

# Journey with Jesus – Part 2

By Alberta Ecker (via Dan Rogers' Sermon)

As we brought out in Part 1, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and disciples who were in Jerusalem to empower and enable them to testify and witness to the good news of his life, his death, his resurrection and the message of salvation and the gift of eternal life. The good news was to begin at Jerusalem, then go out to the rest of Judea then Samaria then to the ends of the earth. We'll pick up Dan Rogers sermon in **Acts 6**.

**Acts 6** introduces us to Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He is named first in the list of seven men chosen to distribute food to the Jewish widows and Hellenistic Jewish widows living in Jerusalem. The Apostles had instructed the brethren to choose men who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom (**verses 1-3**).

**Acts 6** *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> **Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them***

Stephen, **the first on the list**, is also described as being full of faith (**verses 4-5**).

*<sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup> **This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.***

So here is a disciple who is known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom and is full of faith. Stephen is further described in **Verse 8** as a man full of God's grace and power.

**Acts 6:6-8**

<sup>6</sup> They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup> So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. <sup>8</sup> **Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.**

Stephen displayed these gifts from God in the way he lived, and in the way he did great miraculous signs and wonders among the people. It would certainly follow that opposition would arise. At this point in the story Stephen is arrested due to false accusations. But this opposition and arrest would lead to a mighty and powerful testimony before the Sanhedrin.

In Acts 7 Stephen rehearses the history of Israel to the Sanhedrin. At first they listen to Stephen because after all, he's telling them their shared history. And as it says in **Acts 6:15** Stephen's face was like the face of an angel, his face reflected his faith and conviction, he knew what he was going to talk about and he knew the history of his people, Israel.

<sup>15</sup> **All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.**

All the people gathered there with Stephen shared that same history of Israel. Stephen rehearses this history in all its glory and pathos. But then he comes down to the reality and hypocrisy of those who are sitting before him. He continues to speak the truth but now it is the truth about them and it makes them furious.

### **Acts 7:51-53 and 58**

<sup>51</sup> **"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— <sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."**

<sup>57</sup> **At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

The person who would stand guard over the clothes of people who were doing the stoning was a person of influence and authority. His reputation and presence kept others away from the clothes lying at his feet. This young man named Saul was already someone to be reckoned with.

The stoning of Stephen was a very bad thing that was going to bring about a very good thing.

### **Acts 8:1**

***and Saul was there, giving approval to his death. (The Church Persecuted and Scattered) On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.***

The very day that Stephen was martyred a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. **Where were they going to go? They were first scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.** While the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, it says in verses 4 and 5 the disciples were scattered and they preached the word wherever they went.

### **Acts 8:4**

***<sup>4</sup> Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.***

Here the scripture reveals that the disciples are preaching and spreading the word throughout Judea and Samaria *even before and ahead of the Apostles.*

### **Acts 8:5-6**

***<sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.***

***<sup>6</sup> When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.***

These verses focus our attention on the work of Philip. Remember in Chapter 6 Philip is one of the seven chosen along with Stephen to serve the widows. He is a man *known to be full of the Spirit and faith*. The main point here is that Philip is not an Apostle, he's a deacon and he's in Samaria

spreading the word along with the other scattered disciples even before and ahead of the Apostles also.

**.Acts 8:14**

***<sup>14</sup> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them***

The "apostles in Jerusalem" hear that the Samaritans had accepted the word. The point again is that it was not the apostles who went to Samaria and preached the word, it was the scattered disciples and the work of Philip that brought the word to Samaria. So can we say that the work of spreading the gospel was to be done only through the Apostles? Or maybe it was only the 120 who had received the Spirit on Pentecost. Obviously, No!

God makes it clear here that every disciple who has received the Spirit is enabled and empowered to share the whole enchilada, so to speak, enabled to share the whole gospel. These disciples were not empowered to give the Holy Spirit though, that is one reason why Peter and John went to Samaria, **verse 15-17.**

***<sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.***

So we see that the leaders followed the spreading of the word. The apostles go to Samaria to legitimize what is going on, to pray over what is going on, and to bless what is going on, and to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the new disciples.

