

OpenTheo

Acts 8:26 - 8:40



Acts - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Philip evangelizes an Ethiopian eunuch who was likely a Gentile and was reading from the book of Isaiah. This encounter sets a precedent for non-Jewish believers to receive the gospel. The importance of the Holy Spirit in understanding scripture and the significance of baptism in committing to the faith are also highlighted. Philip's obedience to the call to travel to the desert road resulted in a providential encounter that advanced God's plan for spreading the gospel.

Transcript

We're turning back again to Acts 8, and there are two stories in Acts 8, both of them about Philip. The chapter begins with a few verses about how Saul of Tarsus was breathing threats against the church and opposing the church, persecuting the church, but the main body of the chapter is about Philip. Now, Philip is not one of the apostles.

Philip is the one who's called Philip the Evangelist, as we see him called in Acts chapter 21, in verse 8. He's called, in Acts 21, 8, this Philip is called Philip the Evangelist, and he is also said in that verse to be one of the seven, meaning one of the seven persons who, in chapter 6, were appointed to help distribute food to the widows of the church. We often refer to them as deacons because their activities seem to correspond to the activities of persons later in other churches whom the Bible does call deacons. These seven were never specifically called deacons in Scripture, but we sometimes call them the seven deacons in the Jerusalem church.

But when Stephen, one of them, one of the seven, was killed, was martyred, a persecution broke out, which caused a tremendous evacuation of Jerusalem on the part of Christians. The apostles remained there, and so did apparently some number of the church, because the church continued there, but a great number, including some of the seven, fled. And one of them was Philip, who was also, along with Stephen, one of the colleagues in that group of seven.

And though he's not an apostle, his activities resemble those of an apostle. And Luke gives us a whole chapter, or almost a whole chapter, about some of the things he did.

And no doubt the reason that Philip is focused upon here, when in fact Luke tells us elsewhere that quite a few Christians fled and preached the gospel outside of Jerusalem, is that Philip may well, as an evangelist, been one of the first to really plant churches that were not strictly Jewish.

The principal one that we read of in the first part of Acts 8 is the church that he planted in one of the cities of Samaria. Now Jesus had ministered in one of the cities of Samaria. You remember back in John chapter 4, when he and his disciples were traveling between Jerusalem and Galilee, they simply sat for refreshment by a well in one of the cities, Sychar of Samaria, and there Jesus had initially a conversation with a woman who came to draw water, and then through her encouragement, many people from the city came out to meet Jesus, and he stayed with them for two days.

Then he moved on, and we don't read anything else that happened in that city. We wonder what may have happened to those disciples. We're not sure exactly which city in Samaria that, you know, Philip has gone to.

It'd be intriguing if it was the same one. In other words, if he followed up on what Jesus had done. He came back and said, hey, you remember that guy Jesus? Well, here's what's happened since then.

He died, he rose again, you know, the Holy Spirit's come and poured out. We have a new, you know, a new phenomenon of the community of the Messiah, and we welcome you to be baptized into it. We don't know that these were the same people.

It could have been entirely a new group. We do know of several different cities that Philip evangelized because we read of some of the cities he traveled to, but we do not have any details of those visits. It's this one in this city in Samaria that is focused upon, and we see that one of the things of note is that although the people were converted and baptized through Philip's preaching, the Holy Spirit had not come upon them yet, which is very unusual.

Usually when people became converted, at least when the apostles were present, they also got filled with the Holy Spirit. In this case, a man in that city also had deceived the whole city with his sorcery. His name was Simon.

Later church fathers referred to him as Simon Magus, and there's many legends about him, but not in the book of Acts. The book of Acts simply tells about his conversion, or apparent conversion. He was, he believed, it says, and he was baptized.

Sounds like he got converted, same thing as the other people in Samaria, and he continued, it says, with Philip. So it sounds like he had all the marks of being a true convert, but when Peter and John came from Jerusalem, and they ministered to the converts, Philip's converts, by laying hands on them so that the Holy Spirit came upon

them, apparently there were phenomena that occurred which are not recorded in Acts 8, which impressed Simon. Now we know from other cases in Acts, many times when people were baptized in the Holy Spirit, we do know the phenomena that occurred.

They spoke in tongues, and sometimes they prophesied. There's no record of either of those things happening when the apostles laid hands on Philip's converts in Samaria, but they may have. Something happened.

Luke doesn't have to spell everything out for us. There was something, not only that indicated that the Holy Spirit had come upon these people, and visibly observable, but impressive, because this sorcerer, who had himself been rather impressive to the people with his magical powers, he was very impressed, and he actually offered Peter money to give him the same power to do that, and Peter, of course, rebuked him, told him to repent, and we don't know if the man did. The last words we read from Simon are, pray for me that these things don't happen.

