

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 28

I. Exposition of Chapter Eight (continued).

A. Verse 25 – “So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” - This is referring to Peter and John specifically (v. 14) who had come to Samaria from Jerusalem to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It also seems that any prejudice toward the Samaritans, which might have been held by them, was eliminated after they witnessed what the Lord had done. Dr. Thomas Constable states: “Quite a change had taken place in John’s heart, in particular, and in Peter’s, since the time these disciples had first visited Samaria with Jesus. John had wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (cf. Luke 9:52-54).”¹

B. Verses 26-40 - Philip ministers to the Ethiopian.

1. 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.’ This is desert.”

a. This is the second time in this book that we see an angel actively involved (cf. 5:19). In this case, an angel gives direction to Philip as to where to go next. Dr. Stanley Horton has some interesting points regarding this:

“The Bible tells of angels appearing to people comparatively few times. Yet they are often present and function as ‘ministering spirits, sent to serve those who will inherit salvation’ (Heb. 1:14). However, since they are spirits, God has to give them a physical form temporarily in order for them to appear and speak to people. There may have been a special reason for sending an angel. Philip was in the midst of a great revival in Samaria. It probably took something unusual to get him to leave the crowds and go down to a seldom-used back road.”²

b. “...from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert.” – In order for Philip to get to Gaza, he had to pass by Jerusalem. By the direction of the Lord, Philip goes from a place where there are multitudes of people to a place that was basically desolate. God so loves people that He’ll make sure that someone is sent to them no matter how far out of the way it is.

“But while the Lord had His eyes upon His toiling servant and directed him in the way, He also saw and knew the inquiring, hungry soul which traveled along that road towards Gaza. He knew his heart and his longing for the truth and then He brought Philip to meet this soul and through Him He graciously brought light and blessing to the eunuch. And thus He works still. Oh! for more childlike confidence in His guidance! A blessed thing it is to watch His leadings and to see His hand in even the minutest things.”³

2. Verse 27 – “So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship..”

a. Concerning Ethiopia, Osborne writes: “It was commonly thought that Ethiopia was virtually the end of the world, so this is a foretaste of ‘the ends of the earth’ in 1:8.”⁴

b. This “Ethiopia” is not modern day Ethiopia but still a part of Africa. Note the following:

“‘Ethiopia’ here refers not to modern-day Ethiopia but to ancient Nubia, the region from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, Sudan.”⁵

c. After ministering to the multitudes of Samaritans (“half-breeds”), now Philip is led to a man who is a Gentile, though possibly a Jewish proselyte (although this is in question)⁶. Not only that, but being he was African, it is emphasized again that the Gospel is for all people, no matter what their religion, culture or race might be.

d. This man was in charge of the treasury of the queen of Ethiopia. Some important points about this are as follows:

“Kandake’ (‘Candace’ in many versions) was not the name of the queen but the dynastic title she held; *kandakē* means “queen of the Ethiopians.” So he was the treasurer of Ethiopia, one of the highest officials in the country.”⁷

e. So this man was, no doubt, a very wealthy man with, as it’s stated, with great authority.

¹Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 196.

²Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 170-171.

³Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: “Our Hope” Publication Office, 1912), 156–157.

⁴Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 165.

⁵Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 374.

⁶Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, “He could not be a full proselyte (again because he couldn’t be circumcised), but he was a God-fearer, meaning he was fully Jewish in belief and practice.”, 166.

⁷Grant R. Osborne, 166.

However, as is obvious by the fact that he was searching Scripture, his wealth and position were not enough. It seems certain that he was experiencing a void in his life which only Christ could fill.

3. **Verse 28** – “[W]as returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.” – The chariot the eunuch was riding in was probably very slow moving and pulled by oxen. Regarding the fact that he was reading from Isaiah, Dr. Robert Utley states:

“Apparently this man had bought an expensive leather scroll of Isaiah, which would have been over 29 feet long (i.e. one found in the Dead Sea Scrolls). By the Spirit’s direction, he had opened it to the Messianic passage of Isaiah 53:7–8 and was reading it.”⁸

4. **Verse 29** – “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’” – Here we have the Holy Spirit giving direction to Philip rather than an angel. As we already know, the Holy Spirit was prominent in the book of Acts. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is an important ingredient for successful evangelism. The Lord was preparing the heart of this man for someone to come and share the Gospel with him and there are people around each of us who God is preparing in order for us to share.

5. **Verses 30-31** – **Philip and the Ethiopian meet.**

- a. **Verse 30** - “...and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah...” – It seems quite apparent that this man was hungry for God and had a desire to understand. F.F. Bruce asserts:

“He had gone to Jerusalem, presumably to attend one of the great pilgrimage festivals, and while there had procured a scroll of the prophecies of Isaiah (in the Greek translation). He was passing the time during his homeward journey in his “chariot” or covered waggon by reading this scroll. The ancients commonly read aloud, so as Philip approached he heard what the man was reading and recognised what for him were the familiar words of Isaiah 53”⁹

- b. **Verse 30** – Philip asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” – Asking a person a question is one of the best ways to open up a conversation. By asking this, Philip was essentially offering to help him with his understanding.

- c. **Verse 31** – “And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.” – It’s easy to see the Holy Spirit orchestrating everything about this encounter. No doubt the Holy Spirit, unbeknownst to the eunuch, was directing him as to where to read, and the Holy Spirit was able to get Philip there just at the moment when he was reading it.

6. **Verses 32-33** – The place where he was reading was from **Isaiah 53:7-8** which is one of the primary Messianic prophecies.

“The Ethiopian focused on Isaiah 53:7–8, which describes our Lord as the willing Sacrifice for sinners, even to the point of losing His human rights. As Philip explained the verses to him, the Ethiopian began to understand the Gospel because the Spirit of God was opening his mind to God’s truth. It is not enough for the lost sinner to desire salvation; he must also understand God’s plan of salvation. It is the heart that understands the Word that eventually bears fruit (Matt. 13:23).”¹⁰

7. **Verses 34-35** – “So the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘I ask you, of whom does the prophecy say this, of himself or of some other man?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” – One of the gifts of the evangelist has often been said that they can get to the Gospel from almost any passage of Scripture. (cf. **John 5:39**.)

8. **Verses 36-38** – **Philip baptizes the eunuch in water.** The fact that the eunuch asked if he could be baptized indicates that Philip must have included that in his message, much like Peter did (cf. **2:38**). It was indicative of one truly having received Jesus Christ as Lord.

9. **Verses 39-40** – **The Spirit of the Lord catches Philip away and he goes preaching in other cities.** Dr. Horton states:

“Luke does not explain how the Spirit ‘took Philip away.’ The verb used usually means ‘to snatch away’...In any case, the eunuch saw Philip no more, but as a child of God he ‘went on his way rejoicing.’ A few ancient manuscripts and versions add that the Holy Spirit fell on the eunuch. We can be sure that he was indeed baptized in the Spirit...”¹¹

⁸Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 117.

⁹F. F. Bruce, *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* (Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books, 2017), Ac 8:26–40.

¹⁰Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 437.

¹¹Horton, *Acts*, 176.