

## Following the Lord's Leading

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Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 8:26-40 / July 27, 2025

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### Introduction:

Our passage, in Acts 8:26-40, holds the last record of Philip's ministry other than a brief comment of him hosting Paul in Acts 21 twenty years later. And this final story is quite significant to Luke's narrative as it echoes the Emmaus Road story in Luke 24. Consider six echoes Ben Witherington notes, "(1) Jesus joins two travelers leaving Jerusalem, presumably on their way home, who do not know him, and similarly Philip joins another traveler on the way home who does not know Philip; (2) Jesus and Philip both engage their fellow traveler by means of a pointed question (cf. Luke 24:17; Acts 8:30); (3) Jesus' death and resurrection becomes the subject of conversation in each case by means of messianic interpretation of the OT; (4) both narratives conclude with what could be called sacred or even sacramental acts—breaking of bread and baptism; (5) Jesus and Philip both abruptly vanish from the scene and then reappear in another place (cf. Luke 24:31, 36–43; Acts 8:39–40); (6) the travelers are deeply affected emotionally by the encounter (Luke 24:32; Acts 8:39)" (Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 292). These echoes, along with the structure and details Luke provides solidify the importance of this encounter. To see this, I want to share three observations. First, in verse 26 through the beginning of verse 27, we see,

### Philip Obeying a Strange Request

Remember, Philip has been powerfully effective in preaching the gospel in Samaria. Yet, look at the shift in verses 26-27, "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is a desert place. And he rose and went." Imagine you are Philip. God has performed signs and wonders through you that overwhelm Simon and break his hold over the Samaritans. Revival is in full force when an angel suddenly comes and tells you to leave. And note the detail of where, "This is a desert place." History tells us of two cities of Gaza, the old city demolished in 100-96 B.C., often referred to as "desert Gaza," and the new city built after that. This detail suggests the angel referred to the old city. So, Philip is commanded to leave a thriving ministry to go to a place where few people exist. How would you respond? Chances are, you might say, "Are you sure? People are responding to the gospel here and there's no one in Gaza. Shouldn't I stay?" Yet, look at Philip's response, "he rose and went." Two things are emphasized at this point. First, Philip's obedience. There is no delay or hesitation. He receives the call and immediately goes. Second, God is orchestrating this event. The angel of the Lord signifies the special activity of God in Luke's writings. The angel appeared in Luke 1 and 2 to announce the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. And will appear again in Acts 12, when Peter is saved from prison. God is powerfully working to send Philip down this road for His saving purposes. Hebrews 1:14 tells us angels are, "sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" Church, God will ensure the gospel gets to those who are to inherit salvation. This brings us to the second observation. In verses 27-38 we see,

### Salvation Coming to a Significant Person

When we see a lot of details about a person in narrative literature, we should take notice. Look at verses 27-28, "And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah." Notice the amount of details Luke provides about this man. First, he was an Ethiopian and court official of the queen. Candace is a royal title for the queens of the Kingdom of Kush, a major power from the Nile Valley of southern Egypt in around 540 B.C. to A.D. 339, known for their wealth and military prowess. We're also told he was a eunuch, an emasculated male set apart for the queen and was "in charge of all her treasure." Lastly, Luke says, "He had come to Jerusalem to worship." It's unclear whether he was a full proselyte. On the one hand, his status as a eunuch likely kept him from being accepted, as Deuteronomy 23:1 says any man in his state shall not enter the assembly of the Lord. On the other hand, it was hard to get copy of Isaiah, especially for an outsider. I am persuaded he wasn't fully accepted and obtained the copy through wealth.

