

Acts 8:26-40

- God's Providence, the preacher and the Gospel -

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Introduction

- ❖ Pastors, evangelist, missionaries, preachers, all can feel discouraged at times. The history of Philip and the eunuch is enlightening, encouraging, comforting for all who preach the good news of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ This history shows the interplay between God's providence, the role of the preacher and the gospel.
 - God in his wisdom determines where and when. At the same time, the preacher Philip discovers what will be expected to do.
 - Not only in this history, but also the history of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), and the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:11-15).
 - It makes clear that the gospel needs to be preached by missionaries, evangelists, pastors and believers.
- ❖ This history also shows the necessity of a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ability to expound and apply the Scriptures.
 - The question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" is an important question.
 - The church needs preachers and teachers.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Acts. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone". You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ The book of Acts can be outlined as follows:

| THE BOOK OF ACTS | |
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| 1:1-3 | Introduction |
| 1:4-9 | The proclamation of the Kingdom of Christ: the main chapters of Acts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. "In Jerusalem" = Acts 1:12-8:1; II. "and in all Judea and Samaria" = Acts 8:1-9:31; III. "and to the ends of the earth" = Acts 9:32-28:31. Each (cultural) border-crossing is accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. The Pentecost at Jerusalem = Acts 2:1-13; II. The Samaritan Pentecost = Acts 8:14-17; III. The Heathen Pentecost = Acts 10:44-47. |
| 1:9-11 | The ascension of Jesus Christ |
| 1:12-26 | Awaiting Pentecost |
| The proclamation of the Kingdom of Christ | |
| 2:1-8:4 | I. In Jerusalem |
| 8:5-9:43 | II. In all Judea and Samaria |
| 10:1-28:31 | III. To the ends of the earth |

- ❖ Acts 8:26-40 is part of the "second chapter of Acts": 8:1-9:43 — "In all Judea and Samaria."

| Judea and Samaria (8:1-25) | |
|---|--|
| 8:1-3 | A. Persecution by Saul (Paul) in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria |
| 8:4-8 | B. Philip preaching in Samaria |
| 8:9-25 | C. Simon the sorcerer, Peter and John, the Samaritan Pentecost |
| Philip and the Ethiopian (8:26-40) | |
| 8:26-40 | D. Philip preaches the good news |
| The conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1-31) | |
| 9:1-19 | C. Saul converted. He receives the Holy Spirit |

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| 9:20-30 | B. Saul starts preaching in Damascus and returns to Jerusalem |
| 9:31 | A. The church in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria enjoys a time of peace |

- ❖ It is interesting to note the sequence of themes within this chapter:
 - Persecution (8:1-3) and Peace (9:31) (A).
 - Preaching by Philip (8:4-8) and preaching by Saul (9:20-30) (B).
 - Conflict and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans (8:9-25) and to Paul (9:2-19) (C).
 - The story of Philip and the Ethiopian is at the centre (D).

Form and structure

- ❖ An outline of Acts 8:26-40. The story consists of three parts or scenes.

| | |
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| <i>The first scene: (verse 26-28)</i> | Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 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, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. |
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| <p><i>The second scene: (verse 29-35)</i></p> | <p>The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.</p> <p>"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.</p> <p>"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?"</p> <p>So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:</p> <p>"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. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."</p> <p>The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"</p> <p>Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.</p> |
| <p><i>The third scene: (verse 36-40)</i></p> | <p>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?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.</p> <p>Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.</p> |

