

Early Christian Evangelism

Notes for 22 Apr

Jim Cunningham

Read: [Acts 8:3-40](#)

A: Verse 3

Can you assess the likely impact that Saul's imprisonment/persecution of Christians had on the early church?

B: Verses 4-24

The proclamation of the Messiah in conjunction with 'signs and wonders' appeared to be a successful evangelistic formula in a city in Samaria. Can you speculate as to why the city's inhabitants were so ready to receive the messianic message?

Simon the Sorcerer

This gentleman appeared to have magic powers which gave him status and influence among the people of the city. I expect it brought him considerable wealth also. However, he was impressed by the powers which Philip expressed in his ministry. Simon "was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place".

Simon was a man who had 'magic powers'. Was something lacking?

Peter and John made the trip from Jerusalem to the city to lay hands on them as they had not received the Holy Spirit. Did the Holy Spirit not lead them to an understanding that Jesus was the Messiah?

If I examine my own personal experience, I expect that I never reached the stage where a 'Peter and John' laid their hands on me. Have I not received the Holy Spirit?

Simon, I suspect, had an eye for a business opportunity because Philip's unique power trumped his sorcery. He was even willing to pay for it as a man of means.

- Is Christianity transactional?
- If there wasn't hope of eternal life, would you still be a follower of Christ?
- Did Philip blunder in baptising him?
- Was the language which Peter and John use to chide him justified?

C: Verses 25-39

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Compare [Deut 23:1](#) and [Lev 21:20](#) with [Isa 36:3-5](#) and [Acts 8](#). Discuss!

The Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem to worship.

It appears there had been a community of Jews in and around present-day Ethiopia, 4 or 5 centuries before the birth of Christ. The Eunuch may have come from that tradition. This sub-Saharan, black -skinned African was obviously learned and well read, due to the influence of an olive-skinned semitic tribe, at a time when my own white-skinned, iron-age ancestors, were informing the Romans where to put their writing, law, roadbuilding, language, grand building designs and culture.

- Why do you think the Ethiopian was ripe for conversion to the Jewish Christian sect?
- He asked for baptism. Why do you think he was ready, unlike Simon?