

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 7:1 - 8:8

Years ago, the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel reported on a home burglary. The homeowner was out visiting friends. When he returned, the television, electronics, even his valuables had been ignored. All that was stolen was a container filled with white powder. The thieves thought they had scored some cocaine.

But it wasn't coke in the container, it was the owner's sister, Gertrude - *that is, her cremated remains*. The thieves were trying to get high by snorting ole Gertie.

Yet their mistake helps illustrate the Jewish leaders who arrested Stephen. For they too were trying to get high on ashes - on the remains of what was dead.

They had put their trust in the Temple and traditions of Judaism. Religion produced a self-righteous high, but it was ashes and death. Jesus had ended the Law.

Christianity was God's new way - making the Law obsolete. God's Law exposed our sin, but it was God's Spirit who provided forgiveness and power for victory.

The Law condemned. It was grace that saved - yet the Jews were still zealous keepers of the Law. They were snorting ole Gertrude, whereas Stephen was high on God's Spirit. He was full of love, and joy, and power.

Stephen started out as a deacon, *a table server*. Yet God used him as a miracle worker; then a theologian. And at each

stage of service, Stephen was faithful. God often rewards *faithful service* with *broader service*.

The Apostle Paul might've been thinking of Stephen when he wrote 1 Timothy 3:13, "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith."

In Acts 7, Stephen does what Peter did earlier in Acts, he uses an inquisition to proclaim the Gospel. At the end of Chapter 6, Stephen glowed with God's glory, while the High Priest believed a false story about him.

The Jews accuse Stephen of blasphemy against the Temple and the Law. He disrespected neither. Stephen never discredited their proper role in God's plan - but He knew through Christ that God was doing a new work.

And this is the point of his sermon in Chapter 7.

Stephen *preaches a masterpiece of a sermon*. He surveys Jewish history to show how God was always up to something new, yet each *Divine initiative* was met with *Jewish resistance*. You could call Stephen's sermon **a panoramic view of Jewish stubbornness.**

Acts 7 begins, "Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And (Stephen) said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' God spoke to Abraham while he still lived in Mesopotamia, the birthplace of idolatry. Early Mesopotamians worshipped the moon goddess.

Which reminds me, *if they found insects on the moon what would they call them?* The answer, *“lunatics.”* (Just a reminder of what’s been missing while I was gone.)

But Stephen's point is that God went right into a pagan land and picked out a man to father His people. *God did a new thing!* God is always doing fresh works.

“Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father (Terah) was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on.” Abraham died with only a promise. He was a stranger in a strange land from the time God called him out of Mesopotamia until God called him to heaven. And this is true of every life lived for God. This world is not our home. God doesn’t want us to ever get comfortable in our tangible surroundings.

We're on a spiritual pilgrimage. And to avoid spiritual stagnancy, God does new things in us and through us.

Yet the Jews in Stephen’s day were stuck in a 1500-year-old rut. They were resistant to God at every turn.

Verse 5, *“But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.”* Abraham was childless, yet God made promises to his heirs - *which necessitated a son in his and his wife’s old age.* Talk about new works, God promised Abraham the impossible - a miracle child named Isaac, who would grow up to sire a nation.

And God's penchant for new things continued into the nation's future. Verse 6, "But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* 400 years. 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'

Stephen's point was that God is always doing a new thing - *uprooting and moving His people, providing new challenges, and stretching their faith*. Their growth had stalled out in the Promise Land. Thus, God forced the nation into Egypt and into slavery - *to jump start their need for Him*. A new work was needed in their hearts.

And with this new work in their heart, a new sign was to be carved into their flesh. "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs."

By the first century, the time of Stephen, circumcision was the unquestioned mark of God's covenant. All Hebrew males carried this symbol on their person. But there was a time when circumcision was brand new.

Even what the Jews viewed as an *ancient tradition* had at one time in their past been *new and pristine*.

