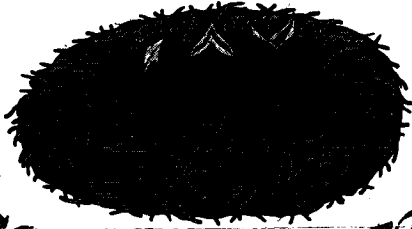


*'They shall
mount up...*

ON EAGLES' WINGS

*... with wings
as eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



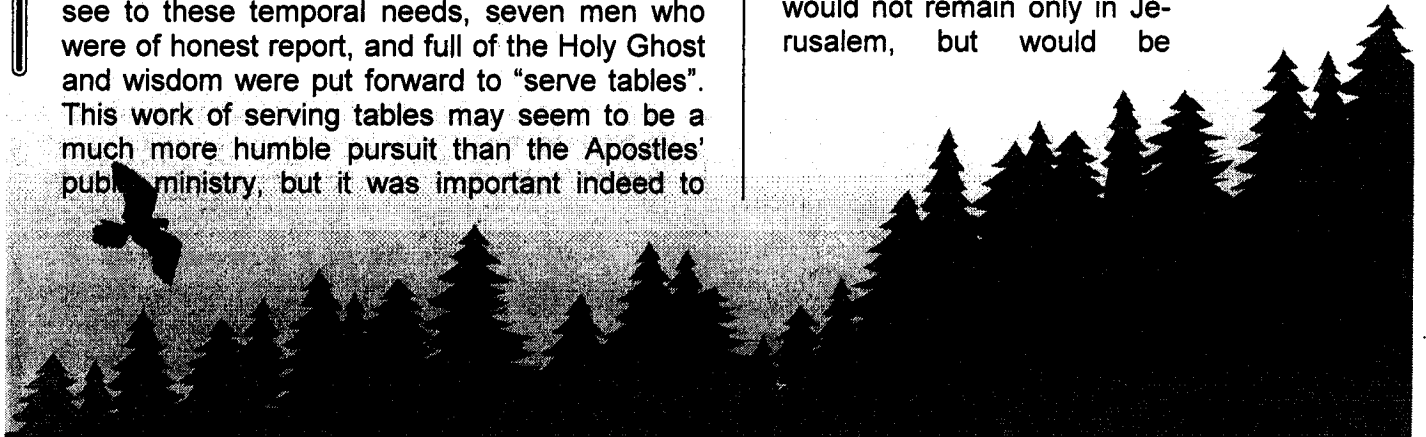
AIRY NUGGETS

Philip the Evangelist
Acts 8:1-8
Steven J. Faulkner

As we open this chapter, we find the early church going through a time of great turbulence. Stephen had just been martyred, and a terrible persecution, spearheaded by Saul of Tarsus, was driving the believers from Jerusalem, scattering them abroad in many directions. Up to the point of Stephen's death, however, the church in Jerusalem had been enjoying a period of relative calm. The gospel was being preached, and the church was growing rapidly. In fact, the church had grown so much by the time of Acts 6 that the Apostles were having difficulty keeping up with the ministry of the Word, while at the same time seeing to all the temporal needs of so many people. One of the important issues of the early church was the daily distributions to the poor widows of the assembly who had no other means of support. In order to help see to these temporal needs, seven men who were of honest report, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom were put forward to "serve tables". This work of serving tables may seem to be a much more humble pursuit than the Apostles' public ministry, but it was important indeed to

the well being and growth of the early church. Stephen and Philip were two of the seven to whom these important duties were entrusted. I believe that both "deacons" were faithful in carrying out their duties, but this does not mean that God had no other plans for them. Later, we find that God has equipped Stephen to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, and so many of the Jews were being saved that others became angry seeing so many of their countrymen becoming Christians. At this point, the Jews rose up against Stephen, and he was martyred.

Thus, as we begin our chapter, we sadly find Stephen, the faithful preacher, being carried to his grave, and we find Saul of Tarsus leading the charge to persecute the Christians of Jerusalem. This persecution was so great that we read in verse 1, "and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." This scene, at least from the world's perspective, might have the appearance of a mounting disaster for the early church, wouldn't you agree? But God had His plan. God's purpose was that the Gospel would not remain only in Jerusalem, but would be



spread throughout the world. Just before the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven, He had told his disciples, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," (Acts 1:8). God's plan was about to unfold despite the fierce opposition in Jerusalem.

My dear friends, we too live in very turbulent times, and what we see with our eyes every day can be most discouraging! Perhaps you have seen in the news or have observed first hand the hostility of the world towards the Gospel. Sometimes it may seem that despite our prayers, we are again and again thrown back by disagreeable circumstances and seemingly forced to retreat. And so it might at first have seemed of the church at Jerusalem. But God's plans cannot be thrown back! This persecution may have been orchestrated by Satan as a way to destroy the church, but God used this very assault to accomplish His own plan to propel the Gospel of salvation to the uttermost part of the earth. And in the process, He used his servants who had been faithful in ministering to the temporal affairs of the assembly to spearhead the advance! When the Christians left Jerusalem, they took with them the very Gospel that Satan was trying to suppress as we read in verse 4, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." One of these faithful Christians was Philip.

Like Stephen, Philip (who is called "Philip the Evangelist" in Acts 21) took the Gospel to Samaria. Now, the Samaritans and the Jews had been rivals for around 500 years, having different religious practices; and the one group had little to do with the other. So, Philip's reception in Samaria might seem surprising! In verses 5-8, we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

It's truly amazing, don't you think, how God can use circumstances that seem to be contrary in every respect, and turn those circumstances around so that His will is accomplished? The world sought to destroy the church, yet the very force exerted on the believers with the intent to ruin them became the means by which the purposes of the Lord would be accomplished. And, Philip, a man not formerly known for preaching, was prepared and equipped

by God such that he might bring the Gospel to a place where men of Jerusalem would not normally have been welcomed; and the people received him with one accord! God takes seemingly impossible situations and uses them to His glory! Still, I think you'd agree that the circumstances in Jerusalem were unpleasant and frightening for those who were involved. Perhaps you too have experienced times when it might appear that all the world is arrayed against you, and all your hopes and dreams seem doomed to fail despite many tearful prayers. Take heart, dear Christian! God's will is sure, and He can overturn the malignant schemes of Satan and this world, and use their very engines of destruction as the means to accomplish His victory. You and I may seem weak and ill-equipped to answer the challenges before us; but like Philip the Evangelist, God can equip us with the power to be used of Him in His plan. All he requires is a willing heart. Remember, Philip started by "serving tables" in the assembly; this same faithful man was given the opportunity to be a part of God's plan to spread the Gospel to the world, even though the occasion for this service appeared to be unfavorable and unpleasant in the extreme.

The mighty works of God which we see in these verses are there to encourage Christians. But, my dear friend, it may be that you have not yet believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. If you are not a believer, then you will not know the comfort of God's faithful hand in the turbulent times of this life. My prayer for you is that like the people of Samaria, you would believe on Jesus. We read that the Samaritans "with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." Would you like to be saved? "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." Acts 16:31.

*"Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can't tunnel
through? God specializes in things thought
impossible: He does the things others can-
not do."*

For address correction or free new name addition,

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