

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Character Forged in Crisis

(Character sketches from Scripture)

The Doors Crisis Opens

(Acts 8; Looking at the life of Philip)

Study #6

Introduction: Water in the desert...

I read this week that back in 2008, the nation of Israel was teetering on the brink of collapse. The threat to Israel was not hostile neighbors. The problem was water.

According to a report by NASA (2016), from 1998-2012, Israel, Syria, Jordan, and much of the rest of the region suffered the worst drought in the Middle East in the last nine hundred years.¹

This long drought brought the nation's largest source of fresh water, the Sea of Galilee, within inches of a "black line" at which irreversible salt infiltration would flood the lake and ruin it forever.

It was a crisis of epic proportions - and the nation responded with behavioral changes (water conservation), structural changes (water treatment plants that recaptured 86% of drain water for use in irrigation),² and, especially, technology (desalination of seawater from the Mediterranean).

¹ The American space agency's researchers examined records of rings of trees across the Middle East to determine patterns of dry and wet years across a span of nine centuries. They concluded that the years from 1998 to 2012 were drier than any other period dating back at least nine hundred years.

² This is vastly more efficient than the second-most-efficient country in the world, Spain, which recycles 19 percent.

Before this mega-drought, desalination was such an expensive process that it wasn't considered practical for large-scale use.

But with pioneering research and new technology - much of it coming directly from Israel - the price of making seawater potable dropped dramatically. (At least a 2/3 cut in cost from the 1990's)

Fifteen years ago, Israel was running out of water. Now it has a surplus. A crisis led to progress. Or, as Winston Churchill said (quoting the Italian philosopher Machiavelli), "*Never let a crisis go to waste.*"

Modern Israeli leaders didn't let their crisis go to waste. They were prompted by their water crisis to create a culture and technology that provided clean water for its people.

A crisis moment prompted action (progress in the technology of desalination) that wouldn't have taken place without the crisis.

It is obvious that crisis opens doors that wouldn't have opened without the crisis. And, yes, people and groups with both good and bad agendas will use a crisis to push their own agendas forward. So, this isn't always a good thing.

But crisis can be leveraged for good. Our study of the Bible today tells us that God leverages crisis for good.

In the early days of Jesus' church, God used a crisis to put a man in a position to spread Jesus' message. This man used the door that opened because of crisis to do exactly that: He spread the good news.

I'm praying that we catch the vision of responding with creativity and sacrifice to our crises to take our own next steps with Jesus and that we never let a crisis go to waste.

The backstory from Acts

When we turn to the book of Acts this morning, the early church of Jesus was thriving.

It began with a bang on the Day of Pentecost and kept growing. As is common with things that grow, there were growing pains.

Desperately poor widows in the church were receiving help from others in the church in the form of daily food. Sadly, a group of Jewish widows from a Greek background were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. (Acts 6:1)

People complained about this to the apostles. The apostles told the congregation to select men to oversee this food supply ministry.

So, the congregation wisely selected seven *Hellenistic* men, as is obvious from their Greek-sounding names, to put over this service: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas.

With the seven in place to serve the widows, a crisis was averted - just as another one formed.

One of the seven table-servers, Stephen, preached a sermon in Jerusalem. In that sermon, Stephen called the Jews to repent of having put Jesus, the Messiah, to death. He called them to believe in Jesus.

They didn't. Instead, Stephen's audience stoned him to death for his bold witness.

That act of violence sparked a wide-scale persecution - a crisis! - against Jesus' followers³ that resulted in a scattering of the first believers in Jesus from Jerusalem.⁴

The scattering of the Christians from Jerusalem was a hard thing because the city was central to the founding of the church.

A terrible [and strategic] scattering...

It was the place where Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

It was the place from which the disciples were to leave to take the Gospel to the remotest part of the earth. It was in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost.

Talk about disruption. Just like that, persecution turned the early believers into displaced refugees.

But this persecution was also a crisis that God leveraged to get the church out of Jerusalem to spread the Gospel - just like Jesus had told them to do in the first place.

God didn't waste this crisis.

And yet, simply being scattered didn't guarantee what the Christians would do, once scattered.

Luke tells us that **[Acts 8:4] those who had been scattered went through places...** - and we wonder how that verse might have ended. **"They went through places..."**
...hiding from the authorities.
...keeping their heads down.
...reverting to their Jewish roots.