Back to the story... "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt." The Jews in Stephen's day were mimicking their ancestors of old. Rather than seek God's grace, they were stubbornly treating Stephen like the brothers

had treated Joseph. They feigned his death, smeared blood on his colorful coat, and sold him to slave traders in route to Egypt.

“But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” Joseph went *from pit to prison to palace*... Though he was the victim of injustice, God was behind the scenes orchestrating his circumstances - positioning him to deliver a nation.

“Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh.”

Here’s the point, God moved on the hearts of kings, caused famines, used injustice, manipulated trouble - to position His people for a new and saving work.

Verse 14, “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people.

So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father of Shechem*.” God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham’s heirs, yet the only parcel Abraham himself ever owned was a burial plot. He was a wanderer at heart and died owning nothing but God’s promise.

“But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.”

The Egyptian dynasty under Joseph’s influence was sympathetic toward the Israelis, but that administration was ousted shortly after Joseph died. The succeeding dynasty was brutal. They feared Israel’s vast numbers. Their Pharaoh ordered a genocide of Hebrew infants.

So again God did a new work, verse 20, “At this time Moses was born and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.”

Exodus 3 recounts how a faithful mom, **Jochebed**, floated her baby boy down the Nile in a wicker basket. Her mini-ark got stuck in the reeds, and it just so happened that Pharaoh’s daughter found the child. She took him as her own and raised him in the palace.

Again, God was at work doing something new!

Verse 22, “**And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.**” Ironically, the Pharaoh who killed the Hebrew babies financed Moses’ education, even his room and board. Pharaoh raised the Hebrew deliverer in his own court.

The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, gives us some extra-biblical insights into Moses’ upbringing.

He says while growing up Moses was such a beautiful child, folks would go out of their way to walk by the nursery and see him. As a young man - Moses, the prince of Egypt - led a regiment of the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians and won a great victory.

Remember, later when God calls Moses at the burning bush to be His spokesman, he balks. *Recall his excuse?* Moses complained, "O my LORD, I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

But apparently he was selling himself short - for here Stephen says Moses was "*mighty in words,*" as well as *deeds*. Moses was a powerful, natural orator. It wasn't *communication skills* he lacked - it was *confidence*.

While, growing up in Egypt, Moses was popular, talented, intelligent, articulate, courageous. Moses was on top of the world, *but the world didn't satisfy him...*

"Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel."

Somehow Moses learned he was a Hebrew, and he sought to understand his roots. It's been said, "It's hard to know where you're going if you don't know who you are." Moses went to the Hebrew camp to *find himself...*

And as Moses walked among the Hebrews, he saw, "*one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.*" It was an instinctive reaction by Moses. He saw an innocent Hebrew being abused by his Egyptian taskmaster, and he took matters into his own hands.

He defended the man and the violent confrontation resulted in the death of the Egyptian. Moses thought the Hebrews would consider him their hero, but not so.

Verse 25, “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’” A mere 24 hours after the incident, and Moses’ vigilantism was public knowledge. Moses had to get out of Egypt.

“Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.”

At some point in Egypt, Moses must’ve sensed God’s call to deliver his people from slavery, but rather than wait on God’s timing and employ His methods, he took matters into his own hands. His botched efforts ended in disaster and his escape from Egypt. Yet despite man’s failure, God was about to do something new.

God gave Moses *a new life* in the land of Midian, *complete with a new wife*. He even bore two sons.

Verse 30 “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.” Moses’ life breaks down into three forty-year periods: The **first** forty was in Egypt, in the court of Pharaoh. The **second** forty was in the desert. And the **third**

forty was spent leading the nation back into the Promised Land.

It was DL Moody who noted, “Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh’s court thinking he was a somebody; forty years in the desert learning he was a nobody; and forty years as Israel’s leader showing what God can do with a somebody who knows he’s a nobody.” God had to humble a haughty Moses before He could use him.

It’s amazing that it took God 80 years to mold a Moses... so *why are we impatient?* Often, we run ahead of God and put our confidence in ourselves. We need to learn our lessons and wait on His timing.

