

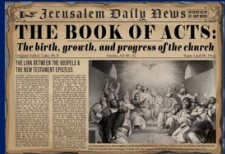
Acts 048
True Evangelism
Acts 8:26-33
May 8, 2024
Dr. Andy Woods

All right, well, as folks are filing in, let's open our Bibles this evening to Acts 8:26. We are continuing our verse-by-verse look at the Book of Acts.

Acts 8:5-40
Philip's Ministry

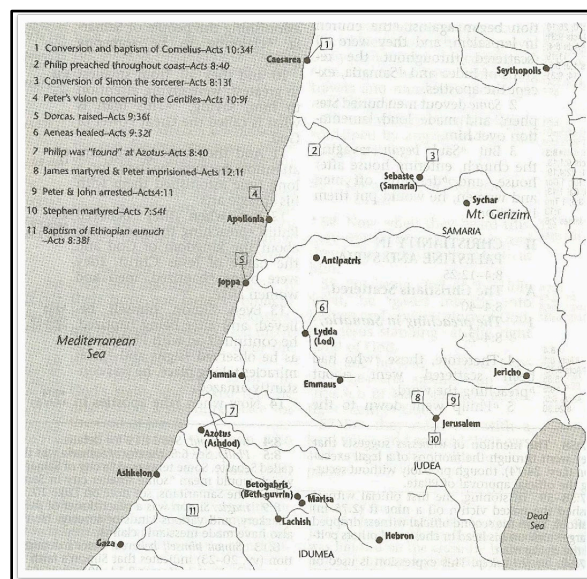
I. Samaria (8:5-25)

II. Judea (Acts 8:26-40)



We are in a chapter where the focus is on Philip. Philip is the second deacon who was selected in the church. The first deacon was Stephen, and we saw Stephen's story play out in Acts 7. And now Acts 8 is really focused on deacon number two, Philip.

You can take Philip's ministry and you can divide it into two here in Acts 8. You can see his ministry in Samaria, Acts 8:5-25, which we finished last time. Then the geography changes and his ministry continues into Judea, Acts 8:26-40.



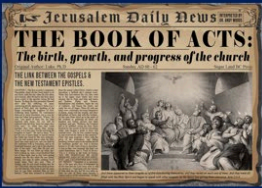
So Philip is in Samaria, up north, and he travels down south to Judea. So it is at this point that he takes on this ministry in Judea. This is where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch, which is going to be a key point, a key factor, if you will, in the spread of the gospel into Africa.

Luke is the author of the Book of Acts—the human author. Of course, we know the Holy Spirit is the author of Acts. Luke records this because Luke is interested in showing the birth and growth of the church. So how did the gospel ever make its way into Ethiopia? You get an explanation of this through Philip's ministry in Judea.

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)



Taking that second half of Acts 8, there is an outline that we can use to try to understand what is happening here in Acts 8:26-40. The first thing you see here is that the angel directs Philip. Look at Acts 8:26. It says,

"But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a desert road.)"
(Acts 8:26).

So it is here that Philip gets a brand-new commission. He is to head from Samaria down south to a road, and the road connects those two areas that I have circled there: Jerusalem and Gaza. The reason the angel directs Philip to standing there is that this is the road from Gaza that the Ethiopian eunuch is going to be traveling on. Philip does not know that, by the way, but he does not need to know it because the Holy Spirit knows exactly what is happening.

So this road that connects Jerusalem to Gaza is part of something called the Via Maris, which basically means "way of the sea." The Via Maris is a well-known trade route, a well-known traveling route, in biblical times. The big picture is that it connects Egypt there in the southwest to Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is there in the east, basically modern-day Iraq. It connects, if you can think of a map with modern nations on it, modern-day Egypt to modern-day Iraq.

So the Via Maris was one of those roads that was well traveled in ancient times. It was a trading route, and it went through the coastal area of the Land of Israel. And it just so happens that the Ethiopian eunuch is going to be traveling on this particular road, and that is why the angel directs Philip to leave Samaria and go position himself on this particular road.

You will notice that Luke seems to know the geography very well. This is one of those hints that Acts had to have been written by someone familiar with the geography and the topography, because he puts in parentheses there:

"...(This is a desert road.)" (Acts 8:26).

