

Acts 050

The Joy of the Lord

Acts 8:39-40

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Let's take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 8:39.

Acts 8:5-40

Philip's Ministry

I. Samaria (8:5-25)

II. Judea (Acts 8:26-40)



We are going to try to wrap up Acts 8 tonight. Acts 8 is the ministry of the second deacon selected, a man named Philip. You can take his ministry and you can divide it into two parts geographically. He first has a ministry in Samaria, up north, Acts 8:5-25. Then the Holy Spirit moves him down to Judea and basically has him standing on a road connecting Jerusalem to Gaza.

II. Ministry in Judea

Acts 8:26-40

- A. Angel directs Philip (26)
- B. Philip's obedience (27a)
- C. Ethiopian Eunuch's introduction (27b-28)
- D. Holy Spirit directs Philip (29)
- E. Philip's witness to the Eunuch (30-35)
- F. Eunuch's conversion & baptism (36-38)
- G. Philip's separation from the Eunuch (39)
- H. Philip's evangelization of the Coastal Plain (40)



Down from the north on the Via Maris highway is going to come the Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip is going to have the opportunity to lead to Christ. We have studied all of that. We have seen the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion, Acts 8:36-38. I want to just spend a little bit more time on Acts 8:37. Notice what verse 37 says,

"[And Philip said (to the Ethiopian eunuch), 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'...]" (Acts 8:37).

In other words, the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized and Philip wanted to make sure that the Ethiopian eunuch was a believer.

"[And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'...]" (Acts 8:37).

In other words, baptism follows belief in Christ.

"[...And he (the Ethiopian eunuch) answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God']" (Acts 8:37).

The eunuch had believed on the right Jesus. He had fulfilled God's single condition and consequently was an authentic believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip, ascertaining that, then led the Ethiopian eunuch into water baptism through full immersion.

We have been getting a lot of emails here at the church from people who want to be water baptized, and we are happy to do that. There is a class that has to be taken first with Pastor Jim, to make sure that people understand that baptism does not save us. Once people take that class, we schedule a water baptism in a local body of water here called a swimming pool. We will baptize. We are happy to do that.

But the thing that bothers people is if you are reading this out of the New American Standard Bible Acts 8:37 is in brackets. How many are using the New American Standard Bible? All right, ninety percent of you are saved. No, I am just joking. You will notice that in the New American Standard Bible Acts 8:37 is in brackets. So what in the world does that mean?

If someone does not explain this to you as a new Christian, Satan will use things like this to make you feel like your Bible just has willy-nilly things added to it. If you have a study Bible, there is usually a note at the bottom somewhere that says, "This verse is not found in the better manuscripts." So you slap your forehead and you say, "Oh my goodness, what does this mean? How was the Bible put together? How could some verses be okay, but others look like they are thrown in at the last minute?"

Let me give you another famous example where this happens. Just hold your place in Acts 8 and go back to John 7 for a minute—John 7:53, at the very end of the chapter, all the way through John 8:11. It is the story of the woman caught in adultery. You will notice that there is a bracket that begins in John 7:53 and ends after John 8:11. For example, in my study Bible that I am using, it says, "Later manuscripts add the story of the adulterous woman, numbering it as John 7:53-8:11."

There is a big one in Mark 16. You might want to take your Bible and flip over to Mark 16 just for a minute. It has to do with Christ's final instructions to the disciples. This bracket, I think, spans through most of the chapter, if I remember right, beginning at Mark 16:9. Mark 16:9 says now,

"[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene,...]" (Mark 16:9).

As you read all the way through the end of Mark 16:20, it is bracketed. There is a little note at the bottom in my study Bible, which says, "A few late manuscript versions contain this paragraph, usually after Mark 16:8."

So there are several places in the Bible where this happens. It throws this bracket at you, and it has some comment that this is not found in the better manuscripts. So what in the world is happening here? And if you do not get an explanation on that, you are going to think the Bible is just filled with a bunch of errors.

You might remember that we brought this up in Acts 2:47, if you can remember back that far. Concerning Acts 2:47, we said that the church had started. I had to give a long explanation for that, because the word "church" is not found in Acts 2:47. Acts 2:47, the very end of the chapter says,

"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

That is the way the NASB (1995) reads. And I said, "The church has started here," and I gave some arguments as to why that is so. In the KJV and the NKJV, the King James Version and the New King James Version, you will notice that the word "church" is thrown right in there. It is the Greek word "ekklesia" (ἐκκλησία). Acts 2:47 says,

"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

The long explanation that I gave as to why the church started in Acts 2 is no longer needed, because if you are reading this from the KJV, the word "church" is thrown right into the text. So the word "church," the Greek word "ekklesia" (ἐκκλησία), appears in Acts 2:47, in the King James Version, but not the New American Standard Bible. So what in the world is going on here?