Verse 31 puts Moses back at the burning bush, “When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘I am the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”

And Moses trembled and dared not look.” Notice, verse 30 says “an Angel of the Lord” appeared to Moses in the burning bush, but the voice that spoke identified Himself as God. That’s how Moses treated Him. He turned his face and trembled in reverence.

The Hebrew word translated “angel” simply means “messenger.” I believe more often than not, when “the Angel of the Lord” appears in the OT it’s none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus.

Stephen is implying here that it was actually his Lord Jesus who spoke to Moses from the burning bush!

'Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush."

Again, God worked in a new and unexpected way. But the stubbornness of the Hebrews was predictable.

God's savior was Moses, the deliverer the Hebrews rejected. And the mistake the Jews made with Moses, they were again repeating with the Savior Jesus!

Verse 36 continues, *"He brought them out after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years."*

And who is the *"He"* that brought them out? It's **the Angel of the Lord**. Stephen is saying Moses was sent and empowered by the Angel in the bush - *Jesus!* It was Jesus who delivered the Hebrews from Egypt!

Stephen is saying the Man the Jews of his day were rejecting was the hand behind Moses' miracles! **Jesus engineered the plagues, and parted the Sea, and sent manna from heaven, and brought water from the rock.**

Ironically, the traditional Jews Stephen is addressing were rejecting the same Jesus who had been so instrumental in the key moments of their history!

And again Stephen points to Jesus, verse 37, *“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’* This is a quote from **Deuteronomy 18**. The *“prophet like me”* Moses had predicted, was none other than our Lord Jesus.

“This is he (Moses) who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected.” The Angel, or messenger that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and gave him the Law on Mount Sinai was Jesus.

Yet the Jews rejected Him then, as they were now.

“And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ During the forty days Moses was atop the mountain with God receiving the Law, Israel’s faith had waned. They desired a god they could see. So they asked Aaron to forge an idol.

Yet this was the pinnacle of stubbornness, for the true God had just shown His superiority over Egypt’s idols!

The 10 plagues God used to pry loose the grip of Pharaoh was a direct assault on Egypt’s idols. God proved His superiority over the Nile-god when He turned the river to blood, the fertility goddess when he sent the frogs, the sky-god when it hailed, and Ra (the sun god) when the sky went

dark. He defeated a supposedly divine Pharaoh by the death of his firstborn

Now just a few days later, the Hebrews clamored for Aaron to make an idol - and take them back to Egypt. Their rebellion against Almighty God was astonishing.

“And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets...” Here’s an insight Stephen provides us that we don’t read about in the books of Moses...

Not only did those who exited Egypt bow to a golden calf, but they also worshipped the stars, *“the host of heaven.”*

They were into astrology, horoscopes, guidance from the stars. They exalted the creation above the Creator.

In verse 42, Stephen quotes Amos 5:25, *‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’”*

Moloch was the god of the Moabites. Remphan an Egyptian demon... It seems barbaric today, but Moloch was a hollowed-out statute that was stoked with fire, *like a wood-burning stove*. Moabite parents would place their babies in the image’s arms to appease his anger and attempt to coax from him a plentiful harvest.

We shutter at the callousness and brutality of the ancients. Yet modern folk are just as evil. Today's parents abort their babies on the arms of convenience, or career, or choice. Today, Moloch worship goes by names like "the right to choose" or "family planning."

And Stephen now speeds up his survey of Hebrew history... Israel's *idolatry* lingered for nearly a thousand years until God turned His people, Israel, over to *the world's most notorious idolaters*, the Babylonians.

In verse 43, Stephen mentions the Hebrews being carried away "*beyond Babylon.*" Jerusalem fell in 586 BC, and the people were deported to Babel, the birthplace of idolatry. They lived in exile for 70 years.

And this was the vaccination that cured the Hebrew nation of its idolatry. In Babel, they developed such an abhorrence for idols they never again followed them.

