

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 11

Acts 8

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 11, Acts 8, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 8 focuses on **Philip's missionary journeys**, first to Samaria, resulting in many conversions including that of Simon the sorcerer, and then to an Ethiopian eunuch, **representing the first fully Gentile convert**. The lecture **analyzes the significance** of these events within the broader context of early Christianity's expansion, **highlighting the themes of power encounters**, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the gradual acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community. Keener also **explores the historical and cultural background** of Samaria and the Ethiopian kingdom, enriching the understanding of Acts' narrative.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 11 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels – Acts → Acts).



**Keener_Acts_Session
n11.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 8:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 8

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener focuses on Acts chapter 8, which narrates the expansion of the early Christian mission beyond Jerusalem and Judea, specifically highlighting the ministries of Philip. The lecture is divided into two main sections, Philip's ministry in Samaria (8:5-25) and his encounter with the Ethiopian official (8:26-40). Keener emphasizes the theological significance of these events, connecting them to themes of power encounters, cross-cultural outreach, and the sovereignty of God in the spread of the gospel.

I. Philip's Mission to Samaria (8:5-25):

- **Context & Background:** Philip, one of the seven Hellenistic Jewish Christian leaders, is the first to officially carry the gospel beyond Jerusalem and Judea, following the theological framework laid out by Stephen in Acts 7. While others were scattered and sharing the gospel, Philip's actions are specifically narrated.
- Philip preaches in a Samaritan city, likely Neapolis (near ancient Shechem). The Samaritans were a mixed-race and religiously distinct group considered outsiders by the Jews.
- **Conversion of Samaria:** Many Samaritans come to faith in response to Philip's preaching and miracles.
- Keener notes, "Well, many people are coming to faith..."
- **Simon the Sorcerer:** Simon is a local magician who gains notoriety by practicing magic that invokes the name of a higher spirit to control a lower spirit. Jewish practitioners were sometimes considered masters of this art, often through the knowledge (or perceived knowledge) of the secret name of God. Keener explains "Jewish practitioners were sometimes considered some of the best at magic."
- Magic was commonly used for various purposes in the ancient world including love and sports, and was prevalent in Egypt.

- Simon is described as claiming to be "the great power of God," possibly aligning with traditions associating him with being an incarnation of a male deity and his consort, Helena, being an incarnation of a female deity. This highlights the prevalent syncretism of the time. Keener mentions, "...the reputation there, the tradition there, was that Simon was being portrayed as the incarnation of the male deity...".
- **Power Encounter:** The narrative portrays a power encounter between Philip's ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and Simon's sorcery. Keener uses the Old Testament story of Moses and Pharaoh to highlight this by saying: "Pagan sorcerers sometimes could duplicate some of God's signs...But there was a limit."
- This encounter underscores the superior power of God over pagan magic and highlights a common theme in Acts where sorcerers are converted after witnessing the greater power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Apostolic Ratification:** The apostles in Jerusalem, Peter and John, are sent to Samaria to impart the Holy Spirit to the new believers. This emphasizes that receiving the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the Christian experience.
- Keener explains that "...the Samaritans received the gift also, and the Jerusalem church recognizes and approves of that, or at least their leaders do."
- The laying on of hands by Peter and John demonstrates the apostolic authority's recognition of the Samaritans' inclusion in the Christian community.
- This ratification process highlights the Jerusalem church's growing understanding of the universal scope of the gospel and moves away from their expectations for a solely Jewish Messiah.
- **Simon's Attempt to Buy the Spirit:** Simon, amazed by the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit, attempts to buy the power to impart it. This is rebuked by Peter, reinforcing the idea that the Holy Spirit is a free gift from God and cannot be purchased.
- Keener observes, "Well, sorcerers were used to buying magical formulas. And so now he wants to buy this power to impart the Holy Spirit."
- **The Nature of Receiving the Holy Spirit:** Keener suggests that while the Holy Spirit is received at conversion, different aspects of it may be experienced at different times, and God is not limited to a single pattern. He says: "In principle, we receive

the Spirit at conversion, but experientially we don't necessarily experience all aspects of it simultaneously."