Well, Peter had said, repent and pray that this wickedness of yours may be forgiven, instead of himself praying, he said to Peter, you pray for me. So, of course, there are still branches of Christianity where people think it's better to have one of the saints pray for them than for them to pray themselves, but Peter told him to pray for himself. The man may or may not have ended up doing so.

Instead, he felt better about Peter praying for him, and we don't read that Peter did, which we don't have any other cases in the Bible of people asking an apostle or someone like that to pray for them, and therefore, the only case we actually have of such a thing is a case where the apostle is not recorded as having done so. So, I wouldn't receive any real encouragement from this in terms of, you know, I think I'll pray to the saints and ask them to pray for me. Not that we know they couldn't, but the Bible certainly doesn't encourage us to expect that or to practice that.

Now, with that story behind us, we read a transitional verse in verse 25. It says, so when they had testified and preached the word, they, in this case, are Peter and John, the apostles who had come from Jerusalem to Samaria. They're now going back to Jerusalem, but they're preaching in other villages of Samaria en route as they return toward Judea.

When they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. So, once Philip had, I guess, broken the ice and made the first move to evangelize Samaritans, and the apostles had seen that there was the blessing of God on that group, they just kind of floodgates were open, so they evangelized many Samaritan villages. And at a later time, in chapter 9, verse 31, there is reference that Luke makes to all the churches in Samaria.

He mentions all the churches in Judea and Samaria and so forth, and so there are

apparently a number of churches planted around this time in Samaria. Now, the apostles, Peter and John, were told they went back to Jerusalem, but the next time we see Peter in the narrative, he is going to be actually making some itinerant rounds in Lydda and Joppa and eventually to Caesarea to meet Cornelius. So, though Peter, until this point, has seemed to be very sedentary in the sense that he has stayed in Jerusalem, even when the church fled at the time of the persecution.

It says all the saints were fleeing, except the apostles. They stayed in Jerusalem. So, the apostles, Peter included, were very much anchored in Jerusalem for up to this point, but perhaps with these new brushfire spontaneous revivals breaking out in other places, which these unspent fleeing Christians inadvertently planted these churches just by going there and talking to people about Jesus, these things would spring up.

Well, the apostles in Jerusalem now realize they need to keep tabs on this stuff. They need to make sure that some of this is not bad, that everything's good, you know, this is all a new phenomenon. And so, we see that Peter, though he returns to Jerusalem, does make other forays out into places where new churches have arisen outside Judea, and we'll see that again near the end of chapter nine.

But before chapter eight comes to an end, we have another complete story about Philip. And this one, there are no apostles involved in this story, just Philip, a lone evangelist out in the desert, reaching a man of some worldly importance, as we shall see. We begin at verse 26, now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Luke says, this is desert. Perhaps Luke says, this is desert in order to convey the idea that you're not going to find a big population down here, and where Philip has been is in a thriving revival. In a Samaritan city, you know, multitudes are being saved.

There's great joy in the city. Signs and wonders are being worked. Healings, demons are going out of people.

You know, you don't want to leave that kind of situation if you don't have to. But an angel of the Lord spoke to him. Interestingly, a little later in the story, the spirit speaks to him instead.

So, you know, I don't know why sometimes an angel brings the message, sometimes it's the spirit himself speaking to, you know, Philip, but that's just the way it happens. And the fact that Luke makes that differentiation means that, you know, Luke is no doubt getting specifics of the story, probably from Philip himself. Luke, the historian, had to get his information from somewhere.

He didn't just sit on a mountaintop, Mount Moriah, and God revealed to him, you know, these stories. He got them, as he says when he opens the book of Luke, I talk to

eyewitnesses, I have sources, other people have written about this. Luke was a historian, and he interviewed people, and we do know that he was with Paul, because in one of the, when Paul stayed in the home of Philip later, that's in Acts chapter 21, Luke is in Paul's entourage as Paul is traveling to Jerusalem for the last time, actually, before his arrest, and they stay for a while in the house of Philip.

So that must have been when Luke, who wrote these stories, got the details here. And it's interesting that Philip must have said, it was an angel who told me to go out there, and then in another word, the Holy Spirit told me to do this. It's like those kind of changes would come from someone who was concerned about detail, and who knew the details.

So as usual, Luke is following very closely, reliable first-hand sources. And he says, the angel told him to arise and go toward the south, so he had to leave this revival. And I don't know whose oversight he left it under.

