

Acts 8 Part II – Phillip evangelizes with unflinching obedience!

CHAPTER 8

THEME: Conversion of Ethiopian eunuch (son of Ham).

We have now arrived at the second major division of the Book of Acts. You remember that we divided the book according to the Lord's commission in Act_1:8. First they were to witness in Jerusalem. Now we come to the Lord Jesus Christ's work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Judea and Samaria. This section of the book includes chapters 8–12.

Chapter 7 concluded with a most unusual scene. It included the two young men who had the greatest influence upon the early church. The one was Stephen, the deacon, the young man who gave up his life, the first martyr in the church. That other was a young Pharisee who had charge of the stoning of Stephen. His name was Saul. - McGee

Act 8:25 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.

The gospel is starting its journey to the ends of the earth. It started in Jerusalem. The apostles were there, and a church was established. Soon the center will move to Antioch. Then it will move to Ephesus. Later it will move to Alexandria, then to Rome. Today, I don't think there is any particular center of the church. It has gone to the ends of the earth.

I believe that one of the finest vehicles to get the gospel to the ends of the earth is radio. Through this mechanical means the church can do what has not been accomplished since the first century when the gospel did penetrate to all the known world. – McGee

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

In chapters 8, 9, and 10 we find the record of three remarkable instances of conversion. I think that these three have been lifted out and given to us particularly for a lesson. Chapter 8 gives the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, a son of Ham. Chapter 9 gives the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a son of Shem. Chapter 10 gives the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a son of Japheth. You will recall that the entire human family is divided into these three categories. This was an ethnological and a geographical division made after the Flood. Ham, Shem, and Japheth were the sons of Noah. We find here that the gospel reaches out to representatives of these three divisions of the human family.

You will also notice from these examples that in a conversion three factors must be brought into focus before there can be a conversion. All three of these are evident in these three representative conversions.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had taken this man Philip to Samaria where there had been a great moving of the Spirit of God. Then the Holy Spirit moved him down to Gaza, and again we see His moving in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit of God had gone ahead to prepare the heart and also to prepare the messenger. This leading of the Spirit of God is absolutely essential. I'm afraid that a great deal of personal work is done in a haphazard manner and without the leading of the Spirit of God. I believe that we ought to make it a matter of definite prayer before we talk to anyone. We should talk to the Lord about the individual before we talk to the individual about the Lord. It is not simply that we need the Holy Spirit to lead us. What we need is for the Spirit of God to go ahead of us and prepare the way, then to call us up to where He is. We want to go where the Spirit of God is moving. This is the first

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essential in a conversion. We find it true in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and also in the conversion of Saul and of Cornelius.

2. The Word of God. “So, then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom_10:17). The Word of God is the second essential. The Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and will reveal them to an individual. It is the Spirit of God using the Word of God. But wait a minute, there must be a human instrument.

3. The man of God. The Spirit of God uses the man of God who delivers the Word of God to produce a son of God, one who is born again. We will see this in the record of the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch.

The second part of chapter 8 brings us to another part of the ministry of Philip. The gospel had gone to Samaria, and there were many genuine believers. But we also saw that in Samaria evil came into the church in the person of Simon the sorcerer. Now, in contrast to Simon the sorcerer, we come to the experience of Philip with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip led this man to Christ, and he became a genuine believer, a wonderful man of God. - McGee

Act 8:26 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.

Samaria is an area which lies north of Jerusalem. Now Philip is told to go way down to the south. What we know as the Gaza strip is south, over along the Mediterranean. This was the trade route down into Egypt and Ethiopia. He would probably travel through Jerusalem to get there.

Philip had been speaking to multitudes in Samaria, and now he is sent down to a desert. He is to leave the place where there has been a great moving of the Spirit of God and go into a place, a desert, where there is nobody. However, when he gets there, he finds that God does have someone to whom he is to witness. – McGee

Would you go immediately like Philip, or would you have lots of questions, maybe have to through down the fleece ask for many confirmations? Do you believe we miss opportunities due to lack or prompt obedience to the Lord?

Why didn't the angel go himself? Because this was a mission where a man was worth more than an angel. In the Lord's plan of salvation there is a place for redeemed sinners as witnesses for Christ, to do a work that no angel could accomplish. It is not for us to say that God could have had any better plan than this. As the plan stands, the man is needed for its prosecution. The best that an angel can do is to come as a messenger from God and tell the man to arise and go. (H. C. Trumbull, D. D) – Biblical Illustrator

Is a large crowd always better? Or can a single encounter in a desert yield greater fruit for the Kingdom?

