

ACTS CHAPTER 8 - THE CHURCH REACHES OUT

Attention is shifting away from Jerusalem to Samaria

and later to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The Church began by being a purely Jewish institution.

Ac.6 shows the first murmurings of the great debate about the acceptance of the Gentiles.

Stephen had had a mind far above national delimitations.

Ac.8 shows the Church reaching out.

Persecution scattered the Church abroad and where they went they took their gospel.

Philip who, like Stephen, was one of the Seven and not the Philip who was one of the Twelve.

Philip preaches to the Samaritans.

The Samaritans bridge between Jew and Gentile

They were half-Jew and half-Gentile

Then comes the Ethiopian eunuch

The Church had no conception or intention of a world mission

In Chapter 8 we see God moving His church unconsciously toward His plan to reach the whole world.

Saul, Philip, and Simon...persecution, power and peril.

“And” - connects events of Chapter 7 and 8.

Saul's persecution of the church

Acts 8:1-4

"At that time a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered abroad throughout the districts of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. Pious men carried Stephen away to bury him, and they mourned greatly over him. As for Saul, he ravaged the church. He went into house after house and dragged out both men and women and put them under arrest."

The church is persecuted and scatters

1) And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

“His death” - Stephen's.

The death of Stephen was the beginning of a flood of persecution which caused the Christians to scatter and to seek safety in remote districts.

The church is forced to do what it had been reluctant to do: get the gospel out to the surrounding areas.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had told His followers to look beyond Jerusalem, to bring the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the whole world.

To this point, Jesus' followers hadn't done this.

God can and will use circumstances to guide us into His will.

When everything is fine, we may have never considered going a certain course.

Sometimes we have to be shaken out of our comfort zone before we finally do what God wants us to!

The burial of Stephen

2) On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Since Jewish law prohibited open mourning for someone that had been executed,

Luke's account says that devout Jews – not men of the church - made great lamentation over him.

Suggesting that they may have repented towards God and become Christians themselves upon hearing and seeing Stephen

Felt great sorrow over Stephen.

The apostles, however, stood fast.

They were men of courage. The apostles were determined to face whatever dangers threatened.

They were good men. There was something about them that won the respect of all.

The lives of the apostles were so impressive that even in a day of persecution men hesitated to lay their hands upon them.

Saul continues his persecution

3) But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

4) Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Saul "made havoc" of the church.

The Greek denotes a brutal cruelty.

Used of a wild boar ravaging a vineyard

Used of a wild animal savaging a body; tearing at its meat.

Used to refer to an army destroying a city

He viciously attacked Christians.

Saul was intensely devoted to what he believed was right, sincerity is not enough. Zeal without knowledge... (another example is Simon Magus).

Consenting probably isn't strong enough; the idea behind the Greek word suneudokeo is "to approve, to be pleased with."

Saul took pleasure in attacking Christians.

"Not only did he not spare the women, but he did not stop short of seeking - and securing - his victims' death (9:1; 22:4; 26:10)."

The contrast between the man savaging the church in this chapter and the man who surrendered to Christ in the next is incredible.

You cannot meet Jesus and remain unchanged.

"Scattered abroad" - actual Greek is "passed through";

occurs 43x in the New Testament,

31x in Acts and Luke.

The persecution served to spread the message.

Those who left Jerusalem left were not formal preachers; most were "accidental missionaries" who shared Jesus wherever they went.

"That they preached the word is misleading;

The Greek expression does not necessarily mean more than shared the good news."

We can share the good news of what Jesus has done in our lives.

Most people don't come to Jesus through a professional preacher or an evangelist; they come to Jesus through people just like us.

Philip brings the gospel to the Samaritans

Acts 8:5-13

"Those who were scattered abroad went throughout the country telling the message of the good news. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. The crowds listened attentively to what Philip had to say, as they heard his story and saw the signs which he performed. Many of them had unclean spirits, and the spirits, shouting loudly, came out of them; and many who were paralysed and lame were cured; and there was much rejoicing in that city.