That basically fits everything we know of the geography of the time. Dr. Toussaint, in his commentary on the Book of Acts, writes,

"Though Luke gave no record of God's commanding Philip to preach to the Samaritans (v. 5),..."¹

See, when Philip went to Samaria, there is no record that he was commanded by God to go. We can presuppose he was commanded by God to go. But Luke does not record that. But here Luke makes particular reference to the fact that Philip went where he went because he was directed by God through an angel.

It shows you how much God loves people. God loves people. God wants to see people saved. God wants to see people in heaven with Him. And God is the one who knows that the Ethiopian eunuch is going to be traveling on this road at this time. So he is positioning His deacon, Philip, for maximum impact.

You can look at your life the same way. Our lives are not about us. I know that is a tough one to get over for Americans, right? We think it is all about us. But the truth of the matter is that there are all kinds of people around you that God wants to reach, and you happen to be the carrier of the gospel.

So you are in the job that you are in, or you live in the neighborhood that you live in—you have contact with the people that you have contact with because God knows a lot of things about what is going on all around you that you might not even be aware of. He is positioning you for the right time and the right circumstances with the right message. That is what God is doing with this obedient deacon named Philip. So concerning this desert road, Dr. Toussaint says,

"Though Luke gave no record of God's commanding Philip to preach to the Samaritans (v. 5), God did sovereignly direct Philip toward Gaza..."²

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 374.

² Ibid.

And yes, Gaza is the exact same Gaza you are hearing about in the news—the Gaza Strip, which the Israelis, in 2004, handed over to the citizens of Gaza. As you know, the people of Gaza had one and only one election there. They voted in Hamas in 2005.

The Gaza Strip in the southwestern portion of the Land of Israel, was at one time, at the time the Israelis handed it over, a beautiful beach area, full of natural resources and botanical gardens. When Hamas got control of that area that the Israelis relinquished, they turned it into a terrorist camp.

Keep that in mind when the news keeps telling you Israel is the oppressor. If Israel is the oppressor, they are doing a lousy job of oppressing because oppressors do not hand over territory to people. Israel handed that territory over. Hamas took it over and ever since then, it has been turned into a terrorist camp to launch attacks into the Land of Israel. The most significant is what just happened on October 7. That all came from the Gaza Strip. So yes, that is the exact same Gaza that we are reading about here.

Toussaint continues:

"The highway is referred to as the desert road. The expression may refer to a desert road or a desert city. Ancient Gaza was destroyed in 93 B.C. and the city was rebuilt nearer the Mediterranean in 57 B.C. The old city was called Desert Gaza. The Greek for the angel's command could be translated, 'Arise and go to the south to the road...that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is desert.' This reference to the road in [Acts] 8:36 may imply that the road, not the city, was in a deserted area."³

So the fact that Luke makes reference to the fact that it is a desert road fits the geography and the topography of the time.

Notice what the angel told Philip to do:

"...Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.'..." (Acts 8:26).

That is a perfect description of the geography and the topography of Jerusalem, because when you travel to Israel and you go to Jerusalem, you are going upward. And when you are leaving Jerusalem, you are coming downward.

That is why there is a section in your Bible called the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 120-134), because the Israelis were required to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the various feast days. They are called Psalms of Ascent because those were the Psalms that were sung or were chanted by the Israelis as they were making their way up to Jerusalem.

So when you go to Israel—and I say "when," not "if," because you are going to get there one way or the other. You are going to be there for a thousand years in the Millennial Kingdom. So you might as well go over now and get the lay of the land. If you are on a good tour group and the guide is pretty competent, as you are making your way towards

³ Ibid.

Jerusalem on the bus, he will have the group sing or chant some of these Psalms of Ascent.

So that is the significance of Acts 8:26 talking about a road that descends from Jerusalem. The reference to the desert road, the reference to coming down from Jerusalem—it is obvious that the facts are contrary to what liberals say: "Somebody wrote Acts centuries, or a long time later, who did not know anything about the geography of Israel." Obviously, that does not make sense, because Acts 8:26 reads as though someone wrote it who either was Jewish or knew the Jewish people very well and understood the geography and the topography of the time period.

Then you go to Acts 8:27, where Philip, after the angel tells Philip to leave Samaria, obeys. Look at Acts 8:27. It says,

"So he [Philip] got up and went;..." (Acts 8:27).

