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'They believed Philip preaching'(Acts 8.12) /1

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The account of the mission of the early church to Samaria (Acts 8.4-34) is one of the most puzzling in the NT./2 It is given in two stages, the visit of Philip (4-13), then of the apostles, Peter and John. These two stages are variously interpreted whether of baptism and confirmation or of conversion and baptism with the Holy Spirit. /3 Dr Dunn in a recent book on "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" has suggested some reasons for claiming that the faith of the Samaritans in response to Philip was defective and that Luke intended his readers to know this./4 This paper is mainly concerned with two of the reasons:

1. That relating to the message brought by Philip;
2. That relating to their faith.

1. That relating to the message brought by Philip. It is claimed that the Samaritans understood the message in terms of their own expectation of the Messiah and the coming kingdom. /5 Such a Messiah was to overcome their foes and exalt the Samaritans, and it was this 'Ta'eb' or 'Restorer' that Philip proclaimed. The misunderstanding, it is claimed, was explicable in the atmosphere of excitement that Simon Magus had aroused. Such an atmosphere affected the response to Philip and their submission to baptism as a rite of entry into their kingdom.

It is claimed that Luke by the phrases he uses for Philip's message is encouraging this view, i.e., 'Ho Christos' (The Christ) simpliciter, and the phrase 'He basileia (The kingdom) tou theou (of God)'. In Acts according to Dr Dunn 'ho christos' simpliciter is always used of the pre-Christian experience, /6 while 'kingdom of God' as proclaimed to non-Christians refers to the kingdom of Jewish expectations. This is a strange claim, almost as if one were to say the Christian message from a certain slant could be seen as Jewish. The verses that contain the main account of Philip's ministry (5-8) are a summary in general

terms /7 and such a summary does not lead us to expect subtle nuances. Sufficient attention is not given to the context of the account- the proclamation of the word(8.4) ie whatever the variation in expression in these verses, it represents the word proclaimed. The 'word' is a summary of Peter's kerygmatic speech on the day of Pentecost which when accepted brings about conversion(2.41). It is the special task of the apostles to give themselves to the preaching of the 'word of God'(6.2). That both the phrases 'the Christ' and the 'kingdom of God' are within this context of preaching the word suggests that they too are kerygmatic in the full sense.

This view is confirmed by the use of 'ho Christos' simpliciter in other references that are given e.g., it is used of 'the Christ' who was to suffer(3.18; 17.3) or who rose from the dead (2.31) i.e., it is thoroughly kerygmatic, not Jewish. Later Philip preaches 'Jesus' as the fulfilment of prophecies pointing to a suffering Christ (8.35). It would be natural to assume that 'the Christ' proclaimed by Philip was not pre-Christian but fully christian in the sense that in response to such proclamation people come to believe (cf 3.18 and 4.4). The argument that applies to the phrase 'the Christ' also applies to the 'kingdom of God' (8.12) i.e., that it is in the context of the proclamation of the word, and should be entirely consonant with that. It should further be noted that it does not stand by itself. The full phrase runs, 'good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.' The combination of 'kingdom' and 'Jesus' as Conzelmann points out. /8 is the Lucan way of describing the content of the proclamation. It is parallel to the content of Paul's proclamation at Rome where we find him 'preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.'(28.31) Are we to apply the interpretation of such a kingdom as being that of Jewish expectation to both places? Or is it not more convincing to see the kingdom of God as Burchard points out as kerygmatic in Acts? /9 To single out the phrase 'the Christ' and 'the kingdom of God' as pre-

christian and ignore the phrases the 'word' and the 'name of Jesus' is too subtle a refinement of the narrative of Luke if our argument is correct.

2. The second reason offered for suggesting that the response of the Samaritans was defective relates to the nature of their faith.

In the story we have two responses of the Samaritans, one to Simon and the other to Philip.

/ 10 Dr Dunn suggests that the response to Simon was one that showed 'little discernment and depth',

/ 11 a movement of the mob caught up in a wave of emotion. This response is bound up with that to Philip by the use of the same verb 'prosecho'. It can mean here with 'ton noun' ('the mind') understood, 'pay attention'. / 12 So the same sort of attention is given to Philip as to Simon ie something superficial and shallow. How valid is this equation however? It should be said to begin with that the use of terms like 'herd instinct' or 'wave of emotion' sounds strange within the Lucan presentation. Luke is rather concerned to underline the impact of Simon's ministry e.g., amazement (9, 11), wholesale attention (10, 11) and over against it the triumph of the proclamation of Philip. This would suggest that the response to Philip was of a more vital kind, and this is confirmed by his use of the word 'believe' (pisteuo) in relation to the word proclaimed by Philip (8.12). 'Believe' is the normal term for the Christian response.