- He further states, "...God is sovereign. God isn't limited to doing it just one way."
- Keener thinks that the outward sign of the spirit wasn't tongues as some have proposed, but possibly some form of prophesying that aligns with the theme of cross cultural communication found elsewhere in Luke.

II. Philip's Ministry to the Ethiopian Official (8:26-40):

- **Significance of the Encounter:** This is presented as the first fully Gentile convert to Christianity, a significant step in the expansion of the church. This conversion prefigures the better known conversion of Cornelius. Keener says "...this is the first fully Gentile convert. The first fully Gentile Christian is from Africa."
- The text emphasizes the official is a eunuch, who under Old Testament law, would have been excluded from becoming a full Jewish proselyte, highlighting the radical inclusiveness of Christianity. Keener notes that if "a person was literally a eunuch, according to Deuteronomy 23.1, this person could not become a proselyte. They could not join the community of Israel."
- **The Ethiopian Official:** The official was not from modern-day Ethiopia, but from the Nubian kingdom of Meroe. This area was south of Egypt and was a powerful kingdom at this time. Keener states, "Ethiopia had a wider meaning back then, and the mention of Kandaka lets us know that he was actually from the Nubian kingdom of Neroe...".
- He is identified as the treasurer of Queen Kandaka (Candace), emphasizing his wealth, power, and importance. This Queen Kandaka was most likely Queen Nawadimak at this time, or perhaps just a title that was used generally.
- His position indicates he was educated, literate in Greek, and familiar with the Jewish scriptures.
- **Divine Orchestration:** The meeting between Philip and the official is divinely orchestrated, reflecting God's sovereignty in guiding the gospel's spread. Philip is specifically directed to go to a deserted road, and the official is reading Isaiah 53.
- Keener points out, "God often tests his servants' faith through apparently absurd commands."

- **Interpretation of Isaiah 53:**The official's question about the identity of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 provides an opportunity for Philip to share the gospel message and explain how the passage was fulfilled in Jesus.
- Keener points out that the servant in Isaiah is not always Israel, but also a person within Israel. Keener clarifies, "In Isaiah 53, verse 9, it says, this servant is not guilty. And 53.12, this servant suffers voluntarily. That doesn't sound like it's describing Israel."
- **Baptism and Conversion:**The official's eagerness to be baptized signifies his sincere conversion to Christianity. Keener states "He wasn't allowed to convert to Judaism. He couldn't as a eunuch, but now he's welcome."
- Keener discusses the background for baptism in this period and its importance in conversion.
- **Philip's Sudden Departure:**After the baptism, the Spirit "snatches" Philip away, a rare, literal, and physical relocation, similar to Old Testament stories of Elijah and Ezekiel. Keener says, "But here it's clearly real and it's clearly physical. He's really relocated."
- This emphasizes that God is the one directing the mission.
- **Philip's Ministry in Coastal Cities:**Philip then ministers in the coastal cities, eventually settling in Caesarea.
- Caesarea becomes an important location for the unfolding narrative.

III. Key Themes & Ideas:

- **Expansion of the Gospel:** The lecture underscores the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Samaria, then to a Gentile African official, showcasing a geographical and cultural expansion of the early church. Keener points out, "...that doesn't mean he doesn't care about the gospel going to the rest of the ends of the earth. And he narrates here it going to the southern ends of the earth."
- **Cross-cultural Ministry:** This chapter demonstrates God's heart for reaching diverse groups of people, even those considered outsiders. He shows "...something significant, too, in terms of reaching out to international visitors in our midst."