So Philip did what he was told. Now, I do not think that was easy for Philip to do, because in Samaria, through his evangelistic activity, he was in the middle of a spiritual revival. There was something going on in Samaria that had not gone on in seven hundred years: God was bringing the Jewish believers and the Samaritan believers together into one new man called the body of Christ. We talked a little bit about that when we were in that earlier section in Acts 8.

If you are Philip, you might want to say, "Well, Lord, why should I leave? This is great what You are doing here. There is a revival going on and actually, Lord, You used me to start the revival. So I ain't going anywhere." Well, the fact that Philip did what he was told pressed Philip into a plan greater than a revival in Samaria, because what is going to happen is not only a revival in Samaria through the hands of Philip, but now the gospel is going to go into Ethiopia, or Africa.

God knew what was going to happen, and he did not give Philip the endgame. He did not say, "Okay, when you stand on this road, you are going to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. You are going to lead him to Christ, and he is going to bring the gospel into Ethiopia." The angel who was instructing Philip gave him no information. He just told Philip to do what he was told. And Philip did it.

So when God directs you a certain way, do not expect some big explanation on the front end. If He gave you a great big explanation on the front end of what He was going to do, there would not be any real incentive to walk by faith, and God wants us to walk by faith. Hebrews 11:6 says,

"...without faith, it is impossible to please Him [God],..." (Hebrews 11:6).

Every Geographical Location in Acts/Epistles

This map illustrates the geographical locations mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. It covers the Eastern Mediterranean, including the Balkans, Greece, Asia Minor, and the surrounding seas. Key locations are marked with dots and labeled, such as Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, and Antioch. A red circle highlights the location of Ethiopia in the bottom right corner.

Paul was probably saying to himself, "Boy, there are a bunch of unreached people groups there. I want to go up north, and I want to go down south." But you see, the Holy Spirit knows what He is doing because He kept Paul moving. He got to Troas and he saw the vision of the Macedonian who said, "Come over and help us." And that is how the gospel got into Europe (Acts 16:8-17:15).

There is a reference to it in 1 Peter 1:1, the gospel made it up into that area (Bithynia) without Paul. The gospel is going to get down here to Asia as well. It is going to happen in Acts 19. What I am teaching you now is from Acts 16.

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"They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:6-10).

So Paul walks by faith and does exactly what the Lord directs him to do, and there is evangelistic progress. The same exact thing is happening here with Philip, who could have rebelled and stayed in Samaria. But because he did not, and he walked by faith and did exactly what the angel told him, there was a far greater evangelistic impact than Philip could have ever dreamed of.

Oh, by the way, one quick verse on all of this. It is Isaiah 55:8-9. Isaiah says concerning God,

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD.
'For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9).*

So we really put ourselves into a dangerous, dangerous predicament when we try to out-strategize God. "God, do not do it that way. Let me stay in Samaria. I am better use here." "No, I want you to do exactly what I told you to do. I want you to stand on this road, which connects to the Via Maris, because I know what I am doing." It is just a matter of acquiescing to what God wants us to do and to walk by faith.

Then you come down to Acts 8:27b-28, and there you get a description of this Ethiopian eunuch who is traveling along the road. Philip did not know anything about this. It says in Acts 8:27,

"So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace,..." (Acts 8:27).

Now, it is tempting to look at "Candace" (Acts 8:27) and say, "Well, that is the queen's name," but it is more of a title like "Caesar."

"...there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all of her treasure; and he [the Ethiopian eunuch] had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah" (Acts 8:27-28).

So who is this Ethiopian eunuch? This Ethiopian eunuch is what we would call a proselyte. A proselyte is basically somebody who was non-Jewish, who wanted to follow the ways of the God of Israel, rather like Ruth in the Book of Ruth.

Remember, Ruth was from Moab, which is east of the Jordan River, in modern-day Jordan. Basically, she was not an Israeli. She was not Hebrew, but she wanted to walk with the God of Yahweh. So she said to her mother-in-law, "Naomi, Your God will be my God. Your people will be my people" (paraphrase, Ruth 1:16).

A proselyte was someone who was non-Jewish, a Gentile, who wanted to follow the ways of the God of Israel. So they, in essence, would convert to Judaism. That is essentially what this Ethiopian eunuch was. That is why he is on his way back on the Via Maris, having stopped at Jerusalem to worship. That is why he is reading Hebrew Scripture, the prophet Isaiah.

