

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



### **The Birth of the Church**

May 2023

Spring Quarter

**May 20, 2023**

**Lesson #3 – An Ethiopian Is Baptized**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 8:29-40

**ICE BREAKERS-**

1. How can you better prepare to be a faithful guide to others who are struggling with Scripture?
2. What is the significance of Water Baptism?

***Key Verse: “He commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”— Acts 8:38***

**LESSON BACKGROUND –**

Lesson Context: The Evangelist

A central figure in today’s text is a man referred to as “Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven” in Acts 21:8 (compare 6:3–5). That distinguishes him from “Philip the apostle”—they were not the same person. In addition to today’s text, other passages that refer to Philip the evangelist are Acts 8:5–6, 12–13. On the other hand, passages that refer to the apostle of the same name are Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; John 1:43–46, 48; 6:5–7; 12:21–22; 14:8–9; and Acts 1:13. Regarding the designation evangelist, see also Ephesians 4:11 and 2 Timothy 4:5.

It’s tempting to refer to this Philip as one of the first deacons of the church, as the noun is used in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8, 12. But that noun does not appear in Acts 6:1–6, although variations of the Greek word do occur in 6:1 (“ministration”), 6:2 (“serve”), and 6:4 (“ministry”).

Like his colleague Stephen, the Philip of today’s lesson moved from a ministry of feeding widows (Acts 6:1–5) to preaching the gospel (compare 6:8–8:1a with 8:4–25). Philip was the first to take the gospel to the Samaritans in fulfillment of Jesus’ directions in Acts 1:8. This happened as a result of persecution in Jerusalem (8:1b). During a highly productive ministry in Samaria (8:25), an angel of the Lord directed that Philip “go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (8:26), the location of today’s text.

C. Lesson Context: The Ethiopian

Acts 8:27–28 reveals several facts regarding the man whom Philip encountered in today’s text.

First, he was from Ethiopia, a kingdom in Africa that is south of Egypt. This kingdom is also known as Cush (see Isaiah 11:11).

Second, he was a eunuch. Though some were born eunuchs or chose this status (Matthew 19:12), the word most commonly refers to a castrated man. Eunuchs were found in royal courts throughout the ancient world (compare 2 Kings 9:32; 20:18; Isaiah 39:7). The Greek historian Xenophon (430–355 BC) wrote that Cyrus the Great (about 600–530 BC; see Ezra 1:1; Isaiah 44:28–45:1; Daniel 1:21) preferred eunuchs in his court because he found them to be more reliable in general and trustworthy around women in particular. The Law of Moses restricted such men from participation in the assembly (Leviticus 21:16–23; Deuteronomy 23:1). One theory is that this individual had purchased a copy of Isaiah because of its promise of inclusion of eunuchs, those who sometimes described themselves as a “dry tree” (Isaiah 56:3–8).

Third, he was a servant to royalty. In particular, he served the queen of the Ethiopians as one having charge over the treasury. He was indeed a person of influence and wealth. He would have had to be wealthy to purchase a copy of Isaiah. The Great Isaiah Scroll, written in Hebrew and discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, measures about 9 inches in height and 24 feet in length!

### **LESSON COMMENTARY**

**8:29.** The Spirit ordered Philip to join the eunuch in his chariot. Philip discovered he was reading from the prophet Isaiah but did not understand the passage. He became the official’s guide for interpreting Isaiah.

**8:32–35.** The passage is from Is 53:7–8, which compares the Suffering Servant to a sacrificial lamb, whose life was taken from him in unjust judgment. The passage was confusing for the eunuch. He wanted to know if Isaiah was speaking about himself or someone else. Philip explained the passage is about Jesus, and focused witness on the person of Christ. Explaining one of the most clear and compelling OT messianic predictions, Philip identified Jesus as the referent who was sacrificed for sin.

**8:36–38.** When they come to water, the eunuch asked if he could be baptized. Though there is a textual question about v. 37, it shows that as a proselyte to Judaism, the eunuch must have understood ritual immersion as an initiatory rite. If the verse was added, it indicates that the early church saw immersion as an initiatory rite, functioning as a confession of faith (see Bock, *Acts*, 345, 348).

The eunuch stopped his chariot, and both of the men entered the water for baptism, which was most likely by immersion. The baptism here would be the same as in the rest of Acts, identifying the baptized as a follower of Jesus.

**8:39.** The Spirit of the Lord **snatched Philip away** in a manner similar to the translation of Elijah (2Kg 2:16), though the text does not state the Spirit transported Philip bodily to **Azotus**. The eunuch did not search for Philip as the prophets searched for Elijah. Instead he continued his journey with **rejoicing**, because of his new relationship with God through Christ.

**8:40.** Philip continued preaching “the good news” from Azotus (35 miles west of Jerusalem) to Caesarea (on the coast, a distance of 55 miles).

The story of Philip and the eunuch is highly significant for Luke's account of the growth of the church. His conversion represented a further advance of the gospel geographically and ethnically. The church was moving out from Jerusalem, south and west. Though he was originally probably a proselyte to Judaism, the eunuch continued his journey to his country as follower of Christ. Some traditions teach that the eunuch was from Ethiopia and started the church in that country.

**LESSON NUGGET** – Philip left a great harvest to talk to one man, but that is the mark of a true servant of the Lord. We must go where God sends us, do what God tells us, and leave the results with Him.

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word For Today Bible, The Full Life Study Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***