

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40

Acts 8:26-40: *“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.* 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,* ²⁸ *was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.* ²⁹ *Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”* ³⁰ *So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”* ³¹ *And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.* ³² *The place in the Scripture which he read was this: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth.* ³³ *In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.”* ³⁴ *So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?”* ³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.* ³⁶ *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?”* ³⁷ *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.”* ³⁸ *So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.* ³⁹ *Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.* ⁴⁰ *But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.”*

Background Notes

Because of increased persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen, the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered. As a result, the gospel moved out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. God used the persecution to accomplish His plan for evangelism! Philip the evangelist took the gospel to Samaria; many believed in Jesus, and were brought into the one true Church. Peter and John came from Jerusalem to Samaria, and God used them to communicate the blessing of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritan believers.

Peter and John preached to many villages of the Samaritans on their way back to Jerusalem. *“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”* (v25). What a change in the Apostle John’s attitude! Back in Luke 9:54, John had asked the Lord if they should bring fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans – and now John was preaching the gospel to the Samaritans. What a wonderful change!

In the second half of Acts 8, Philip was directed by an angel to travel south to the sparsely populated road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. Along that road he met a man from Ethiopia who was now traveling home from Jerusalem in his chariot.

This Ethiopian eunuch held a high position – he was treasurer to the queen of Ethiopia. In that day Ethiopia was the land south of Egypt. Apparently he was a proselyte (a convert to Judaism) and had been to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. While in Jerusalem he had acquired a portion of the manuscript of Isaiah, and when Philip met him along the Gaza road, the Ethiopian “just happened” to be reading the Messianic passage from Isaiah 53: *“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. ³³ In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.”*

Do you think this all happened by “chance” - or do you think God arranged it all, right down to the very detail? Of course you know the answer! Can God arrange the details of our life circumstances today? Of course He can - and He does! Ephesians 1:11 says, *“God works all things after the counsel of His will.”* **All things!**

Notice that the eunuch recognized that the prophetic passage from Isaiah spoke of an ***individual person***, not the ***nation of Israel***. I stress this fact because modern Judaism wrongly attributes Isaiah 53 as referring to the nation of Israel, and not an individual. It is interpreted this way to avoid the obvious reference to Jesus Christ.

By the way, when you witness to your Jewish friends or neighbors, Isaiah 53 is an excellent portion of Scripture to use. It is in the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament), and it is very hard to escape the obvious conclusion that this is prophecy that is speaking about Jesus. The “Suffering Servant” predicted in Isaiah 53 is Jesus!

If your Jewish friends take the approach of modern Judaism, and say that the Suffering Servant is the nation of Israel, have them read Isaiah 53:8: *“For He [the Suffering Servant] was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people [the people of Israel] He was stricken.”* The Suffering Servant is distinguished from the nation - a clear indication that the Suffering Servant is an ***individual***, not the ***nation***. In Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant is clearly distinguished from the people of Israel for whom He was suffering. He was suffering as an individual, and as a substitute for the people’s sins.

The Ethiopian eunuch understood Isaiah 53 to be speaking of the Suffering Servant as an individual. He interpreted this passage correctly. *“So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” (v34).* The Ethiopian eunuch properly interpreted this passage, so beginning with this Scripture, Philip preached the good news of Jesus to him. The Ethiopian eunuch believed and was saved.

Doctrinal Points

1. The conversion of the Ethiopian man followed the norm for Christian conversion.

Notice the sequence of events in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. First, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the heart and life of this Ethiopian official, since he had already recognized that the God of Israel was the one true God. He had come to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship the one true God.

Next he was brought in contact with the Bible, and he read the Word of God. Then the Holy Spirit brought along a person who could explain the Scripture to him. Finally the Ethiopian eunuch believed the message, and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation.

The sequence of events in the conversion of the Ethiopian official seems to be the normal sequence of events that takes place when a person becomes a Christian today. There are exceptions, of course, but this is the norm. The same pattern is seen in the salvation of Cornelius in Acts 10.

Romans 10:14 says, *“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”* and verse 17, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* This is the “normal” way in which people become Christians. Their hearts are open to God, they read or hear the Word of God, and someone explains it to them. Then, having heard and understood the Word, they come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Recently a couple shared their conversion experience with us. They were dissatisfied with life, and were on the verge of divorce - but then she trusted Jesus! Her brother had become a Christian. He shared the good news of Jesus with her; she believed and was saved. She found a good Bible-teaching church, and began to pray for her husband.

One day, the husband was at home alone, and he had an unbelievable urge to read the Bible – just to see what his wife was getting into. He started reading from the beginning of the Bible, and when he got up to Noah and the Flood and he fell asleep. When he woke up, he made himself a cup of coffee, and then began reading again, this time in Proverbs. Here he realized that this Bible was no mere human book!

When his wife came home, she noticed he was behaving “strangely” - he was painting the deck without being asked! Then she noticed the Bible had been disturbed, so she asked her husband about it. He confessed that he had been reading the Bible, so she asked him if he would like to talk to someone at the church about the Bible. He agreed. The pastor came over that night and explained the Scriptures to him - and the husband believed and was saved. They now have a wonderful Christ-centered home! What a great story!

Notice that their conversions followed the “norm” of Christian conversion – reading and hearing the Bible, and someone explaining the Word. Then, having understood the Word, they believed it, and trusted Jesus Christ for salvation.

This “norm” of Christian conversion is illustrated in the salvation of the Ethiopian man.

2. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch followed the norm for Christian baptism.

Verses 36-38: *“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?” 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.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”*

The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized as a Christian. It was the next logical step in this man's life of faith. There wasn't a long time period between his conversion and his baptism. There's usually no good reason for a long time gap between conversion and baptism - in fact, believer's baptism is a testimony to the world that you've become a Christian, and you're identified with Jesus Christ.

And notice that the mode of baptism was immersion - they went down into the water, and he came out of the water. This normal pattern for Christian baptism: baptism follows conversion. Infant baptism is not believer's baptism, because the infant is not yet saved.

Immersion is the biblical mode of Christian baptism. The symbolism is that the believer is identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6). Baptism by immersion conveys this truth much better than sprinkling or pouring water on one's head. So the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch followed the norm for Christian baptism.

Practical Application

Be willing to leave a successful ministry.

Philip was involved in a very successful ministry in Samaria, but the Lord called him away - to a *wilderness road*, of all places! Notice - the Lord didn't tell Philip about the Ethiopian man ahead of time, but Philip didn't argue with the Lord about leaving a successful ministry. He obeyed, and went.

Notice that when the Holy Spirit took Philip away from the Ethiopian man, He didn't lead him back to Samaria. Philip found himself about twenty miles north of Gaza at Azotus (Old Testament Ashdod). Then Philip moved north along the Mediterranean coast, preaching all the way to Caesarea, and it seems that Philip settled there. He continued to evangelize, and he raised a family there, because he was in Caesarea when Paul returned from his third missionary journey (Acts 21). So it seems that Philip never moved back to Samaria, where he had had such a successful ministry. But God knew what He was doing in Philip's life.

The Lord knows what He's doing in our lives as well. God may choose to move you away from a successful ministry for **His** purposes and reasons. He has moved me several times in the past. So - *be willing to leave a successful ministry!*