No. **[8:4]...those who had been scattered went through places preaching the word.**

The disciples faced a crisis and responded by using it as an opportunity for the Gospel. Exhibit A of those disciples who did this is the character we are sketching today: Philip.⁵

There are two disciples named "Philip" in the New Testament.

This Philip is NOT the Philip that Jesus chose to be one of His apostles.⁶ This Philip was one of the seven men who were chosen to oversee the provision of food to the widows in the early church.

And Acts, chapter 8, tells us of the adventures Philip had while serving Jesus because of the crisis brought about by persecution.

Philip Traveled Into Samaria (vv. 5-24)

³ Saul, a young man (later to become the Apostle Paul) watched approvingly as the crowd stoned Stephen to death. Saul then became the chief opponent of the church, attacking believers, and dragging them from their homes to jail. (Acts 8:3)

⁴ Acts 8:1 includes the words, **"except for the apostles."** Of the early Christians, only the apostles were not scattered from Jerusalem.

⁵ This Philip is the only person in the New Testament personally identified as an **"evangelist."** (Acts 21:8)

⁶ See the first chapter of John's Gospel for a couple of details about that Philip.

A Positive Response to the Gospel - in Samaria! (vv. 5-8)

Philip proclaimed Christ to the Samaritans (v. 5)

[Acts 8:5] Philip went down⁷ to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them.

It isn't surprising that we find Philip in Samaria. After all, while He was with them, Jesus had cast a vision to reach Samaria.

He did it first by leading a Samaritan woman at a well near the village of Sychar to faith and by then spending a couple of days evangelizing Samaritans in the village.

The other way was by explicitly telling His followers to be His witnesses...in Samaria (Acts 1:8).

Sure, they were to go to the friendly territory of "**Jerusalem and Judea**" and to the exotic "**remotest part of the earth.**"

But He also explicitly told them to go to the less welcoming and riskier land of Samaria.⁸

So, out of obedience to Jesus, Philip went outside his comfort zone. He left Judea and traveled north, landing in Samaria.

Now, we're proud of Philip for bringing the good news about Jesus to that hard place.

But we wonder. Will the Samaritans pay any attention to what he, a JEW, has to say?

Philip's message received! (v. 6-8)

⁷ Of course, by "**down**" Luke is referring to an elevation loss, as Samaria was north. Jerusalem sits at the highest elevation in Palestine.

⁸ By the first century, Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for centuries. They were separated by culture, race, and religion.

[6a] The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what was being said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

God enabled Philip to perform miracles in Samaria. He cast out demons. He healed those who couldn't walk.

As Luke records, **[8] So there was much rejoicing in that city.**

There was a large, general turning to Jesus. And we can't ignore the response of one particular Samaritan.

A BELIEVING Response in Samaria (vv. 9-13)

The influence of Simon, the magician, in Samaria (vv. 9-11)

[9] Now a man named Simon had previously been practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great...

Simon's nickname? "**The Power of God that is called Great!**"

This Simon was not a con artist. He didn't do card tricks. He was involved in something far darker. The kind of magic practiced by Simon was occult, demonic stuff.

And he had been impressing the Samaritans with these occult powers for a long time.

But when Philip rolled into town, he performed miracles by the power of the TRUE God.

The Samaritans saw in Philip's ministry a power greater than that of Simon the Magician (Latin: *Simon Magus*) and they believed in the Jesus Philip proclaimed.⁹

The influence of the Gospel, in Samaria, generally (v. 12)

⁹ Had Philip performed no miracles, the Samaritans might have concluded that Philip represented a power inferior to Simon.

[12] But when they believed Philip as he was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were being baptized.

The Samaritans turned from Simon to Jesus. We keep reading and find that Simon, himself, turned from demonism to Jesus.

The influence of the Gospel's power, on Simon (v. 13)

[13] Now even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was repeatedly amazed.

It's a big deal when anybody comes to faith in Jesus and receives the gift of eternal life. Today or in the first century, in San Antonio or anywhere else.

But it was a REALLY big deal when the Samaritans believed, because their turning to Jesus was the first non-Jewish turning to Jesus.

To this point, Christianity was 100%, Jewish. Now, Samaritans, who were only partly Jewish, have trusted Christ.

Word that the faith had spread to Samaria quickly reached the mother church in Jerusalem and the apostles had to see for themselves.

Full Inclusion for the Samaritans! (vv. 14-17)

[14] Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,¹⁰

[15] who came down and prayed for them that they would receive the Holy Spirit. [16] (For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

[17] Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.¹¹

¹⁰ This is the last mention of the Apostle John in the book of Acts.

