 8:1-6) We do not know if Philip was married at that time or not, but probably he was; and he took his family with him to Samaria. Fortunately, the experience recorded in John 4 with Jesus and the woman at the well in Sychar had made an opening on which Philip was hoping to expand.
10. Who were the Samaritans? At the time when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 723/722 B.C., the Assyrians deported almost all of the remaining Israelites and scattered them throughout their kingdom. At the same time, they took people from various other places and resettled them in Samaria. The few Israelites that were left in the northern kingdom then intermarried with and assimilated those new people. The Samaritans liked to think of themselves as descendants of the Israelites. However, the Jews considered them to be descendants of foreigners. Remember that there were squabbles between the Jews and the Samaritans right from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Later, one of the Maccabean sons conquered the Samaritans and forced them to pay tribute. He also apparently destroyed their temple.
11. When Philip arrived in Samaria, his tasks suddenly changed. He then became essentially a foreign evangelist. If the example of Stephen is any indication, Philip may have already been a very effective evangelist. But, at least we are sure that Philip was no longer dealing primarily with widows!
12. Those who have observed the church's work in foreign countries have recognized that many missionaries have been sent overseas only to find that they were needed to do jobs that were quite different from what they had thought they were going to do!
13. Read Acts 8:6-15. Apparently, Philip was conducting a very successful ministry in Samaria. His ministry was so successful that when the Christians in Jerusalem heard about it, they sent Peter and John to check things out and/or to assist. Apparently, Philip had been baptizing Samaritans; but, they had not received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)
14. Peter and John also had to deal with Simon who had been astonishing the Samaritans with magic. Later, he wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit; Peter condemned him for it.
15. Read Acts 8:26-39, the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch had been reading Isaiah 53:7-8. What would you say to someone who asked what the meaning of

those verses is? The Ethiopian was probably reading in Greek.

16. How did the Ethiopian decide to become a Jew? How much of the gospel did he learn from Philip? Did he ever go back to Jerusalem to get further instruction? Apparently, Philip used that occasion to explain to the eunuch about the death and resurrection of Jesus. What points about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would you want to mention in a brief encounter with someone? How brief was that encounter?
17. The next time we read about Philip was about 23 years later. In the late spring of A.D. 58, Paul and his friends were taking the offerings from the Gentiles to the church in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 21:7-10 that they landed at Caesarea. There Paul spent some wonderful days with Philip and his family. Philip had four daughters who were deemed by the Holy Spirit to be suitable to receive the gift of prophecy. We do not know exactly what they were doing; but, it is certainly a wonderful testimony to Phillip's home instruction. How did Philip manage to be so successful raising his daughters to serve God? What do the example of Philip's daughters have to say about the role of women in the church then as well as now?
18. Try to imagine the discussion between Philip and Paul. Remember that it was Paul's persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem that forced Philip to flee from his work as a deacon! What do you think they talked about?
19. What do we know about Philip's wife? Nothing! Was he married before he was chosen as one of the deacons? We do not know. However, Paul's later instructions about the selection of deacons suggests that Philip was married. (1 Timothy 3:8-13) Had he been one of the lesser-known followers of Jesus? We do not know that either. But, apparently, Paul and Philip had a wonderful time together which extended to "a number of days." (Acts 21:10)
20. Remember that after being arrested and tried briefly in Jerusalem, Paul was whisked away from Jerusalem to preserve his life (See Acts 23:12-22.) and was taken to prison in Caesarea where he stayed for about two years under Felix and Festus. Did he have opportunity to work with Philip or to at least talk to him during that time? Was Philip allowed to go to the prison where Paul was being kept?
21. We do not know how long Philip stayed in Samaria or whether he went directly after that to Caesarea. In any case, he conducted a very successful missionary program.

When they were scattered by persecution they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a famishing world; and they were constrained by the love of Christ to break this bread to all who were in need.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 106.1.

And when His disciples were driven from Jerusalem, some found in Samaria a safe asylum. The Samaritans welcomed these messengers of the gospel, and the Jewish converts gathered a precious harvest from among those who had once been their bitterest enemies.—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 106.4.

22. While it is too bad that differences arose between the Hebrew-speaking widows and the Greek-speaking widows in the early church, it resulted in the wonderful experience of choosing the seven deacons. (Romans 8:28) Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is scattered over almost all of the world. How can we make sure that we do not allow cultural, social, or other barriers to divide us? Do we ever have differences of opinion today?
23. Even if the church's evangelistic programs today are very successful and assuming we managed to eliminate prejudices, etc., we need to remember that if the church is very successful at reaching people of all classes and accepting them without prejudice, it will result in even more people being attracted to the church, and they will join with their biases and prejudices to be worked on!

24. Did God have to allow persecution to come to the believers in Jerusalem in order to get His people to move out of Jerusalem so that they would speak to Samaritans and Gentiles?
25. What sort of early training do you think Philip received? As a young Hebrew boy, he should have attended a synagogue school. But, the most important aspects of his training were probably in the Christian community during the time he served as a deacon or maybe earlier.
26. On what basis were the deacons chosen? (1 Timothy 3:8-13) Surely, they must have had a very good opportunity to spend time with the original disciples and learn from them. In fact, those who were chosen to be deacons were probably young men who already knew a lot about Christianity; many of them may have been followers of Jesus earlier. Do you think Paul remembered that the first Christian sermon that he heard was from a deacon?
27. It has been said that if Adventists could just keep all of their children in the church here in North America, the church would be growing faster than it is now. Unfortunately, in our day and time, the natural tendency toward rebellion during the teen years makes it particularly challenging to keep them in the church. How can we do a better job of keeping our children faithful?
28. Philip is an example of someone who ended up doing something quite different from that for which he was originally chosen. Are we prepared to meet the needs of our local communities even if they are quite different from what we would choose for ourselves? Are we willing to serve humbly where the needs are greatest?
29. What lessons can we learn from these early experiences of the church about sharing the gospel? Look again briefly at the story of Philip. He fled persecution, confronted the sorcerer, preached to unbelievers, cast out demons, witnessed to a high official of the Ethiopian royal court, and discovered what it meant to be surprised daily by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
30. Could some of us today who dedicate our lives faithfully to spreading the gospel have experiences similar to those which Philip had? The disciples had been told that they were to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. For first century Romans, Greeks, and Jews, Ethiopia was probably considered to be one of the ends of the earth.
31. How many miracles do you think Philip performed in the course of his ministry? Was his miracle-working power one of the things that attracted people to him?
32. Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In these verses are spelled out Paul's admonition for the choice of deacons. Were those the guidelines that the first disciples used when choosing Philip? Would they be appropriate guidelines for us to use today? At what point in his ministry do you think Philip received the Holy Spirit? Did he begin working miracles soon after that?
33. How well did Philip understand the Samaritan culture and customs? Is it important for missionaries to understand their "audience"? Lots of evidence suggests that the better we know our audience, the more effective our witness will be.
34. What are the most challenging areas of the world in our day? How will the gospel be carried to China? Some Adventists have gone to China as English-language instructors. What about to the Muslim world? Many of us will never have the opportunity to serve the church overseas and certainly not under those kinds of circumstances; but, what practical things could we do in our own church to make it a more effective evangelistic ministry? One thing that would always be appropriate is to continue inviting other people to join us. When was the last time you invited a non-Adventist to church? Or, to Sabbath school?

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