Well, this is what we would call an issue of text criticism. Let me just back up just for a minute. We do not possess the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. We do not have them. And you might be saying, "Well, you mean we have staked our whole lives on manuscripts that we cannot validate anymore?" That is true. There is actually a divine reason for it.

I think God did not allow us to keep the original manuscripts of the Greek New Testament for two reasons. Number one, if they existed and they got damaged in some way or changed, then all of Christianity would be hurt. But if you have multiple copies of

the original manuscripts, which we do have, then if you damage one, it does not cause all of Christianity to suffer, because the same truth is found in another copy. Do you see that? So God, in His providence did not allow us to retain the original Greek manuscripts.

The second reason that I think God did not allow us to retain the original Greek manuscripts is because of idolatry. You see how people act when they think they find a splinter of the cross or something—they just go crazy and they travel everywhere to worship it. Just think if we had the originals—think of the idolatry that would take place. God does not want us to be idolaters. He will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8).

So the truth of the matter is, we do not have the original Greek manuscripts that our New Testament is based on. But here is what we do have: we have copies—lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of copies of the originals. Why do we have so many copies in comparison to other works of antiquity?

We have so many copies compared to other works of antiquity because Christianity has always been evangelistic. Its whole purpose is to get the truth out to as many people as possible, because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We have fragments of different New Testament books everywhere. When you compare the copies that we do have in terms of number to other works of antiquity (which no one question because the other works of antiquity do not have the originals either)—when you compare the copies that we do have compared to other works of antiquity, like Thucydides, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Homer's "The Iliad," we have way more copies than any other work of antiquity.

If you are going to play this game of, "Well, we have to throw out Christianity because we do not have the originals," you have to throw out everything. You have to throw out Plato. But nobody is challenging Plato. They only challenge Christianity because Christianity makes a moral claim on people's lives. Plato, as smart as he was, did not do stuff like that. So you have to throw out Plato, Thucydides, Tacitus—you have to throw out every other work of antiquity that we have, if you are going to throw it out on the basis of not having the originals.

Well, it is true that we do not have the originals, but we have way more copies than anybody else. And—this is an important "and"—when you examine the earliest copies that we do have, compared to a likely date when the original was written, there is a shorter distance of time from our copies in their proximity to the original, than any other work of antiquity.

Author	Written	Earliest MSS	Time Span	No. MSS
Cesar	100 to 44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10
Plato	427 to 347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	7
Thucydides	460 to 400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300	8
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000	20
Suetonius	A.D. 75 to 160	A.D. 950	800	8
Homer (Illiad)	900 B.C.	A.D. 400	500	643
New Testament	A.D. 40 to 100	A.D. 125	25 to 50	24,000
Cesar	100 to 44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10

<http://creationrevolution.com/2012/05/should-we-trust-the-bible/>

A chart like this helps you see that. You take the works of Caesar: we have ten manuscripts of Caesar and 1,000 years between the earliest manuscript and the original. Plato—7 manuscripts and 1,200 years between the earliest manuscript and the original. Thucydides—8 manuscripts and 1,300 years between the earliest manuscript and the original. Tacitus—20 manuscripts and 1,000 years between the earliest manuscript and the original. Suetonius—8 manuscripts and 800 years between the earliest manuscript and the original. Homer's "The Illiad," which is famous in classical literature, has 643 manuscripts and 500 years between the earliest manuscript and the original.

Just keep some of those numbers in your head and look at the New Testament, second from the bottom there: 24,000 manuscripts and the time distance between one of the earliest manuscripts that we have and the originals is 25 to 50 years. (I think there are some earlier manuscripts—even earlier than that is the John Rylands Papyrus, which I believe is a very early manuscript of a fragment of John's Gospel). There is no more than 25 to 50 years between the earliest manuscript that we have and when the original was likely written.

You can see from this chart that we come out smelling like a rose compared to any other work of antiquity. So when people raise this issue, "Well, we do not have the originals," you would have to throw out everything to be intellectually fair. You have to treat Christianity with a special set of gloves, a case of special pleading, which people do with Christianity all of the time because Christianity is politically incorrect—because it makes moral claims on people's lives.

Manuscript Evidence for Ancient Writings				
Author	Written	Earliest Fragment/Copy	Time Span in Years	Number of Manuscripts
Cesar	100 to 44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10
Plato	427 to 347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	7
Thucydides	460 to 400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300	8
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000	20
Suetonius	A.D. 75 to 160	A.D. 950	800	8
Homer (Illiad)	900 B.C.	A.D. 400	500	643
New Testament	A.D. 40 to 100	A.D. 125	25 to 50	24,000

Information in this chart can be found in various sources. This chart was adapted from: Christian Apologetics, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p. 307; and Evidence That Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, 1979, pp. 42, 43.