"A man called Simon was in the habit of practising magic in the city and of bewildering the people of Samaria. He alleged that he was someone great. Everyone, small and great alike, was greatly impressed by him, for they said, 'This man is the power of God called Great.' They were impressed by him because they had been bewildered by his magical deeds for some considerable time. Both men and women were baptized when they believed Philip, as he told them the good news of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ. Even Simon himself believed, and, after he had been baptized, he was constantly in Philip's company; and he was amazed when he saw the signs and great deeds of power which were happening."

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA

5) Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. 6) When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7) With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8) So there was great joy in that city.

Philip was introduced in Acts 6:3-6; and as an evangelist in Acts 21:7.

When the Christians were scattered, Philip, who was one of the Seven like Stephen, arrived in Samaria; and there he preached.

After the gospel had been rejected again by the Jews, we see God extending the offer of salvation in Jesus out to other peoples, beginning with the Samaritans.

The Jews would normally have no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn.4:9).

- In the eighth century B.C. the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom whose capital was Samaria.
- As conquerors did in those days, they transported the greater part of the population deporting all the wealthy and middle-class Jews from the area.
- They then moved in a pagan population from far off lands settling strangers in the land.
- These imported pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of remaining Jews in northern Israel, and from these people came the Samaritans.
- In the sixth century the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem and its inhabitants were carried away to Babylon; but they completely refused to lose their identity and remained stubbornly Jews.
- In the fifth century B.C. they were allowed to return and to rebuild their shattered city under Ezra and Nehemiah.
- In the meantime, those of the Northern Kingdom who had been left in Palestine had intermarried with the stranger races who had been brought in.
- When the people of the Southern Kingdom returned and set to build their city, these people round Samaria offered their help.
- It was contemptuously refused because they were no longer pure Jews.

From that day onwards there was an unhealed breach and a bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

Jesus' experience with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and His story about the kindness of a Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) illustrate this point.

Because Philip had been touched by Jesus, there was no room for this kind of prejudice in his heart. He wasn't a racist towards the Samaritans.

Undoubtedly, one reason there was such fruit was that Jesus had sown the seed in Samaria during His ministry (John 4:1-26); now Philip is reaping the harvest.

Philip's preaching in Samaria shows the Church taking one of the most important steps in history – it discovered that Christ is for all the world.

Christianity brought the story of Jesus,

- the message of the love of God in Jesus Christ.
- It brought healing. Christianity has never been a thing of words only.
- It brought, as a natural consequence, a joy that the Samaritans had never known before.

It is a counterfeit Christianity which brings an atmosphere of gloom; the real thing radiates joy.

Philip comes presenting the gospel, with signs and wonders following as an impressive confirmation; when the people found Jesus, there was great joy in that city!

Simon the Sorcerer believes

9) Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10) and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." 11) They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. 12) But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13) Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

"But" - note opposition.

Simon the Sorcerer >>> "Simon Magus" - a magician.

This Simon had fair degree of local fame;

he claimed and was honored as one who had the power of God;

Sorcery in the Bible always has the connection with the occult and with drug-taking; whatever real power Simon had, it was from Satan, not God.

The wording indicates that Simon was a magi.

In the ancient world there was a class of astronomers and scientists known as magi (Matthew 2:1), but local wizards and sorcerers also took the title - and preyed on the ignorance and superstitions of the common people.

The Samaritans wrongly assumed that because Simon had real spiritual power that it was from God.

Simon is convinced by Philip's preaching and amazing miracles, to the point where he declares belief, is baptized, and continued with Philip

Simon became a follower of Philip and his ministry.

One can believe a great deal about Christ, and yet not be saved.

No reason to say that Simon was insincere!

Simon was baptized, but not saved?!

Clearly self-deceived.

THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE BOUGHT AND SOLD

Acts 8:14-25

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they despatched Peter and John to them. They came down and prayed for them, so that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet the Holy Spirit had fallen on no one. It was in the name of the Lord Jesus that they had been baptized. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he brought money to them and said, 'Give me too this power so that he on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'

Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you because you thought to obtain the gift of God for money; you have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray God if it may be that the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of wickedness.'

Simon answered, 'Do you pray to the Lord for me, so that none of the things you spoke of may come upon me.' So after they had borne their witness and spoken the word of God, they returned to Jerusalem, telling the good news to many villages of the Samaritans on the way."

The Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit as Peter and John laid hands upon them

14) When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15) When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16) because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17) Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Simon was not an unusual type in the ancient world.

There were many astrologers and soothsayers and magicians,

They had a great influence and made a comfortable living.

Even today society has not risen above horoscope, fortune-telling and astrology.

Simon and his fellow-practitioners were all conscious frauds.

Many of them had deluded themselves before they deluded others and believed in their own powers.

The coming of the Spirit upon a man was connected with certain visible phenomena, in particular with the gift of speaking with tongues (compare Ac.10:44-46).

He experienced an ecstasy which manifested itself in this strange phenomenon of uttering meaningless sounds.

In Jewish practice the laying on of hands was very common.

With it there was held to be a transference of certain qualities from one person to another.

"Peter and John" - always paired together.

This is the last time you read about John, he disappears from the narrative record, but shows up, of course, in Revelation on Patmos and the letters.

The apostles were men held in such respect and even veneration that simply to feel the touch of their hands was a deeply spiritual experience.

Simon was impressed with the visible effects of the laying on of hands and he tried to buy the ability to do what the apostles could do.

Simon has left his name on the language for simony still means the unworthy buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices.

Simon was not interested in bringing the Holy Spirit to others so much as in the power and prestige it would bring to himself.

The exaltation of self is ever the danger of the preacher and the teacher.

We cannot show that we are clever and that Christ is wonderful at the same moment.

Simon forgot that certain gifts are dependent on character; money cannot buy them.

"Preaching is truth through personality."

To bring the Spirit to others a man must be not a man of wealth but one who himself possesses the Spirit.

How could the Samaritans be saved, and yet not have received the Holy Spirit at the moment they professed faith?

Obviously, there was a subsequent experience with the Holy Spirit that these Samaritan believers did not know until the apostles came and ministered to them.

We are not told what gave evidence to the fact that they had now received the Holy Spirit; perhaps certain spiritual gifts were manifested (1 Corinthians 12:7-10).

The fact that these Christians received the Holy Spirit in what seems to be a subsequent experience to their salvation has caused much controversy; there have been different explanations offered.

- They were never saved to begin with under Philip's preaching; when Peter and John came, they really trusted in Jesus and then received the Holy Spirit.
- They were really saved, and then, in a subsequent experience, received the Holy Spirit in a pattern that believers should follow today.
- They were really saved at Philip's preaching, yet God, in a unique move, withheld the gift of the Holy Spirit until it could be bestowed on them by Peter and John, to ensure continuity between the church in Jerusalem and the new church in Samaria, guarding against division.

Cf. John 4:3-24. Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well

The issue for her was which temple to worship at!

For 500 years the temples in South at Jerusalem and in the North at Mt Gerizim had been rivals.

If the Spirit had immediately fallen on these Samaritan believers, the Body might have suffered division through the centuries...

But when the apostles from Jerusalem came and identified themselves with the believing Samaritans, the work was recognized as of One Body.

God's intention was to build a single Body of Christ, not pieces and parts (1 Cor 12:13).

When Jesus gave unto Peter (and the other apostles) the keys of the kingdom of heaven, it was really for these kinds of purposes:

to officially welcome those (the Samaritans) who had previously been excluded from the people of God into the kingdom of God.

- They were really saved, and did really receive the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, but were given special gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands by Peter and John.

The last option seems to best explain what happened; whatever the Samaritans experienced, it seems to have been more than the "regular" impartation of the Holy Spirit at salvation.

God has special gifts and graces to bestow on us - why would we be afraid of having someone lay hands on us and pray for us?

Peter confronts Simon and his desire to gain the things of God with money

18) When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19) and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20) Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21) You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22) Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23) For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

24) Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25) When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Simon did not really desire the Holy Spirit for himself, but the ability to impart the power of the Holy Spirit to others at his will - something that would give him much spiritual authority.

- He wanted to be "in charge" of the Holy Spirit!
- He regarded the Holy Spirit as a "power" he could use as he willed, instead of a Person who would rule his life.

"The sin was a desire to possess spiritual power for personal ends."

Simon offered money!