I guess just the Holy Spirit's, because the Holy Spirit had been given through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. The Simon the Sorcerer was still there, and he was a bit of a threat. But apparently, the Holy Spirit, or the angel sent by God, felt that the church there would do okay without the oversight of Philip, and he should go do something else, and go down to a desert.

The road to the south is actually a road that runs south from Samaria, actually from Jerusalem. And it goes down to Hebron, then it turns west, and it goes over to Gaza. Gaza was one of the five Philistine cities back in the Old Testament times that were permanently established in Israel.

The Philistines had come and settled the Mediterranean coast in Israel, and they had five cities, Gaza, and Gath, and Ashkelon, and Ashdod, and another one just escaped my mind, but there were five of them. And of course, the Philistines were defeated by David, and in the time of the New Testament, the Philistines were no longer there, but these cities still had the same names in some cases. And Gaza was on the coast, the southern coast of Israel, and that's the road, it's a desert road, as Luke says.

In other words, why leave a thriving church where revival is happening, and go down in the middle of the desert, where you're not really likely, there's not going to be a lot of traffic, first of all, on that road, but even if there is some traffic, it's not like what you're leaving behind in the church in Samaria, but he's just obedient, he goes down that road, it's a desert place, as such not a very promising area to do evangelistic work, but it says, he arose and went, and behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority, under Candacy, the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning, sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet, as we shall see, as the story progresses, he was actually reading Isaiah 53, quite providential for the purpose of evangelism, because he was going to, of

course, that, if you know Isaiah 53, it's probably the most direct chapter in Isaiah, though there's many in Isaiah, that speak about the Messiah, probably nothing is a clearer description of Jesus' suffering in Isaiah, than the 53rd chapter, but this is the divine appointments that God sets up, he doesn't just meet an Ethiopian, who's, you know, reading the Bible, he's reading a passage about Jesus. Now, if Philip had been there a little earlier, or a little later, maybe even 10 minutes earlier or later, the guy would be reading some other passage, probably, but it's the timing of God, the angels would go down there, and however long it took him to run down there, we don't know, he might even caught an Uber chariot, but eventually he's moving around supernaturally, as we'll see by the end of the chapter, but the truth is that this man was a powerful man, in what was called Ethiopia in those days. Now, there's a modern Ethiopia, of course, but it's not, Ethiopia back then was more the region that we would call Sudan today, the country of Sudan today is the country that would be called Ethiopia in biblical times, but because it was called Ethiopia, we'll call him the Ethiopian eunuch.

Now, he was a treasury official, apparently over the whole treasury of Queen Candacy. Now, scholars have said that Candacy is a throne name of the queen mother, it's not a personal name, it's more like a title, sort of like Pharaoh in Egypt is a title, it's not a guy's name, all the kings of Egypt were called Pharaoh. Abimelech was apparently a similar throne name of the Philistines.

So, Candacy, we don't know what this woman's personal name was, but she was, you know, the queen mother, who actually was the effective ruler of the region in those days, so this man was answerable to her, he was apparently a man of great responsibility when the whole nation's finances are under his care, and yet he's a worshipper of Yahweh. He has gone, it says, down to Jerusalem to worship, he's traveled internationally to be at the temple. Now, Ethiopia, of course, is a Gentile nation, but in the diaspora, centuries before the time of Christ, many Jewish people had relocated in North Africa, especially in Alexandria, Egypt, but no doubt had spread out to other regions too.

It is possible this man was a Jew. We picture him as a black African because he's an Ethiopian, but he could have been, it says he was a man of Ethiopia, he could have been a Jewish man who lived in Ethiopia, we don't know. The main thing is, if he was an Ethiopian Gentile, then it would appear that he was the first Gentile to be evangelized, and this is before Cornelius, this is before the apostles even recognized the possibility of Gentile evangelism.

If that is so, if this man was an uncircumcised Ethiopian, then his being evangelized by Philip makes Philip a head of the apostles in terms of grasping the fact that Gentiles could be saved too, but we're not told, and Luke makes no issue of this man being uncircumcised. When it comes to Cornelius, the fact that Peter goes into his house and is later challenged in chapter 11, the apostles in Jerusalem challenge Peter, says, you ate with the uncircumcised. Now, the fact that Cornelius was uncircumcised means he was a

Gentile and unclean, and up to that point, the church had never recognized the possibility of the uncircumcised to be converted.

It may be that Philip just, you know, he just followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit led him to actually convert an uncircumcised Gentile, but because the man was in another country, the matter never came to the attention of the Jerusalem church or never was an issue to them. I don't know. Or some commentators would suggest he may have been a Jewish man of Ethiopia or what they call a God-fearer or a proselyte.

