

Adult Teaching Resources

January 9, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalm 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

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“Amazing Grace”

Acts 8:4-17

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep everyone together in the large group. Ask everyone to share their answers to this question:

What boundaries, real or implied, keep us separated from our neighbors?

As folks share their answers, record them on the board or large sheet of paper for everyone to see.

Then, ask this follow-up question:

What is the best way to break down those boundaries, cross the chasms, and make connections in order to build significant and meaningful relationships?

Record those answers on the board.

Spend a few minutes sharing about Philip’s willingness to take the gospel to places previously avoided because of racial and cultural differences.

Reading the Bible

What did those who were scattered do? (went from place to place proclaiming the word)

Where did Philip go? (to the city of Samaria)

How did the crowds receive his message of the Messiah? (they listened eagerly to what was said)

What happened to some in the crowd? (unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured)

What did a certain man named Simon do in Samaria? (he had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great.)

What did the people say about him? (“This man is the power of God that is called Great.”)

Reading the Bible *continued*

Why did the people listen eagerly to Simon? (for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.)

What message did Philip bring? (he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ)

What happened to them because of their belief? (they were baptized)

What happened to Simon when he heard Philip's message? (he believed, he was baptized, and stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.)

Who did the apostles send to Samaria after Philip spread the message? (Peter and John)

What did Peter and John do in Samaria? (they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Making Connections

Who is the most outspoken proponent of the gospel you know? What does he or she say that makes him/her stand out? How is the message received?

What do you think is the cause for social prejudice? Why do you think we let prejudices dictate so much of our attitudes toward others?

Who, other than Jesus, is the best example of someone willing to “cross borders” and break down societal barriers? How did that person do it? What results did that person achieve?

What does it mean to have the “spirit at work” within someone? What does that look like? How do you know it is the spirit of God?

Have you ever been to a live magic show? Who was the magician? What was his/her best trick? Did you have any idea how the trick was done?

Do you believe in magic? Why do you say that? Have you experienced something that you cannot explain? What do you attribute that to?

How often do we get distracted by something “new and shiny” like magic and lose focus on the truth found in Christ? What are the things we most often get distracted by? What pulls us back to the faith?

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “When news of the Samaritan revival reached Jerusalem, Peter and John came out to investigate. They noted that the Samaritans’ faith was immature – perhaps, like Simon, they were only following Jesus because of the miracles they saw Philip do.” Who, in your experience, has been like Peter and John who help the faithfully immature grow in their faith?

Have you ever had hands laid on you? What was the event? What do you remember? How did you feel?

Making Connections *continued*

Have you ever laid hands on someone else? What was the event? What do you remember? How did you feel?

When do you think believers receive the Holy Spirit? How does it happen? Have you received the Holy Spirit? How do you know?

So What?

Have your group remain together in the large group. Go back to the list of barriers the group created at the beginning of the lesson. Spend some time in large group conversation and discussion over these questions?

How many of those barriers do we allow to get in the way of us worshipping together?

Which barriers are the easiest to bridge?

Which barriers are more difficult to cross?

Why do we allow those barriers to exist?

Now, imagine Jesus were in your group. What do you think Jesus would say about the barriers we create?

Are any barriers necessary or should all barriers be removed?

What strategies do you think Jesus would share about breaking the barriers?

What holds us back from being more inclusive with other groups when it comes to our faith lives?

Why do we hesitate to include more people in worshipping God?

What would Philip do if he lived today?

Spend time in conversation and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, do something intentional to be more inclusive for your group or your church.

Break a barrier that has been in place and see what God does with your actions.

Prayer

Loving God, we confess that we are comfortable with the barriers and boundaries we have created. Forgive us for holding on too tightly to the gospel and not sharing it with everyone we see. When we have the opportunity, give us the courage and put your words in our mouths so that others might hear the good news we proclaim. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Samaria—King Omri moved the capital of Israel from Tirzah to Samaria around 884 BCE.

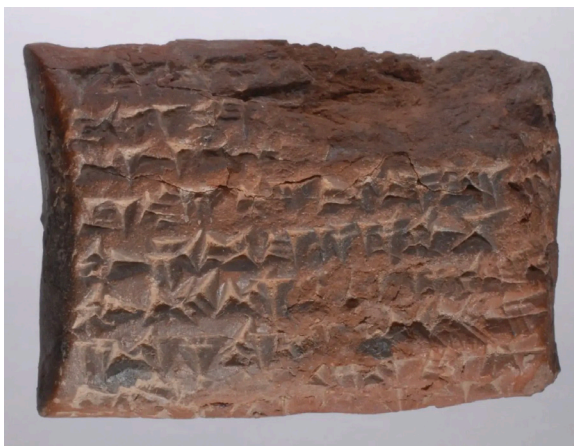
According to 1 Kings 16:24, Omri “bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.” The Hebrew name of Samaria was *Shomron*, and the hill in question was a very large hill.