He didn't ask for the Spirit himself, he wanted the power to give the Spirit.

"Simony" - buying and selling position and office within the church... the purchase of spiritual things.

The practice of purchasing offices or influence in the church became known as Simony, because it is done in the same spirit as this Simon.

Again Peter is bold and discerning

Realize how difficult it would have been for you to stand by and watch and hear this confrontation.

Our tendency would have been to say to Peter, "Hey, lighten up on Simon! Look, he's a new Christian!"

Peter was willing to tell Simon the truth in love

- even though it was hard for Simon and those standing by to hear it.

When Peter says, You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God (Acts 8:21), it is a pretty clear indication that Simon's belief was superficial and his baptism just a ceremony.

Simon had shown (and Peter had discernment to see) that he really had no part in the message of who Jesus was and what He did to save us.

Peter also made it clear that Simon was headed towards hell - that is exactly what is meant by the phrase Your money perish with you.

Phillips translates verse 20 with to hell with you and your money - offensive to some, but a rather accurate translation.

Simon was poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity; yet Peter doesn't attempt to cast a demon of bitterness or iniquity out of him.

Instead, Peter calls him to repentance, prayer, and righteousness.

Simon gave every outward evidence to being saved.

- He expressed a belief in the preaching of Philip and was baptized (Acts 8:13),
- We can be sure that Philip would not have baptized Simon if he didn't think he really wanted to follow Jesus.
- Simon also continued with Philip (8:13)
- He attended meetings of the church (8:18).

"Men may come very near, they may be intellectually convinced of the supremacy of Jesus; they may even decide that they will adopt His ethical ideal; they may go so far as to determine that they will imitate the perfection of His example. But these things do not make men Christians."

What prevented Simon from coming to a genuine belief in Jesus?

Selfish pride.

Before the coming of Philip and the gospel, Simon was an admired holy man in the region - so much so that people declared, This man is the great power of God (Acts 8:10), and had been admired for a long time (8:11).

A proud person might give an outward display of faith - because it's the "right thing" to do.

But in the secret place of their heart, they may fail to submit to Jesus Christ.

Instead of actually humbling his own heart before God, Simon asks Peter to pray he would be spared the consequences of his sin.

Simon felt a true conviction of the Holy Spirit, but had not yet been willing to humble his own heart before God.

Peter couldn't do it for him!

What must we do to have our heart . . . right in the sight of God?

- We must trust in Jesus, in whom He is and what He has done to save us, with our heart.

- It is a private transaction, something no one can do for you, but you must do with God yourself.

As bad as Simon's case was, he could still

"Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22).

The door of repentance and getting the heart right with God was open to Simon if he would but take it. Simon still has the opportunity to repent.

Simon doesn't repent.

He wants the apostles to pray for him thinking that their power would be greater.

This is the last place we read of Simon in the Scriptures.

We read a lot about him in the early church writings, he became the first anti-christ, one that fought the church, going from place to place opposing the Gospel.

This is the visible difference between believing about Christ, and totally trusting Him with your life, FAITH.

Don't let miracles or supernatural events fool you because Satan is not only capable of it, but prophecy says he will deceive many in the end times.

Your protection is in the Word of God, remember Acts 17:11 always.

See Jude for a study on false teachings.

Philip preaches to the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26-40

"The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip and said, 'Rise and go to the south by the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza; that is Gaza in the desert.' So he arose and went. Now, look you, an Ethiopian eunuch, an influential official of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury and who had gone to worship in Jerusalem, was on his way home.

As he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go and join yourself to this chariot.' So Philip ran up and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He said, 'How could I do that unless someone were to guide me?' He invited Philip to get up and to sit with him.

The passage of scripture which he was reading was this--He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he received no justice. Who will recount his lineage because his life is taken from the earth? The eunuch said to Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet speaking about? Is it about himself? Or about someone else?' Philip opened his mouth, and, taking his start from this passage of scripture, told him the good news about Jesus.

As they were going along the road they came to some water, 'Look,' said the eunuch, 'here is water. What is to stop me being baptized?' And he ordered the chariot to stand still. So both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away and the eunuch no longer saw him, but he travelled along his road rejoicing. Philip was found at Azotus. He went through all the cities and preached the good news to them until he came to Caesarea."

