

Third Quarter 2008 Adult Sabbath School Lessons

Special Insights No. 12

(Produced by the Editorial Board of the 1888 Message Study Committee)

Gifted for Service: Phillip

Gifts of Grace. There was great grace upon the church under the “former rain” (Acts 4:33). However, conflict arose within the church even while the rain fell from heaven. So, is conflict always bad? Not if good comes from it as we observe in the history of the early church. Conflict calls for heart-searching and prayers for grace, faith, and wisdom.

The office of deacons came about because of ethnic conflict and division between two subcultures of Christian Jews—Hebrew and Greek. Jews from Greek cultures complained because their widows were neglected, administratively, in the early church (Acts 6:1). The attitudes exhibited were contrary to the principles of the gospel. Consequently, deacons were chosen to help relieve the symptoms that arose because of conflict.

Deacons were chosen because of their honesty and wisdom and because of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, whereby the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts (Acts 6:3; cf. Rom. 5:5). They were thus prepared to administrate in the church business affairs.

Persecution. The enemy of God and His church began to persecute the church. As a result Stephen, the first of seven deacons called to that office, was the first to be martyred for the gospel. Following his death, persecution of the church increased greatly. Church members were scattered to other nations. Philip fled to Samaria, where he preached the gospel. The deacon became an evangelist—an unintended consequence of persecution.

The Gospel. Philip knew the gospel. He had applied the principles in dealing with problems within the church. Following that he was called to preach the gospel to an amalgamated race—the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-8). Philip was a Grecian Jew, and as such was more broad-minded than Aramaic-speaking Jews from Israel, and thus went to the Samaritans and preached the gospel to them.

Next he instructed a spiritualist medium, Simon Magus, and baptized him (vss. 9-13). Finally Philip was used by God to teach the gospel to, and baptize, the treasurer of the kingdom of Ethiopia (vss. 26-39) who was traveling near the city of Gaza (today the Palestinian-administered city near the Mediterranean with the surrounding coastal district today called the Gaza Strip, adjoining the Sinai Peninsula) linked with Jerusalem by an important highway that went on to Egypt. The Ethiopian eunuch was traveling this road from Jerusalem. “Ethiopia” here refers to ancient Nubia, the region from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, Sudan. Notice in Acts 8 the description of Philip’s preaching of the gospel and the result:

His public ministry (8:4–8):

1. The Person of Philip’s message: Philip tells the Samaritans about Christ.
2. The power of Philip’s message.
 - (a) The sick are restored, (b) the possessed are released, (c) the people rejoiced.
3. Philip’s private ministry in the desert close to Gaza (8:26–40):

1. The message from an angel: Philip is instructed to go to the Gaza desert.
2. His meeting with the Ethiopian chief financial officer.
 1. The perplexity of the treasurer: Philip finds this man reading Isaiah.
 1. Reading the gospel of Isaiah 53: 7–8; but cannot understand.
 1. Philip preaches the gospel of Christ to him.
 2. The treasurer confesses Jesus as the Son of God; Philip baptizes him.

Philip's ministry at Azotus (Ashdod): After the treasurer was baptized, the Spirit of God immediately took Philip to the city of Azotus, where Philip resumes his preaching of the gospel, and then travels north to Caesarea (Acts 8:40), where his home was. The last mention of Philip is that of an evangelist living in Caesarea, about 20 years later, in whose home Paul stayed for a short time (Acts 21:8).

Lessons Concerning Minneapolis. The conflict in the church in Minneapolis was not over ethnic difficulties as in the early church in Jerusalem. Instead, the division was theological. In Minneapolis, the conflict was over the law in Galatians (Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 234), the gospel, especially justification by faith understood as the faith of Jesus (Review and Herald, April 1, 1890), and the two covenants (The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 623).

Had God's gift of grace been operational in the church in 1888, as it was in the early church, the conflict would have been settled shortly. The church would have worked through the conflict and would have united under one Head. The "latter rain" would have been poured out from on high, would have done its work in the hearts of the church members, and she would have been prepared to give the "loud cry" which, in turn, would have prepared her for the ensuing persecution.

As with the early church, the members of the remnant would have been scattered everywhere throughout the world. The everlasting gospel message of the righteousness of Christ in the end-time setting would have been proclaimed with ten times the power of 1844 [1, 2] and as the result God's people would have come out of Babylon in droves (Rev. 18:1-4). These would have joined God's remnant, gifted by grace, and consequently prepared to meet the Lord at His return. That's what might have been. And will be. Perhaps this generation.

—Gerald L. Finneman

Endnotes

[1] "This will come as suddenly as it did in '44 and with ten times the power." A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message" #7, General Conference Bulletin, 1893.

[2] "I saw the latter rain was coming as the midnight cry, and with ten times the power." E. G. White, Washington, NH, Spaulding and Magan Collection, Sept., 1852, p. 4.

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