Here is another chart that basically teaches the same thing. The works of Caesar—10 manuscripts and 1,000 years between the earliest and the original. Plato—7 manuscripts and 1,200 years. Thucydides—8 manuscripts and 1,300 years. Tacitus—20 manuscripts 1,000 years. Suetonius—8 manuscripts and 800 years. Homer's "The Illiad" (which you probably studied in college or high school)—643 manuscripts and 500 years.

Look at the New Testament—24,000 manuscripts, and the distance between our earliest manuscript and the original is no more than 25 to 50 years. Again, we have so many manuscripts because of the evangelistic nature of Christianity. Now, the thing to understand when you get into this subject of text criticism is that these 4,000 manuscripts that we have agree with each other. They are copies. They are not originals. They are copies. They agree with each other over ninety-nine percent of the time. They are almost identical.

Now, there are fewer than one percent of slight variations in the copies. And it is also important to understand that the variants (these are called variants when the manuscripts disagree with each other) do not disagree with each other on any cardinal doctrine of Christianity. The differences never call into question the Trinity, or the virgin birth, or the deity of Christ, or the inerrancy of Scripture.

But you have to understand that with all of these 24,000 copies, they are not going to read identically in every instance. There is a very small percentage where there are disagreements in the copies—less than one percent. These disagreements are called variants. They do not affect any major doctrine of Christianity.

So with all of that being said, what is text criticism? Text criticism is a science and an art. There are New Testament scholars that give their whole lives to this pursuit. So the explanation that I am giving you here is probably a very gross oversimplification of it, but I want you to see the big picture of it.

The work of a text critic is trying to figure out, when you run into a variant (in other words, when you run into an issue where there are disagreements in the manuscripts)

how do you figure out which reading—because they cannot both be right—better reflects the original manuscripts, which we no longer have? That is what text critics do. They are focused on that less than one percent that does not affect any cardinal truth of Christianity.

The text critic, who has devoted their whole life to this science and art, is trying to figure out, when you have a variant reading—when there is a contradiction between the manuscripts—which reading better reflects the originals, which we do not have anymore. That is what text criticism is doing.

So what you have to understand is that the Bible translation that you use or choose has different theories as to which variant reading is the correct one. It is just like any other discipline: not all text critics agree with each other—just like in the field of law. Not all lawyers agree with each other. I know it is shocking to learn that.

Not all physicians agree with each other. Not all counselors agree with each other. So it is the same in this area of text criticism. There are basically different theories. The New American Standard Bible that I typically use says that the earliest is the right reading.

I am oversimplifying because some people use a combination of these two views. They call it "rigorous eclecticism," but I am not getting into that. I just want you to see what your different Bible translations are doing.

So the New American Standard Bible is saying, "If it is in the earliest manuscripts, that is the one you follow. So when the two manuscripts contradict you go with the you go with the earlier. Earlier is better." That is a valid theory.

So in our Acts 8:37 passage, the New American Standard Bible is going to put brackets around Acts 8:37 because that contradicts other manuscripts. But Acts 8:37 is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

The New American Standard Bible is going to put brackets around Mark 16:9-20 because that is not found in the earliest manuscripts. The New American Standard Bible is going to put brackets around the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11), because that is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

So when the NASB says, "This is not found in the better manuscripts," it is saying, "It is not found in the earliest." Now, I am not an expert in text criticism. I just know a little bit about it. We had a little bit of it in seminary. It is something I wish I understood better.

But to be honest with you, I do not always think the earliest is the best, because one of those very early manuscripts comes from Alexandria. It is called Alexandrinus, from North Africa, or Egypt, and that is where Gnosticism, allegorization, Amillennialism, and realism ultimately came from.

So if I was making a guess, I would say that kind of manuscript is not necessarily the best. But text critics who put together the New American Standard Bible, which is a wonderful translation, would argue vehemently with me on that, and they would say that the earlier is the better.

Now, the King James Version and the New King James Version have a different theory of text criticism. They say, "If this is found in the majority of manuscripts, it is the accurate reading. So it does not matter how early we go. What matters is, 'Was it picked up by the Christian community early on in the majority of existing manuscripts?'"

So when you are reading this in the New King James Version, Acts 8:37 is not in brackets because it is found in the majority, not necessarily the earlier. When you are reading the story of the woman caught in adultery, there are no brackets around it because it is found in the majority, not necessarily the earlier. When you are reading Mark 16 about, "You are going to pick up serpents and not be hurt" (paraphrase, Mark 16:18), there are no brackets in the New King James Version or the King James Version, because that story is found in the majority of manuscripts rather than the earliest.

So that is why that bracket, if you are reading this in the New American Standard Bible, is there in Acts 8:37, but it is not there in the King James. What is happening is that the English translations are following different theories of text criticism. I guess I lean more towards the King James way of doing things. I think if it is in the majority, it is authentic.