¹¹ We are to understand that the reception of the Spirit here was marked by the same external manifestations as had marked the Spirit's arrival on the first disciples at Pentecost - i.e., tongues, miracles, healings, exorcisms.

What was happening here was so historic that God arranged for a second, *Samaritan Pentecost* to validate that this turning to Jesus was legit - and Peter and John saw it happen.

They can now go back and tell the church in Jerusalem, "*Jesus brought THEM into life in Jesus just like He brought US into life in Jesus!*"

And had this NOT happened, there would have been a Jewish church, and a secondary Samaritan church, and, eventually, a secondary Gentile church.

But with the Samaritans receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit exactly as the Jews did, it was clear that there was one church. Anyone who believes in Jesus is welcomed into life in Jesus. All who believe are fully included in the church of Jesus.

And, again, if the church had not suffered the crisis of scattering, I think it is doubtful that Philip - or anybody - would have soon voluntarily gone to Samaria to spread the Gospel.

God didn't waste the crisis of persecution. He scattered the believers, giving them the opportunity to spread the word. And Philip didn't waste the crisis, either. He leveraged it to go to Samaria!

***The focus of today's message will continue to be on Philip, so we are skipping over the section dealing with Simon the Magician. However, for those interested, I have included some thoughts about that section in an Appendix at the end of the written manuscript.

While things wrapped up in Samaria, God sent the subject of today's character sketch, Philip, on another crisis-prompted mission. **Philip Traveled Toward Africa (vv. 26-40)**

Philip Converges with an Ethiopian (vv. 26-29)

Philip, re-commissioned (v. 26)

[26] But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get ready and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)¹²

Philip departed Samaria, walked to Jerusalem, and then headed out of Jerusalem on the Gaza highway, traveling south.

Not far out of town, he met up with a man who was on his way to his home back in Africa. Watch what this man is doing.

An Ethiopian, seeking (vv. 27-28)

[27] So he got ready and went; and there was an Ethiopian¹³ eunuch, a court official of Candace,¹⁴ queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

This man was a high-ranking government official. Again, he was **[27] in charge of all [Candace’s] treasure.**¹⁵

He was a Gentile by both birth and culture. But **[27] he had come to Jerusalem to worship.** He had converted to Judaism and was someone the Jews called a “God-fearer” or “proselyte.”

He was just returning from a time of worship at the temple in Jerusalem and was traveling by chariot.¹⁶ He’s just at the start of a five-month long journey back to Africa.

¹² Gaza and Jerusalem were separated by about sixty miles of desert. The land between Gaza and Jerusalem was not “desert” in the sense that the land around Pecos, Texas is desert (whew!). It was simply uninhabited, deserted.

¹³ Ethiopia *then* is not the same thing as Ethiopia *now*. Biblical and Ancient Near East scholar, Edwin Yamauchi, believes Ethiopia was the region now known as Sudan, about one thousand miles from the Mediterranean. Also known as Nubia.

¹⁴ The Ethiopians held that their king was the child of the sun and was, thus, too sacred a person to carry out the functions of royalty. So, the actual tasks of ruling were performed on his behalf by the queen-mother, whose title (not her proper name) was “Candace.” (as “Pharaoh” was the title of the Egyptian king, and “Caesar” that of the Roman emperor)

¹⁵ He was a eunuch, the type of man typically put in charge of a king’s harem. Eunuchs frequently rose to governmental prominence.

¹⁶ Royal chariots used for long-distance travel sat three people, two passengers and a driver. I assume that there was a driver and/or a guard with this man.

Philip, who was catching up to the Ethiopian, got word from the Holy Spirit (v. 29) to join the chariot, which he did.

A Believing Response in the Desert (vv. 30-38)

An Ethiopian needs guidance (vv. 30-34)

Philip’s question (v. 30)

As Philip approached, he overheard the Ethiopian reading, which means that he was reading out loud, the common practice in the ancient world.¹⁷ Luke tells us that he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Philip asked this man if he understood what he was reading.

Well, the Ethiopian knew what he knew, and he knew what he didn’t know. And he knew that he didn’t know what the prophet Isaiah was talking about.

The Ethiopian’s confusion (vv. 31-33)

[31] And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Here’s what he was reading.

