



Sunday School Lesson for October 16, 2005

"Philip Teaches an Ethiopian Official"

LESSON: **Acts 8:26-38**

READ: **Acts 8:26-40**

TIME: A.D. 36

PLACE: On a road between Jerusalem and Gaza

GOLDEN TEXT: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this [the same] Scripture, preached Jesus to him [the Ethiopian]." Acts 8:35 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Churches are typically involved in many activities, including Sunday school and other educational ministries, benevolent work that aids the needy, support of schools, orphanages, and various missions. Even social activities are important to the life of a local congregation.

As important as all of these activities are, the lifeblood of the church is evangelism. What is evangelism? It is simply the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead, and is coming back for His children. To be sure, some of the aforementioned activities can be used as tools for evangelism; nevertheless, without intentional efforts to reach the lost, a church will wither and die.

Last week we were introduced to the Evangelist Philip. Although no specifics are given in Acts, we can conclude that a considerable number came to know the Lord through his ministry in Samaria. Now, however, Philip was going to be called away from a thriving public ministry to share the gospel with one man.

Philip could identify with both mass and personal evangelism.

TODAY'S AIM

FACTS: to examine the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian official.

PRINCIPLE: to illustrate how the Spirit uses the Word and faithful witnesses to bring people to Christ.

APPLICATION: to encourage us to know Bible content and be prepared to share the gospel as the Spirit provides opportunity.

LESSON OUTLINE

Providential Encounter-Acts 8:26-29

Prophecy Explained-Acts 8:30-34

Pardon Embraced-Acts 8:35-38

LESSON TEXT

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-the desert road-that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.

29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

QUESTIONS

1. Who told Philip to get on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza? (Acts 8:26)

The "angel of the Lord" is who gave Philip the divine appointment to get on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. The "angel of the Lord" is mentioned in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the OT, this "angel" is equated with God Himself (see Gen. 22:11p16; and Exod. 3:1-6). When the "angel of the Lord" spoke, it was thus the Lord speaking (see Matt. 1:20).

2. What do we know about the man from Ethiopia? (Acts 8:27-28)

We know that this man from Ethiopia was a eunuch-which technically means that he had been emasculated or castrated. However, by the first century the term had become a government title used for important military or political officials. This man is said to have been "of great authority" as he served as minister of finance under the queen mother-or Candace-of Ethiopia.

3. The eunuch had come to worship in Jerusalem. What does this tell us about him? (Acts 8:28)

We are told that the Ethiopian Eunuch was returning home to Ethiopia after having worshiped in Jerusalem. Many Gentiles in the first century had grown weary of the multiple gods and loose morals of their nations. They were searching in Judaism for the truth. We are not told if he was a full proselyte-one who converts to Judaism by undergoing circumcision and baptism, or if he was a God-fearer-one who simply attends the Jewish synagogues to listen to the Scriptures. What we do know is that he was spiritually hungry for the truth.

4. What was the Ethiopian reading as he traveled? (Acts 8:28-30, and 32-33)

As he rode in his chariot-most likely he was being driven by servants since he was "a eunuch of great authority" and would not have been traveling along-he read aloud from a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. What we know as Isaiah 53:7-8 is what he was reading.

5. What does the passage of Scripture in Isaiah deal with? (Acts 8:30, 32-33, and Isaiah 53:7-8)

This passage of Scripture is one of the clearest prophecies concerning the death of Christ in the entire Old Testament! First-century Jews did not speak much about a suffering Messiah. The Jewish people, facing the yoke of Roman rule, believed that the Messiah would come as the Lion of Judah, a delivering king, not a weak lamb. They believed and taught that the suffering One spoken of by Isaiah was the suffering nation of Israel.

The Ryrie Study Bible further notes the following regarding Acts 8:35. "Before the coming of Jesus, the Jews understood Isaiah 53 as referring to the Messiah. This interpretation was abandoned as Christians applied the prophecy to Jesus of Nazareth, and Isaiah 53 was then considered by the Jews to be referring either to Isaiah himself or to the people of Israel, who would be a light to the nations."

6. What initial question did Philip ask the Ethiopian? (Acts 8:30)

Philip ran to catch the Ethiopian riding in his chariot and asked him if he understood what it was that he was reading. Just because one is a Bible student-such as the Ethiopian Eunuch obviously was-does not assure immediate or complete comprehension of the Word of God. This question indicates the diligence that is required in the study of Scripture (see 2 Tim. 2:15). Like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), we must search the Scriptures daily to plumb the depths of the truths contained therein. The Spirit of God does not eliminate the need for human teachers or for diligent Bible study. The Holy Spirit is not given to make study needless, but to make study efficient.

7. What important question did the Ethiopian ask Philip regarding the text from Isaiah? (Acts 8:34)

The eunuch asked Philip if the Prophet Isaiah was talking about himself or "some other man." The identity of the person Isaiah was speaking about bears a direct relationship on the meaning of the passage.