So I take the woman caught in adultery as an authentic story, or else it is hard for me to believe why the Christian church would have adopted it early on. I take the instructions that Jesus gave in Mark 16 about picking up serpents as authentic. And by the way, you do not have to experiment with that. Let's not go there. But I do think when Jesus said that, it was an authentic story. (In fact, Paul did that: he got bitten by a snake in Acts 28, and they thought he was going to die on the spot, which he did not.)

I think that Acts 8:37 is authentic as well. So anyway, that is a crash course on text criticism. That is why you will encounter these brackets. I would not let them bother you too much. I think if someone does not explain this to a new believer it wreaks havoc in their mind. It is not that big of a deal, because the manuscripts agree with each other ninety-nine percent of the time or more, and the disagreements really have very little to do with the cardinal Christian doctrine.

So my position as a Bible teacher is just ignore those brackets if you are reading them in the NASB. If you like crossing things out, you can go ahead and do that. If you are reading this in the King James Version, you do not have any crossing out to do because it is following majority text. So I hope you found that helpful a little bit.

We come to Acts 8:39. We covered Acts 8:38 last time. Now notice Acts 8:39. Philip has just baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. It says,

"When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).

Now, notice this expression:

"...they came up out of the water,..." (Acts 8:39).

It does not say, "Philip sprinkled the Ethiopian eunuch on his head with water while the two of them were on the edge of the water." It does not say that at all. It says that the two of them came up out of the water (Acts 8:39). So we believe that what this communicates is that the typical mode of expression for baptism, which does not save (it is an outward symbol of an inward reality; it is a step of obedience for the new Christian), is to be completely immersed in water.

Sprinkling or Immersion?

- Sprinkling? Other words (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Tim. 4:6)
- Immersion?
 - Christ's baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10)
 - Ethiopian eunuch's baptism (Acts 8:38-39)
 - Best symbolizes our union with Christ (Rom. 6:3-5)
 - Symbolizes a new creation (Gen. 1:6, 9; 2 Pet. 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17)



From last time you might remember this slide where I gave you several reasons why we think that is true. First of all, if baptism was by sprinkling water on the forehead. The Greek New Testament has other words for "sprinkling" which are not used here. You will find sprinkling in 1 Peter 1:2. Also, the concept of "pour" as in pouring water on a part of the body, as in 2 Timothy 4:6, is not used in Acts 8:39. The word "pour" or the word "sprinkle" is not used in Acts 8:39.

Beyond that, we believe that Christ was immersed in water, Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10. When you read those passages, you will see it is full immersion. So therefore, if that was good enough for Christ's baptism, it should be good enough for our baptism.

Number three, the Ethiopian Eunuch's baptism, Acts 8:38-39, which we are covering (that is why we are bringing this up—we are not just bringing this up *carte blanche*, but it relates to what is happening in our verse-by-verse study of the Book of Acts), was obviously full immersion. So if that is how Philip baptized in water—completely, totally immersing a person—that is the normal mode of baptism.

Of course, we do not build what is normative in the church exclusively from the Book of Acts, right? Because the Book of Acts is a transitional book. There are all kinds of transitional things happening in the Book of Acts. You might remember Acts 8:14-17, where the Samaritans believed, and received the Holy Spirit later, after the apostles came from Jerusalem to lay hands on the Samaritans.

I tried to explain, when we were covering those verses, that this was a one-time occurrence for a specific historical reason. It is not normative. What is normative is that you believe and you receive the Holy Spirit instantaneously. So you have to be careful

with the Book of Acts. You cannot build what is normative in the Church Age from the Book of Acts.

But this concept of immersion in water is not something just found in the Book of Acts. You will see it taught in Christ's baptism, and it best symbolizes what the epistles explain is our baptism into Christ, which is the next bullet point: immersion in water best symbolizes our union with Christ.

When Christ saved you and took you at the point of faith and baptized you in the Holy Spirit, meaning that He identified you with the Body of Christ, according to Romans 6:3-5, Christ did not just take my elbow or my right foot. He took my whole body. So I have been identified into the transaction of Jesus Christ.

When He died, I died at the point of faith. When He was buried, I was buried at the point of faith. When He rose from the dead, I rose from the dead at the point of faith alone in Christ alone. When He ascended back to the right hand of the Father forty days after His resurrection, I ascended. That is why Ephesians 2:6 says that is where we are right now legally. We are legally at the right hand of the Father, although where we are factually has not yet caught up to where we are legally.

So the truth of the matter is that when you became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is a transaction called baptism in the Holy Spirit, which the Lord did for you. And the Lord took all of you. He did not just take an elbow. He did not just take an ear. He did not just take your wisdom teeth—if you still have your wisdom teeth.

