

Study 3: Acts 1 - 8

Acts has a unique place in the New Testament writings. It provides an historical context for much of the rest of the New Testament, and enables us to put the epistles into context. We also learn much about how the New Testament church functioned in reaching out to the world with the gospel of Christ.

Introduction

Date and Timing

The major themes

The major players

Chapter 1 – Jerusalem AD 33

Chapter 2 – Jerusalem AD 33

Chapter 3 – Jerusalem AD 33

Chapter 4 – Jerusalem AD 33

Chapter 5 – Jerusalem AD 33

Chapter 6 – Jerusalem AD 33/34

Chapter 7 – Jerusalem AD 33/34

Chapter 8 – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria AD 33/34

Homework and preparation for next week:

- Read the notes as a review of the study
- What things caused the gospel to go out from Jerusalem to other areas?
- When the church was attacked and persecuted, what was the effect on the church?
- Skim-read Acts chapters 9 – 12
 - Who are the major players in this part of the book?
 - What period of time is covered by these chapters?
 - What are the major events that happened in these chapters?
 - Where do the events happen?

Summary of the Book of Acts (Part 1)

- Authorship of the book: Luke, because of the similarities and introductions with the third gospel.
- Written around AD 63 or 64 covering from Jesus ascension in AD 33 until Paul's first Roman imprisonment in AD 63, but excludes destruction of Jerusalem.
- Major themes: Spread of the gospel, Establishment and growth of the church, Sermons to the lost and their conversions to Christ, The Holy Spirit.

Chapter 1:8 summarises the book: ... you will receive power when **the Holy Spirit comes** on you; and you will be my witnesses *in Jerusalem*, and in all *Judea and Samaria*, and to *the ends of the earth* (NIV)

Chapter 1 AD 33 Jerusalem – Passover to Pentecost

Major events: Jesus tells disciples to wait in Jerusalem for HS; Jesus' ascension; election of Matthias.

Chapter 2 AD 33 Jerusalem - Pentecost

Major events: HS comes upon the apostles; Speaking in tongues; Joel's prophecy fulfilled; Peter convinces Jews that Jesus was promised Messiah they had crucified; Told to repent and be baptised; Lord added saved to church.

Chapter 3 AD 33 Jerusalem – Soon after Pentecost

Major events: Healing of the lame man; Peter's consequent preaching to the people.

Chapter 4 AD 33 Jerusalem – Soon after Pentecost

Major events: Continuation of the healing of the lame man; Peter and John's arrest and appearance before the Sanhedrin; Peter's 3rd sermon; growth of the Jerusalem church.

Chapter 5 AD 33 Jerusalem (June)

Major events: Discipline of Ananias and Sapphira; further growth of the church; High Priest & Sadducees put Apostles before Sanhedrin; Gamaliel's defence.

Chapter 6 Late AD 33 / early AD 34 Jerusalem

Major events: Dispute between Greeks and Jews over benevolence; 7 deacons chosen; Apostles laid hands on the deacons; Miracles are worked by Stephen; Stephen accused of teaching against God & Moses.

Chapter 7 Late AD 33 / early AD 34 Jerusalem

Major events: Stephen before the Sanhedrin; A brief history of the Jews (Israel); Moses' prophecy concerning Christ; These Jews resist God – just as their fathers did; Stephen is stoned; Saul is a witness.

Chapter 8 Late AD 33 / early AD 34 Jerusalem – Judea – Samaria

Major events: Persecution of the church at Jerusalem; Disciples (except apostles) scattered spreading the word; Saul made havoc of the church; Philip in Samaria – worked miracles; Simon sorcerer baptised; Apostles came to Samaria to pass on HS; Simon tried to buy gift of HS; Eunuch baptised.

Chapter 9 AD 34 – 35 Damascus, Jerusalem, Joppa

Major events: Saul given authority by High Priest to persecute disciples; Saul's conversion – immediately preached Christ in Synagogues; Saul joins disciples at Jerusalem; Peter raises Dorcas from the dead at Joppa.

Chapter 10 AD 37 Caesarea, Joppa

Major events: Cornelius is told to call for Peter; Peter sees vision of animals – nothing is unclean; Peter comes to Cornelius and preaches Christ; HS falls on them; they were baptised in Jesus' name.