One final thing to note comes from outside our text. Ancient Greek historians often referred to Ethiopia as the ends of the earth because of its distance from Greek civilization, a point Theophilus may have been familiar with. So, this man was a high-ranking official in the Ethiopian government, gentile eunuch, and near-proselyte who had traveled from “the ends of the earth” to worship in Jerusalem. This was a significant person. Continue in verses 29-31, “And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” Once again, we see God’s divine intervention as the Spirit tells Philip to join the eunuch’s chariot and, once again, he obeys. As Philip runs to the chariot, he hears the eunuch reading Isaiah and boldly asks him if he understands what he was reading. Picture this moment. I imagine it was clear this chariot held an important person because of the Ethiopian wealth. The eunuch is riding along the road and reading Isaiah aloud, when, out of nowhere, a simple man appears and asks him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” This scene invites us to consider the faithfulness and humility of Philip and the eunuch. Philip is willing to run to a clearly important chariot and boldly question the understanding of the person inside. And the eunuch’s desire to know God breaks down any pride that would cause him to be offended. Look, next, at verses 32-35, “Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’ And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.” These verses are at the center of cascading mirrored ideas, like a sandwich, to draw our attention to them. They focus on the passage being Isaiah 53:7-8 and eunuch’s desire to know who it refers to. Now, the eunuch was certainly reading more of Isaiah and this was simply where he was when Philip arrived. What drew his interest to Isaiah? I believe it was the marvelous promise Isaiah held out to men like himself. Isaiah 56:3-5 says, “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people’; and let not the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’” For thus says the Lord: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” I believe he was searching Isaiah to find out how that promise could be his because he hadn’t been fully welcomed by the Jews. Then, he comes to Isaiah 53 which speaks of one despised and rejected like himself. He discovers this person bore our griefs and sorrows, would heal people with his wounds, and make many righteous by bearing their iniquities. Hope was set before the eunuch and the way to that hope was engaging his heart. But he needed to know who this was speaking about. See, a suffering Messiah was foreign to pre-Christian Judaism, and these verses were often either identified with the prophet or the nation of Israel. Isaiah was dead and Israel had rejected him. Was he without hope? As we see Philip begin with this scripture to share the good news about Jesus, our hearts are directed to how important it is to see Jesus as the one Isaiah was speaking about. Jesus is the one who was crushed and pierced for the iniquities of all who trust in him. He is the one who makes many righteous and holds out the hope of inclusion with God’s people to the foreigner and the eunuch. Jesus is the Ethiopian eunuch’s hope. And He is our hope. Church, see the beauty of the gospel leaping from this story. Then, notice verses 36-38, “And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.” The eunuch responds in faith, asking to be baptized. Several translations omit verse 37 because it’s only found in late dated manuscripts. It says, “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” This was likely inserted by a later copyist to ensure we saw the eunuch exercising faith.

I am persuaded it wasn't part of Luke's original writing and there was a reason Luke wasn't concerned with that. Note how the focus falls on the eunuch's insistence on being baptized. Why was he so insistent? We can assume Philip ended the gospel like Peter, calling for repentance and baptism, which was likely significant for this eunuch. Water baptism was a required for a Gentile to show repentance and convert to Judaism. Because of Deuteronomy 23:1, the eunuch may have been prevented from being baptized and fully converting. So, he remained cut off from the people of God. As he was commanded to be baptized as a response of faith in Jesus, he jumped at the chance. Luke immediately moves to his command to stop the chariot to be baptized to show what brought this man joy was finally belonging to the people of God. An Ethiopian eunuch, from the ends of the earth, has seen the salvation of God and been welcomed into God's covenant people. John the Baptist proclaimed in Luke 3:6, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," quoting the last half of Isaiah 52:10 which says, "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." As a representation of the ends of the earth in Greek thought, this Gentile eunuch's inclusion in the people of God points to the universal nature of God's covenant promises. Salvation had come to a significant person. Which brings us to the final observation. In verses 39-40, we see,

### **The Spirit Carrying Philip Forward on Mission**

This is what some may have been waiting for. Do I believe in teleportation? Look at verses 39-40, "And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea." The narrative reads like Philip suddenly vanished from sight and ended up in Azotus, twenty miles away from Gaza. What do we do with this? Let me first say that we should be careful our skepticism doesn't deny God's power. If that is what happened, God is able to do so. Remember, this is similar to Luke's description of Jesus' exit in the Emmaus story in Luke 24:31 and few question what happened to Jesus. However, Luke specifically uses a Greek word for vanishing or disappearing there. So, he may simply be signaling the Spirit's perfect control over Philip, telling us Philip suddenly left and continued down the road till he arrived at Azotus. Either way it happened, Luke makes two things clear. First, Philip was led forward on mission by the Spirit and obedient to continue spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, the eunuch went back to Ethiopia rejoicing in his salvation and inclusion in the people of God. And those are the things we should focus on. I love this story because of what it speaks to our hearts about salvation. Consider three take aways from the main characters in it. First,