As a eunuch, he was not even a full-fledged proselyte. He was a half-proselyte, because Deuteronomy 23:1 says of eunuchs,

"No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 23:1).

So you are dealing with someone who is a very sincere seeker of God. He does not really understand the fullness of God. He somewhat has the status of a proselyte, but he is not a full proselyte.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum gives a really good description here of this Ethiopian eunuch. He says,

"The text states that he was a eunuch. Eunuchs were often employed by oriental rulers in positions of high office. They were also male servants of female dignitaries, but only placed in such positions after having been castrated..."⁴

Why would you have someone who wanted to serve in this capacity castrated? So they would not impregnate the queen and all of the females.

"Politically, he was a highly influential official under Candace,..."⁵

If you look at Acts 8:27 it says,

"...who was in charge of all of her treasure;..." (Acts 8:27).

So the eunuch is somebody who is actually influential in the Ethiopian circles.

"Politically, he was a highly influential official under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. 'Candace' ('Kandakēs,' in Greek) was not a proper name, but the title of the queen of Ethiopia, much like the word 'Kaiser' was the title

⁴ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 200-201.

⁵ Ibid.

of the king of Germany and 'Czar' was the title of the king of Russia. Because the king of Ethiopia was considered to be a child of the sun and therefore a person too sacred to be involved with secular functions of the royal court, all such duties fell to the queen mother, who had the title of 'Candace.' As a result, she was the real power behind the throne, and Ethiopia was a de facto matriarchy."⁶

Now, the Holy Spirit never explained any of this to Philip. "If this guy gets saved, given his position in the Ethiopian Empire, and given who the Ethiopian eunuch is connected to, suddenly just like that, you are going to have the gospel at the highest places in Ethiopia, Philip. That is why I want you to leave Samaria and go stand on this road." Philip was not told any of this. He just had to walk by faith.

It is a lot like if you are in a strange city, as I was just in Milwaukee. I have never been to Milwaukee before, other than that I used to follow some of the Milwaukee Bucks games back a long time ago—the Bob Lanier and Marques Johnson days. So I know nothing about Milwaukee. I do not know my way around Milwaukee. But the guy who picked me up and took me to the conference knows where he is going.

When he is driving me, he does not say, "Okay, this is what is going to happen, and that is what is going to happen. I am going to turn left at this signal. I am going to turn right at this signal." That is information I do not really need to know. All I really have to do is trust the guy that is driving the car. If I trust his integrity and his character and his abilities, I do not have to have the whole driving script given to me in advance.

That is how it is walking with the Lord. The Lord is not going to in advance lay out a map and tell you exactly what He is going to do, because if He did it, (a) we probably would not believe it anyway and (b) it is just above our pay grade. His ways are higher than our ways, right (Isaiah 55:8-9)? He is doing things in our lives that are intellectually beyond us. All He wants us to do is to walk by faith and be obedient.

So that is why this is happening to Philip the deacon.

"The eunuch was in charge of her treasure, which means he held one of the highest government positions. His influence in Ethiopia would have been very considerable."⁷

Now, this is analogous to, or very similar to, Paul's interest in the praetorian guard in the Book of Philippians, when he had his prison ministry.

In the Book of Philippians, which is the "Book of Joy," Paul spends Philippians 1 explaining that the Christian is never a prisoner of his circumstances. One of the illustrations that he uses is, "Hey, I am in prison and I am chained to this guard. But the truth of the matter is that I am not chained to the guard. The guard is chained to me." Paul completely reverses the circumstances.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

If I were chained to a guard in a prison, I would just be probably in my natural self, just feeling sorry for myself—"Oh, Lord, why have you put me through this?"

But Paul, the apostle, in that circumstance, turns the whole thing around and says, "I am not chained to him. He is chained to me. Incidentally, the soldier chained to me is a member of the praetorian guard, which is Caesar's elite guard. So if this guy gets saved—and he has nowhere to go, right, because he is chained to me—talk about a captive audience...If this guy gets saved, think of how the gospel is going to spread in the upper echelons of the Roman Empire."

So that is why Paul makes reference to the praetorian guard in Philippians 1:13. He says,

"so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else," (Philippians 1:13).

See, the humanistic way of thinking is, "Lord, I would be much more useful to you if I was free as a bird and traveling about and evangelizing."