He does not just take part of you. He takes all of you. So the issue is, "Of the different modes of baptism which one expresses that truth?" Well, obviously, taking a human being and immersing them totally and completely in water best illustrates that. Sprinkling and pouring does not.

The last bullet point here is that baptism by full immersion symbolizes a new creation. Second Corinthians 5:17 says,

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

All you have to do is go back to the original creation and what you will see is that God, from a giant ball called water, brings the earth (Genesis 1:6, 9) up out of the water. The "eres" (אֶרֶץ), the land, is totally underwater, and when God wants to create dry land, it comes up out of the water. You will see Peter making a reference to that in 2 Peter 3:5.

So the whole imagery of coming up out of the water, just like what is happening here with the Ethiopian eunuch, is the mode of baptism that symbolizes that a person who is now a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a new creature, or creation, in Christ Jesus. It is imagery that parallels original creation, physical creation, going back to Genesis 1.

So you take these concepts—there are other words for sprinkling which are not used here; then you throw into the mix Christ's baptism and the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism;

which mode symbolizes our union with Christ; which symbolizes the truth of Genesis 1 of a new creation—and we believe that the norm for baptism is to take a person who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and immerse them completely in water and bring them up out of the water. So that is why we practice full immersion here at Sugar Land Bible Church.

That is the significance of Acts 8:39 when it says,

"When they came up out of the water,..." (Acts 8:39).

Then it gets even more interesting: what happened when they came up out of the water?

"...the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).

So what just happened to Philip? He got snatched up. Now, he was snatched up and then he was brought back down, which I will make reference to in a second. But the Holy Spirit caught him up. Now the word translated "snatched" in the New American Standard Bible is the Greek word "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω), which is used where else in the Bible? It is used to describe our Rapture, when we who are alive and remain will be caught up just prior to the events of the Great Tribulation Period.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (you know these verses well),

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain..." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Let's assume this happens in our lifetime, which would be a good thing, right? As we have said before, I do not have a single problem in my life that the Rapture would not resolve. So come, Lord Jesus!

"Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up [Greek 'harpazo' (ἁρπάζω)] together with them [that is the dead in Christ ascending] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Notice that Jesus here does not come to the earth. This is a heavenly reunion.

"...and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

So we are going back to the Father's house, to the heavenly dwellings He has prepared for us (John 14:1-3).

"Therefore read a bunch of prophecy books about the New World Order and Klaus Schwab and the World Economic Forum and the mark of the beast and be terrified until your dying day." Oh, I am sorry, 1 Thessalonians 4:18 does not say that, because all this stuff is supposed to comfort the Christian.

"Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

So it is interesting that the word for our Rapture, "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω), is the same word that is used right here in Acts 8:38. I bring this up because a lot of people will say that this Rapture stuff is just science fiction—how could you believe it is true?

Well, the truth of the matter is that there have already been several raptures in the Bible. Why can't there be one more? Enoch was caught up, Genesis 5, as was Elijah in a chariot, 2 Kings 2. Jesus was caught up when He ascended, Acts 1:11. When Revelation 12:5 talks about it, it also uses the word "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω). The verses I have underlined here use that same Greek word, "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω).

Exemption from Death

(1 Cor 15:54-56)

- Enoch (Gen 5)
- Elijah (2 Kings 2)
- Christ (Acts 1:11; Rev 12:5)
- Philip (Acts 8:39)
- Paul (2 Cor 12:2, 4)
- John (Rev 4:1-2)
- Two witnesses (Rev 11)



Now Philip is caught up, Acts 8:39. We are reading about it right here. Paul was caught up; "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω) is used there in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4: he was caught up to the third heaven. John, in Revelation 4:1-2, was caught up to see the end-times vision. Then the bodies of the two witnesses in the Book of Revelation, who will be killed in the city streets of Jerusalem in the full visibility of the whole world, will lie dead for three and a half days. Then they will be brought back to life, and they will be caught up to heaven.

So people say, "How can you believe in this concept of the Rapture? It is so science fiction." Well, how many raptures have there already been in the Bible? I am counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Why can't we have another one? It is just that the next time it happens, God is not coming for an individual. He is coming for a whole generation of Christians. In other words, He is bringing the bus. He is bringing the whole bus, and we are all going to be taken at the same time.

So do not let people tell you, "Don't believe in the Rapture because anybody who believes in it is crazy." If you do not believe in the Rapture, you are basically ignoring

countless Bible passages where raptures have already transpired, not the least of which is Philip: once his ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch is over, he is snatched up—"harpazo" (ἁρπάζω). "Seized" or "caught up by force" is what the word "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω) means.

