

# READING FROM ACTS FOR MAY 3, 2015

**START WITH SCRIPTURE:** Acts 8:26-40

**OBSERVE:** This is one of the early examples of the expansion of Christianity beyond the first Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Philip obeys the *angel of the Lord*, and intercepts an influential Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot on a desert road who just happens to be the treasurer of the Ethiopian queen.

The Ethiopian eunuch is returning back to Africa from Jerusalem where he had gone to worship the Lord. This raises several questions. Is he a Jew? Or is he one of the group of Gentiles known as “God-fearers” who had become sympathetic to the Jewish faith but had not been fully initiated into Judaism? Of course we know he was literate, and was reading from the Messianic passage of scripture in Isaiah 53 that is associated with the Suffering Servant. But was he reading the text in its original Hebrew or from the Greek translation known as the Septuagint?

In any event, he is puzzled by what he reads about the one *led like a sheep to the slaughter*, and wonders just who the writer is referring to. And there, in the middle of the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza, there is an apostle who can interpret the scriptures to him!

Of course Philip explains that the passage from Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in the crucified and risen Jesus; and as a good evangelist Philip then closes the deal. Interestingly, though, it is the eunuch who actually takes the initiative after the Gospel is explained to him: *“Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”*

The chariot in which they were riding is stopped, and Philip takes him down into the nearby water to be baptized.

Philip is miraculously transported from the scene: *the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing*. He continues his evangelistic ministry from Gaza up to the coast at Caesarea.

**APPLY:** The church is beginning to be transformed from a local sub-sect of Jews following a crucified carpenter into a world-wide movement. Philip is the first Apostle to reach out beyond the confines of Jerusalem.

What is fascinating about this account is the questions it raises about the Ethiopian eunuch. We know that the Ethiopian Christian church claims its origins begin in the first century after Christ, so it would seem obvious that this eunuch became an evangelist for his new-found faith.

This episode also reminds us that this new faith transcends racial distinctions as well. Every tribe, nation and race will be represented in the Christian church.

But what does this tell us about our role as Christians? Two things come to mind: First — like Philip we must be obedient to God’s guidance and look for opportunities to share our faith with others, especially among those who already seem to express an interest in spiritual matters. And second — we do well to study the scriptures ourselves so that we can make the connection between our faith and the Word of God.

**RESPOND:** We live in a pluralistic society, and that makes us reluctant to be too bold about witnessing to others. Many folks have had unpleasant experiences with overly aggressive evangelists who can be a little offensive at times.

However, that doesn’t take us “off the hook” when it comes to evangelism. At the very least we can invite others to church. And, as in the case of Philip, we can listen to the Holy Spirit and learn to be sensitive to opportunities that may come along to talk to someone who may be genuinely searching for spiritual answers.

*Lord, open my eyes to the people around me who are spiritually hungry, genuinely looking for answers, and who desire to know the truth. And give me the courage and the wisdom to tell them about you. Amen.*

**BY TOM LETCHWORTH**

<https://soarlectionarybiblestudy.wordpress.com/2015/04/29/reading-from-acts-for-may-3-2015/>