

# CARRYING THE FIRE: WHEN GOD SENDS REVIVAL

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*By the Book*™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study  
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## Let's Begin

*American astronaut, Michael Collins, wrote a book entitled, "Carrying the Fire." He wrote that "carrying the fire" describes what space flight is like to him. The same phrase could well describe what transpires at this juncture in Acts. Pentecost started a fire burning. In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave the disciples an assignment to carry the fire from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Surely an impossible mission if ever there was one! Yet, the Holy Spirit fueled the fire they spread.*

*In today's lesson, we begin a new chapter in carrying the fire. The geographical outline we noted in chapter one (1:8) unfolds to the second stage. The fire of evangelism and church growth burned in Jerusalem for seven chapters. Now, for the next five chapters God's fire will burn in Judea and Samaria. The river of God's grace is widening; the program for God's evangelism is spreading to the entire world!*

*As we study chapter eight, we'll follow the simple outline below:*

- I. The Movements God Initiated Before Revival (vv. 1-4)**
- II. The Manner God Used to Bring Revival (vv. 5-25)**
- III. The Man God Saved After Revival (vv. 26-40)**

## I. The Movements God Initiated Before Revival (vv. 1-4)

God never brings about revival in a vacuum. Much of the work toward revival is accomplished prior to revival. And, in any genuine revival from heaven, God's work in saving men remains long after the revival visibly ends. There are three distinct movements we notice in the first four verses of chapter eight. Let's look at them together.

*First, we observe the movement of persecution.* Luke clearly describes the circumstances facing the church, "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (v. 1). Focus specifically on the "great persecution." This sounds strange in a day when the church is patronized by the world rather than persecuted by it.

Luke describes this persecution by giving three characteristics of it. This persecution was predicted by the Savior. One of the main themes in Jesus' words to His disciples pertained to persecution

(Matt. 23:34; Mark 10:30; John 15:20). The fact is, Jesus never promised they would be popular or have it easy. Even more, the words of Jesus about persecution echo all through Scripture (cp. 2 Tim. 3:12).

Another characteristic about this persecution: *it was precipitated by Stephen.* Luke writes, "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him" (v. 2). Stephen's martyrdom opened the floodgates of the world's wrath. Persecution rushed throughout Jerusalem, flooding every pocket of Christianity. Not that the hostility wasn't already present; it was. Yet, it was under the surface. Stephen just made it float!

### Reflection Connection

*Dr. Vines mentions a day when the church is patronized by the world rather than persecuted. What do you think he means? Explain. Think of your own community. Would you say your church is patronized? Why or why not?*



The radiance of a life filled with Jesus inevitably draws persecution. The real always reflects adversely upon the counterfeit. Genuinely godly people can solicit the howls of the ungodly quicker than anything else. An easy way to demonstrate this is simply to place a genuine Christian in the office—whether at work or school — and watch what happens!

While the persecution was precipitated by Stephen, *it was pursued by Saul*. There's one man who seems to be leading the persecution. His name is Saul of Tarsus, "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison" (v. 3). Think of an imaginary scene: there's a small home with a man reading the Bible and talking to his family about Jesus. Saul rushes in, binds the father, and takes him away never to be seen again.

Secondly, we observe the movement of permeation. Particularly notice the church's plight. Luke emphasizes they were "scattered abroad." This is his way of saying they were "dispersed," like a seed planted in a field. On the one hand, the persecution was an intense moment of pain for the church. However, on the other hand, the persecution was an inspirational movement in proclaiming the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ! They were scattered like seeds, permeating their world with Jesus' resurrection.

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Make no mistake; this scattering was a *personal* burden. If we're not careful, we could easily miss the emotion and trauma of what Luke records. These people were leaving their family, homes, friends, and familiar surroundings. Fleeing for their lives and the lives of their children meant being uprooted from everything they knew and loved.

Serving Christ involves personal burdens. No one denies this. Nevertheless, who would argue today's church is not spoiled, soft or weak? The fact is, we are too comfortable! Ours is an air-conditioned, carpeted, and push button faith! Cushions have in some cases replaced crosses. It is true we sing, "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow." All too often, however, we must have all the fringe benefits. The Gospel calls us to be prepared to make personal sacrifices for Christ's sake.