Luke is careful to make a distinction that is important between his uses of 'prosecho'. It relates to the subject of the attention. The Samaritans give heed to the man Simon (10, 11), the magician (9,11) but in Philip's case they give heed to the message he proclaims (6, 12) i.e., the concentration of attention is on the good news proclaimed. It is contrasted with the source of Simon's power i.e., his magic. That paying attention to the word proclaimed can bring about discipleship is given striking confirmation in the story of Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (16.14) / 13 Do we not need to distinguish the rich response of Lydia from that of the Samaritans?

Before proceeding to look at the nature of the faith implied here, there is one other point brought in to support a mass movement of unthinking people and that is 'homothumadon' ('with one accord') (vs 6), 'the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip.' /14 According to Haenchen, Luke uses the term to describe the ideal unity of the community and applies it to the Samaritans in their united response here. /15 It is used of the united action of a group whether in prayer (1.14; 4.24; cf 2.46) or in decision in the council (15.25) or of an angry mob (7.57; 18.12; 19.29). The stress here would appear to be on the unity in eager and glad response.

We turn now finally to look at the terms in which faith is described: "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news." (8.12 'Hote de episteusan to Philippo euangelizomeno ') Dr Dunn is not prepared to concede that Luke means by the use of 'episteusan' ('believed') here a full and valid faith. Rather in his view this is found when the verb is used with the preposition 'epi' or 'eis' followed by the accusative of the person believed in e.g., 'Lord' or 'Lord Jesus Christ.' Here it is used with the dative and, he claims, signifies 'intellectual assent to a statement or proposition' and is paralleled in the phrase elsewhere in Acts of 'believing in the prophets' (cf 26.27 'pisteueis tois prophetais'; 24.14)

Our first reaction is to wonder whether in Acts there is such a refinement in the understanding of faith as 'intellectual assent to a proposition' in the realm of soteriology. But can we distinguish the use of 'pisteuo' in this way in Luke? In the context the word is proclaimed whether it is described in phrases like 'the Christ' or 'the kingdom' or the 'name of Christ'. The response to this is given in terms of faith and it is faith not in 'Philip' but in 'Philip-proclaiming-the-good news' i.e., it is response to the good news.

It is questionable however if the distinction between 'pisteuo' with the dative and 'pisteuo eis' or

'epi' with the accusative can be maintained. /16 If we take the use of 'pisteuo' with the object 'kurios' (Lord), we find it can be expressed in Acts in three ways either with the preposition 'epi' ('Many believed in the Lord'; 9.42) or with 'eis' ('The Lord in whom they believed'; 14.23) or simply with the dative. ('Those who believe in the Lord'; 5.14; cf 18.8). There appears to be no difference in the meaning attached to 'pisteuo'. In every case it is the decisive committal of the Christian. When 'pisteuo' is used of trust or reliance on the scriptures whether the law or the prophets, it can take the dative (24.14. 26.27) or be joined by 'epi'. It is clear that if Paul says to the Philippian jailer 'Believe on ('epi') the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved' (16.31), it is no mere intellectual assent. As far as Luke is concerned it is full committal. Yet he can use the same combination of verb and preposition ('epi') for belief in scripture. The claim therefore that it is mere intellectual assent in 8.12 does not seem in accord with the linguistic situation in Acts.

As further evidence of the shallowness of the Samaritans' faith, Dr Dunn puts it parallel to the faith of Simon Magus. /17 It is said of him that 'he believed' ('episteusen') and was baptised' (8.13). This is interpreted that 'he had never become a member of the people of God' /18 and based on the words of indictment of Peter, 'you have neither part nor lot in this matter'. (vs 21). Peter's words however refer to Simon's attempt to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit with money. According to Haenchen /19 supported by Lampe /20, the formula which is taken from the LXX is a formula of excommunication. If this is the case, then up to this point Simon has been a member of the believing community. This is confirmed by the use of 'pisteuo' in the absolute form without an object. It is said simply that 'Simon believed' (episteusen'). Elsewhere in Acts such an absolute use applies to the believing community e.g., 'those who believed' ('hoi pisteusantes') (2.44), the 5000 converts ('episteusan' 4.4) i.e., it is understood

