

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Week 10
Acts 8:26-40

v.26 Following Stephen's stoning, Luke points us to a couple of stories that show that God is still moving despite the persecutions of the believers. The disciples scatter upon the persecution of Stephen which forces the disciples to move to foreign places. This scattering due to persecution sows the seeds for God to build his church. A disciple named Philip travels to Samaria¹ and then towards a place called Gaza by the prompting of an angel. Here he meets an Ethiopian eunuch who was a court official under the queen of the Ethiopians. He is on his way back from Jerusalem; he had probably gone to celebrate the Festival of Weeks as commanded by the scriptures. Right away, this story contains many things that require context. Eunuchs occupied a very important part of royal life. The credit for creating eunuchs has been given to Asia and Egypt and at this time were still seen as something to be abhorred by Romans² and probably by Hebrews as well. They were seen as trusted servants, either because their disfigurement required them to seek out a master or because their ambitions were greatly restrained by their condition.³ Therefore, it is not out of the ordinary to see a eunuch serving under a queen in an area near Egypt.

vv.26-30 What is surprising is to see him here, returning after celebrating in Jerusalem. This indicates that he is at least interested in God or could be a somewhat practicing Jew, as God commands all Jews to come together for the festival.⁴ He was probably introduced to God through a Jew who escaped to Ethiopia after the fall and the exile of the nations of Israel and Judah, which would be referred to as the Jewish Diaspora. Jeremiah had told the scattered Jews in Babylon to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce... Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile (Jer 29:4,7). This was a command from God to integrate into these foreign cities and to bring the elements of God into these pagan nations. So this eunuch was likely introduced to God through one of these Jews living faithfully in Ethiopia. This was followed up with God sending Philip to minister to him with the gospel and answer his questions.

vv.31-40⁵ The passage in question that the eunuch is reading comes out of Isaiah 53:7b-8. It just happens that this scripture is perfect for Philip to answer his question about who the prophet is speaking about. Philip is able to tell the story of Jesus and how this scripture relates how Jesus was killed under the watch of the Roman empire. Inspired by this story, the eunuch immediately asks to be baptized as soon as they see water. He is baptized and as soon as this was finished, Luke records that "the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away," which is reminiscent of how God snatched Elijah away after he gave his prophetic spirit to Elisha (2 Kings 2:11). This shows how God is still acting in the same ways in both time periods

¹ Philip is already attempting to make good on the command given by Jesus in Acts 1:8, to bring the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

² Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Everyman's Library, 1993, Vol. 2, pp. 200–202.

³ Xenophon writes, "Moreover the eunuch, being degraded in the eyes of other men, is driven to seek the assistance of some lord and master. Without some such protection there is not a man in the world who would not think he had the right to over-reach a eunuch: while there was every reason to suppose that the eunuch would be the most faithful of all servants." Xenophon. "Chapter VII." *Cyropaedia*, translated by Henry G Dawkins, Project Gutenberg.

⁴ Lev 23:15-22

⁵ Verse 37 is omitted in most non-King James Version bibles. This is because ancient manuscripts differ on whether or not the verse is included in their texts. Most Greek, Syriac, and Coptic manuscripts lack the verse, while many later Latin manuscripts include the verse. Evidence points to this verse being added later on, therefore it is omitted in the ESV translation. For more see, the article on carm.org titled "Was acts 8:37 removed from modern bibles?"

and also creates a sense of “spiritual succession” from a Jewish Christian to a Gentile Christian. God’s Spirit can use both now. Philip continues on still preaching the gospel through Azotus, arriving in Caesarea, a Gentile area, showing that he was encouraged by the faith of a Gentile and sought more.

Baptism

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch centers around the Ethiopian placing his trust in Jesus, the true fulfillment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, and his immediate baptism⁶. A few words of note regarding this event, and that is the meaning behind baptism, the method of baptism, and the candidate of baptism.

Meaning - Baptism is the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matt 28:16-20 when He gave the Great Commission. In being baptized, the Christian wishes to emulate their teacher and Lord by following His baptism by John and also in his death and resurrection. This is an outward expression of what has inwardly happened, that the believer has “died” to their sins and has been “reborn” in a new life.

Method - Note that specifically that Luke writes the phrase, "going down into the water " implying full submersion. The Greek word βαπτίζω, or baptize is used in this passage to describe something being submerged or fully bathed⁷. The believer is submerged into the water symbolizing death and taken out of the water symbolizing resurrection (Rom 6:3-4). While in church history we will later see snapshots of different methods such as sprinkling, or even triple immersion, what we see in this passage is a one time immersion.

Candidate - What is interesting to note is the expediency between "conversion" and baptism. The eunuch is quick to ask for baptism, and Philip is quick to comply. In these early Christian times, rituals and customs have yet to be created involving catechizations or periods of evaluating one's faith. Philip has no issue in issuing a baptism right after the eunuch expresses interest but does not discredit any sort of waiting period.

Conclusion

This conversion becomes a mold for what Christians should see as evangelism. This occurs through many faithful decisions. Philip listens first to Jesus and preaches the gospel to the Samaritans, before listening to the Spirit and traveling through Samaria, a place that normal Jews would avoid. More importantly, Philip obeys Jesus’ command to baptize people of all nations, regardless of station or nationality. This man would have been on the outskirts of Jewish society, being a foreign eunuch, and unable to even enter the temple on account of his disfigurement (Duet 23:1). Yet now as the first non-Jewish Christian convert his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God’s love is not restricted to one nation or any particular type of person. This eunuch now has a powerful symbolic position. Whereas before he could not produce progeny, now he is the potential father of new believers in his homeland.

⁶ The Greek historian Eusebius claims that the eunuch went on to plant the first church in Africa. Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine. Chapter 1:13

⁷ “Acts 8.” *NET Bible*, Bible.org, <https://netbible.org/bible/Acts+8#>. Accessed 15 March 2022.