This incident is a type of what often happens in the experience of God's people. Our Lord Himself on one occasion left the busy, crowded cities where He was carrying on a most beneficent ministry, for the lonely desert, in order that there He might cure the solitary demoniac, who, in his turn, was the means of a wonderful spiritual awakening among the people of Decapolis. Peter was sent from the large

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maritime city of Joppa, where he could preach to persons from all parts of the world, in order to instruct a single Gentile family in the small town of Caesarea. And so, God bids His servants still leave the ninety and nine and go after the one lost sheep. We think that we need to get together large meetings in order to produce a deep and widespread impression. But crowds have not always been helpful in the matter of progress. Not infrequently, by their distractions, they have placed hindrances in the way. A man has in a crowd no calmness of mind to think but is swayed exclusively by the feelings of the moment. Our Lord's own best work, so to speak, was not done in crowds; and the sayings of His that sink deepest into our hearts were uttered when conversing with a solitary woman beside well or near a tomb. The fickle crowds fell away from Him in His hour of need; but the solitary souls whom He called to Him one by one from the seashore and the receipt of custom, and the desolated home, clung faithfully to Him to the last.

– Biblical Illustrator

Act 8:27-28 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, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

We read here that this man of Ethiopia had charge of all the treasure of the queen. He was actually the Secretary of the Treasury. He was an official, and a high official of that day. This man was not traveling alone. He had a great retinue of servants and minor officials with him. He wasn't sitting in a chariot with the reins in one hand and a book in the other hand as we see him pictured. This man was sitting back in a chariot, protected from the sun by a canopy. He had a private chauffeur and was riding in style.

He was a citizen of Ethiopia, but he had come to Jerusalem to worship. This indicates that he was a proselyte to Judaism. He had just been to Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish religion. Although Judaism was the God-given religion, he was leaving the city still in the dark. He was reading the prophet Isaiah, but he was not understanding what he was reading. - McGee

Act 8:29-30 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So, Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The Holy Spirit is leading, as He must in any conversion. Philip is the man of God whom the Spirit of God is using. The Word of God is already in that chariot, for the Ethiopian is reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Philip is a hitchhiker. When he hears what the man is reading, he asks, "Do you understand what you are reading there?" The Ethiopian doesn't; so, he stops his retinue and invites Philip to come up and ride with him.

Act 8:31-33 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 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. IN HIS HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY, AND WHO WILL DECLARE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN FROM THE EARTH."

Where was he reading? You will recognize that this is from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He was reading the seventh and eighth verses. It is obvious that he must have been reading for some time. So, it is also obvious that he must have read the preceding verses: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him

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stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa_53:3-6). - McGee

Act 8:34-35 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God.

I do not believe that people can be converted by hearing a song. The song may affect a person emotionally and influence the will to make a decision for Christ. However, if the Word of God is not in it, there can be no true conversion. It requires the Word of God. How important that is!

Simon Peter, whom God used so wonderfully in the conversion of multitudes, makes it very clear that the Word of God must be involved if a person is saved. He wrote in his first epistle: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1Pe_1:23-25).

When the Spirit of God uses the Word of God, what is going to happen? These men were in the chariot, discussing the Word of God. Philip was telling the eunuch about Jesus. - McGee

Act 8:36-37 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."

Remember that Philip had had an experience with Simon the sorcerer up there in Samaria. He is not about to have a repetition of that. When this man asks for water baptism, Philip wants to be very sure that he believes with all his heart. - McGee

Act 8:38-39 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 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.

Philip is snatched off the page of Scripture. He is not needed here anymore. The Ethiopian rides off the pages of Scripture in his chariot. He went on his way, rejoicing. Now what about this man? The first great church was not in the United States, nor was it in Europe, nor was it in Jerusalem, nor was it in Asia Minor. The first great church was in northern Africa. The Ethiopian evidently went back and through his witness and his influence, a church was begun there. You would find it very profitable to read about the early church in North Africa. – McGee

Preaching to one

I remember, years ago, one Sunday that I had to preach at the Chapel Royal; and in those days the old duke used to attend service there, and when he was in town the congregation may have numbered generally some seven or eight persons, but when he was out of town perhaps two or

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three. And on this occasion, he was out of town. Well, the morning prayer was over, and the clergyman who had said it had to leave for duty elsewhere; and by the time I had mounted the pulpit the clerk had gone into the vestry to stir the fire. I was left alone with the congregation! Under the circumstances it would have been ridiculous to have preached the sermon, and I went down to the congregation and told him so. He said—it was a young man I knew—“Oh! I have come a long way on purpose to hear you preach. I beg you will proceed.” “No!” I said, “I really can’t. Besides, how personal you would find the sermon. But I will walk across the park with you, and give you the heads of my sermon as we walk along.” Then I and Samuel Wilberforce, Esquire, walked across the park together. (Dean Hook.)

The Rest of the Story: Samuel Wilberforce is known for pushing against slavery, debating Charles Darwin, defending the faith, and a leading Bishop in London with world acclaim based on his writings to this day.

Act 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Azotus is Ashdod, which is over in the Gaza strip. To reach Caesarea, he would have gone through Joppa. Tel Aviv is there today. So he went, preaching the gospel along the coast up to Caesarea. The gospel has gone to Judea and to Samaria and is moving out. The eunuch has carried it down to Ethiopia. Philip is carrying it along the coast to Caesarea.