Chapter 11 AD 37 - 43, Jerusalem, Antioch

Major events: Peter recounts conversion of Cornelius to apostles at Jerusalem; The church is established at Antioch; Barnabas is sent to Antioch, and then goes to find Saul and brings him back to Antioch; Disciples are called Christians; a great drought is prophesied.

Chapter 12 AD 43 – 44, Jerusalem, Caesarea

Major events: James is killed; Peter is imprisoned, Peter freed by an angel – then appears at Mary's house. Death of Herod Agrippa 1st for not giving glory to God.

Summary of the book of Acts (part 2) *The ministry to the rest of the world (1:8)*

Chapter 13 AD 45 Antioch

Major events: Barnabas and Saul are called, First missionary journey begins: Cyprus: Elymas rebuked – Perga – Antioch in Pisidia – History of the Jews – to Iconium.

Chapter 14 AD 47-48 First Journey concludes

Major events: Preaching at Iconium, Persecution of Paul & Barnabas – flee to Lystra – cripple healed. Paul & Barnabas worshipped. Paul stoned. To Derbe – return to Lystra – Iconium & Antioch. Elders ordained – to Pisidia & Pamphylia, Perga & Attalia – back to Syrian Antioch. Report of the journey.

Chapter 15 AD 51 Jerusalem

Major events: The Judaisers come to Antioch, the conference at Jerusalem, the letter back to Antioch, the split between Paul & Barnabas. The beginning of the second journey.

Chapter 16 AD 52 The Second Journey

Major events: Early part of the Second Journey. Timothy circumcised, Derbe & Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas. Macedonian call – to Philippi: Lydia converted, demonic girl. Paul & Silas in prison – jailer converted.

Chapter 17 AD 52 Second Journey

Major events: Middle part of the Second Journey, Amphipolis & Appolonia, Thessalonica, Christians (Jason) persecuted, - to Berea. Paul goes to Athens, address on Mars Hill.

Chapter 18 AD 52-53 Corinth, Conclusion of Second Journey

Major events: Paul leaves Athens for Corinth, Silas & Timothy come from Macedonia, The Jews reject the gospel & Paul goes to the Gentiles, Two years in Corinth, Sails to Syria via Ephesus, Caesarea, then to Antioch. Start of Third Journey, Apollos at Ephesus. [Writes 1st & 2nd Thessalonians from Corinth]

Chapter 19 Early AD 54 Third Journey, Ephesus

Major events: Paul comes to Ephesus, correction of disciples faulty understanding, growth of the Ephesus church, 7 sons of Sceva, Burning of the books, Paul's travel plans, Ephesus riot. [Writes 1st Corinthians from Ephesus]

Chapter 20 Late AD 57 / early AD 58 Corinth, Third Journey

Major events: Paul goes to Macedonia and Greece, Comes via Philippi to Troas. The meeting at Troas – then Assos to Mitylene, and to Miletus. Paul calls for the elders of the church to come from Ephesus. Meeting with the elders. [Writes 2nd Corinthians from Thessalonica or Philippi, writes Galatians, and Romans from Corinth]

Chapter 21 AD 58 Conclusion of Third Journey

Major events: The trip back to Jerusalem, visiting Tyre and Caesarea, Agabus' prophecy and warning against going to Jerusalem. Visit to James & the elders, Accusation of the Jews, Violence & protective custody.

Chapter 22 AD 58 Jerusalem

Major events: Paul's defence to the Jews. His background as a Roman born, Greek educated Jew. His study under Gamaliel, an account of his conversion. Appeals to his Roman rights.

Chapter 23 AD 58 Jerusalem

Major events: Paul before Sanhedrin, causes division between Pharisees and Saducees, Jesus appears in night vision – you will go to Rome. Plot to kill Paul; sent to Caesarea. Letter from Claudius Lysias to Felix.

Chapter 24 AD 58 – 60 Caesarea

Major events: High Priest and Jews come down to make accusations against Paul. Paul's defence before Felix. Preaches to Felix & Drusilla. Paul imprisoned for two years.

Chapter 25 AD 60 mid-year, Caesarea

Major events: Festus takes up his appointment as Governor. Paul appears before Festus, then appeals to Caesar. Paul appeals before Agrippa and Bernice.