By the way, from the word "harpazo" (ἁρπάζω) we get the English word "harpoon," with which you spear a sea animal and yank it towards yourself. That essentially is what the Rapture is like. It is to be caught. It is to be caught up almost violently. But do not worry—there is not going to be any physical harm to you, because Paul says,

"Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

So the Rapture is a reality. Now, in Philip's case, he was not raptured to heaven. He was raptured up and then he went back down somewhere. So he was not raptured to heaven, but he was raptured away from the Ethiopian eunuch.

So what does the Ethiopian eunuch do? I will tell you exactly where Philip was taken to in just a minute. It is in Acts 8:40. But what does the Ethiopian eunuch do?

"...and the eunuch no longer saw him [Philip], but went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).

There are a lot of people who have a mentor or someone who leads them to Christ, and they become inappropriately attached to their mentor, and they want to be with their mentor all the time. You will notice that is not necessary because Philip's mentor was snatched up, and the eunuch does not sit there despondent—"Oh, no, my mentor was taken away from me." He *"went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39)* because he knew that he did not belong to his mentor, Philip, the man who led him to Christ. He belonged to Jesus.

So there are people that God will put in your life for purposes of birthing you and helping you grow, but you should not inappropriately attach yourself to that person, because you belong to Jesus. And when Jesus moves you from Phase A of your life into Phase B, He will bring other people into your life who can help you with your spiritual well-being.

Sometimes people, particularly new Christians, get inappropriately attached to the person that initially blessed them. You will notice that the Ethiopian eunuch does not follow that pattern when the Ethiopian eunuch's mentor Philip is taken up. So the Ethiopian eunuch goes on his way, rejoicing.

And I am not sure we talk enough about the joy of the Lord. Jesus did not come into the lives of people to ruin them. Jesus came into the lives of people to liberate their lives. In fact, if you go back to Acts 8:8, when the Samaritans were won to Christ, it says,

"So there was [not a little, but] much rejoicing in that city" (Acts 8:8).

That is what Jesus does. He does not make people miserable. This is a great lie of the devil. The devil makes the unbeliever think, "Wow, if I get involved with Christianity,

Jesus is going to ruin everything." The opposite is true. When you come into a relationship with Jesus, you come into the One who gives you context and an explanation as to why you exist. Only He who created you and redeemed you can fulfill you. You cannot find true, lasting fulfillment outside of Him.

True Christianity never results in misery. If you are in a church and you are finding yourself miserable and under legalistic bondage, I can guarantee you this much: that the Spirit of Christ is not in that church. Some other spirit is running it, but not the Spirit of Christ. When Christ encounters people in the Bible, the result is always rejoicing.

John 10:10 says,

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I [Jesus] came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

In the Bible, I do not find legalistic bondage that makes people miserable. What I find is 1 John 5:3:

"...His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

What I find in the Bible is Matthew 11:28-30, where Jesus says,

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

If you are walking with the Lord and you just feel yourself more and more miserable, you might want to reevaluate whether it is the Lord causing that, because I do not necessarily find that in the Bible. I do believe God can make us feel miserable and convict us when we step out of line, but that is for our own protection and good.

Ultimately, the Christian should be the happiest, most joyful person on Planet Earth. Paul in Philippians 4:4 says,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

How about the commandments of the Lord? Deuteronomy 10:13 says,

"and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:13).

God's commandments are not there to be a cosmic killjoy. They are guardrails, basically, to keep us away from the cliff. It is like when you go camping and you go to Pike's Peak and there is not a rail up, and your youngest jumps out of the car and starts running towards the scenery, and you yell, "STOP!" at the top of your lungs. You are not doing it to take away joy from the young person's life. You are trying to protect them from falling over the ravine.

That is what the commandments of the Lord are. They are there for protection. They are a guardrail. So one of Satan's strategies is to get us to look at God's commandments and resent them and act like He is there to make us unhappy and destroy our lives. It is actually the exact opposite. They are there to protect us. They are there for our own good.

A walk with the Lord always results in more joy. The Ethiopian eunuch could not have been more joyful. Neither could the Samaritans who were saved towards the beginning of Acts 8. Do you know who is miserable in the Bible? The Pharisees. Those are the misery merchants. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus described the Pharisees when He said,

*"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full"
(Matthew 6:16).*

The people who are miserable and show it externally, constantly, are not God's people, but the false teachers and the religionists, who are walking in legalistic bondage. In fact, Jesus made a reference to this in Matthew 23:15. He said,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte [a convert to Judaism]; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

Wow. No wonder they wanted Him dead. He was saying stuff like that. I remember when I was in college there was a guy who felt God had called him to fast. That is not a bad idea if God calls you to do that. But he would sit in the dorm lobby while everyone else went to lunch, and boy, this guy really knew how to attract attention to himself as someone who was sacrificing for the Lord. He could put on the most unhappy, gloomy face.