As Philip is spreading the word in Samaria he encounters an Ethiopian eunuch. Remember, eunuchs could not go into the temple or even inside the walls around the temple. There was no place set aside on the temple grounds where eunuchs could gather. Eunuchs were persecuted, discriminated against, considered outsiders.

We all know this story. The Ethiopian eunuch is riding along in his chariot reading a scroll from the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit directs Philip to run

up to the chariot and listen to the eunuch as he reads from Isaiah. Philip begins with this passage in Isaiah and tells the eunuch the good news about Jesus.

Here is a man from Ethiopia whose life is transformed by Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that now all people are his, all people have access to him. It makes no difference if a person is born into the cast system in India, or one who suffered from apartheid in So. Africa, all peoples everywhere are loved and have equal access to Jesus and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Saul is converted in Acts 9 and in **Acts 9:31** it says:

### **Acts 9:31**

***<sup>31</sup> Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.***

God is very gracious, he knows when to apply pressure, when to allow persecution, when to scatter, and when to give times of peace. We just need to rest in the Lord and let him lead and direct our lives as we are strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

### **Acts 10:1-2**

***At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. <sup>2</sup> He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly***

God brings the gentiles into the body of Christ. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is the kind of gentile that the Apostles would have never associated with in any way. They would have never eaten with a gentile like Cornelius; they would not have considered entering his home. But the Holy Spirit is leading the church in the direction of inclusion of all the families on earth. This new direction would be physically and spiritually challenging for the Jews but it would turn into a radical phenomenon.

### **Acts 11:19-20**

***<sup>19</sup> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and***

***Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.***

Here there is further reference to the persecution and scattering that was connected to Stephen's martyrdom. These scattered believers went out but some of them only gave the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to Jews. But some went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks. News of this reaches Jerusalem so they send out Barnabas who goes to Antioch then on to Tarsus to bring Saul back to Antioch to teach the great number of new believers. It's here in Antioch that these new believers are called "Christians" for the first time. Let's also remember that these Greeks in Antioch would have been uncircumcised gentiles. So it is uncircumcised gentiles who are first called "Christians."

The leaders in Jerusalem did not rush off to Antioch, so who was leading the way? It was those scattered disciples who were full of the Spirit and faith in the Lord Jesus. They were being led by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in **Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch**. Did these disciples have to send to Jerusalem to get a license first? Did they have to check with HQ to be sure they could witness to the love and salvation given to them through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ? No!

Antioch became a significant Christian church for the early Christians. It was very diverse in its culture. Christianity was breaking loose and spreading out from there, going out to the gentiles. Antioch was a generous church to those in Judea and Jerusalem. It's ironic that from Antioch you have gentiles sending aid to the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem. Antioch is quite a healthy church, proclaiming and spreading the gospel. Of course, Saul (who becomes Paul in Chapter 13) becomes their main teacher; he keeps them grounded in the Scriptures.

#### **Acts 13:1-4**

***In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on***

***them and sent them off. <sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.***

Here is a diverse group of leaders in the church at Antioch, which becomes more or less Headquarters for the Gentile work. From here the Holy Spirit sets aside Barnabas and Saul to do the work to which he has called them. Leadership in the New Testament is always plural. This early work is done through team leadership. But note how diverse the leadership is in Antioch: first there is Barnabas who is from Cyprus, he's Jewish but he grew up on an Island in the Mediterranean filled with Gentiles, there is Simeon called Niger (the word Niger means black) he was obviously a black man, then Lucius of Cyrene (Cyrene is in North Africa and was a part of the African Christian movement in the early church) then there is Manaen, whose name origin is Turkish. Last but not least is Saul, a Hellenistic Jew, who is multi-lingual from the city of Tarsus, which was in the area of Asia at that time. So here are two Jews (one from Cyprus and one from Asia) , two men of African descent (both black men) and one Turk.

In our third and final sermon in this series from Dan Rogers' notes, we will focus on the church at Antioch. We will bring out the **characteristics** of Antioch and **the work** among the gentiles that went out from there **and why** it became the Headquarters church for the gentile work.