Chapter 26 AD 60 mid-year, Caesarea

Major events: Paul appears before Agrippa, and recounts his conversion. Agrippa declares "he's done nothing worthy of death, and might have been released had he not appealed to Caesar"

Chapter 27 Mid – late AD 60 Journey to Rome Begins

Major events: Begins journey to Rome. Went to Sidon, sailed under Cyprus, came to Myra. Sailed under Crete to Fair Havens. Paul predicts the shipwreck. The shipwreck.

Chapter 28 Late AD 60 – AD 63 Completion of journey to Rome & Imprisonment

Major events: The safe landing at Malta, Paul bitten by a snake but is not harmed, Publius' father healed by Paul, many others also healed. Winter on the island for 3 months. The journey to Rome. Paul meets with the Jews. Paul's 2 year house arrest. [Writes Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon (possibly Hebrews)].

Notes for study 3: Acts 1 - 8

Introduction

Acts provides a “history” book in the New Testament, although that is not primarily what it is. It is the second half of Luke’s narrative concerning Jesus and the church. In his gospel, Luke tells us about the beginning of the gospel “...all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taken up...” (Acts 1:1-2). In Acts he tells us about the consequential action of the Holy Spirit in the establishment and growth of the church as it spread “...in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and into all the world...” (Acts 1:8). In fact, this verse summarises what Acts is about:

- The first few chapters deal with the work in Jerusalem.
- The stoning of Stephen (chapter 7) sets a turning point in the book, and the gospel goes to Samaria (chapter 8).
- From chapter 13 onwards, we see the ministry to the rest of the world.

There are some key events that place a “peg in the sand” where we know the specific times (or even the approximate times) of the events. These help us to unravel the chronology of Acts, and include:

- Pentecost,
- Aretas, King of Damascus,
- The death of Herod,
- The expulsion of the Jews from Rome,
- Gallio in Achaia,
- Festus the Governor of Judea.

Specific duration’s mentioned in the book also help us piece things together, such as the time that Paul spent working with the churches in Antioch, and at Corinth, and we can “work out” (or take an educated guess) at the length of time of some of the journeys, and how long Paul might have stayed in some of the cities. And there is the information that we get from Paul’s letters that also help us fill in some of the details. We can piece all of this evidence together, and have a pretty good picture of the time line and chronology of the events.

As we take a fast-paced trip through the book, we want to note three fundamental questions:

1. The Timing – when did the events occur, and how do we know?
2. The Cast – Who are the main characters in the chapter?
3. The Plot – What are the main events described in the chapter.

These three things will help with our fundamental understanding of not only the book of Acts, but also as we piece the rest of the New Testament together.

Date and Timing

Acts begins in AD33, and the date of writing is generally placed around 63 AD, and covers the period until near the end of Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. The account closes with no details of the outcome of Paul’s imprisonment, his trials, and his subsequent release. Further, the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem began around AD 67 or 68 and took 3 years. With such an enormous imposition on the christians in Jerusalem and the effect of the spread of christianity, it would be most unlikely that the book was written after AD 70 and did not mention these events. Importantly, the description of Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, trials and imprisonments take up the last quarter of the book, culminating in his house arrest in Rome. However, the book closes without any form of disclosure as to what happened to Paul – what was the outcome? This suggests that it was written at the time when Paul’s imminent release had not yet taken place.

The treatise closes when the mission statement of 1:8 has been completed, and the story of the gospel going into all the world has been described.

The major themes

The major theme of the book is the spread of the gospel throughout the “then-known” world. But equally, the book is also a history of the establishment and growth of the church. Jesus said in Mt 16 that “...I will build my church...” (future tense). In Acts chapter 2, we see that promise come to fruition, and then the church being established throughout the world as the gospel is spread. We see problems in the church develop and being dealt with, governance for the church put into place, and the church at work in the various communities where it was founded.