The site of Samaria was largely limited to the top of the hill. Though expanded by Omri’s son Ahab, it was not a large city, but served primarily as a royal and administrative compound. Samaria has been carefully excavated by archaeologists, who have confirmed the presence of monumental buildings from the time of Ahab, along with numerous costly items such as furniture inlays of ivory, statues, wall panels, and glass inlays, opulent lifestyles that provoked the prophets from Elijah to Amos.



Samaria was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Sargon renamed it *Samerina*, and claimed to have rebuilt it even better than before.

The city was later the focus of a massive reconstruction under Herod the Great, who made it into a lavish Roman city. This would have been the city known to Philip and other first century Christians. The small theater pictured above would have come from this period.



A change of hands—Archaeology confirms the shift in population following the demise of the Northern Kingdom. Not only does the material culture show signs of changing, but two clay tablets found in the ancient town of Hadid—between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv—record legal transactions between people with non-Israelite names.

The tablets were inscribed in cuneiform, in the Assyrian language, and date to the early seventh century, BCE. One records a transfer of land, and the other records a loan. None of the names

Digging Deeper *continued*

in the documents are Yahwistic. One of the tablets is pictured above (photo by the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, from [Haaretz](#)).

Still appalling—Many years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. famously observed: “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.”

That observation remains true. Does it trouble you? Can you think of ways to make that situation better?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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How do we explain the “Samaritan Schism?”

Following the exile, both Ezra and Nehemiah sought to enforce a doctrine of ethnic purity among the returning exiles. In their minds, the only “pure” Jews were those who could establish a pedigree of descending from Jews who had been in exile. This eliminated descendants of Jews who had remained in the land—primarily the poor—on the assumption that their families would have intermarried with people of other ethnicities.

After the return, many of the former exiles also married among the local peoples, but for Ezra, this was detestable, meaning that “the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands” (Ezra 9:2-4). When he learned the extent of it, according to his own account, Ezra ripped his mantle, tore at his hair and beard, and went into mourning (Ezra 9:2-4). Following a loud prayer of repentance, he persuaded the people that they had broken faith with God and concluded “So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law” (Ezra 10:3).

After first attempting to call everyone to a mass meeting but being thwarted by heavy rain, representatives were appointed to canvass all of the people and compiled a list of those who had intermarried with local people. The resulting list included not just laypeople, but also many priests and Levites, whose names are listed in Ezra 10:16-43. The text claims that all of these were forced to end their marriages and abandon their children: “All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children” (Ezra 10:44).

Interestingly enough, the text notes that two men opposed the measure: “Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this” (Ezra 10:15). One might expect their opposition to have been from self-interest, but they are not mentioned on the list of those who had married foreign peoples. While we cannot be sure of their motives, perhaps they saw the cruelty of the practice and felt compassion for the families who would be separated. Perhaps they had a more inclusive attitude, believing that foreign peoples could be incorporated into the Hebrew family without diluting their allegiance to Yahweh.

It is evident, however, that both Ezra and Nehemiah believed it would work the other way. Knowing that women raise the children and have the most influence over them, they were particularly concerned with instances in which Hebrew men married non-Hebrew women.

Nehemiah took an even more contentious and hands-on approach than Ezra. Consider his account of how he dealt with the issue:

The Hardest Question *continued*

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?” (Neh. 13:23-27).

Intermarriage was not the only issue. After both Israel and Judah had been conquered and their elite populations deported, people of the land continued to worship Yahweh, and others who have been deported from other lands had also begun to worship Yahweh. When it became known that those who had returned from exile planned to rebuild the temple, some of them sought to help. Though the writer of Ezra regarded them as “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin,” they wanted to assist in the effort and worship in Jerusalem.

According to the text, “they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here’” (Ezra 4:1-2).

The returning exiles would not allow it, however, seeing themselves as the only legitimate Jews: “But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, ‘You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us’” (Ezra 4:3).

So it was that local residents who had never stopped worshiping Yahweh were cut off from the community of the returning exiles on the premise that their mixed heritage disqualified them from further participation in Israel. This was the beginning of the Samaritan schism, a divide that only deepened in the coming years. Not permitted to worship in Jerusalem but still desiring to worship, the Samaritans built their own temple atop Mount Gerizim. During a brief period of Jewish independence, the Hasmonean king John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple (about 111-112 BCE), pushing the two groups even further apart.

These are the historical roots of the sharp divide between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day. Though they worshiped the same God and lived in adjacent lands, the history of enmity kept them apart. This is what makes Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and Philip’s work among the Samaritans (Acts 8) so exceptional.

Even today, a small community of Samaritans continues to live on Mount Gerizim, and they still observe the Passover with blood sacrifices. And to this day, Jews are forbidden to marry Samaritans.