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Philip

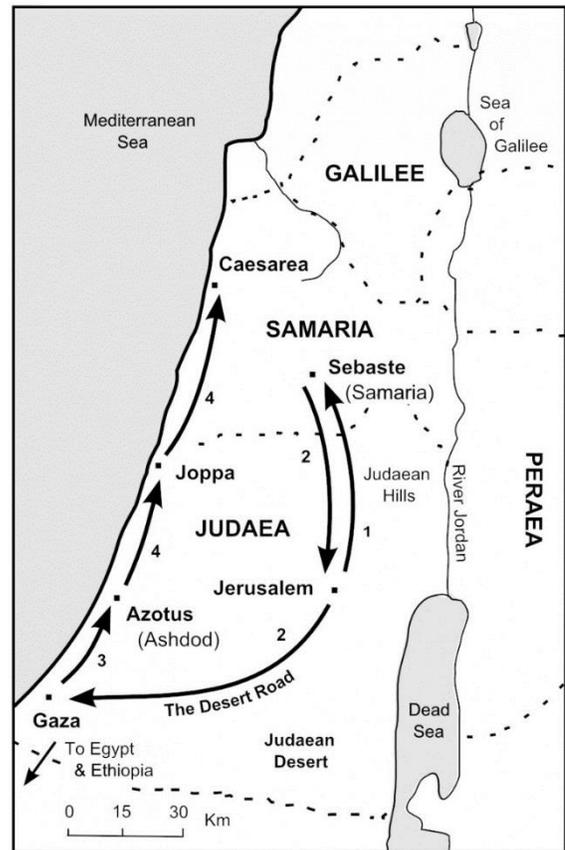
- ❖ Philip belonged to the group of seven Greek-speaking leaders of the church in Jerusalem, who assisted the apostles (Acts 6:1-6). He was a man full of the Spirit and wisdom. His travels are shown by the map.¹

Eunuch

- ❖ This man had been emasculated, which was probably a prerequisite for his high position as treasurer of the queen of the Ethiopians. It is interesting to note that the Law said: “No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord” (Dt 23:1). Isaiah promised: “Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.’ And let not any eunuch complain, ‘I am only a dry tree.’ For this is what the Lord says: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant— to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off’” (Isa 56:3-5).
- ❖ Some remarkable aspects. This man came from Ethiopia. Although the exact location where he served the queen is not known, it can be estimated that he travelled for about 4000 km to reach Jerusalem. Google maps can also give an estimation of the time needed to walk this distance, probably it took about three months to reach Jerusalem by foot or by chariot.

Candace

- ❖ This is a title, not a personal name.



¹ The Bible Journey | powered by Edit.com. (n.d.). Philip's Journeys. Retrieved from <http://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/7-journeys-of-jesus-followers/philips-journeys/>

Exposition

Verse 26-28

- ❖ **“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip.”** An angel is a messenger. Three things should be noted.
 - (1) The angel indicated the time “**μσημβρία**” = noon or at midday. This word can also mean “south.”
Newman and Nida remark: “Though most translators and commentators understand that Philip was directed to *go south*, it is possible that this expression is intended to be taken in the sense of “at midday”² Although the NIV and the ESV prefer the translation “south”, this is rather superfluous, because Philip would have had enough information about the location.
 - (2) The angel indicated the location. “the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **“The desert road”** can better be translated by “this road is not frequently used.” It must have been a rather good road, which could be used by a chariot.
 - (3) The angel did not tell Philip anything about the purpose of this commission. That will follow suit.
- ❖ **“On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.”** Luke gave detailed information about this man. Some things can be noted. This information must have served the first readers of the Book of Acts.
 - He travelled a long way from home to worship God in Jerusalem, 3 to 4 thousand kilometres, about 2 to 3 months of travel! This is amazing. It reminds us of the visit of Queen of Sheba to King Solomon after she had heard of his fame and wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-13).
 - Witherington thinks that “the geographical location Luke has in mind is the Nubian kingdom whose capital is Meroe, south of Egypt, which is today part of Sudan.”³
 - Now, he is on his way home reading the Book of Isaiah aloud, which was the custom.

Verse 29-35

- ❖ **“The Spirit told Philip.”** It might be guessed what the reason is for the shift from “**an angel of the Lord**” to “**the Spirit**.” For the thrust of the story, it is not important. It is clear that “The Lord” and “the Spirit” are one.

² Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1972, p. 179).

³ Witherington, B., III. (1998, p.295).