But God says, "My ways are higher than yours (Isaiah 55:8-9). You are actually chained to a pretorian elite guard, and you are not chained to him as much as he is chained to you, and he has nowhere to go. So keep proclaiming the gospel to him around the clock, and as he gets saved, the whole gospel is going to spread into the upper echelons of Rome."

So that is an equivalent thing to what is happening here with Philip. Then you come down to Acts 8:29, and now the Holy Spirit starts speaking to Philip. See, first it was an angel that spoke to him, Acts 8:26. Now it is the Holy Spirit.

Oh, and incidentally, even before we move to Acts 8:29, what was the Ethiopian eunuch reading? Isaiah. Why was he reading Isaiah? Because he was involved in a spiritual pilgrimage as a proselyte (not a full proselyte) to Jerusalem, traveling near that area on the highway. That is why he is reading Isaiah.

He is probably leaving Jerusalem and going back to Ethiopia. So he had a spiritual experience of some kind in Jerusalem, and he is reading the most well-known prophet in Hebrew Bible, which is Isaiah. And by the way, we are going to find out in a minute that it just so happened—what a coincidence—he is not reading any old section of Isaiah.

He is reading Isaiah 53, which happens to be a prophecy written seven hundred years in advance about whom? Jesus Christ. So you see how the Lord set this whole thing up. And Philip was never told on the front end any of these things. He was just told to walk by faith.

So you go down to Acts 8:29, and now it is not just an angel talking to Philip, it is the Holy Spirit. It says,

"Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot'" (Acts 8:29).

So notice, first of all, that God uses multiple means of communication. First, he is speaking through an angel, Acts 8:26, to Philip, but then he uses a different means: God the Holy Spirit. The eternally existent third member of the Trinity is now speaking to Philip, and he is telling Philip to do the exact same thing. That is the ancient principle of "Let a matter be confirmed by two to three witnesses" (paraphrase, Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19).

If God is leading you to do something, talk to somebody, go somewhere. I would not go just on the basis of one witness. I would ask the Lord to confirm it through two to three witnesses, because the Bible, from cover to cover, says, "By two to three witnesses, let a matter be confirmed."

So my wife, who is very beautiful, as you guys know—as I know—would have people come up to her when she was a missionary with a missions group. I am not sure if they said it to her, but they said it to her peer group and the men would say, "Well, God has told me that you are supposed to be my wife. Thus saith the Lord—God says you are to be my wife."

"Well, God has not really told me that. Can we let this be confirmed a little bit?" People will do this to you. They will come up to you and they will say, "God told me to tell you 'x': do this." And you do not have to do anything. You say, "Well, let's let the Lord work this out and confirm it," because there is an ancient principle in Scripture: "Let a matter be confirmed by two to three witnesses."

If you are going to make a radical life change like that for marriage, I guarantee it is not just going to be a singular witness. It is going to be two to three. And in some cases, God is kind enough to give you multiple witnesses. So this time it is the Holy Spirit, the eternally existent third member of the Godhead, speaking to Philip.

Basically, when you look at this in the original Greek, it is a directive, it is a command. You can translate it as follows: "Glue yourself to the chariot. Go up there and sit with this guy. It is almost as if you are gluing yourself to him." For Philip to obey that involved courage, because you are dealing here with a high government official. The Ethiopian eunuch, obviously, given his position, had security detail. So you could think of a scenario where Philip could have lost his life for doing this.

Second Timothy 1:7 says,

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

A lot of the things that God is calling us to do are going to require some courage. Following Jesus is not the easiest thing in the world. Yet, when you fall into fear, you just have to understand that the fear did not come from God. It came from the sin nature that does not want to walk by faith and generates excuses as to why you cannot do what God has called you to do.

You know, I had a youth pastor once who put it this way. He said, "One plus God is a majority." All you need is a calling of God, and God will take care of all of the potential obstacles that we generate in our unbelieving minds. "What about consequence A? What about consequence B? What about consequence C?" God says, "Do not worry about that. I just want you to walk by faith."

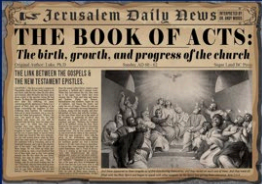
This is why the Bible, as you know, says 365 times, "Do not fear." Look at that number 365: that is one time for every day of the year, all the 365 days on our calendar. So every day you wake up and the Lord is telling you, "Do not be afraid. Walk by faith. Do what I tell you to do. Leave the results to Me and do not fear."