He would remind you as you were walking through the dorm lobby with your big ice cream cone for dessert how much he had sacrificed for the Lord in giving up his meal. There was zero joy, zero happiness. And I am sorry—that is not the Lord. The Lord does not do that to people. I am not saying the Lord does not call us into walks of discipleship, but ultimately, when the Lord is at work in someone's life, you are not going to see misery and legalistic bondage and a mindset that misery loves company. What you are going to see is joy.

So when you run into a perpetually sad-faced saint, it might be that such a person is walking under some other influence than Jesus, because Jesus brings complete fulfillment to a human being. I am not saying that the ways of Christ discipleship walk are always easy, but if it translates into a lack of joy—a lack of inner tranquility, peace, contentment—then at some point you might want to ask yourself, "Is this really the Lord?"

There are people sitting in churches—I get the emails constantly—whose salvation is always challenged. They wonder if they are one of the elect and are going to make it in the final judgment. So they live their lives in a perpetual state of fear.

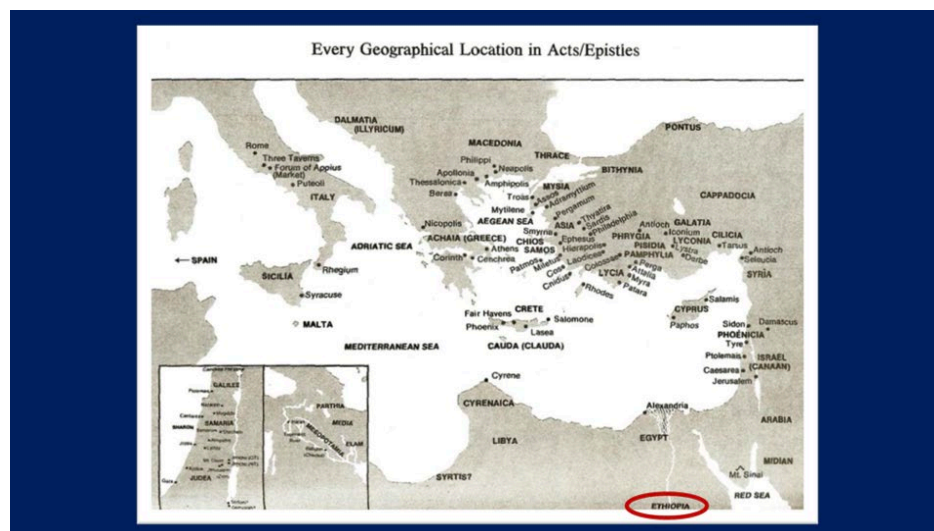
There is a doctoral dissertation written on the Puritans, about what was going on in the minds of the Puritans near death, and almost to a man, this doctoral dissertation doing this historical analysis says that the Puritans, who, by the way, largely founded our East Coast of the United States of America, went to their graves in fear and trepidation because they did not know if they were one of the elect and had borne enough fruit to prove they were one of the elect.

So on their deathbed, at a time when you really need to be trusting in the promises of God, they were in a state of perpetual fear, wondering if they were going to go into heaven or hell. I am sorry, folks—that is not Christianity. That is religion, but it is not Christianity. The Ethiopian eunuch *"went on his way rejoicing"* (Acts 8:39). Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). In Philippians 1:21-23 Paul says,

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

But anyway, the Ethiopian eunuch goes on his way rejoicing. Presumably, he went right back to where he came from, and that is how the gospel penetrated Africa. Some of you have asked me for some historical sources showing that the gospel, through the Ethiopian eunuch, did penetrate Africa, or Ethiopia. You can find that in Irenaeus' histories. Irenaeus is one generation removed from John. John discipled Polycarp. Polycarp discipled Irenaeus.

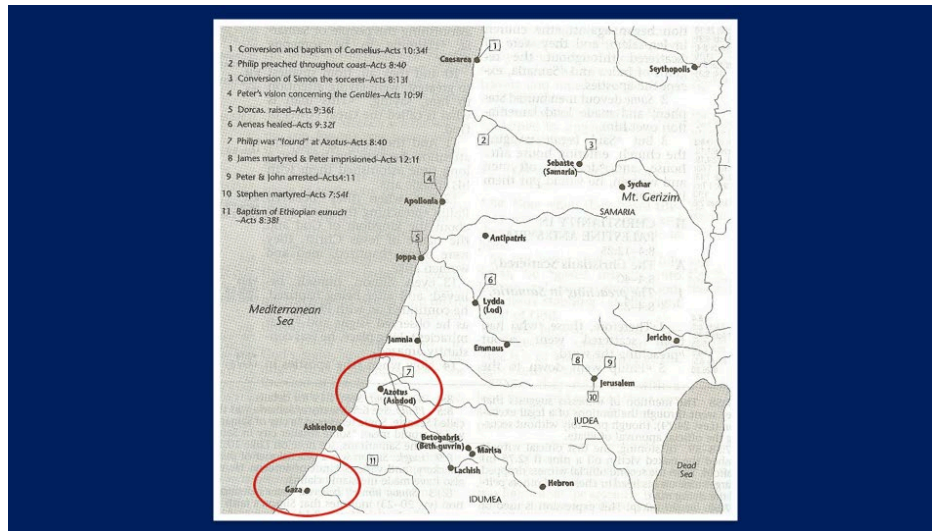
Irenaeus' "Against Heresies," Book 3, Chapter 12, Sections 8-10 is the historical source that tells you that the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion did lead to the penetration of the gospel into Ethiopia. I bring that up because Acts does not tell us that information. It just tells us that the Ethiopian eunuch *"went on his way rejoicing"* (Acts 8:39). But Irenaeus tells us that he went back to Ethiopia and spread the gospel, and that is how Christianity made it into Ethiopia.