Many modern Bible students look at a Scripture text and ask, What does this verse mean to me? While that is a valid question, it should not be the student's first question. When studying God's Word, we must ask ourselves, Who is speaking? Who is being addressed? What is the context of the passage? Under what historical setting did this take place? Is the text history, prophecy, poetry, or some other kind of literature? After we discover the intention of the writer, then we may ask, What does this mean to me?

We must commend the Ethiopian Eunuch for not being ashamed to ask Philip-a perfect stranger-for clarification regarding this Scripture. And, thank God for Philip's being obedient to the Holy Spirit by going when and where he was told to. May we become more serious about our studies and bolder in our witnessing for Christ. We are but counterparts to Philip-as we too have been called to evangelize the world. As Philip changed his route at the Holy Spirit's direction, we also have to be mindful each day of what He is saying to us. Too many opportunities are allowed to pass whereby we miss the chance to share Christ. Remember, we are only to plant the seed. God will give the increase in His season. Vow to not let another day go by without being armed with God's plan of salvation*; this armor is God's Word.

*For those of you without a plan of salvation, Jesus Is All Ministries shares below "The Roman Road"-scriptures that will allow a child of God to methodically lead a non-believer to Christ Jesus...

Romans 3:10 and 3:23

None of us is "good" or right with God. We can't save ourselves because we can never meet God's requirements.

Romans 5:12, and 6:23a

Man and woman were born into sin and all of mankind has this same sin in common. The price of sin is physical and spiritual death in the "lake of fire and brimstone" (Revelations 20:10).

Romans 5:8 and 6:23b

God has the answer to this sin problem. Jesus Christ died for all of mankind's sins. This is God's gift to us through Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:9, 10

Audible (with the mouth) confession of sin and belief (in the heart) in Jesus Christ makes you right with God; this is God's plan of salvation.

8. What did Philip preach about? (Acts 8:35)

Not only had God brought together the evangelist and the seeker, but He also had providentially arranged a very appropriate text to be considered. Whereas Christ can be preached from any text, a more suitable passage would be difficult to find than Isaiah 53:7-8.

Since Philip began with this text, we can only imagine that he utilized many other Old Testament passages to declare the truth that Jesus is the Christ. Philip no doubt allowed the eunuch to ask any questions that he may have had. It is a tried and true fact that some of the most fruitful witnessing opportunities arise when we give others an opportunity to have their questions answered. May we pray for more of these types of opportunities, and for our evangelistic efforts to increase.

9. Why did the Ethiopian want to be baptized? (Acts 8:35-38)

Perhaps in Philip's "preaching" or evangelizing to the eunuch, he may have reiterated the Great Commission of Christ—that is that we are to "make disciples" by going, sharing, and teaching (see Matt. 28:19-20, and Mark 16:15-16). It is out of obedience that one who believes and trusts in Christ will also desire to be baptized in Him; which is exactly what happened in the case of the eunuch.

10. What do we know of the eunuch's faith?

The eunuch willingly confessed his faith in a simple declaration: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). This basic and straightforward profession is quite similar to Peter's response to Christ's question "But who do you say I am?" (see Matt. 16:15). This same simple declaration is all that it takes for a sinner to move from God's wrath to His love and promise of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Faith is not some huge ordeal. It is sincere and from the heart.

CONCLUSION

After great spiritual victory in Samaria, Philip was directed to a desert road south of Jerusalem. On that road he found a spiritually hungry soul struggling to understand prophetic Scripture. Philip met the man where he was and used the Scriptures to point him to Jesus.

There are many in our world who also have spiritual hunger. They need to hear the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. We should be on the lookout for those the Lord is calling to salvation. We are challenged to be students of the Word of God so that we can use it effectively in leading people to Christ.

Philip was willing to go to unlikely places and to seize the opportunities to witness that the Lord put before him.

PRACTICAL POINTS

In one way or another, God always directs those who are attentive to Him (Acts 8:26)

Do not be surprised to find that God has already begun to prepare people to listen to your witness (vss. 27-28).

A sensitive heart and a good question can often open a door for witnessing (vss. 29-30).

A true biblical witness must be grounded in the Scriptures (Acts 8:31-33; see Rom. 10:17).

No salvation message is complete that leaves out Jesus and His cross (Acts 8:34-35).

Baptism is for all believers in Jesus Christ (vss. 36-38).

PRAYER

God of truth, make us bolder, we pray, to share the truth of salvation. You have revealed that truth to us, and we must share it. We pray in the name of the one who brought truth to light for all of us. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God will use you in His service to the extent that you have prepared yourself to be used.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Subject: "**Cornelius and Peter: God Welcomes Gentiles**"

Text: **Acts 10:1-20**

Golden Text: **Acts 10:19-20**

Time: A.D. 32-33

Place: Caesarea; Joppa

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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