

# Philip & the Ethiopian



## Ice-Breaker

What experience have you had with being tutored, or with tutoring others?



## Scripture Passage

Acts 8:26-40

<sup>26</sup>Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup>So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian<sup>a</sup> eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup>and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup>The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

<sup>30</sup>Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup>"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

<sup>32</sup>The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

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

<sup>33</sup>In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."<sup>b</sup>

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

<sup>36</sup>As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"<sup>c</sup> <sup>38</sup>And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

a [27] That is, from the upper Nile region

b [33] Isaiah 53:7,8

c [36] Some late manuscripts baptized?" [37] Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."



## Bible Study

1. Why does the eunuch visit Jerusalem (see 2:1-11)?
2. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. In what ways does Jesus fit the picture of the one described there?
3. How did God pave the way for his message? What is the relationship between divine preparation and human initiative in this story?

4. So far, what has been the effect of Stephen's death upon Phillip? Upon the church as a whole?

## Reference Notes

**8:26 *an angel of the Lord.*** A Jewish expression for the Spirit of God (see 8:29,39). ***the road.*** Two roads, one of which went through a desert area, led from Jerusalem to the old city of Gaza.

**8:27 *eunuch.*** Eunuchs were commonly employed as royal officials. Although attracted to Judaism, as a eunuch he would never be allowed to fully participate in the temple worship (Deuteronomy 23:1). Candace. A dynastic title for the Ethiopian queens.

**8:28 *chariot.*** While we have visions of light war chariots racing along behind fleet Arabian horses, it is probable that the eunuch was in a slow-moving, ox- drawn cart accompanied by a retinue of servants.

**8:30 *Do you understand what you are reading?*** This reflects how the apostles themselves could not understand the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah until they were explained by Jesus after his resurrection.

**8:32-33** The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, a key Old Testament passage about the Servant of the Lord. This passage underlines much of what Luke has already recorded about the apostles' preaching concerning the identity of Jesus.

**8:34 *who is the prophet talking about?*** The eunuch's question was a common one in Jewish circles. Some thought the prophet was speaking of his own sufferings as one rejected while others thought he was speaking figuratively of Israel as a nation which suffered at the hands of its oppressors (Isaiah 44:1-2). Still another view of the Servant's identity linked him with Cyrus the King of Persia (see Isaiah 44:28-45:3). The traditional rabbis had not made any connection between the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the kingly Messiah of Isaiah 11, and the glorified Son of Man in Daniel 7:13. Only in Jesus' teachings did these concepts come together (Luke 24:26).

**8:35** Philip used this passage as a jumping off point to explain the ministry of Jesus. He undoubtedly referred the eunuch to other verses in Isaiah 53 as well as to the other references about the Servant in Isaiah which point out the Servant's suffering for the sake of others and how this Servant would be a light for the Gentiles. All of this would have been related to Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. To the age-old question of why God allows the good to suffer, the Christian answer would become God himself suffered in the person of his Son. ***Philip began.*** Literally, "opened up his mouth." The same word is used in Acts 10:34; it connotes a solemn pronouncement. ***the good news.*** This Gospel is not gloom and doom, but a message of joy God came in Christ to take on and defeat suffering and death.

**8:36 *Why shouldn't I.*** The Greek word behind this expression also occurs in the baptismal accounts of Cornelius in 10:47 and 11:17. It may be part of a baptismal liturgy the early church used with candidates for baptism. The strict Jew would offer at least one reason why he was ineligible to be considered part of God's people: he was a eunuch. Although due to his castration this man could never become a Jewish proselyte, he was able to become a full member of the church through Jesus Christ. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 56:3-8 which anticipates a time when both foreigners and eunuchs would be welcomed into God's household. Luke may have included this particular story to illustrate just that truth. Verse 37 is an addition not found in the earliest manuscripts. It was apparently added at a later date by a Christian scribe who wished to highlight

what was required of a candidate for Christian baptism.

**8:39** Another ancient text has an additional phrase here. Keeping in mind that in Greek adjectives commonly follow the noun which they modify, this longer account (with the additional words italicized) is literally translated, "the Spirit Holy fell upon the eunuch but the angel of the Lord suddenly took Philip away." While it does not change the meaning of the passage at all, it can be seen how this phrase, which completes the story better, may have been inadvertently dropped out by a copyist at a later date. **took Philip away.** Whether this was a miraculous act of God (1 Kings 18:12) or another way of describing a command of the Spirit to Philip (8:26) is uncertain. rejoicing. The joy of the eunuch reflects that of the believers in Jerusalem (2:46) and Samaria (8:8), another evidence of the Spirit.

**8:40 Azotus.** Another city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea about 20 miles north of Gaza. Caesarea. The Roman seat of power in Judea, about 60 miles up the coast from Azotus. Philip evangelized throughout the Jewish communities along the Palestinian coast of the Mediterranean.

## Caring Time

1. From the way God sets up opportunities to witness (vv. 26-40; 2:5-14; 3:6-16), how does that free you from fears in evangelism?
2. Deep down, do you think successful VIPs really need the Gospel as much as poor beggars do (3:2)? Why or why not?
3. Would you know the Bible well enough to address the eunuch's questions? How can you grow in faith so you will be prepared for similar opportunities?