

May 21, 2023

“An Ethiopian is Baptized”
Lesson 4

Acts 8:29-40

Intro

There are two central figures in this passage: the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the seven, along with Stephen, chosen for the ministry of feeding the widows in Acts 6. By the first part of chapter 8, he has also been preaching the gospel in Samaria, which Jesus told them to do in Acts 1:8. He is walking in obedience to what Jesus has instructed His followers to do, when he is led by an angel to the meeting we see in today’s passage.

The person Philip meets is from Ethiopia, a nation just south of Egypt. He is far from home when Philip meets him on a road from Jerusalem to Gaza—this man is heading back home from Jerusalem. The *shortest* land route is between Ethiopia and Jerusalem is almost 2500 miles! Traveling 50 miles a day, it would take almost 2 months to make this trip. The man was a eunuch, meaning his genitals are missing. This most often happened as a result of castration. Leviticus 21:16-23 says that anyone who has a physical defect cannot participate in the spiritual service and worship in the temple. In 8:26, just before our study passage, we are told that this eunuch was “an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” In serving the queen, he is a person of both influence and wealth.

Read Acts 8:29-40

1. vs. 29: The Holy Spirit guides Philip to go to the eunuch’s chariot and stay near it
 - The Spirit knows the heart of the man inside the chariot
 - The chariot may have looked fancy, and Philip didn’t know the man
 - But the Spirit directs Philip, and he obeys

2. vs. 30: Philip runs up to the chariot
 - It’s either moving slowly, or has stopped
 - He hears the man reading the book of Isaiah
 - The man was reading aloud, which was common in that time
 - The man was educated, to be able to read
 - He was wealthy enough to be able to buy a copy of the Isaiah scroll
 - Writings were rare, and therefore expensive to purchase
 - Philip asks him a simple, but leading, question
 - “Do you understand what you are reading?”
 - It’s one thing to read something; it’s another thing to understand it

3. vs. 31: The eunuch responds, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?”
 - He has come to Jerusalem to worship (vs 27), so his heart is toward God
 - He wants to know, but he doesn’t understand
 - He’s not too proud to admit that he doesn’t know what Isaiah is talking about
 - He’s so hungry to know that he invites a complete stranger into his chariot

4. vs. 32: The man is reading from Isaiah 53:7-8
Isaiah 53 is one the clearest prophecies about Jesus as the Messiah
The passage being read shows Jesus as a sufferer, not a conquering king
It shows the Messiah to be humble and accepting of the role God has asked of Him
5. vs. 33: This verse continues the quoting of Isaiah 53
It describes the Messiah as being humiliated
Jesus was mocked, beaten, and scourged as well as being crucified
Any of these would qualify as humiliation
All of them together show just how greatly he was humiliated
All these actions led to Jesus not being treated with justice or fairness
Pilate, declaring Him innocent, still allowed Him to be crucified
6. vs. 34: The eunuch's question shows he has the right direction in his thinking and understanding
The passage is about *someone*; he doesn't know who, but he's trying to find out
He has carefully read and thought about this passage to come to this question
This makes him open to hearing about Jesus from Philip
7. vs. 35: Philip uses the passage from Is. 53:7-8 as a springboard to other Scriptures about Jesus
The surrounding verses of chapter 53 offer many ideas
53:3: He was a "man of suffering"
53:4: He "bore our suffering"
53:10: His life was "an offering for sin"
What was done to Jesus as predicted by Isaiah was well-known by this time
It's very possible/likely that the Ethiopian had heard at least some of the details
Besides these Scriptures, Philip likely uses some non-recorded details of the "good news"
Jesus was buried and rose again is certainly part of this good news
8. vs. 36: The eunuch's question here shows that Philip talked about many things besides Isaiah 53
The eunuch knows that being baptized is a necessary step in his spiritual journey
He has come to understanding and belief in the resurrected Jesus
As Peter preached in Acts 2, he knows he must repent and be baptized to be saved
"What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"
He's ready and excited to take this important step
9. vs. 37: This verse doesn't appear in the oldest manuscripts of Acts
What it says is found in Matthew, John, and I John
It's teaching is therefore accurate and genuine
Philip is here giving the Ethiopian a chance to think through what he is doing
"Do you believe completely in who Jesus is and has done?" is the focus
His answer of "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God" confirms his faith in the truth
Jesus was God in the flesh, come to earth to atone for mankind's sins with his own death
10. vs. 38: After Philip heard the Ethiopian's response to "If you believe", then he has the chariot stop
They go "into the water" and the Ethiopian is baptized
The ceremonial washings of the Jews were also full-body experiences

11. vs. 39: Two things of note happen here

First, Philip disappears after the baptism

He has been taken away by the Holy Spirit

The text says “the eunuch did not see him again”

Why it was done with way is not said, but it was certainly out of the ordinary!

Second, the eunuch continued his trip home, “rejoicing”

If he was shocked at Philip’s disappearance, it didn’t phase his joy

He has come into a relationship with the living God

He rejoices in his salvation, and in being close to God

12. vs. 40: We are told that Philip ends up in Azotas

It is a coastal town some 25 miles to the west of where he met the eunuch

He is preaching the gospel there and in other towns in the region

Application: Philip used the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah to help the Ethiopian come to salvation. There are over 300 prophecies in the OT that refer to Jesus’ birth, life, purpose in coming, and death and resurrection. Just as Philip did, we are called to be a “worker...rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). We have the opportunity to read and study these scriptures so that we too might use them to help others see the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the prophecies that predict Jesus’ life and ministry. They show that You planned everything, and that You have a plan for every person in this world, which starts with them coming to know You and follow You. We want You to use us in Your plans to reach those who are ready to hear about Jesus. We pray these things in His name, Amen.