It seems that Philip would have objected to leaving the great success of the work in Samaria to go out to the desolate desert, but God had a plan in it all.

This desert reminds us that Philip's errand was foolish from man's perspective, but wise in God.

There was a road from Jerusalem which led via Bethlehem and Hebron and joined the main road to Egypt just south of Gaza.

There were two Gazas.

Gaza had been destroyed in war in 93 B.C. and a new Gaza had been built to the south in 57 B.C.

The first was called Old or Desert Gaza to distinguish it from the other.

Gaza was one of the five cities of the Philistines which was destroyed by Alexander.

Philip, led by the Holy Spirit, is directed to an Ethiopian government official

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 eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, 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."

Along in his chariot came the Ethiopian eunuch.

Ethiopian caravan with a treasurer, this was the treasurer of all the treasure of the Queen of Ethiopia.

"Eunuch" - in the ancient times officials in the palace were eunuchs to protect the harem.

But as time went on that title tended to be an office, not a condition imposed biologically.

Deut 23:1; eunuchs were not allowed in the congregation of Israel, but this guy was worshipping.

He was the chancellor of the exchequer of Candace.

Candace is not so much a proper name as a title, the title which all the queens of Ethiopia bore.

This eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship.

In those days the world was full of people who were weary of the many gods and the loose morals of the nations.

They came to Judaism and there found the one God and the austere moral standards which gave life meaning.

If they accepted Judaism and were circumcised they were called proselytes;

If they did not go that length but continued to attend the Jewish synagogues and to read the Jewish scriptures they were called God-fearers.

This Ethiopian must have been one of these searchers who came to rest in Judaism either as a proselyte or a God-fearer.

Falashas: an Ethiopian of Jewish faith. "Beta Esrael":

The origin of this group goes back to the days of Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, and in those days Ethiopia included Saudi Arabia, so the Queen of Sheba was Ethiopian.

They had a son, Menelik, who grows up there for a while and then returns to Ethiopia, and he brings with him, Judaism.

He is the founder of a group called Falashas.

They consider themselves Jews (about 30,000 of them today).

They observe the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws, ritual cleansing, etc.

They have a Bible written in Ge'ez which is a derivative of the Septuagint.

When Menelik leaves the Temple to go back to Saudi Arabia, he takes with him a replica of the Ark of the Covenant.

There is folklore that he switched them, that he left the replica and took the real Ark to Ethiopia.

Philip preaches Jesus to the Ethiopian

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) 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.***

33) In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

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.

Both the Eunuch and Philip are prepared by the Holy Spirit for this interview.

The Spirit said to Philip:

it took real boldness for Philip to go right up to the Ethiopian's chariot and speak to him - but that is what the Holy Spirit told him to do.

The Ethiopian was a rich man, a man of power, a celebrity - yet Philip knew he needed Jesus just as much as anyone else.

Why do we fear telling "important" people about Jesus?

We often shrink back from speaking boldly about Jesus, and the world lets us know we shouldn't talk about such things.

But does the world shrink back from cramming its gospel down our throats?

How many people are upset when all sorts of immorality and lies are forced upon us?

We will be just as bold to the world about Jesus as the world is bold to us about sin!

Plainly, God had arranged this meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian; this is a glorious example of how God opens doors for evangelism.

God wouldn't have directed Philip unless God had already arranged an open door.

Our greatest task in preaching the gospel is praying for open doors, and in keeping alert to opportunities God presents to us.

Philip was effective as an evangelist because he knew how to flow with the Holy Spirit; he was truly led by the Spirit, not by his own whims and feelings.

"Heard him" - reading out loud.

In the ancient world, it was common to read aloud.

Philip knew what the Ethiopian was reading by listening as he read.

"Guide" - medical technical term.

Authoritative teacher.

Christ reference to blind guides.

It was good for the Ethiopian to be reading the Bible, but unless understanding was brought to him, there would be little benefit from his reading.

But God had brought someone (Philip) to bring understanding.

How can I, unless someone guides me?

is the proper question of anyone who wants to understand the Bible.