We know that Gentiles could be either pagan or they could be proselytes, which means they actually got circumcised and they're considered to be Jewish, although they were born Gentile, and they had all the privileges of a Jew when it comes to temple worship. Or if they were Gentiles who were not circumcised, but they were fearers of Yahweh, that is, they more or less renounced their paganism and they believed in the God of Israel and wanted to please him, but they hadn't taken the final step of becoming a true convert and being circumcised, these people were called God-fearers. If this man was not a Jew himself, he would be at least a God-fearer, and he might have been a proselyte.

The fact that Luke makes no issue of him being uncircumcised may incline us to feel like he was circumcised, either as a proselyte or as a Jew. We do not know, but Luke does make a big deal about Cornelius, two chapters hence, being a Gentile, uncircumcised. He gets saved.

Wow. Well, if that was the case with the Ethiopians, it seems like Luke would have, you know, exhibited the same fanfare about the radicalness of this thing. It is an amazing story, but he doesn't treat it like it's a radical thing.

Philip doesn't seem conflicted. Oh, dare I evangelize this uncircumcised guy? I mean, Peter himself was conflicted when he came to the house of Cornelius. You see, he himself is still not at complete peace.

He says, you know, it's not lawful for a Jew like me to come into your house, but God has shown me not to be prejudiced and all that. So, you know, Philip just seems to be natural about it. So it makes me think that this man probably was circumcised, either a Gentile who is a proselyte or maybe even a Jewish man from Ethiopia.

The Jews often had high positions in finances in Gentile lands, as they do now. They were known for it. Often they were hated for it because people were jealous of their success in financial matters.

It's not impossible that a queen of Ethiopia might have had a Jewish man overseeing things, just like Potiphar had a Jewish man, or we would say an Israelite Joseph, set over

all his finances and so forth. So I'm only saying we don't know. And you might say, well, if you don't know, why talk so much about it? Well, partly because it would be significant if, in fact, he was uncircumcised.

And yet, I'm saying we don't know if that particular significance accrues to this story or not. So we can't really bring it up. But he had been in Jerusalem worshipping.

He was on his way home, and he was sitting in his chariot and reading Isaiah the prophet, it says, the spirit said to Philip, go near and overtake this chariot. Now, I always have to say that picture Philip being a really fast runner to overtake a chariot, you know? And perhaps it's because I think back to Elijah, who outran Ahab's chariot when the rain was coming. He and Ahab were going to the same place, and Elijah was on foot.

Ahab was in the chariot. Elijah got there first. So he must be a really fast runner.

But here, there's no reason to believe the chariot was in a hurry. If you're going hundreds of miles in a horse-drawn vehicle, the horse has to walk some of the time or even be stopped to eat or drink. So it's possible the chariot was stopped, or they're just walking at a regular horse's pace, which is not much faster than a man's walking pace.

So he was able to overtake. There's no suggestion he's like a supernaturally fast runner to run up and overtake a chariot. It might have been sitting still, for all we know.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. The idea of reading silently is a rather more modern innovation. People always seem to read out loud in the old days.

I don't know why, but he was reading out loud to himself, probably, but perplexed by what he was reading. And when Philip heard what he was reading, which turned out to be Isaiah 53, he said, do you understand what you're reading? And his response was, how can I understand unless someone guides me? And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. Now, that's a great opening for evangelism, when the guy's reading Isaiah 53, and you can say, hey, do you know what that's talking about? I had a friend who witnessed to a Jewish girl in Fullerton, actually, California, many, many years ago in the 70s.

And she was giving him some grief about his belief in Christ, because she was Jewish. And he said, well, let me read you a passage. And he read Isaiah 53, this very passage to her.

He said, who do you think that is? And she said, well, that's obviously Jesus, but we Jews don't believe in the New Testament. It is obviously Jesus. But it's interesting that he asked her the question about this same passage that this man asked Philip, who is this talking about, after all? Is the prophet speaking about himself? We see that that's what he says.

That question is asked later on in verse 34. But the man says, how can I understand it unless someone guides me? This is the dilemma people had before the Holy Spirit was given, that people needed a man to explain Scripture to them. The Jews required the Levites to read and explain the Scriptures to them, or else they wouldn't understand them.

Why? Well, because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.14 that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. They're foolishness to him because they're spiritually discerned. You need to become a born of the Spirit.

You need to have the Spirit of God to illuminate what he himself has inspired in the Scriptures. That's why Jesus had to open his disciples' understanding, it says in Luke 24.45, that they might understand the Scriptures. He means the Old Testament.