- The Spirit commissioned Philip to stay close to the chariot but did not tell the reason why. Philip needs to discover by himself what to do when he hears the Ethiopian reading this passage of Scripture. It is not by chance that he is reading a part of Isaiah.
- ❖ **“Do you understand what you are reading?”** Sometimes, when you hear somebody reading a passage aloud, it is possible to infer that this person doesn’t understand what he is reading.
 - The eunuch invites Philip to climb up into the carriage and he has a question. **“Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”**
 - It is important to realize that the eunuch didn’t know about Christ. Therefore, this question is quite understandable.
 - It might be possible that Isaiah is talking about himself in a prophetic perspective.
 - It is more probable that Isaiah is prophesying about someone else.
 - The eunuch is reading a passage from Isaiah 53:7, 8 in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Luke doesn’t inform the reader about a more detailed explanation of these verses given by Philip. Philip **“began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”** It was just a start.
 - The quotation has an open end. **“For his life was taken from the earth.”** It is thinkable that Philip gave a summary of the crucifixion, the resurrection and the glorification of Jesus: **“For his life was taken from the earth, by God into heaven.”**
 - Presumably, Philip must have explained the meaning and importance of baptism:
 - “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations, baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Mt 28:18-20).

Verse 36-40

- ❖ **“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?’”**
 - The eunuch could not become a Jew as a proselyte and receive the circumcision, because he was emasculated. But, there is no objection to be baptized. It shows the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God. Anyone who believes can enter.
 - **“Look, here is water.”** In Greek, there are only two words: **“Look, water.”** This outcry reveals a deep longing to belong to the Kingdom of Jesus.
- ❖ **“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.”**
 - “Incidentally, the words ‘went down into the water’, as J. A. Alexander comments, ‘can prove nothing as to its extent or depth’. Total immersion *may* be implied, but in that case the baptizer and the baptized will have been submerged together, since the same statement is made of them both. So the expression may rather mean, as the earliest

paintings and baptistries suggest, that they went down into the water up to their waist, and that Philip then poured water over the Ethiopian.”⁴

- John Stott quotes I.H. Marshall, who wrote: “The way in which the story is told bears some structural resemblances to another story in which a Stranger joined two travellers and opened up the Scriptures to them, took part in a sacramental act, and then disappeared from view (Lk. 24:13–35).”⁵

Application

- ❖ Pay attention to the eunuch his journey of months to Jerusalem to worship God. He tried to understand the Scriptures. He was eager to learn.
 - Pay attention to his joy after he has heard the good news, and his baptism.
- ❖ There are two main themes, which can be addressed:
 - (1) Preaching the good news of Christ.
 - Philip began with this passage and probably he adduced more passages.
Compare:
“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lk 24:47).
 - Proclaiming the Gospel, explaining and applying the Scriptures is the main task of the church. The church needs men like Philip. He had a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, in his case only the Old Testament.
 - (2) A second interesting theme is the providence of God, the Lord, and the Spirit and the interplay with men.
 - There is the angel, or messenger, of the Lord, speaking to Philip.
 - There is the Spirit speaking to Philip.
 - There are the Scriptures (Old Testament) pointing to Christ.
 - There is the Spirit of the Lord, who took Philip away.
 - There is an interplay between the guidance by the Lord and human action by Philip. Pay attention to this guidance.
 - The first command was about time and place.
 - The second command was about following the chariot.

⁴ Stott, J. R. W. (199, p. 162).

⁵ Stott, J. R. W. (1994, p. 161).

- Philip is obedient. He discovers what he needs to do: to proclaim the gospel.
 - Philip asked the first question and after the response of the Eunuch, he started preaching.
 - The same interplay is found in chapter 10, the conversion of Cornelius. Cornelius received in a dream a message from the Lord. The Lord commanded him to invite Simon Peter. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, he started preaching.
 - It is necessary to identify the need of the congregation.
- ❖ The passage also shows the inclusiveness of the Gospel. Where in the Old Testament a eunuch could not enter the assembly (Dt 23:1), there is no objection in the New Testament.

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