- **Power of the Holy Spirit:** The ministry of Philip is consistently portrayed as empowered by the Holy Spirit, both in miracles and in the divine orchestration of events. Keener mentions, "Well, the power of the Holy Spirit was so strong..."
- **Sovereignty of God:** The lecture emphasizes that God is sovereignly directing the mission, using people like Philip to fulfill His purposes. He also says: "...God is the one directing the mission."
- **Unsung Heroes of the Gospel:** The lecture points out that some people like Philip don't get the notoriety of others like Peter, but still perform significant roles that the church wouldn't know about if it were not for the writings of someone like Luke.
- **Importance of Obedience:** Philip is an example of someone who obeyed God's apparently absurd commands.

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture on Acts 8 highlights the early church's dramatic expansion of the gospel. The inclusion of Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch showcases the breaking down of religious and cultural barriers, demonstrating the universal nature of God's love and the power of the Holy Spirit. The lecture serves as a powerful encouragement for Christians today to be open to the ways God might orchestrate opportunities for them to witness across all cultures.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 11, Acts 8

Acts 8 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What role does Philip play in the expansion of the early church, according to the lecture, and why is he significant in Acts 8?
2. Explain the significance of the city of Neapolis (ancient Shechem) in the context of the narrative of Acts 8.
3. How was magic practiced in the ancient world, according to the lecture, and what was the reputation of Jewish practitioners of magic?
4. Who was Simon the sorcerer, and what did he desire to obtain through the apostles' power?
5. What was unique about the conversion of Samaritans in Acts 8, and how did the Jerusalem church respond to this event?
6. What is the significance of the "laying on of hands" by Peter and John in Acts 8?
7. According to the lecture, what was the ethnic and geographical origin of the Ethiopian eunuch, and why is his conversion so significant?
8. How does Dr. Keener address the possible multiple interpretations of the word "Ethiopia," regarding the eunuch?
9. Explain how the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official relates to the broader themes of the book of Acts and the movement of the gospel.
10. What are some possible reasons why Philip's story is given less attention than others in Acts, and how does Dr. Keener address this idea?

Answer Key

1. Philip is the first to officially carry the gospel beyond Jerusalem and Judea, becoming a key figure in the expansion of the early church. His ministry to Samaria and an African court official marks the beginning of the gospel moving to new areas and people.

2. Neapolis, built on the site of ancient Shechem, is likely the Samaritan city where Philip's ministry takes place. Shechem's history was important to the Jewish people, as mentioned in Stephen's speech, making this a significant location for the spread of the gospel.
3. Magic was widely practiced using incantations and invoking spirits, with Jewish practitioners often being seen as among the most powerful due to their knowledge of the divine name. Despite the disapproval of many rabbis, magic was a common practice, including attempts to use different permutations of the divine name for power.
4. Simon was a Samaritan sorcerer who gained notoriety through magic and was revered by the people. He was so impressed with the power of the apostles' Holy Spirit that he offered to buy the ability to impart the Holy Spirit.
5. The conversion of the Samaritans was unique because it blurred the lines between Jewish and Samaritan identities. The Jerusalem church's approval of this conversion was significant as it indicated a shift in understanding who is included in God's plan and work.
6. The "laying on of hands" by Peter and John in Acts 8 signified the imparting of the Holy Spirit and apostolic ratification of the Samaritan conversions. While the practice is not common for general prayer in the Old Testament, it demonstrates a means of bestowing spiritual gifts and empowering believers.
7. The Ethiopian eunuch, according to the lecture, is likely from the Nubian kingdom of Meroe, not the present-day nation of Ethiopia, and is the first fully Gentile convert to Christianity. His conversion signifies that the gospel is for all peoples and expands the boundaries of God's plan.
8. Dr. Keener notes that "Ethiopia" was a broader term used by the Greeks for all of Africa south of Egypt. He clarifies that while the current nation of Ethiopia has a rich Christian history, the eunuch was from a different kingdom and a wider region.
9. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian official demonstrates the movement of the gospel beyond Jewish boundaries, illustrating that the gospel is intended for all people, including those on the fringes of society. The events were divinely orchestrated, as exemplified through the eunuch's reading of scripture, showcasing God's providence in spreading the good news.