While the scattering was a *personal burden*, it was also a *providential blessing*. The enemies of the church meant it for evil; but God meant it for good. Enemies meant to smother the fire. God would not have that. Instead, God scattered it! Consequently, the church flourished. True Christianity always flourishes under persecution. Perhaps this is the biggest problem in the church today. It's just too easy to be a Christian. Scripture reminds us, however, we'll never know how real our faith is until it is tested (1 Pet.1:7).

Thirdly, we observe the movement of proclamation. The church went everywhere preaching the Gospel. This is the supreme activity of every church—the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. In light of this, three questions

### Reflection Connection

*Think for a moment what it would be like to suddenly, without any warning, gather what belongings would fit in your car and leave your home. How difficult would it be to accept? Explain.*



present themselves to us. The first question is this: *who preached the Word?* Notice carefully. It was not the apostles; they stayed in Jerusalem. In fact, Luke took pains to make sure we understood that the whole church left town “except the apostles” (v. 1).

Too often we limit preaching to the pulpit. It is true that pulpit ministry is Gospel proclamation. Nonetheless, the church permeating the community, cities, counties, and the marketplace sharing the Gospel is proclamation as well. It is not every Christian’s duty to get into a pulpit. But it is every Christian’s duty to preach Christ. This is the secret of a strong, evangelistic church — every member is a preacher!

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Christ.*

Another question presents itself: *where did they preach the Word?* This is very easy to answer. They preached the Word wherever they were! As they went from place to place they took their Christianity with them, a practice we must not fail to follow.

Finally, *why did they preach the Word?* This is easily answered as well. They preached because of the *direct command* of Jesus, a *deep conviction* of heart, and the *deplorable condition* of the world. This question strikes at the heart of the church’s mission. There’s never been a time when people so needed Jesus. People who have plenty of money cannot buy peace of mind. People who have plenty to do are going to psychiatrists in droves. Masses who own beautiful houses are cursed with empty hulls, void of authentic life. It is to this world we are sent to carry the flame!

## II. The Manner God Used to Bring Revival (vv. 5-25)

There have been instances in history where whole cities were swept by heaven-sent revival. Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitfield, Charles Finney, Billy Sunday, D. L. Moody, and Billy Graham are men who’ve been associated with awesome moves of God, seeing hundreds of thousands — sometimes in one gathering — come to Christ.

It’s true these men could be considered “extraordinary.” But as we see in Scripture, it’s not always the most popular person God uses in powerful ways. One such man is Phillip. Phillip preached Christ and Him crucified. The result? The whole city of Samaria was set ablaze by the fire carried by this man, Phillip. Let’s note *two key features* of the citywide revival in Samaria.

*First, observe the revival initiated* (vv. 5-8; 14-17). No revival can take place apart from God. Even more strongly, no revival happens unless God Himself initiates it, a truth too many too often forget.

Charles Finney, a converted New York trial attorney who became a great evangelist, once said, “It is useless for Christians to expect revival without bothering to fulfill the laws which govern spiritual blessing.” Thus, when we think about God initiating revival, our thoughts immediately turn to the Master (cp. John 4:35, 40).

### Reflection Connection

*What do you think of when you hear the term “revival”? Explain. What would you say are the marks of true revival? Has your church experienced genuine revival? Explain.*



Samaria was the most unlikely place on earth for revival to happen. From the Jewish standpoint, it was a despised place. No spiritual hope existed for Samaria. But Jesus ever challenged the conventional standpoint. In fact, Jesus worked there! He sowed seeds in the field that was white unto harvest.

When I was a pastor in Mobile, Alabama, I believed Mobile was ripe for revival. There was hunger in people's hearts. I preached to the end that people would come to Christ. They did! Also, after arriving in Jacksonville, God stirred my heart, believing Jacksonville was ripe for revival. I preached Christ crucified. They came! Our Master, the Lord Jesus, works where His Gospel is proclaimed.

Where the Master works, there's also a man through whom he works. Phillip was doing the preaching. Recall he was one of the seven deacons. Some pastors unfortunately have had bad experiences with deacons. While it's true there is a fundamental confusion in some of today's church's concerning the role of deacons, it's been my experience that godly deacons make some of God's choice evangelists.