But upon their return to the land, the Hebrews had a new problem - *no longer idolatry, but now hypocrisy.*

Verse 44, "*Our fathers had the *tabernacle* of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David...*" Recall Stephen was accused of disrespecting the Temple. The Tabernacle had been its predecessor. To speak against either was an affront to God. And the Jews thought as long as God's Temple stood, they'd be assured of His blessing.

But Stephen says this is a false assumption. The Tabernacle stood until David, *but then God did a new thing*. In verse 46, David inquired about a Temple. David “**who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house.**” David was a man of war, thus God didn’t want him building the Temple. He left the task to his son.

Yet God taught David a bigger lesson. Stephen here quotes from Isaiah 66:1-2, “**However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’**” Stephen argues, and the prophets supported him, that God was never confined to a Temple. God is far bigger than any man-made Temple. God made the entire universe - the earth is His footstool. No structure can contain Him. And God will continue His work with or without a Temple.

Yet beware, confining God is still the goal of religion. Religion tries to limit God’s domain. It tells Him where He can and can’t go, or what He can and can’t do.

Religion confines God to only one place at one time: *the Temple on the Sabbath or church on Sundays*.

It puts God in a box. But the true God isn’t confined to any man-made system or structure. God is Lord over every venue and venture. He defies all limitations. Our God is bigger than anybody’s rules and traditions.

God does as He pleases, according to His Word and His will. He surely doesn’t *fit into any box*. And Stephen realizes

the Jews want Him to stay in their box, obey their tradition.
How dare God do something new?

Stephen speaks strongly to his accusers in verse 51, “**You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.**” The Jews were circumcised in the flesh, but uncircumcised in their “*heart and ears.*”

This means at heart they were insensitive rather than tender, and they were deaf to the voice of God.

Stephen calls them “*stiff-necked*” or unbending, inflexible. These Hebrew were resistant to God’s Spirit.

In verse 52, Stephen asks the Jewish leaders, “**Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?**” **And the answer was none of them.** Every time God *raised up* a prophet the nation tried to *beat him down*.

The Jews tried to stone Moses and assassinate Jeremiah, after which they tossed him into prison. They prevailed in killing Zechariah. And after sticking Isaiah in a tree trunk, they sawed the man of God in half.

The Hebrews hated God’s prophets while they were alive, yet once they were dead they revered them as mighty men of God. Israel was a nation of hypocrites.

Stephen says, “**And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One...**” “*The Just One*” was a title for Messiah. Stephen is saying the Jews killed the prophets of old who foretold the coming of Jesus.

And “now (you) have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.” The Angel of the Lord led Israel. Other passages tell us angels conveyed the Law to Moses. *Throughout their history, Israel had angelic help, yet they still didn’t obey God!* An angel could appear to some folks, and they’d still resist God.

And how did the crowd standing in the Temple that day respond to Stephen’s sermon? Verse 54, “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.” They snarled. The Jewish priests looked like pit bulls in clerical robes.

“But (Stephen), being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Suddenly, the physical peels back, and Stephen gets to peer into the eternal realm.

He sees God’s throne and is amazed. He beholds, “*The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*”

Mark 16:19 speaks of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. “After the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.” Notice, Jesus “*sat down*.” Every time the NT speaks of Jesus’ heavenly, high priestly ministry He is always seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Except here... The assumption is that Jesus was so enthused over the faith and faithfulness of Stephen He rose

to His feet to welcome him home. Stephen sees the Lord Jesus *"standing at the right hand of God."*

Verse 57, *"Then they (the Jews) cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord (the rushed him); and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul."*

Apparently, this Saul - *a young, upstart rabbi* - had been the ringleader of the opposition to Stephen.

"And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." In the throes of death, Stephen quoted Jesus in *His* final hour. He maintained a Christ-like attitude of mercy and forgiveness to the very end! What a witness He was!

It's been said, *"The blood of the martyrs becomes the seeds of the church."* It was true in Stephen's case. His death caused this Rabbi Saul to consider Christ...