The rabbis apparently didn't understand them. The disciples, the apostles did because Jesus gave them that ability. And Philip was not, of course, one of the apostles, but he'd been schooled under the apostles.

He knew how they understood the Scriptures, and he was filled with the Spirit. And remember what John says in 1 John chapter 2, in verse 27. 1 John 2.27, he said, the anointing which you have received of him remains in you, and you need not that any man teach you.

But as that same anointing abides in you and teaches you all things, and is truth and is no lie, you also shall abide in him. But he says you have the anointing, he means the Holy Spirit. As a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit.

And therefore, he says, you need no man to teach you. The Ethiopian did not have the Holy Spirit, he was a natural man. He said, how could I understand without someone to guide me? Well, lots of times we don't need a man to guide us anymore.

Now you might say, well, then why are you teaching the Bible? Aren't you a man? I am, and you don't need me. If you have the Holy Spirit, you don't need me. But I can maybe help.

You know, God can lead you into all truth without my help. But God has also given gifts of the Spirit, including teachers is one of the gifts of the Spirit, through whom the Holy Spirit who guides you into truth may speak and help too. He may speak through a teacher or without one.

The point is your ultimate dependency is not on a man. Your ultimate dependency is not on a teacher. This is why cults go wrong.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, you name any cult, what they all have in common is somebody, some man, some committee, they do all the thinking. They do all the

interpreting. You just believe what they say about every passage of Scripture.

You start thinking for yourself, you're out of there. They won't let you stay because you do need someone to teach you in their opinion, usually the leader. In the real body of Christ, Christians are led by the Spirit if they have to be fortunate enough to have Bibles, which many Christians never have.

But if you do, the Holy Spirit also opens your understanding to receive knowledge of the Scriptures. Now, some might say, but, you know, there's a lot of Christians, all Christians have the Holy Spirit. How come they don't all understand the same? If the same Holy Spirit is teaching all Christians, how come some Christians read a passage and they take it this way and some take the same passage another way? Why are there Calvinists and Arminians, for example, who obviously look at the same Scriptures and interpret them differently? Why are there dispensationalists and reformed who do the same thing? They look at Scripture, they don't see them the same way as each other.

Why are there different camps within the body of Christ, all of whom we presume have the same Holy Spirit and all of whom the Bible says are being led by the Spirit into all truth? Why aren't they there yet? Well, he doesn't say that the Holy Spirit will download all truth into your head in one momentary download. It's a lifelong walking with God and meditating day and night on the Scripture and studying to show yourself approved and obeying the Scriptures and processing what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. And as you learn one thing, he teaches you another thing.

It's line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. The Holy Spirit doesn't just say, okay, now that you're a Christian, boom, you understand everything. And by the way, when people do become Christians, they're not all at the same starting point.

Everybody's at a different point in their understanding of things and opinions about things. The Holy Spirit has to lead them all. But as he's leading all of us to all truth, which we will someday all know, we all go through the stages between where we started and the place we're going, and we're not all at the same spot yet.

But that doesn't mean the Holy Spirit's not there. My Catholic friends have said, you know, you Protestants, your problem is you don't have a centralized authority to interpret the Scripture for you like we do. You know, we've got the College of Bishops and the Pope and all that.

And you Protestants lacking that have 4,000 denominations because everyone does what's right in his own eyes and doesn't have a central authority to open. How come the Holy Spirit isn't leading you guys? But actually my experience has been that when I find people who are reading the Bible and trusting God and the Holy Spirit, they are moving all pretty much in the same direction. There are people who don't move much because

lots of times people just take whatever it is they first heard and camp there for the rest of their lives.

They just don't want to learn anymore. I got that down. You know, you spend your first two or three years as a Christian learning how to parrot whatever beliefs your denomination holds, and then the rest of your life trying to defend it against all comers, you know, I mean, and instead of learning.

But there are a great number of Christians of all denominations that I've encountered who are not camped out. They want to learn. They're studying.

They're meditating. And I find when I get together with them that we are all, you know, moving kind of the same direction. We might not be all in the same spot, but we're all closer to this, the one insight that we, that certainly must be the truth because the Holy Spirit's leading all Christians toward it if they will be led, if they will move from where they started.

You know, we can't just say, I'm okay the way I am. I'm not going to learn anything more. But if we are learning, we still won't believe all the same things immediately that other learners are learning.

But we will eventually. It's a lifetime of learning. And if the Holy Spirit is guiding us, eventually we are learning and seeing things the way that they are to be seen, even though we might have a great number of prejudices and stumbling blocks in our minds that make us not progress as quickly as we otherwise would.

