



The Holy Spirit's Leading in Evangelism (Acts 8:26-40)

Notes: Week Sixteen

Acts 8:26-40 (NIV)

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian^[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

³³ *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”*^[b]

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ^[37] ^[c] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 8:27](#) That is, from the southern Nile region
- b. [Acts 8:33](#) Isaiah 53:7,8 (see Septuagint)
- c. [Acts 8:37](#) Some manuscripts include here *Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

Acts 8:26-40 (HCSB)

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Official

²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.)^[a]²⁷ So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,^[b] who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”

³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,
so He does not open His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation justice was denied Him.

Who will describe His generation?

For His life is taken from the earth.^[c]

³⁴ The eunuch replied to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or another person?” ³⁵ So Philip proceeded^[d] to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

³⁶ As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized?” ³⁷ 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.”^[e]³⁸ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip appeared in^[f] Azotus,^[g] and he was traveling and evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 8:26](#) Or *is a desert place*
- b. [Acts 8:27](#) = Nubia
- c. [Acts 8:33](#) [Is 53:7-8](#)
- d. [Acts 8:35](#) Lit *Philip opened his mouth*
- e. [Acts 8:37](#) Other mss omit bracketed text
- f. [Acts 8:40](#) Or *Philip was found at*, or *Philip found himself in*
- g. [Acts 8:40](#) Or *Ashdod*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Acts 8:26-40

8:26-39 Through the agency of **an angel of the Lord**, God arranged for Philip to stand in a place that would bring him into contact with an important **Ethiopian man** who would listen, believe, and in turn spread the gospel to other lands.

8:30-31 Philip's question and the Ethiopian's response imply that the OT passage the eunuch was reading ([Isa 53:7-8](#)) required interpretation in light of what God had done in Jesus of Nazareth.

8:32-34 The Ethiopian was reading [Isa 53:7-8](#), apparently from the Greek text. It is likely that he was reading the entire Suffering Servant section of Isaiah ([52:13-53:12](#)). The eunuch's question, **who is the prophet saying this about**, allowed Philip to explain Jesus as the subject of the passage. It is Jesus, not Isaiah, who suffered for the sins of humanity ([Isa 53:6](#)). From the earliest days of the church, the Suffering Servant section has been seen as an ideal starting place for explaining the gospel.

8:35 The phrase, **beginning from that Scripture**, may indicate that Philip went on to explain other relevant OT passages besides those in Isaiah.

8:38-40 The Ethiopian requested and was granted baptism just as soon as he believed (see note at [10:47-48](#)). That they went **into the water** and then came **up out of the water** apparently indicates baptism by immersion. A miracle is indicated by **carried Philip away**, for **the eunuch** came "up out of the water" and found himself alone. The Holy Spirit had taken Philip to his next appointment, a place called **Azotus**.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 8".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

Acts 8:26-40

8:26-40 *Witness to an Ethiopian Eunuch.* Philip was next led to witness to an Ethiopian. This passage strongly emphasizes the Spirit's leading.

8:26-27 Gaza was the last watering place before the desert on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt. Ethiopia was the ancient Nubian Kingdom, south of Aswan on the Nile. The designation **eunuch** could have been a mere title (for a "treasurer" or trusted royal servant), or could refer to his having been emasculated. Since he had been **to Jerusalem to worship**, the eunuch was probably a "God-fearer," a Gentile who worshiped Israel's God but had not become a full convert ("proselyte"). As a eunuch, he would have been barred from the inner courts of the temple, which makes his reading "the prophet Isaiah" ([v. 28](#)) especially significant. Isaiah held out the promise that God would grant devout eunuchs a heritage "better than sons and daughters" ([Isa. 56:3-5](#)).

8:30 The Holy Spirit directed Philip to approach the eunuch. People usually read aloud in those days, so Philip was probably aware that the eunuch was reading [Isa. 53:7-8](#). A more appropriate passage could not have been chosen as a witness to Christ, attesting to the Holy Spirit's leading. The passage cited focuses on the injustice done to Jesus, something that reflects Luke's presentation of the cross (see [Luke 23](#)), as well as the death of Stephen, who followed in his way.

8:36 The direction of the Holy Spirit in this incident is apparent again as Philip and the eunuch arrive at a rare watering place in the desert precisely when the eunuch requested baptism.

8:39 Philip was snatched up and **carried... away**, much like Elijah was ([2 Kings 2:11](#)).

8:40 Philip was then taken to witness in the coastal region, first in **Azotus** (OT Ashdod), then in **Caesarea**, where he seems to have settled (see [21:8](#)). Caesarea was a city with a large Greek-speaking population. Originally a small harbor town known as Strato's Tower, it was rebuilt by Herod the Great in magnificent Hellenistic style with a greatly improved harbor. In Philip's day it was the seat of the Roman government of Judea. Excavations have yielded significant finds, including the Herodian port and theater, an "amphitheater" shaped like a hippodrome for horse races, a palace built on a promontory out into the sea (frequently identified as Herod's palace), and a great raised aqueduct. Herod built a temple to Augustus here, and an inscription found in the theater mentions Pontius Pilate's dedication of a *Tiberium* (a sacred site devoted to the emperor Tiberius). Tense relations existed between the mixed Jewish and Gentile inhabitants, and one cause of the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66-73) was the Gentile desecration of the Jewish synagogue in Caesarea.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 8".

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Acts 8:26-40

8:26 Philip was having a successful preaching ministry to great crowds in Samaria (**8:5-8**), but he obediently left that ministry to travel on a desert road. Because Philip went where God sent him, Ethiopia was opened up to the Good News. Follow God's leading, even if it seems like a demotion. At first you may not understand his plans, but the results will prove that God's way is right.

8:27 Ethiopia is located in Africa south of Egypt. The eunuch was obviously very dedicated to God because he had traveled such a long distance to worship in Jerusalem. The Jews had contact with Ethiopia in ancient days (**Psalms 68:31**; **Jeremiah 38:7**), so this man may have been a Gentile convert to Judaism. Because he was in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia, this man's conversion brought Christianity into the power structures of another government. This is the beginning of the witness "to the ends of the earth" (**1:8**). See the prophecy in **Isaiah 56:3-8** for words about foreigners and eunuchs.

8:29-35 Philip found the Ethiopian man reading Scripture. Taking advantage of this opportunity to explain the Good News, Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. Philip (1) followed the Spirit's leading, (2) began the discussion from where the man was (immersed in the prophecies of Isaiah), and (3) explained how Jesus Christ fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies. When we share the Good News, we should start where the other person's concerns are focused. Then we can show how God's Word applies to those concerns.

8:35 Some think that the Old Testament is not relevant today, but Philip led this man to faith in Jesus Christ by using the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is found in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. God's entire Word is applicable to all people in all ages. Don't avoid or neglect to use the Old Testament. It, too, is God's Word.

8:38 Baptism was a sign of identification with Christ and with the Christian community. Although Philip was the only witness, it was still important for the eunuch to take this step.

8:39, 40 Why was Philip suddenly transported to a different city? This miraculous sign showed the urgency of bringing the Gentiles to belief in Christ. Azotus is Ashdod, one of the ancient Philistine capitals. Philip probably lived in Caesarea for the next 20 years (**21:8**).

Many Christians fled Jerusalem when persecution began after Stephen's death, seeking refuge in other cities and countries.

Saul tracked them down, even traveling 150 miles to Damascus in Syria to bring Christians back in chains to Jerusalem. But as he neared the ancient city, he discovered that God had other plans for him (**9:15**).



Saul Travels to Damascus

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1833-1834.