10. Philip's story is not as widely known as others, in part, because he was not a prominent figure of the Jerusalem church. However, he is an important forerunner to Peter and the narrative highlights unsung heroes of the church whose acts are known to God, emphasizing the importance of all kinds of ministry.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Choose ONE of the following questions to answer in essay format.

1. Analyze the theological implications of the Samaritans' conversion in Acts 8, considering the historical relationship between Jews and Samaritans.
2. Discuss the significance of Philip's ministry as a "forerunner" in the book of Acts, particularly in relation to Peter, and how this theme is explored in Acts 8.
3. Examine the role of divine intervention and the Holy Spirit in the events of Acts 8, providing specific examples from the text to support your claims.
4. Compare and contrast the portrayals of Simon the sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, discussing what each story teaches us about faith, power, and the nature of God's grace.
5. Explore how Acts 8 contributes to the overarching narrative of the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to the "ends of the earth," paying attention to the cultural and geographical details.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hellenist:** A Jew who was culturally influenced by Greek traditions and language.
- **Neapolis:** The Greek name for the Samaritan city built on the site of ancient Shechem, where Philip ministers in Acts 8.
- **Sebaste:** A Greek city built on the site of ancient Samaria, named after the title of the emperor (Augustus), and mentioned as nearby to Neapolis.
- **Simon the Sorcerer:** A Samaritan magician in Acts 8 who was impressed by the apostles' power and attempted to buy the ability to impart the Holy Spirit.
- **Laying on of hands:** A ritual practice signifying the transfer of spiritual blessing, authority, or the impartation of the Holy Spirit, commonly done in the Old Testament, and notably done by Peter and John in Acts 8.
- **Eunuch:** A man whose reproductive organs have been removed or who was born without them, in antiquity often employed in royal courts, and significant in the narrative as the Ethiopian official of Acts 8.
- **Kandake (Candace):** The title used for a ruling queen mother, specifically of the Nubian kingdom of Meroe, where the Ethiopian official was a treasurer.
- **Meroe:** A black Nubian kingdom south of Egypt in what is now Sudan, where the Ethiopian official was from.
- **Proselyte:** A Gentile who has converted to Judaism and committed to following Jewish laws and customs.
- **God-fearer:** A Gentile who is sympathetic to Judaism, follows its moral teachings, but has not fully converted to Judaism.
- **Wadi:** A seasonal riverbed that is usually dry but can contain water during the rainy season, where the Ethiopian eunuch is baptized.
- **Azotus:** An ancient Philistine city, also known as Ashdod, where Philip preaches after his encounter with the Ethiopian official.
- **Caesarea Maritima:** A coastal city where Philip settles and where Peter later encounters Cornelius, significant for its multicultural population.
- **Forerunner:** Someone who goes ahead to prepare the way for another, a role that Philip takes in relation to Peter in the book of Acts.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 11, Acts 8

Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Acts Chapter 8

1. **What is the significance of Philip's ministry in Samaria, and how did it challenge existing religious norms?** Philip's ministry in Samaria marks a significant shift in the early church's mission, moving beyond Jerusalem and Judea. It was a radical act because Samaritans were considered religiously and ethnically impure by Jews. Philip, a Hellenist Jew, extended the message of Jesus to Samaritans, including the baptism of many converts. This challenged the prevalent Jewish expectation that the Messiah was only for Jews, showcasing the inclusive nature of the gospel. It also highlighted the theological point made in chapter 7 that the mission was to expand beyond Judea and Jerusalem, which was set in motion by Jesus himself.
2. **Who was Simon the Sorcerer, and what does his encounter with Philip reveal about the nature of spiritual power?** Simon the Sorcerer was a notable figure in Samaria, renowned for his magical practices. His encounter with Philip illustrates the difference between authentic spiritual power, which comes from God, and deceptive, self-serving magic. Simon was impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit manifested through Philip and attempted to purchase this ability, demonstrating his misunderstanding of spiritual gifts as commodities rather than as God's free grace. This encounter emphasizes that the power to impart the Spirit cannot be bought or earned, highlighting the distinction between divine power and human trickery.
3. **Why did the apostles Peter and John travel to Samaria, and what was their role in the Samaritan conversions?** Peter and John's visit to Samaria was to provide apostolic ratification of the Samaritan conversions. While Philip had effectively preached and baptized many Samaritans, the apostles were sent to lay hands on them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. This action demonstrates the unity of the early church and underscores the importance of recognizing the work of the Spirit among those who were previously considered outsiders. It was a crucial step in fully integrating Samaritans into the Christian community and acknowledging their equal standing in God's eyes. This shows a decentralization of witness in action, where the leaders are approving and empowering a movement.

4. **How is the gift of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 8, and what does it reveal about its nature and reception?** In Acts 8, the gift of the Holy Spirit is described as a powerful experience that was distinct from conversion. It was something that was imparted through the laying on of hands by the apostles, which was observed by Simon the Sorcerer as a significant event. The text suggests that while the Samaritans were true believers, they had not yet fully experienced the Spirit's power for witness. The fact that it was given through the apostles underscores that God isn't limited to one way of operating and does not limit himself to specific patterns or ways of giving gifts, but that he is sovereign in how these things are distributed.
5. **Who was the Ethiopian eunuch, and why is his conversion so significant in the narrative of Acts?** The Ethiopian eunuch was a court official of Queen Candace from Nubia, a region south of Egypt. His conversion was a landmark event as it signifies the gospel reaching its first fully Gentile convert. This challenges the Jewish understanding of the gospel being exclusively for the circumcised. He represents a person who was both an outsider by religion and by physical circumstance and yet was fully welcomed into the church, illustrating the gospel's inclusivity to the ends of the earth. This also demonstrates the move of the gospel to international and non-Jewish audiences.
6. **What does the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch teach about the role of scripture and divine guidance in evangelism?** The encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch underscores the importance of scripture and divine guidance in sharing the gospel. The eunuch's reading of Isaiah 53 provided an opportunity for Philip to explain the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus. Philip's following of divine guidance from the spirit to run to the chariot shows the necessity of actively seeking divine direction in missions and evangelism. This story emphasizes the importance of God's orchestration and the readiness of those who seek him to receive the message. This interaction demonstrates the way that the Old Testament is used as a basis to explain the significance of Jesus.

7. **How does Philip's ministry in Acts 8 illustrate the theme of God's power being greater than sorcery?** Philip's ministry highlights the contrast between the true power of God and the deceptive power of sorcery. This is especially seen in Simon the Sorcerer's inability to replicate or purchase the gift of the Spirit, and the transformation of hearts that resulted in many coming to faith. This highlights the limitation of human means to mimic what is done by God, and shows how God's power transforms hearts in a way that magic cannot replicate. It also showcases the sovereignty of God as the only source of spiritual power.
8. **What is the significance of Philip's journey after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, and how does it contribute to the narrative of the book of Acts?**
Following the baptism of the Ethiopian, Philip's miraculous transportation by the Spirit and his subsequent preaching in the coastal cities, including Azotus and Caesarea, mark a continued expansion of the church's reach. It shows God's leading of his people and how his message was brought to a diverse set of cities. It also demonstrates that God used those previously considered outsiders in new ways. His settlement in Caesarea is significant because it becomes a key location for later events in Acts, including Peter's ministry to Cornelius. The story emphasizes that God's work is not limited to certain locations or people, and it moves the narrative forward by showing the mission continuing to move outward. It also highlights the importance of people who are unsung heroes of faith and are not always the most well-known people.