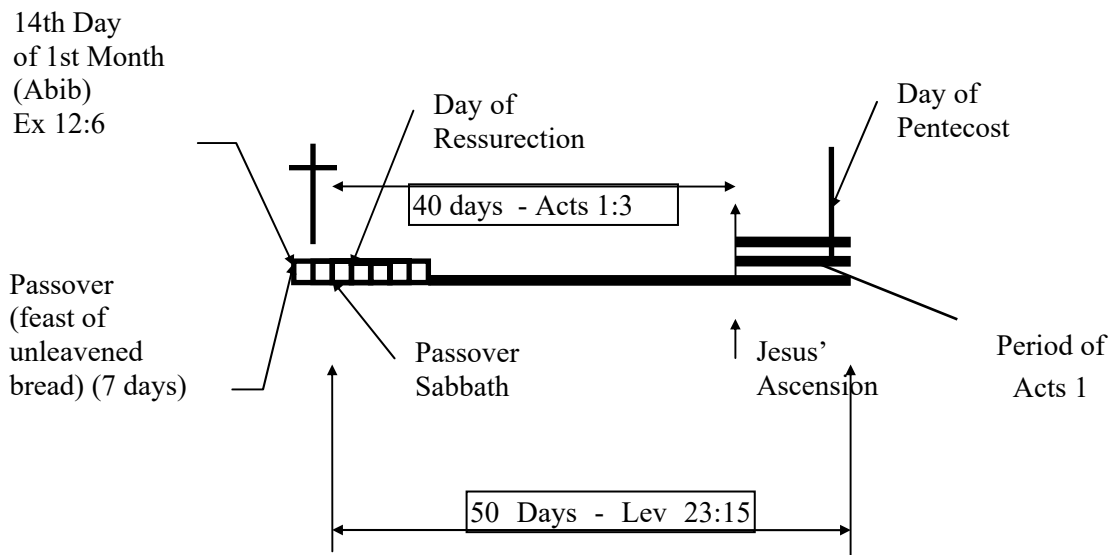
Acts is often referred to as a “book of conversions”. Throughout the book, conversion after conversion occurs, and we can discern what God wants us to do in response to the gospel.

Some other themes that run through the book are the presence and use of the spiritual gifts, the establishment of God’s kingdom, and the place of Gentiles within God’s family.

The major players

The apostle Peter features for most of the first half of the book (through chapter 12). The second half deals with the work of the apostle Paul (chapters 13 through 28). There are many other players, but the book can be divided as dealing with these two people as the lead.

Chapter 1 – Jerusalem AD 33



The period of Acts chapter 1

In chapter 1, Luke picks up with the ascension of Jesus, and a brief conversation that He had with the apostles beforehand, during which Jesus re-iterates the promise that the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles:

*“...after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit **to the apostles** he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself **to these men** and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared **to them** over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one*

occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit

AC 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

AC 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..." (1:2-8 NIV –emphasis mine)

The promise was quite specific. It was promised to the apostles. Not to the general population of believers, nor to others. The promise is baptism (immersion) with the Holy Spirit, and was to occur "...not many days from now..." (1:5 NKJV), and comes to fruition on the day of Pentecost.

Judas Iscariot had killed himself after betraying Jesus, and his office (as an apostle) needed to be replaced. The qualifications for an apostle are briefly given, and Matthias is appointed and numbered with the other eleven.

Chapter 2 – Jerusalem AD 33

The events of chapter 2 follow on immediately from chapter 1, and describe the events of Pentecost. Josephus¹ tells of one Passover feast (around that time) where 256,500 lambs were sacrificed, and he estimates the number of people attending at 2,700,200 people. If we accept this number as typical, we see 2.5 million people come from all over the then-known world to see Jesus crucified (c/f Lk 24:18-20). These same people are about to witness God's power in the establishment of the church.

The Holy Spirit came to the apostles (for a further discussion on this, see my Acts study), and something like fire sat on each of them. A sound like a rushing mighty wind drew the attention of the crowd, and they could then *see* something going on with each of the apostles, and then *hear* them speak in languages that they had never learned!

Peter took the lead, and preached the first gospel sermon, that the things that were happening that day were the fulfilment of prophecy, and concerned Jesus who had been crucified just 7 weeks before, as many of them had seen.

Many of them were convinced that Jesus was in fact the very Messiah, and they asked Peter what they needed to do (Acts 2:47). His response was that they needed to repent and be baptised so that their sins could be forgiven (2:38), and the same day 3,000 of them obeyed the gospel (2:41).