That, and when we are not learning much, it's often because we are saying, how can I understand if I don't have someone to guide me? Like this man, how can I understand? Now, it's a good thing that this man said that because he didn't have the Holy Spirit. He was not a Christian. He did need to be instructed.

You know, in Jeremiah chapter 31 and verses 31 through 34, where you have the prophecy about the new covenant, and God says, I'm going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the old covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, though I was a husband to them. And this is the covenant that I'll make with them. He says, I'm going to write my words in their inner parts, write my laws on their hearts, and they will no longer have to say everyone to his neighbor and everyone to his brother, know the Lord, because they'll all know me from the greatest to the least.

He's talking about those who are in the covenant, those who know Jesus. All will know him and will not depend on an intermediate person, another human being, a priest like they had in the old covenant. The priests and the Levites, they had to let people know what the Bible meant, because frankly, most people didn't have a Bible to read anyway.

But the truth is that the new covenant internalizes God himself by his Holy Spirit within us as a teacher, so that we don't depend on everyone, his neighbor and his brother, to tell him what this stuff means, but the Holy Spirit guides us. So we see, although this man's question was a valid question, if we find Christians taking this attitude, I think there needs to be some adjustment of their thinking. You don't, you shouldn't say, I can't understand it unless someone teaches me what it means.

It's good to be humble, and it's good to listen to teachers, but even when you hear a teacher, you need to judge what they say. Paul said, judge all things or prove all things and hold fast what is good. So you can't depend on man.

You have to depend on God, ultimately the Holy Spirit to be your God. People can be used by the Holy Spirit to assist you, but ultimately, don't put a human being in a guru relationship with you that, you know, somehow you just have, you know, you have to do whatever and think whatever that person says. So fortunately, this man did have someone who could guide him into an understanding of this passage that he's reading.

And so he asked Philip to come up to the chariot and sit with him. Says, the place in the scripture which he read was this. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearers, so he opened not his mouth.

In his humiliation, his justice was taken away, and who will declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. That's verses 7 and 8 of Isaiah 53 that was sampled there. And so the eunuch answered Philip and said, I ask you, of whom does this prophet say this? Of himself or of some other man? This is still a controversial question among Jews.

Who is this talking about? Not just that, you know, which man is it? Is it Jesus or is it some future messiah? But many Jews, in fact, I think the official position of Orthodox Judaism today is that this is not talking about the messiah. It's talking about Israel. This is one of what they call the servant songs in Isaiah.

There's four of them in Isaiah that talk about the servant of Yahweh. And Isaiah 52, 13 to all the way through chapter 53 is the fourth of the servant songs. And all the servant songs are about the servant of Yahweh.

Now, I do believe that in biblical times, many Jews did believe this was a messianic individual. But after Jesus came along and so admirably corresponded with the predictions, the Jews who reject Jesus especially have adopted completely the view that this is talking about Israel, that Israel is being personified here, that it's Israel that is suffering. It's Israel that is the servant of Yahweh that is suffering.

It's just personified and individualized as one being. The problem with this, there are others, but one problem with this explanation is if you read the passage in Isaiah 53, it

can't be talking about Israel because the servant says, or he says about the servant, all we like sheep have gone astray in verse six. We have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Well, who's us all? Isaiah certainly must mean Israel. They are God's sheep in the Old Testament. They're his flock and they're the ones who went astray, but he, somebody else other than them is the one on whom the iniquities were laid.

Somebody else took the pain. Someone else took the guilt. Somebody else paid the price for their wander.

It even says in the verses just prior to that, he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon him.

Obviously, who's the, our, who, who are, who's the, we who have the iniquities and who, who's that he is wounded for. Clearly the, we has got to be Israel themselves. If that's so, then the servant is not Israel.

It is somebody else upon whom the iniquities of Israel have been placed. So although Israel Jews today generally do not believe Isaiah 53 is a messianic prophecy. I believe that before Jesus came, many of the rabbis did, but unfortunately they didn't want to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

So they say, well, this is not really talking about the Messiah, but Israel, but it doesn't work to take it that way. I mean, it's not, not true, but the man says, is this prophet talking about himself or someone else? And that is still the question. Is this prophecy about one person or another? Who is it? You know, it's certainly not about Isaiah himself, but it's, we know it's about Jesus, but the question that you would ask is, is this about Jesus or the Messiah or is it about someone else? And so it says, Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture preached Jesus to him.