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### Reflection Connection

*From your perspective, should deacons be more active in evangelism or social ministry? Why or why not? Ask your pastor or the deacon chairman to lead a discussion in your class about the role of deacons.*

The lesson we learn is simply this: you don't have to be an apostle or possess a pulpit to be effective as a Gospel witness. More importantly, we learn that being an effective witness does not mean expertise in social reform, politics, or even religion. That was not the content of Phillip's preaching. Phillip preached Christ and Him crucified. That was the message the Holy Spirit anointed.

Consequently, the spiritual results were unbelievable! The Gospel brought liberation (v. 7), jubilation (v. 8), identification (v. 12), and impartation (vv. 14-17). The Holy Spirit showed up in a flame burning brighter than any time since Pentecost.

God's initiation in bringing revival — genuine revival — inevitably resulted in Satan initiating a phony one (vv. 9-13; 18-25). When the fire of God falls, Satan intentionally sets a wildfire. And, no greater example exists of the counterfeit conversion than Simon the Magician. First, Simon's pretension refuses to hide (vv. 9-11). Through his magician arts, he pretended to be powerful, possessing supernatural abilities. In the end, his charlatan character finally surfaced. Secondly, Simon gave a phony profession (vv. 12-13). He even submitted to baptism and joined the church. What more could anybody ask? Churches often have weak procedures which encourage false converts to join the membership.

Thirdly, notice Simon's presumption (vv. 18-25). The shallowness of his Christian experience was soon exposed. He literally thought spiritual gifts could be purchased at bargain prices. This sends a warning to people who think what they give to the church entitles them to special position.

### III. The Man God Saved After Revival (vv. 26-40)

It's been said all good things have to come to an end. Not really. At least, that's the way it is in God's Kingdom. Phillip preached until God's fire fell in Samaria. People joined the church left and right. Talk about church growth! Even so, God moved Phillip out of heaven's revival to head down to a lonely, hot desert.





### Reflection Connection

*Imagine how you would feel if the fire of God was burning in revival with thousands of people getting saved. Then, God drops the bomb — go down to the desert where there are no people. What would be your response? How do you think you would handle it? Explain.*

Nevertheless, whatever Phillip thought about God's leading him to the desert, no question was uttered. He immediately obeyed God. Could we say the same thing about ourselves?

The desert has the ability to teach us a lot. First, we unexpectedly find a *prepared sinner* (vv. 26-31). Phillip may not have expected this one coming. There he met a needy man, "And he arose and went; and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship" (v. 27). From the information Luke gives us, we know the eunuch was a responsible man, a religious man, and a receptive man. God had already prepared the sinner to hear the Gospel.

Phillip wasted no time. He instantly morphed into a *prompt soul-winner* (vv. 26-31). Seeing the open door, Phillip lunged through it with the Gospel. Men and women who love the Savior can be given any text in the Bible and end up at the Cross! Starting in Isaiah, Phillip led the eunuch to Calvary. The text he read was a powerful Scripture ultimately leading to the *personal salvation* of the eunuch (vv. 36-40). Everything Simon the magician wasn't, the eunuch was. He had a heart transformation.

Consequently, his heart experience equaled a holy experience. They stopped at the river, waded out into it, and Phillip baptized the eunuch a disciple of Jesus Christ. Revival is revival even when it's the revival of one.

### Golden Greek Nugget

In verse three, Luke describes Saul's persecution of the church as having "made havock." In the Greek language, this verb comes from a word that means "outrage." Outrage was used by many writers who recorded the actions of wild animals who "mangled" their victims. Sometimes it pertained to their natural habitat in the wild. At others times however, the "mangling" of the wild beasts took place in the arenas. It was a term of "destruction" and "death." Such was the "mangling" Saul of Tarsus delivered to the church during his rampage of persecution.

### Wrap Up

*No era in history needs a fresh touch from God more than our present era. Thousands of churches are empty. Hundreds of churches are closing their doors. We need a fire built by the Holy Spirit. Only He brings true, authentic heavenly revival. We must seek Him, and, once we've found Him, surrender to Him.*