[Acts 8:32] Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

**“HE WAS LED LIKE A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND LIKE A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.**

**[33] “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL DESCRIBE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN AWAY FROM THE EARTH.”**

That passage comes from Isaiah 53. Jews have always seen Isaiah 53 as one of several of Isaiah’s “*Servant Passages*.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Reading aloud enhances retention. It allows the reader to “hear” the author. The reader takes in with both eyes and ears when words are read aloud.

The Jews believed that these passages described the suffering of either Isaiah himself or the experiences of Israel.

They didn't think that it was talking about the Messiah, because the Jews couldn't wrap their minds around the thought of a Messiah who suffered.

The Ethiopian was reading the text, but he didn't "get it."

A request for insight (v. 34)

[34] The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

So, here's Philip, a lifelong Jew who would have had a wealth of knowledge about what we call the Old Testament.

Remember, too, that Philip was a recent convert to faith in Jesus and had heard the apostles' teaching in Jerusalem.

And as Philip listened to the words of Isaiah, he knew that the Person being described here was Jesus.

So, he was able to explain Isaiah's words through a Jesus grid.

Philip gives guidance (v. 35)

[35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

I suspect that Philip marched through the whole chapter. I imagine Philip pointing out every place in Isaiah 53 where the life of Jesus parallels the words of the prophet.

They were on a long trip, so he had time to talk about other Old Testament passages that spoke of the life and ministry of the Messiah. Philip would have tied all of that into the life story of Jesus.

He would have told the Ethiopian all that had happened during Jesus' three-year ministry. He certainly would have told this man about Jesus' death and resurrection.

Well, after some time of listening to Philip's presentation of Jesus, the Ethiopian, who has been listening intently, got it. He understood what Isaiah was writing about.

While Philip was explaining, this man has come to faith in Jesus.

Full Inclusion for the Ethiopian! (vv. 36-38)

[36] As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

So, Philip must also have told this guy about baptism.

He would have told him about all those in Jerusalem who had believed in Jesus and had been baptized, and about how all of those who had just recently believed in Jesus in Samaria had been baptized.

It was perfectly fitting for the Ethiopian to point to water at some desert oasis and request baptism.

He believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He had come to believe in Jesus for salvation while Philip told the stories.¹⁹

Thus, the question.

But what an odd way to frame the question. Not, "*I want to be baptized*" or "*Baptize me now!*" but "***What prevents me from being baptized?***"

Well, remember who this man was...

¹⁸ There are several of them in the book of Isaiah.

¹⁹ Harrison, Bock, and most other commentators, take verse 37 as a gloss that was added later.

He wasn't quite a Jew. He was a proselyte, and there were restrictions on how fully a proselyte could participate in Judaism. "*Can I, a non-Jew, partake of life in Jesus?*"

And he was a eunuch. There were limits as to how fully he could participate in Judaism, because there were limits placed on eunuchs. "*Can I, a man, but not fully a man, enter fully into life in Jesus?*"

Listen to his question: "*Am I going to be accepted in Jesus, just as I am? Will there be limits placed on my participation in this faith, like there is in Judaism? You've told me, Philip, that baptism symbolizes full inclusion. Is there anything preventing me from being baptized? Am I welcomed? Am I really 'in'?*"

And, hallelujah, there's no hesitation.

[38] And he ordered that the chariot stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

By that baptism, Philip obeyed Jesus' Great Commission, baptized a proselytized Jewish African eunuch, and fully welcomed a man who wasn't fully welcomed anywhere into life in the Messiah.²⁰

Again, because of the scattering caused by the crisis of persecution, Philip was commissioned to go to another non-Jewish person and introduce him to Jesus, just as he had when he went to the Samaritans.

As we close, I'll highlight the similarities in the stories of Philip and the Ethiopian and Philip with the Samaritan AND see what Philip's story says to us, today.

Conclusion:

Gospel hospitality...

²⁰ Several commentators note that in the ancient world, Ethiopia was regarded by Asia and the Near East as "*the end of the earth.*" The inclusion of this episode may have been Luke's intentional tie-in with Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Although, clearly, the gospel continued to expand as Acts continues.

Remember. The Samaritans believed the message that Philip brought about Jesus. And the one who believes in Jesus has eternal life. Then, the Samaritans were baptized, which is the outward act someone takes to confirm that they believe.

But God did something else to give His stamp of approval to the Samaritans' full inclusion in life in Jesus. He put out the Welcome Mat by gracing the Samaritans with the same spiritual giftings that had occurred on the Day of Pentecost. That's Gospel hospitality.

