

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

**# 7 Topic: "The Church Scattered" -- with commentary**

**Acts 8:1 – 3; "The Church Persecuted and Scattered;" Acts 8:4 – "Philip in Samaria;" Acts 8:9 – 25; "Simon the Sorcerer;" Acts 8:26 – 40, "Philip and the Ethiopian."**

**The purpose of the Book of Acts** is to record the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Vision and Ministry of Peter and Paul. **Today's study is the 7th of 20 lessons.**

**A contextual statement:**

Interestingly, *The Interpreter's Bible* makes the following observation. In the book of Acts, "The Lord is not returned, but in the meantime the word of God is being carried on by the church. The Gentile mission is itself the eschatological action of God." (*The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1971. p. 730.)

This I want to affirm as our perspective. **We will study this book from the perspective of the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit.** This puts us out on the cusp of a deep and foreboding spiritual hole that is eternally deep. The Holy Spirit is that intuited presence within us that urges us to "Jump." "Jump!" To take this leap of faith means to surrender ourselves to the eternal deeps. The discovery, to which I can personally testify, is that this deep, dark, mysterious hole is the place where God lives within us. As we lose control of everything— our-selves, our relationships to neighbor and to God— then we can discover that God really does sustain us. But the experience is like falling, and it is not entirely comfortable. But it works.

**Read the assigned scripture.**

**For those following the Acts chart**, this is the last session in the larger context of "The Activity of the Holy Spirit: Peter's Story." Next week we'll begin the second context concerning "Peter's Vision and Work: Moving Out Into The Greek/Gentile World." Happy endings and beginnings.

**PLEASE REMEMBER: Gut Trip Analysis means to take seriously your own experience. When the instruction is to use Gut Trip Analysis, this means to keep asking yourself, what is the human experience that is being presented here in scripture. Push yourself hard to think this way. This is the fundamental of using Gut Trip Analysis.**

**I. Acts 8:1 – 3, "The Church Persecuted and Scattered."**

**A. Use one of your maps in the back of your Bible to observe where (vs. 5) "Judea and Samaria" are located. What are the implications that can be drawn for this exercise?**

**WS:** *The Interpreter's Bible* commentary observes that the people of Samaria were similar to the Judean Jews in their worship of God and in following the teachings of the Torah. However, they did not believe in the resurrection, and were thought to be inferior to the Jews. They were a "step toward Gentiles." (*The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary of the Bible*. p. 793.)

## II. Acts 8: 4 – 8; “Philip in Samaria.”

### A. Do a background check on Philip. Share your finding here.

**WS:** Philip was a Hellenist. He believed in a missionary effort that “began in the shadows of the Temple to be the essence of Christianity.” (*The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary of the Bible*. p. 793.)

### B. Vs. 5b: “. . . proclaimed the Christ.” Using Gut Trip Analysis, what is the experience of proclaiming Christ? (Note that this same statement is made concerning Peter in vs. 25.)

**WS:** The Gut Trip Analysis of the “Good News” is in the affirmation that **All is Good** (God don’t make no junk!) The **present** moment is a gift—this is why it is the “present.” Our **past** is forgotten, and our **future** is an Open Possibility. This is the experience of what Good News is.

### C. Vss. 6 thru 8 concern the miraculous, healings, and demon exorcising. Give us a Gut Trip Analysis of what is going on. (A review of the material in session # 4 will be helpful here.)

**WS:** To understand these events as supernatural events is to dismiss their profound significance. First, these events are deeply spiritual and can be used as a mirror to interpret our own profound experiences of life. (A Salina County prisoner who spiritually awakens that she/he is not a victim but a victor is an example of a profound spiritual healing, but nothing supernatural.) When we read such things as these in the Bible it is necessary to suspend our disbelief, and understand them as the demonstration of potentiality—if it can happen it will. Use them to interpret our own deeply spiritual experiences.

## III. Acts 8:9 – 25; “Simon the Sorcerer.”

### A. Simon gets in trouble with Peter, but not for doing magic. In particular, see vs. 23 and 24. What’s going on here?

**WS:** Simon is noted in traditional resources as an arch heretic. The commentaries observe that he is the Father of Gnosticism (believe in secret knowledge that leads to salvation), and demanded loyalty to himself. Some thought of him as a divine being that used magic to draw attention to himself. Peter is upset with Simon because he attempted to purchase his position within the Christian community. Even today, those who seek to purchase positions of authority within the church are accused of “simony.” Peter reminds Simon that the power of God “is a gift of God.”

## IV. Acts 8:26 – 40, “Philip and the Ethiopian.”

### A. These verses tell one of the most interesting stories in the book of Acts. First, note the place in which the story takes place, note the characters involved. Reflect on the reading in Isaiah 53:7 and 8 that the Eunuch is reading. Why is this important information to know in the context of this story?

**WS:** It is important to note that a eunuch is a castrated male. In biblical times, males who worked for high ranking women were castrated so as not to be sexually attracted to their employer. This eunuch is the treasurer for Queen Candace of

Ethiopia; obviously, the Eunuch is a gentile.

The characters involved are an angel, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Philip and Peter.

It is not coincidental that the Eunuch is reading a passage from Isaiah 53: 7 and 8.

1) Isaiah is the prophet who foretold the down fall of the Jewish nation because of their disobedience in taking the *Good News* of God's love to the gentile world.

Essentially, the Jews failed in the task because they spent their time defending themselves from the people from whom they took the land in the first place. In the Exile, God achieved God's purpose by sending The People of God out into the Gentile lands of Syria and Babylonia. During this time, the Jews never lost their identity nor their beliefs and were able to achieve God's purpose in this manner that God wanted to achieve all along.

2) This passage in Isaiah identifies the suffering servant who will be led to slaughter like a lamb or sheared like a ewe. It clearly intimates how this is to be done not by a legal trial (deprived of justice), by sentenced to death and buried (in the earth.)

There are some interpreters of this passage who are on the out side of our faith tradition that believe the experience of Isaiah was entirely written to predict the Christian Messiah/Christ, and that this has no relationship to the nationally events of the Jews. While these events can mirror such a relationship to Jesus Christ, traditional faith-history acknowledges that the figure of the suffering servant is poetic metaphor and represents the Nation of Israel.

**B. Vs. 35b, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. Use Gut Trip Analysis to identify the Good News.**

**WS:** The Gut Trip Analysis of the "Good News" is in the affirmation that **All is Good** (God don't make no junk!) The **present** moment is a gift (this is why it is a "present.") Our **past** is forgotten, and our **future** is an open possibility. This is an experience of what Good New is.

**C. Vs. 39b and 40, what happened to Philip. Be sure to think experientially and relationally using Gut Trip Analysis.**

**WS:** What in the world happened here? Simon just disappears to reappear somewhere else. This reminds me of the transportation methods used by the Tibetan monks who teletransport themselves from place to place. Again, this is one of those passages that it is easy to get caught up into supernaturalism. It is best to suspend your disbelief and lay them at the feet of potentiality. Or, another way is to think of them as a simile to describe a profoundly spiritual event.

**Alright, folks. Talk to me!**