as effective faith (cf also 11.21; 15.5). If as the context suggests Luke is emphasising the impact of Philip's ministry over against that of Simon, this would support a valid faith. /21 It is assumed because of the expression of Simon's life that he is not a Christian. Yet it is interesting that in Acts Luke seldom mentions the necessity of faith finding its validation in works. He never uses the word 'fruit' ('karpos') and only on one occasion does he use the phrase 'In Paul's speech of 'works ('erga') fit for repentance' (26.20). His interest is in the witness of the church (1.8) proclaiming the word and the response is described in a stylistic variation of the word 'pisteuo'. Unlike Ananias and Sapphira, members of the believing community (5.1-11) Simon has the possibility of repentance of his desire to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that he resembles Ananias and Sapphira in that his judgment is in relation to material matters and to the Holy Spirit.'

To conclude then: whatever may be the explanation of the two accounts linked together in the account of the mission to Samaria in Acts, it does appear that to suggest the faith of the Samaritans in response to Philip's preaching of the good news was defective does not represent the Lucan view.

Notes

1. This short essay arose out of a seminar on the charismatic movement and the NT in the Presbyterian College over a period of two years where among other books that of Dr J.D.G.Dunn on 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' (London, 1970) was studied with great profit. The essay was delivered at the International Bible Congress in Oxford in 1973 and is here published essentially as given along with Dr Dunn's reply. We are grateful to him for consenting to reply.

2. For the discussion cf E.Preuschen, Apostelgeschichte, (Tübingen, 1912) p 50 (he considers the separation of water baptism and that of the Holy Spirit

- as opposing the view of the early church); Wendt (H.H.), Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen, 1913), p.153
- N.2; K.Bornhäuser, Studien zur Apostelgeschichte, (Gütersloh, 1914), pp 89-93; M.Dibelius, Studies in Acts, (London, 1956), p.194; C.S.C.Williams, Acts, (London, 1957), pp 118-120; E.Haenchen, Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen, 1961), pp 256-259; F.F.Bruce, Acts, (London, 1962³), pp 181-183; H. Conzelmann, Apostelgeschichte, (Tübingen, 1963) pp 53-55; G.Stählin, Apostelgeschichte, (Göttingen, 1966), p.123; G.W.H.Lampe, The Seal of the Spirit, (London, 1967), p.66ff
- N.3: Cf J.D.G.Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, (London, 1970), Ch.5 for a thorough look at the problem.
- N.4: op.cit., p.63ff
- N.5: op.cit., p.63f; also J.Macdonald, Theology of the Samaritans, (London, 1964), pp.362-371 (on 'Ta'eb)
- N.6: References in Acts are 2.31, 36; 3.18; 4.26; 9.22; 17.3; 26.23.
- N.7: Cf M.Dibelius, op.cit.p.17, N.34
- N.8: H.Conzelmann, op.cit., p.54 (on 8.12 'der Inhalt der Predigt ist in seiner (Lukas) Diktion gegeben')
- N.9: C.Burchard, Der dreizehnte Zeuge (Göttingen, 1970), p.141: 'In der Apostelgeschichte nennt Lukas die Basileia als Kerygma'. Cf K.L.Schmidt, TDNT, Vol.1, p.583(b)
- N.10: The account of Simon should precede that of Philip. For the problem see the literature cited.
- N.11: op.cit., p.64; on the 'superstitious people' (sic), the Samaritans, cf the discussion in Macdonald, op.cit., pp.22-24; cf also p.389 on the absence of belief in Satanic power.
- N.12: For the various uses of the word cf. W.F.Arndt and F.W.Gingrich, Greek English Lexicon of the NT etc., (Cambridge, 1957) p.721; it occurs in Acts: 5. 35; 8.6, 10, 11; 16.14; 20.28.
- N.13: This is the only place where such a parallel phrase appears in Acts.
- N.14: References are 1.14; 2.46; 4.24; 5.12; 7.57; 8.6; 12.20; 15.25; 18.12; 19.29; Romans 15.6.

N.15: op.cit., p.120; cf Heidland, TDNT, Vol IV, p.86 where in reference to 8.6 he speaks of the 'inner unity of the community....listening to apostolic teaching'.

N.16: Cf Bultmann, TDNT, Vol VI, p.203ff

N.17: op.cit.,p.65

N.18: ibid

N.19: op.cit.p.255.

N.20: Lampe, New Peake Commentary, (London,1962),ad loc.

N.21: Haenchen, op.cit.,p.254; cf however Stählin, op.cit., p.121 who claims that Simon's faith was not a valid faith; cf also Wendt, op.cit.,p.157; Bruce,op. cit.,p.179.