The apostles witnessed it. So, they could report it. "*Samaritans aren't second-class citizen Christians. They are just as fully included in life in Jesus as we are.*"

Any wall that had been separating Jew and Samaritan was torn down in Jesus.

And remember. The Ethiopian heard and believed Philip's explanation of Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus.

His question to Philip was a normal one for a man who wasn't welcomed fully as a Jew or as a man. "*Can even I be baptized? Is there even a place for me?*"

The answer was a resounding "*Yes!*" as Philip baptized him, giving the Ethiopian full assurance that he was fully included.

We see that Philip's adventures are both fulfillments of Jesus' command to be His witnesses outside of Jerusalem and Judea. Take the message everywhere. Invite everyone. All are welcome.

We see all of that in Acts 8, and we celebrate it. We also apply it by welcoming anyone who comes to Jesus.

When you are out to help a beginner in Jesus, welcome her with open arms. Accept him as warmly and as well as God does.

Give the newbie no reason to doubt that they are in. Assure them that they are accepted, both by your love and by your continuing invitations to them to grow.

Direct that new believer to this: **[1 John 5:13] These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

And lead him or her to baptism. Baptism is an important growth step in Jesus.

Baptism symbolizes the journey from death to life. It is the act that publicly declares, *"I have decided to follow Jesus."* (Yes, we'll be having an opportunity for baptism at some point this fall.)

There is a lifetime of more growth steps that a beginner will need to take on his Jesus-following journey. Help him take those steps.

You've been following Jesus longer than the newcomer has - by years or by days. Help him.

Never wasting a crisis...

Finally, let's learn from Philip's experiences and from God's use of persecution to never waste a crisis.

God allowed the persecution that led to the scattering. Jesus had warned His disciples that persecution would come. But He leveraged the crisis of persecution by providing opportunities for His scattered people to spread the word. He didn't waste the crisis.

Philip became a refugee, thrust out of Jerusalem for his belief in Jesus. He didn't waste that crisis, but put it to good use for God, telling Samaritans and an Ethiopian about life in Jesus.

Can we take what we have seen today and aim to adopt new attitudes and new ways of thinking about challenges and trials and hardships?

The daily prayer app put out by the Voice of the Martyrs put out this request yesterday: **Pray that persecution will embolden Christians to continue their witness for Christ in Nepal.**

I prayed that prayer yesterday for my brothers and sisters in Nepal.

And since yesterday haven't been able to NOT pray that I will be emboldened to continue my witness for Christ by whatever hardships, of whatever magnitude, may come my way.

The early disciples were scattered and didn't hide from the authorities, keep their heads down, or abandon Jesus. They were scattered and spread the word about Jesus.

The call to us, today, is to no longer view crises as nuisance to complain about, but as door openers to shine for Jesus. So, for heaven's sake, let's never waste a crisis!

Philip put his crisis (Persecution! Scattered!) to good use by sharing Jesus. How might you put the crises of your life to Kingdom use, today?

APPENDIX

- *The spiritual condition of Simon (Magus)*

There is much discussion about the spiritual condition of Simon the Magician (i.e. - whether or not he was saved).

Some who argue that he was not saved make much of the fact that Simon didn't personally pray after Peter's rebuke. They think that Simon wasn't interested in prayer.

BUT it is also possible to see Simon's request for prayer as a humble petition from a believer that the apostles pray for him to receive fresh cleansing from God.

And many doubt that he was saved because of the enormity of his error of asking to buy with money the ability to gift the Holy Spirit to others.

BUT his misunderstanding is not a shock when we remember his former life as a satanically empowered magician.

Plus, what Peter said about Simon being in the **"bondage of iniquity"** is best taken as a comment about Simon needing to enter more fully into the freedom that Christ brings and NOT as a comment that he wasn't saved.

BUT what believer is free of all bondage to sinful practices? In Acts 19:19, believers in the city of Ephesus burned 50,000 pieces of silver's worth of magic books two to three years after they had come to faith.

The best evidence that he was saved is that Luke tells us that **"he believed"** (8:13) and was baptized (Philip certainly counted Simon among the saved).

Lots of Bible scholars straddle the fence on this one, though.

Stanley Toussaint, lists seven reasons why he believes Simon Magus was not saved, and then, in a remarkable moment of candor, says, *"But we can't be sure. He might be saved."*

Darrell Bock interacts with several theologians in his commentary, all of whom represent different views - and then concludes that Luke leaves the matter open-ended.