#### **1) Know that God Will Accomplish His Saving Purposes**

Make no mistake about it, the primary character in this story is God. God sends the angel to tell Philip to go down the road to Gaza. The Spirit leads him to the chariot and gives wisdom to teach the Scriptures like Jesus. Then, the Spirit carries Philip forward on mission. Even the precise passage Philip heard, question by the eunuch, and immediate response have touches of God's sovereignty. God is moving the good news of Jesus Christ forward, foreshadowing the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. The early church father, Irenaeus, later speaks of the Ethiopian Eunuch as a missionary to the Ethiopians. So, not only does God use Philip, a Hellenistic Jew to take the gospel to Samaria, He uses this Gentile outcast to take his saving message to the ends of the earth. Psalm 68:31, written over 1000 years prior to this, declared, "Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush [Ethiopia] shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God." Family, know that God will accomplish His saving purposes and He will use you to do so. Second,

#### **2) Be Sensitive & Obedient to the Lord's Leading**

At each moment Philip immediately obeys the Spirit's guidance. And God calls each of us to surrender to His calling in similar ways.

George MacDonald wrote, “Many people want to direct God instead of surrendering themselves to be directed by Him. They want to show Him the way instead of submissively following where He leads.

I said, ‘Let me walk in the field’;  
God said, ‘No, walk in the town’;  
I said, ‘There are no flowers there’;  
He said, ‘No flowers, but a crown.’

I pleaded for time to be given;  
He said, ‘Is it hard to decide?’  
It will not seem hard in Heaven  
To have followed the steps of your Guide.’

I said, ‘But the sky is black,  
There is nothing but noise and din’;  
But He wept as He sent me back,  
‘There is more,’ He said, ‘there is sin.’

I cast one look at the field,  
Then set my face to the town;  
He said, ‘My child, do you yield?’  
Will you leave the flowers for the crown?’

I said, ‘But the air is thick,  
And smog is veiling the sun’;  
He answered, ‘Yet souls are sick,  
And your work is yet undone.’

Then into His hand went mine,  
And into my heart came He;  
And I walk in a light Divine,  
The path I had feared to see.”

I said, ‘I will miss the light,  
And friends will miss me, they say’;  
He answered me, ‘Choose tonight,  
If I am to miss you, or they.’

Family, are we willing to leave the flowers for the crown? Let’s follow Philip’s example of being sensitive to and obedient of the Spirit’s lead, taking the gospel to a world in desperate need. Finally,

### **3) See the Joy of Belonging to the People of God**

The eunuch’s insistence on being baptized and rejoicing came from longing to be part of God’s people. He traveled a great distance to worship and searched the Scriptures for answers. When He heard the gospel gave Him inclusion in God’s new covenant people, he couldn’t wait to declare his commitment to follow Christ through baptism because his hope was secure. Today, many take slow steps towards Christ. They may believe, but don’t pursue baptism. They may trust in Christ, but don’t strive to be united with His body on earth. I think one reason for this is a failure to see the joy of being God’s people. Family, when we come together, we don’t come to say we are part of GracePoint Church. We come to proclaim that we are His people, and He is our God.

### **Conclusion:**

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, let this story challenge and strengthen your faith. Know God will accomplish His saving purposes and desires to use you to do so. Ask Him to make you sensitive to His Spirit’s leading and obedient to His commands. Think on the joy of who you are and who you belong to. Reflect on the fact that you are a son or daughter of the most high God and marvel at what that means. Then let it strengthen your resolve to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel. As you respond, you are welcome to sit and reflect, stand and sing, or come and kneel before the Lord. We also have people ready to pray with you and for you who will be worshipping on the front rows with lanyards on. Would you pray with me as we respond to God’s Word together?