From that time, we see the church spoken of as having been established "...and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved..." (2:47). This was not something that they just did on 'Sunday' but was an integral part of their lives, and we see them daily coming together and having fellowship and praying and praising God and sharing meals together.

Because these people had come from all over the world, after they became Christians in Jerusalem, they then faced a dilemma: How could they go home now? Soon, they began to run out of money, and they "reached the credit limit on their bankcard". This sets the scene for events that will follow in the next few chapters.

¹ Josephus: "Wars of the Jews" Book 6, Chapter 9, Verse 3

Chapter 3 – Jerusalem AD 33

In the early part of Acts (up to chapter 6) we see all of the miracles being done only by the apostles. On one particular day, Peter and John went to the Temple, and saw a man who was lame from birth and begged for money (there was no social security) to live on. This man had been there for years, and he would have been a familiar sight to the people who lived in Jerusalem.

They did not give him money, but they did heal him so that immediately he was able to rise up and walk. The people saw it and were astonished, which gave Peter the opportunity to preach another sermon.

- Why do you marvel at this?
- Jesus was glorified by God
- You delivered Him up
- You denied Him to Pilate – he wanted to let Him go
- You sought a murderer to be released instead
- You killed God’s chosen one
- God raised Him up again
- We (Peter and John) are witnesses of this

Chapter 4 – Jerusalem AD 33

Peter’s sermon is interrupted by the Jewish leaders, and they took them into custody. Peter and John are taken before the Sanhedrin, and they stand in the very place where Jesus had stood and been condemned to death only a few weeks before. Peter responds to them with his third sermon:

- This was a good deed that was done to the man (so what is the problem? Have we been arrested for doing good?)
- You are witnesses of this, and so are the people of Israel,
- We did this by the authority of Jesus:
 - Whom you crucified
 - Whom God raised from the dead (a challenge to the Sadducees’ doctrine)
- This man stands whole before you (consider the evidence)
- Jesus was the stone that YOU builders rejected (makes the condemnation of the OT Scriptures apply to them) (Ps 118:22; Is 28:16),
- God has made Him the head of the corner (c/f Eph 2:19-22),
- You have rejected God’s Messiah “no other name under heaven” (4:12)

Whilst the Sanhedrin did not like what Peter and John were doing or saying, they faced a problem because they could see that the man who was lame could now walk, and could not explain how this came to be. The sudden rise of the Christians were seen as a threat to the Jewish religion, so the Sanhedrin threatened them, commanded them not to speak and teach in the name of Jesus any more, and let them go (4:14-18). Peter’s response was that they needed to do what God said, not what the Jewish leaders said! (4:19-21).

The number of the disciples continued to grow, and the number of men came to be about 5,000 (4:4) which implies that the number excludes women and believing children. This would take the total number of the disciples to probably about 12,000.

The apostles performed miracles (4:30-31) and gave witness to the resurrection (4:33). The brethren shared whatever they had (remember that there were thousands of people from all over the world who had come for Passover and Pentecost, then became Christians, and had decided not to return home. They were running out of money and needed to be fed). The brethren sold whatever they had, including land and houses and brought the money to the apostles.

Chapter 5 – Jerusalem AD 33

Two people who had become Christians in Jerusalem were a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They wanted to be seen to be like the rest of the brethren, and so they sold some land and brought the money to the apostles. But they lied about how much they got for the land and said that what they were giving was all the money they received for it. They lied to God, and He struck them down dead for their sin. This had a huge effect on the early church, and showed that God was not to be messed with!

The apostles continued to work miracles (5:12), which resulted in increasing numbers of people becoming Christians (5:14). This continued to raise the ire of the Jewish leaders, and so they arrested all of the apostles (5:17-18). However, God had them released by sending an angel to open the prison door, and said to them to go and stand and preach in the Temple. (5:19-20). The next day the Jewish leaders assembled the Sanhedrin to make a judgement against the apostles, but found them missing from the prison but teaching in the Temple. They were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Now all of the apostles stood where Jesus stood. [Later, Paul will also stand there (22:30)].