So it made it very clear that the man that this is about is Jesus. And, and he used the man that as a text for his message, the very passage the man was reading. Of course, you can do that really with almost any text in the Bible, because Jesus said in the volume of the book, it is written to me.

Remember on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, Jesus said, well, the Bible says that Jesus went through the Psalms and the prophets and, and, and Moses, and he expounded on all the things that were about him. You could take almost any part of the Bible and expound on Jesus, because that's what the Bible is about, Old and New Testament. And that's what Philip successfully did here.

Now, as they went down the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, see, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized? Now at this point, different translations will differ. I'm reading the new King James and it follows the same

manuscripts as the King James version does.

If you're reading another new translation, then verse 37 won't even be there, because the newer translations are based on different manuscripts, older really, than the manuscripts that were used by the King James. The King James uses what's called the Textus Receptus Greek manuscripts. And since that time, since 1611, when the King James was translated, scholars have found older manuscripts and they differ in some respects.

One of the differences is that this verse 37 is not found in the older manuscripts. So the modern translators do not usually include this verse. They might have the footnote saying, you know, some manuscripts have this verse, but the way this will read in most modern translations is directly from verse 36 to verse 38.

So it'll say, and the eunuch said, see, here's some water. What hinders me from being baptized? So he commanded the chariot to stand still and both he and Philip and the eunuch, both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him. Now the verse that's in between there, that is found in some later manuscripts and therefore is in the King James and the New King James, has a little more dialogue about this.

And perhaps a scribe may have added this to the later manuscripts because it sounded too quick. You know, the man just says, here's water. Can I be baptized? They stopped the chariot, he gets baptized.

We don't really have any confession of faith from them. We don't ever have him saying, I believe, you know, and I think historically in the church, usually baptism was accompanied by some assurance, verbal assurance, being given by the baptizee that they are a believer, you know, and there's no, in the older manuscripts, there's no conversation that would guarantee this. But I think we'd understand that more conversation took place between these two than is recorded.

And the very fact that the man wanted to be baptized suggests that he believed the message he was being talked to. Why would he want to be baptized? So we don't need that part of the conversation, but it is in some manuscripts. It says, then Philip said, if you believe with all your heart, you may.

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Now, that conversation could have taken place. But as I say, most scholars believe the older manuscripts are more reliable.

And that conversation may not have taken place, but whether it did or not, it's clear the man did believe, and that's why he got baptized. Why would he be baptized otherwise? Now, what I find interesting is that the man raised that particular question. What hinders me from being baptized? Oh, when did Philip ever mention being baptized? How did the

man even know about baptism? Obviously, it says Philip simply preached Jesus to him.

And when Philip preached Jesus, it must have included in that message. And, you know, he commands everyone to be baptized. Because he does in the Bible.

Now, so the man, you know, we don't have much, we don't have the whole sermon. We just say, we just read, he preached Jesus. Now, if we could get an outline of what that sermon involved, it would apparently also include some reference to being baptized, because the man said, well, I'll be baptized.

And can I be baptized? Here's some water. It's interesting, too, that Philip didn't say, well, let's not be too hasty here. I think you ought to sign up in some baptismal classes.

We're having them every Sunday for the next three months. And when you've gone through that course, then we might, you know, if you still want to be baptized, we'll put you on the list. Again, modern churches don't put much emphasis on baptism.

Some do, but some put very little. And yet the early church figured you get saved by the whole package. Repent and believe and be baptized, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, pretty much how Peter said it in Acts 2.38. And as I said at that time, I don't believe that water baptism saves you.

I believe you're saved by faith. I believe we're justified by faith. I don't think water baptism justifies you, but being saved by faith means that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you and incorporates you into the fellowship of the justified by faith, into the fellowship of those who have the Holy Spirit, of those who are the body of Christ.

And that ritual of entry into the body of Christ was always baptism. So if a person was not baptized in the first century, or frankly, almost any century after that until modern times, the person who was unbaptized was not regarded to have entered the fold. It's possible that, you know, certainly people like the thief on the cross who didn't get baptized, he went to paradise, he was saved by faith, as Abraham was.

Abraham wasn't baptized either, but Abraham was justified by faith, and David and others. But the point is, they didn't enter the body of Christ. They got saved and went to heaven.

But God brings us not into a life that simply has a ticket to heaven stamped on it, but he brings you into a community of living out the life of Christ corporately as his body. And entrance in that community was always marked by baptism. And so we see that here's a man who's just heard the gospel for the first time, and they happen out in the desert where there's not much water.