E.

Acts 8:30-35

Philip's Witness to the Eunuch

1. Philip's question (30)
2. Eunuch's answer (31)
3. Eunuch's reading (32-33)
4. Eunuch's question (34)
5. Philip's witness (35)



So here Philip, fortunately, did not acquiesce to fear. So now Philip begins to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch. You see here Philip's question (Acts 8:30), the eunuch's answer (Acts 8:31), what the eunuch was reading (Acts 8:32-33), the eunuch's follow-up question (Acts 8:34), and then Philip, from Isaiah 53, boldly declares Jesus in Acts 8:35. Notice, first of all, Philip's question (Acts 8:30).

"Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet [probably because the eunuch was verbally saying it as he was reading], and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'" (Acts 8:30).

What an important question that is, because there is a big difference between reading and comprehension. Those are two different things. Many read but do not comprehend. Many hear but do not listen. In other words, you can hear someone audibly talking, but listening is different: you are actually comprehending what they are saying. Many see or perceive but do not fully understand.

Philip presupposes that "Just because you are reading this does not mean you really understand what it is talking about. You might be going through a ritual exercise." In fact, when you go to Israel, to Jerusalem, and you go to the Wailing Wall, off to the side they have these prayer books and Scriptures that you can read.

You see all of these Jewish people going down to the Wailing Wall, doing their reading, putting the book up, putting it on its shelf, and leaving the Wailing Wall area. And as you sit there and observe these people, it is very obvious that they are going through a ritual that they really do not understand.

It is like, "Okay, I did the religious thing, checked it off my list, put the book back on the shelf where it is supposed to be, and now I will just go back to my normal life. But I got my religious checklist accomplished today." But it is obvious that for the people going through this ritual—and you can watch them do this all day long if you stay there long enough—it is just a ritual without any real understanding.

It is very similar to the first sixteen years of my life when I was raised Episcopalian. The Episcopalians, I am telling you, they move in the service. You are up, you are down, you are singing, you are turning in the hymn book to this, you are saying the Nicene Creed, you got the prayer bench out, you kneel down, you stand up again, you recite this, you recite that.

I will be honest with you: I was an altar boy in the Episcopalian church. I had the whole thing memorized—the whole thing—and I did not have the foggiest idea what it was about. It was just a ritual that I was going through, because that is what our family did on a Sunday morning. So it was not until I got saved and filled with the Holy Spirit that I went back to that particular parish, and went through the ritual, and finally the stuff that they were doing made sense spiritually because now I was saved.

But I had no concept of what any of it was about before I was saved, even though I had it down to a science. In fact, they actually gave me this giant cross for perfect attendance and all of these kinds of things. I had all this stuff memorized. I did not know anything about the truth of the gospel. So I was reading but not perceiving. I was hearing but not listening. That is the situation that the Ethiopian eunuch is in.

Isaiah 6:9 actually talks about the Israelis doing this when they do not have a right relationship with the Lord. It says in Isaiah 6:9,

*"He said, 'Go, and tell this people:
"Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand"" (Isaiah 6:9).*

So Philip's question, *"Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30)* is a very important question. Then the Ethiopian eunuch gives an answer. It is there in Acts 8:31.

"And he said, 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me? [How can I really understand it without a teacher?]' And he [the Ethiopian eunuch] invited Philip to come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:31).

So when I became the president of Chafer Seminary, they asked me to write a brochure explaining the significance of our school: why we exist. This is the verse that I picked. I did a little exposition in written form on Acts 8:31—

"... 'Do you understand what you are reading?'... 'Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?'..." (Acts 8:30-31).

So the purpose of Chafer Seminary is to raise up teachers and preachers that have the ability to guide people and explain to people what the Bible is actually saying. If that gift is not in operation in the body of Christ, what you are going to be left with is a whole bunch of rote rituals of people doing things, but not really understanding what exactly it is they are doing. That makes the gift of teaching such an important spiritual gift. This is why God put the gift of teaching in the body of Christ.

It says in Romans 12:7 concerning the various spiritual gifts,

"If service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;" (Romans 12:7).