Peter's response is that they needed to obey God, not the Jewish leaders (5:29). Peter then has the opportunity to preach another sermon:

- Would God have raised Him up if he was a guilty man? (No!)
- If he was innocent, then what you did was wrong!
- God has put Him in the supreme position (at His right hand),
- Through Jesus, Israel has repentance and forgiveness of sin,
- We can give eyewitness account of these things,
- The Holy Spirit also attests to this (they had seen and heard the action of the Holy Spirit with the Pentecost events, speaking in tongues, and the miracles – not the least of which was the lame man!)

The Sanhedrin were furious, and wanted to put the apostles to death (5:33). However Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of the Sanhedrin uttered wisely that if what they were teaching was from man, it would die out, but if it was from God then they could not stop it (5:34-39). They agreed with him and commanded the apostles (again) to stop teaching in the name of Jesus (5:40).

Chapter 6 – Jerusalem AD 33/34

The Jerusalem church had grown beyond measure, and feeding the enormous number of people who were staying in Jerusalem had become a massive task. A dispute arose, because the Christians of Greek origin (they were all Jews, but were proselytes who had become Jews) were missing out on a fair share of the food (6:1).

The apostles asked the church to make a selection of some deacons to look after the task, so that they could attend to their own work of teaching and preaching. The apostles then appointed the seven deacons, and confirmed the appointment by laying their hands on them (6:3-6).

This event (laying on of the apostles hands) is a turning point in Acts, and after this we see two of these men (Stephen and Philip) performing miracles (6:8; 8:6).

Some of the Jews (not Jewish Christians – but the Jews), rose up against Stephen, and brought him to the Sanhedrin (6:11-15).

Chapter 7 – Jerusalem AD 33/34

Stephen appears before the Sanhedrin, and begins his defence by giving a potted history of Israel. He is taking the Sanhedrin on a journey from a place that they are comfortable with (God's call to Abraham) to a place that they were very uncomfortable with (Christ was the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham – and **YOU KILLED HIM !!!**) (7:51-53). The Sanhedrin revolted, and took Stephen out and had him stoned to death (7:54-60). A young Saul appears on the scene, and he appears to have returned to Jerusalem about a year after the beginnings of the church (7:58). It is possible (even probable) that he returned because of what he had heard about the rise of Christianity. He had previously studied under Gamaliel, but would have been absent from Jerusalem for about 5 years. [See my Acts series “Study 12–Paul’s Early Life” for further details]

Chapter 8 – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria AD 33/34

Saul becomes an important player in the scene, and he was so irate at the rise of Christianity because he thought that it was against God's will, that he himself went to the High Priest to ask for authority to round up the Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment (Acts 26:9-11). Saul's persecution marks another turning point in Acts, because it causes the Christians to move away from Jerusalem. This first dispersion is to regional Judea and Samaria (8:1), and everywhere they went they preached the word (8:4).

Philip (one of the deacons) went to the city of Samaria, and we soon see the church established there (8:6). When Philip worked miracles, the people listened to what he had to say (8:6), which shows the purpose of the miracles. Although Philip was able to work miracles, he could not pass that ability on to other people, and as soon as the brethren in Jerusalem heard that the church had been established in Samaria they sent two apostles, Peter and John, down there (8:14). When they came, they laid their hands on some of the brethren, and the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit (the ability to work miracles, speak in tongues, and other gifts) came upon those who received it (8:15-17). We see here that it was the *apostles alone* who had the ability to pass on the miraculous spiritual gifts. Whilst Philip had received the gifts, he couldn't pass them on to others.

Philip was told to go the road to Gaza. There he met an official from Ethiopia who had come to worship in Jerusalem and was returning home. It is probable that he had come to Jerusalem for one of the three great pilgrimage festivals. If so, then this would place the time at the Feast of Tabernacles in AD 33 (October), or more likely Passover / Pentecost in AD 34 (March / May).

He was reading Isaiah 53, but didn't understand it. Philip explained to him that it was a passage about Jesus who was crucified and rose again. He must have explained how the church began in Jerusalem, and how the 3,000 were baptised on the day of Pentecost. The Ethiopian asked why he couldn't be baptised, and Philip explained that he could if he believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God (8:26-37). We then see a description of Philip baptising the Ethiopian “...and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptised him...” (8:38). As the Ethiopian returned home, we see the gospel going beyond the regions of Judea and Samaria, and for the first time going to another continent (Africa). Philip continues his work until he arrives in Caesarea, where he will appear again about 20 years later (21:8).