Me? I think that Simon was clearly a flawed man, was clearly a beginner in following Jesus, and was clearly a brother in Christ.

- *Samaria vs. Israel*

The tension between Israel and Samaria began when the kingdom of Israel divided north and south (into Judah in the south; Israel in the north), following the reign of Solomon.

The southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were regularly ruled by direct descendants of David, while the northern ten tribes were ruled by a succession of dynasties not related to the Davidic line.

The tension became a permanent rift when the Assyrian Empire defeated the northern kingdom in 722 BC. The Assyrians intermarried with the Jews, creating a Jewish/Gentile race that was rejected by the pure-blooded Jews of the south (Judea) and north (Galilee).

The relationship was so bad that when the Samaritans offered to help the Jews who were rebuilding the broken-down Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem (in the days of Ezra), the Jews would not allow the Samaritans to help. The Samaritans responded to that slight by erecting a rival temple on their own sacred hill, Mt. Gerizim.

During the days of Jesus and the apostles, the hatred of the Samaritans by Jews was intense. When traveling between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south, Jews would cross the Jordan River twice to enter the Decapolis to avoid polluting their feet on Samaritan soil.

Jesus, though, didn't observe this custom. In John 4, he passed through Samaria (John tells us, **"He HAD TO pass through Samaria"**) and spoke with a woman at Jacob's well. The woman placed her faith in Jesus and became the first evangelist to the Samaritans. John tells us that **[John 4:39] many of the Samaritans believed in Him** after having heard the testimony of the woman at the well.

Of course, the disciples - including Peter and John - were with Jesus when He stopped off in Samaria.

No doubt Jesus' time there not only prepared some of the Samaritans to receive the Gospel through Philip, it prepared Peter and John for what they would see in Acts 8: A Samaritan revival.

- *The post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit in Samaria*

When people put their faith in Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit.

Yet that is clearly NOT what happened in Samaria. The Samaritans believed in Jesus. Days passed and THEN they received the Holy Spirit in the presence of the apostles Peter and John.

So, does a person now, in 2023, subsequent to trusting Christ, need to receive the Holy Spirit as a separate act? Is THAT normative?

And if not, if it is normative for a person to receive the Spirit when he believes, why didn't it work that way for the Samaritans in Acts 8?

This much is clear: The New Testament says so frequently that it could go without saying that a believer in Jesus HAS the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

Consider these verses:

[Romans 8:9] However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (i.e. - the Holy Spirit), he does not belong to Him.

[1 Corinthians 6:19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

[Galatians 4:6] Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

And beyond apostolic teaching (see also 1 Corinthians 12), there is apostolic practice.

In Acts 10, there is no separation of time between salvation and the reception of the Spirit at the home of Cornelius, the Gentile.

In fact, nowhere else in Acts (besides here) can we point to an example of people being saved and then receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Some may point to Acts 19 as an example of a post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit. But the disciples that Paul found in

Ephesus were not Christians, having only been baptized into John's baptism of repentance.

They only knew that One was coming after John. As soon as they heard about Jesus, they believed, were saved, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, as is the norm.)

So, why the separation of days between FAITH and RECEPTION OF THE SPIRIT in Samaria?

It was to validate to the rest of the church (especially to those in Jerusalem) that the Body of Christ, the church, is One Church, not a Jewish church and a Samaritan church.

In Acts 11, there is another Pentecost-like experience when the Gentiles in Cornelius' home come to faith in Jesus, proving that there is not a Jewish/Samaritan church and a Gentile church. There is one church.

Michael Greene sees the delayed reception of the Spirit as a "*divine veto on schism*" in the infant church, a schism which could have slipped almost unnoticed into the Christian fellowship, as converts from the two sides of the Samaritan curtain found Christ without finding each other. That schism would have been the denial of the one baptism and all it stood for.

What happened in Samaria defined the future of the church. It drew a line in the sand that said, "*Anyone who crosses that line by placing faith in Jesus is united with every other person who has crossed that line. You may be Jewish or Samaritan. It doesn't matter.*"

And, speaking bluntly, today, you may be left- or right-handed, blue- or brown-eyed, rich or poor, young or old. It doesn't matter.

You may hold to any or no particular political persuasion. You may be of any ethnicity. You may be a patriot or a pacifist.

You may be an athlete, a millionaire, a computer geek or homeless. You may have a shaved head or long hair, be all tattooed and pierced, a graduate school student or not.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are united with every other person who has placed faith in Jesus. And you are welcome here!