If you do not have teachers that are equipped with the truth of God's Word, what you are going to be left with in Christianity is what I was stuck with for the first sixteen years of my life: ritualism without understanding. This explains why the gift of pastor-teacher, which only God can give, is so important. A school cannot give this gift. A degree cannot give this gift. The Holy Spirit gives the gift. The school can come alongside and assist someone in growing in that gift.

Ephesians 4:11-16 talks about this:

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers," (Ephesians 4:11).

Now in Greek, there is Granville Sharp Rule: when you have the singular definite article followed by two nouns which are joined by a conjunction. I think it is "kai" (καί) here.

Granville Sharp, by the way, was an abolitionist. He had an interesting history. "Oh, you Christians are in favor of slavery because the Bible tells masters to be kind to their slaves." People who say stuff like that do not know anything about church history. Granville Sharp worked alongside William Wilberforce to abolish the slave trade in from Parliament in Europe.

Granville Sharp also happened to be a Greek scholar, so Granville Sharp developed this grammatical rule that all first-year Greek students know. It is called the Granville Sharp Rule. The Granville Sharp Rule is that when you have a definite article followed by two nouns which are joined by a conjunction, then the two nouns are equal.

Now, just because you are a Greek scholar does not mean you do not care about cultural issues, and the issue of slavery, which is an abomination of an institution. Granville Sharp, who developed this rule, worked with William Wilberforce to get rid of the slave trade. While I am on this subject, I think it is interesting that many nations of the earth still have slavery, and those happen to be nations of the earth that are primarily Islamic, where the gospel of Jesus Christ never penetrated.

Everywhere Christianity goes, it destroys the institution of slavery. How can one man enslave another when we are all made in God's image, regardless of skin pigmentation? So just remember that when you are hit with propaganda by people who are saying, "Oh, all you Christians are in favor of slavery because the Bible tells slaves to be obedient to their masters." Nonsense. Granville Sharp's life demonstrates that.

Okay, that was a rabbit trail. No extra charge for that. But the Granville Sharp Rule kicking in here says that pastors and teachers are equal in Ephesians 4:11. What Ephesians 4:11 really says is as follows:

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as...[pastor-teachers]," (Ephesians 4:11).

There are pastors and then there are teachers. But there is a unique gift that God has put into the body of Christ, called the gift of pastor-teacher. It is the ability to teach the Word of God in a way that people can understand it, in a way that is applicable and understandable, so that the body of Christ can mature, and so that as we mature, we are not just going through rituals without understanding what we are doing.

So this is the kind of thing that Philip is moving in here. Yes, he is a deacon, but he is bringing understanding to this Ethiopian eunuch. That is what the gift of pastor-teacher does. It is not to put a person on a pedestal. It is to help the body of Christ mature.

Paul says,

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as...[pastor-teachers]," (Ephesians 4:11).

Can you be a pastor without being a teacher? Yes. Can you be a teacher without being a pastor? Yes. But there is a special gift called pastor-teacher. Well, why did God give that gift? Ephesians 4:12 says,

"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;" (Ephesians 4:12).

In other words, when we understand what it is we are supposed to understand, we are not just hearers, but we are understanding things. We are not just going through rote ritualism. We are becoming equipped and we are maturing. "Well, what does maturity look like?" Glad you asked.

"until we attain to the unity of the faith,..." (Ephesians 4:13).

Until we are not involved in factionalism, fighting with each other—turf wars over things that are not spoken of clearly in Scripture...

"...and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;" (Ephesians 4:13-14).

That sounds like a modern description of Christianity today: little children swept along by various fads, not acting as a unified man in the body of Christ. Well, what is the problem? You do not have an activation of the gift of pastor-teacher. That is the problem. You do not have prepared people with the gifts standing in the pulpit teaching these things from the Scripture.

What you have is a bunch of Christians going to a religious service that is more of a pep rally than a time of equipping. That is what is happening in most churches: you go and you listen. It is a pep rally. You are excited. People are clapping. Nothing wrong with clapping and being excited. But are they being equipped? If they are not being equipped, they are going to be neutralized in their lives. They cannot be effective for God if you are not being equipped.

"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Notice that everything started with the apostles and the prophets. The foundation of the church was laid through them (Ephesians 2:20). Then God brought in the evangelists to lead other people to a saving knowledge of this foundation that has been established by the apostles. Then God dropped into the body of Christ the gift of pastor-teacher to help the converted mature and grow. This is what Philip, in a slightly different sense, is helping this Ethiopian eunuch to do.