This brings us to chapter 8, *"Now Saul was consenting to his death."* This was the *"Saul"* who'd later become *Paul - Christianity's greatest champion!*

Isn't it interesting, Stephen's Jewish executioner became Christianity's apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was part of Stephen's legacy. After Stephen's testimony, Rabbi Saul was haunted by what Stephen had said. He mulled it over. God used it to soften Saul's hard heart.

We're told Saul consented to Stephen's death. The word "*consenting*" can be translated as "*voting*." It implies that Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, who condemned Stephen to death.

We know that marriage was one of the requirements of being a member of the Sanhedrin. At the time, Paul may've been married and had kids. Yet in 1 Corinthians 7:8, he wished everyone was single, as he was.

What happened to Saul's wife? Most Bible teachers believe after he was converted, Paul was abandoned.

Even today, when an Orthodox Jew converts to Christianity, it's common for them to be renounced by their families. Paul paid a steep price to follow Jesus.

Verse 1 adds, "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Thousands of believers in Jesus now worshipped together in Jerusalem...

The fellowship was sweet, the miracles were mighty, the growth was explosive, the grace was attractive, the Spirit's filling was thrilling. It was high energy and holy harmony. The church in Jerusalem was a cool church!

Yet everyone was so buzzed with what God was doing *inside the Church* they'd forgotten those *outside the Church*. They were neglecting the command of Jesus to preach the Gospel not only to Jerusalem, but in Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The Church in Jerusalem had become a holy huddle. It was time to break up the *fellowship* and *ship out*.

In Acts 1:8, God said “Go...” - now in Acts 8:1 He has to shove the believers out of the nest and force them to fly. God uses a little persecution to get some houses on the market and move a few reluctant missionaries.

Certainly, fellowship is important, but never forget, we'll spend eternity with each other. We've only got a few short hours left to reach a fallen world for Jesus.

“And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” I'm sure Rabbi Saul couldn't shake Stephen's witness, so he lashed out against Stephen's faith.

Saul was proud and stubborn. He loved his tradition. And he couldn't believe God would do a new work.

Saul was asking, *how can a carpenter from Nazareth eclipse the prized institutions of Judaism? Why would God's Spirit make His home the hearts of Galilean fishermen, instead of the glorious, Jerusalem Temple?*

Saul was “*stiff-necked.*” Back in Acts 5 his rabbi, Gamaliel, said if this new movement was not of God it would go away. But it hadn't. It was multiplying and Saul couldn't entertain the thought he could be wrong.

So he mounts a ferocious attack. He “made havoc of the church.” The word translated “havoc” describes “a wild animal mangling its prey.” Saul went berserk with hatred. He turned

into a rabid dog. He spent every waking second plotting the extermination of Christians.

Verse 4, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” I’m sure when the persecution *intensified* the believers *wondered why...*

Some may’ve thought God had forsaken them; yet He had a reason. God was lighting a fire under the Church to move them out in the world with the Gospel.

That’s when “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” Notice, here’s another faithful deacon taking on greater responsibilities. Like Stephen, Philip goes from table waiter to evangelist.

He heads to Samaria. And recall Jesus paved the way when He saved the woman by the well and promised her living water. She, in turn, had witnessed to the entire town. In Jesus’ wake, John 4:39 tells us, “Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him.”

Jesus had visited Samaria, but this was new territory now for the Church. Samaritans weren’t considered Jews. They were interracial: *part Assyrian* and *part Hebrew*. Christianity is about to cross cultural and racial barriers for the first time. Jesus came for all men.

Verse 6, “And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.”

Similar miracles to those seen in Jesus' ministry now occur in Samaria. God is doing a new work among a new people group! God is always up to something new.

And notice, Philip was not an apostle, yet he worked miracles. Don't think God's power is reserved for a select few. *Who knows how God wants to use you?*

Verse 8, “And there was great joy in that city.” Yet verse 9 begins, “*But...*” For no work for God is without opposition and challenges - *including this revival in Samaria*. Next week we'll study the issues Philip faced.