We should never feel bad if we need to be taught before we can understand many things.

It is glorious for us to come to understanding of the great truths of Scripture on our own; but God always has a place and a purpose for teachers in the body of Christ.

To get anything from our Bibles, we must plunge in.

We won't get anything if we just hover over our Bibles; we have to dive right in.

Reading the Greek translation of Isa 53.

The Ethiopian official was reading Isa.53; and beginning from it Philip showed him who Jesus was.

Regarding this passage from Isaiah, the Jews of that day had different ways they interpreted the identity of this suffering servant.

- Some held it was the nation itself, as Israel had suffered greatly in wars, exile, and persecution.
- Some thought the suffering servant was Isaiah writing about himself.
- Some thought the suffering servant was the Messiah, but they thought this hard to accept, because they didn't want to think of the Messiah suffering.

Authorship of Isaiah, see John 12:38-41.

- Isaiah is quoted 21x in the New Testament in 6 different books (10 from Isaiah "1", and 11x from Isaiah "2").
- 4x by Jesus (3x from Isaiah "1", and once Isaiah "2"),
- Matthew 2x (one each),
- Luke 4x,
- John 3x,
- Paul 6x quoting Isaiah "1" and "2" as the SAME Isaiah.
- There are 300 words and expressions that are common to Isaiah "1" and "2", and these 300 words are NOT found in Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Beginning at this Scripture: Philip talked about more than this passage from Isaiah, but this is where he started.

He started at common ground with the Ethiopian, but made his way to talking about Jesus.

Philip's effective preaching consisted in explaining who Jesus was (like a lamb . . . preached Jesus) and what He has done for us (He was led as a sheep to the slaughter); this is the essence of the gospel.

Too many are out preaching what we must do for God; but the gospel begins with what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

The Ethiopian's response to the gospel; Philip's mysterious departure

36) 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?" 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.

Philip insisted that the Ethiopian believe with all his heart before being baptized; this is the gospel in a nutshell.

The devil has the faith of the head, but he hates the truth in his heart.

God wants His truth not only in our heads, but in our hearts.

We may intellectually know Jesus died for the sins of the world; but do we know in our hearts He died to cleanse our sins?

The Ethiopian's confession of faith (I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God), taken in all its implication, is the essential belief for anyone who will come to God.

The logical response was to be baptized as a declaration of faith; notice that clearly, Philip immersed the Ethiopian in baptism.

When he became a believer he was baptized.

It was by baptism and circumcision that the Gentile entered the Jewish faith.

In New Testament times baptism was, whenever possible, by immersion and in running water.

It symbolized three things.

- It symbolized cleansing. As a man's body was cleansed by the water it was symbolic of his soul being bathed in the grace of Christ.
- It marked a clean break.
- Baptism was a real union with Christ. As the waters closed over a man's head he seemed to die with Christ and as he emerged he rose with Christ (compare Rom.6:1-4).

Suddenly, Philip was carried away (while the Ethiopian was still in the water where he was baptized!) by the Spirit of the Lord; he was "transported" supernaturally to the former Philistine city of Azotus (Ashdod).

"Azotus" = ancient Ashdod.

Caesarea Sebaste - Built by Herod in honor of Augustus (Greek Sebastos).

Between Carmel and Joppa, 55 mi NW of Jerusalem.

Roman procurators resided there; present ruin has an inscription of Pontius Pilate. (Not Caesarea Philippi, which north of the Sea of Galilee.)

This is a strange, perhaps unprecedented event in the Scriptures;

but a similar thing happened when the disciple's boat came immediately to its destination (John 6:15-21),

and a similar thing will also happen when the church is caught up together with Him at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

The joy of the Ethiopian, even after Philip's strange departure, shows that his faith was firmly rooted in God, not in Philip.

"If Christ is hindered, it is because some Philip is not willing to go!"

The Ethiopian himself was ready to respond to the gospel; this was a work of the Holy Spirit, not a tribute to Philip's "salesmanship."

Tradition has it that this eunuch went home and evangelized Ethiopia.

We can at least be sure that he who went on his way rejoicing would not be able to keep his newfound joy to himself.