"... 'Do you [really] understand what you are reading?'" (Acts 8:30).

So Philip asks the question, then the eunuch gives the answer.

"... 'Well, how could I [ever understand this], unless someone guides me?'..." (Acts 8:31).

You see the sovereignty of God there in Acts 8:32-33, because the eunuch just happened to be reading Isaiah 53:7-8 (see Isaiah 53:3-8). What a coincidence. The Holy Spirit knew he would be reading that passage as he was returning from a religious pilgrimage as a proselyte, traveling on that particular road at that particular moment. "Philip, I am not going to explain all this to you. Just go stand where you are supposed to stand, because you are going to be the instrument that I am going to use in these circumstances to get the gospel to Ethiopia."

So you go down to Acts 8:32-33, and you have a description of the section of Isaiah 53 that the Ethiopian eunuch happened to be reading.

*"Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this [Isaiah 53:7-8]:
'HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
'IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH'" (Acts 8:32-33).*

So that is quoting Isaiah 53:7-8 (see Isaiah 53:3-8), which had been written about the eighth to the seventh century B.C. So this is something that had been written more than seven hundred years in advance. It is a prophecy about Jesus, which, by the time this is being written and read, had been fulfilled by Jesus. That is what the Ethiopian eunuch is reading here.

*"He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:3-6).*

That is what the Ethiopian eunuch is reading, which was written a minimum of seven hundred years in advance—a prophecy fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ in this generation that we are reading about here. So God has put everything into motion for this Ethiopian man to get saved so that the gospel can go to Africa. The instrument that God used to do this was Philip.

Now, what if Philip had stayed in Samaria? "I do not want to do things your way, Lord." "Are you saying, Andy, that the Ethiopian Ethiopian eunuch would not have gotten saved?" I am not saying that at all, for this simple reason: God's work is going to get done. The only issue is do you, or do I receive the honor of being used by Him?

There are a lot of Christians that just do not want to cooperate with God. There are a lot of churches that do not want to cooperate with God. There are a lot of elder boards that

I know of that do not want to cooperate with God. They do not want to cooperate because walking with God and listening to Him and trying to follow His lead is taking us too far out of our comfort zone.

God takes that kind of Christian or that kind of church, and He just puts it on the shelf. They did not lose their salvation or something like that. They just missed out on being used of the Lord. They missed out on the uniqueness and the neatness of being that pliable tool in the hands of the Creator.

If churches will not cooperate, "Okay, I will get church B." It is a lot like when my daughter was very, very little. (I know it is hard to imagine her little.) She would see me emptying the dishwasher. And believe it or not, that is my job in the home: emptying the dishwasher. I wake up every day and take dominion over the dishwasher.

My daughter would see me doing this, and she would try to help. She was so little that she would reach up and try to put the cups in and the dishes, and I would watch her doing it, and she was struggling because she was so little. I would just say, "This has taken too long. It would be much easier if I just did the whole thing myself." But then as a father, you think for a minute: "Well, if I just did the whole thing myself, I just cheated her out of the opportunity of contributing to the household and participating."

So that is how it is with God's work. God's work is going to get done. It is no problem for God. The issue is whom is He going to use? If we cooperate with what He wants to do, suddenly we are blessed because we get the privilege of being used by the Lord. It reminds me of Esther 4:14.

It says in Esther 4:14, Mordecai speaking to Esther, "Deliverance is going to come from another source. If you will not cooperate, Esther, deliverance is going to come through another source. God is going to get His work done. But who knows? Maybe you have been put into this position for such a time as this" (paraphrase, Esther 4:14).

So cooperate with what God wants to do and be used mightily by God. And do not think that if you do not cooperate, then somehow the work of God suffers. The work of God is going to get done. The gospel is going to go into Ethiopia. Here the issue is whom is God going to use? In this particular case, he used this man Philip.

So the Ethiopian eunuch is reading, and then the Ethiopian eunuch is going to ask a question, and then the Ethiopian eunuch is going to get saved, and then the Ethiopian eunuch is going to get baptized, and then Philip is going to get raptured—not permanently. He is going to be brought back down, and he is going to keep traveling up to Caesarea, preaching the gospel, eventually settling there for the rest of his life. We will pick up that story beginning in Acts 8:34 next time.