Acts 8:40 says,

"But Philip found himself [because he had been raptured—so where did he go?] at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40).

So what happens to Philip? He is raptured from Gaza, where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch, and he goes up in the air and comes back down at Azotus. These are real geographical areas and real geographical names. Azotus took on a Greek name. It is also named "Ashdod."



That should sound familiar, because this is the area called the "Gaza Strip" right here, involved with all of the incursions that happened October 7 (2023) from the Gaza Strip into Ashdod. So that is where Ashdod is. You notice that the Bible deals with actual real-life geography and real-life geographical areas. You are not reading a fictional account when you read the Bible.

So Philip goes up from Gaza after his ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch. He comes back down to Azotus, and he makes his way up to Caesarea. This is an area called the "Philistine Plain" or the "Sharon Plain." The whole way he is evangelizing.

Look at what happened in his ministry. He starts in Jerusalem. He has this tremendous ministry in Samaria. Then he is told to go back to Jerusalem and put himself on this road that connects Gaza and Jerusalem. It is here that he met the Ethiopian eunuch. He leads the eunuch to Christ because God put him in the right place at the right time—the Ethiopian eunuch happened to be reading Isaiah 53. Then he is raptured up, taken away, brought back down to Azotus, and he keeps ministering all the way to Caesarea.

You did not know there was so much geography in the Bible, did you? So there is Philip up in Caesarea, and that is where we leave Philip. Acts 8:40 says,

"But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40).

So from Azotus to Caesarea is a coastal plain, and Philip is evangelizing all the way up. Now, Caesarea is the official residence of the governors of Judea. It is a place where all civilian and military governors typically went. It is actually the area where Philip settled. We know that he settled in Caesarea because Acts 21:8-9 says,

"On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist,..." (Acts 21:8).

Caesarea is a beautiful coastal area with beautiful turquoise water. That is where Philip settled.

"On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses" (Acts 21:8-9).

More on that when we get to Acts 21. But notice the evangelistic strategy of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sends people to the population centers. This is going to happen a little bit later in the Book of Acts in Paul's second missionary journey. In Troas, he is going to be given the vision of the Macedonian man. The vision is going to say, "Come over and help us" (paraphrase, Acts 16:9).

So this is how the gospel, on Paul's second missionary journey, made it to Europe and penetrated all of these cities: Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens. The Holy Spirit is always directing these people in the Book of Acts to the population centers. That is what Caesarea is. It is an official residence of the governors of Judea. The Holy Spirit knows that as those people start to get converted to Christianity, the message, through influential people in populous areas, is going to spread all the more.

One other quick thing here about Caesarea before we wrap up. Caesarea is going to become a big deal in Acts 10-11, because it is in Caesarea that the very first Gentile, a man named Cornelius and his household, his entourage, will be won to Christ. So I hope what you are seeing in the Book of Acts is progress.

The gospel and the church starts out all Jewish, but what just happened in Acts 8? Now we have someone who was a proselyte, a Gentile who has converted to Judaism, the Ethiopian eunuch, now saved. So now the gospel has, in a sense, gotten outside the borders of Israel to a proselyte and ultimately, to Ethiopia.

By the time we get to Acts 10—it is going to be so radical that the apostles will have to explain this to the Jerusalem leadership in Acts 11—by the time we get to those chapters, what we are going to see now is that a full-fledged Gentile will be saved.

After that, when Paul leaves the borders of Israel and goes on his three missionary journeys, "Katy, bar the door," because it is mostly Gentiles that are getting saved at

that point. It is unbelieving Jews who are becoming opponents of the Christian message.

So that takes us to the end of Acts 8:26-40, Philip's ministry in Judea. It is a good place to stop because what is coming in the next chapter? The conversion of Saul, who will become Paul. Paul is destined to become the main man in the duration of the Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament from this point forward. So be thinking about Acts 9 over the summer.