He apparently finds a little puddle or a pool, and he says, hey, here's some water. Can I be baptized? Okay, let's do it, you know. It was assumed, as I think we usually assume,

like an evangelist, a crusader, if people come forward and they say a sinner's prayer, we assume that they're really sincerely getting saved.

In those days, they didn't have altar calls, they didn't have sinner's prayers like that, but they did have baptism. That's how a person, you know, made their public commitment. I'll be baptized now.

And Philip said, I guess I'll take that at face value, and I'll baptize you. And we, as I said earlier, when we saw the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people saved in one day, they all got baptized that day. That would be inconvenient for a few ministers, you know, 12 guys to baptize 3,000 people in one day, but apparently being baptized the same day was the norm.

And so here, the guy hears the gospel, wants to get baptized, Philip gets down out of the church, baptizes him. Now, we don't read anything here about the Holy Spirit coming upon him, but there's no reason to believe that that didn't happen. Although we might wonder, because Philip's ministry in Samaria had seemed to lack that element until Peter and John came down and laid hands on them.

But I think that that was a unique case, or at least a very special case. In all likelihood, this man received the whole package, that he was fully converted, regenerated, had the Holy Spirit, and went on his way rejoicing, it says. It says, now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuchs saw him no more.

And he went on his way rejoicing, but Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through, he preached in all the cities until he came to Caesarea. Now, after the man was baptized, and we don't know if it was like that moment or shortly afterwards, no other intervening events happened to be recorded, but when this confrontation and conversation was over, Philip was, it says, caught away. The Holy Spirit caught him away.

Now, it's just barely possible that this just means the Holy Spirit said, leave now, and he left real fast, you know, and he was snatched away, figuratively speaking, by the Holy Spirit's command to go. But the word caught there is *harpezo* in the Greek, which is the same word, by the way, that you find in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 17, where it says, it says in verse 16 of 1 Thessalonians 4, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, and it says, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught, *harpezo*, the same word, caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and thus shall we ever be with the Lord. So, that's obviously talking about the rapture of the church, and the rapture of the church is a, it appears to be a snatching away, rather sudden.

I mean, in another passage on the same subject, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says,

in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we should be changed. And so, it's a rather abrupt removal, all right? So, that is the same Greek word that is used here of the spirit caught him away, and for that reason, I think most readers have correctly assumed that this is not just saying the Holy Spirit said, leave quick, but really the Holy Spirit snatched him away, and it's interesting, he says, and he was then found at Azotus. By whom? Who found him there? Did they have, were people looking for him? It does say he found himself at Azotus, which may have been true, but it says he was found there, next time anyone heard of him, that's where he was, and he may have been transported supernaturally.

This is, we'd say translated, is the word that in English would usually be used, and so, it is thought by many, and perhaps correctly, that Philip was supernaturally transported instantaneously, sort of like, beam me up, Scott, kind of thing, and he rematerializes, reappears in Azotus. Now, the eunuch, the last we hear from him, is that he went on home, he went home rejoicing. Now, Christianity, by the way, has for a very long time been established in that region of Africa, North Africa, and in Ethiopia, there's been a church for almost forever.

I mean, from the earliest days of Christianity, there's been Ethiopian Christians, and the Ethiopian Christians themselves have certain legends about Solomon, and the Queen of Sheba, and so forth, being actually the parents of a line of Ethiopian rulers, of which more, most recently, or not most recently, but not too long ago, was Haile Selassie, the ruler in Ethiopia, whom the Rastafarian cult considers to be the messiah. But that's obviously not Christianity. That's the more, the more Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia is, would be a form of Coptic Christianity, I believe, or Eastern Orthodox, one or the other.

I forget exactly what, which, or which kind of Christianity they have there, but it's been a Christian nation for the most part, officially, for a very long time, and no one knows of any apostles that went down there. It's very probable, it seems, that this eunuch evangelized people when he went down there, and he had a high government position, and therefore, credibility. I mean, he wouldn't be in that office if he wasn't regarded as a man of integrity.

A queen's not going to put a man over all of her finances of her whole country, unless she feels he's been vetted well, and that he's a credible man. A man who's got that much respect, and that much trust in his country, is pretty believable. Now, Philip, then, is found in Azotus.

Now, Azotus is a more modern name for the country, I mean, the city, Ashdod, one of the other Philistine cities. And then he worked his way up to Caesarea, preaching in every town. We're going to find that among the towns he preached in were Lydda, and also Jaffa, which is now Jaffa.

And those are towns that Peter is going to go to, and apparently minister in churches

there, where Philip has evangelized. Eventually, he'll go up to Caesarea, where Philip settled, too. Now, we'll take a break at this time, a very brief one, if we could.