

To The Ends of the Earth

Acts 8:26-40

Introduction:

Acts 1:8 provides this promise from Jesus to His disciples:

“⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In ancient times Ethiopia was a place of great intrigue to the Greek historians and the Roman world. Ethiopia literally meant “the land of people with burnt faces.”¹ Ancient Ethiopia included most of modern Ethiopia and the Sudan. Rome did much trade with this intriguing land.

But of greater interest to us for our study is the fact that ancient historians equated Ethiopia with “the ends of the earth.”² Through this contact the church has now started taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And once again it is clear from this passage this was the strategy of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, not the schemes of people. Once again we are humbled to realize that when God makes a promise – you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth – He always fulfills it. What promises are you clinging to today?

The Audience – Acts 8:26-28

1. Philip is part of a great revival in Samaria. People are coming to faith in Jesus and are baptised into the fellowship of the church. Any pastor would love to be a part of what God was doing there. What is it that uproots Philip from this place where God is obviously at work? (v.26) Where is he told to go? What is it like there according to this verse? What might be the spiritual implications of such a description?

¹ Richard Thompson, New Beacon Bible Commentary: Acts, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015) p. 180.

² Ibid

2. What was Philip's response to the message of the angel? (v. 27)
3. Who does Philip encounter on his way to Gaza? What do we learn about this man?

Eunuch: the term used in Scripture – both in Hebrew and Greek – can refer to someone in a place of authority, or someone who has been castrated. Alternatively, as often was the case, it can mean both, for those elevated to positions of high authority may be castrated to ensure their fidelity and purity. The state of the eunuch in ancient times was difficult, especially among Jews, as they were seen as incomplete in God's eyes for He created people to reproduce, and as unable to approach God at the Temple because they are imperfect. Therefore, like the Samaritans, they were outsiders to the promises of God, and His corporate worship. At best, this man could have stood with the women in their court at the Temple, unable to get any closer to God.

4. As the Ethiopian travelled home, in a "chariot" (more likely a four-wheeled cart) what was he doing? How would Philip know this is what he was doing?

The Assignment: Acts 8: 29-35

5. What does the Holy Spirit direct Philip to do? (v.29) What is the risk?
6. How does Philip get to the Ethiopian? (v. 30) How does this echo the life of the famous Old Testament prophet, Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 18:46)? What does this say about his commitment to doing God's work?

7. When Philip heard what was being read, what does he ask? (v. 30) (NOTE: Luke, the human author of the Book of Acts, draws a distinction between the Word being read and understood.)
8. In verse 31 we have the response of the Ethiopian. What does he say? What does this tell us about his heart? The response is interesting, as it uses a unique Greek construction that suggests someday he will be guided to truth. A literal translation of the word translated “guides me” is “lead the way.” Then the Ethiopian invites Philip – a stranger- to join him in his chariot (cart). What might this indicate?
9. What passage of scripture is the Ethiopian reading? It is likely that we only get a portion of the reading, these few verses standing for the whole (ie. when Jesus cites Psalm 22:1 from the cross it is likely he is thinking of the whole Psalm, not just one verse (Matthew 27:46)). The text as given reflects he is reading the Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX).
10. What is the Ethiopian’s question in verse 34?

One cannot but wonder that this, of all predictions of Messiah’s sufferings in the Old Testament the most striking, should have been that which the eunuch was reading before Philip joined him. He could hardly miss to have heard at Jerusalem of the sufferings and death of Jesus, and of the existence of a continually increasing party who acknowledged Him to be the Messiah. But his question to Philip, whether the prophet in this passage meant himself or some other man, clearly shows that he had not the least idea of any connection between this prediction and those facts.³

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 182). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

11. What is Philip's response according to verse 35? How important is it that we know the Word of God?

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" says Rom. 10:17 (NKJV). Isaiah 53 was the chapter Philip used (vv. 32–33), that wonderful picture of the Lamb of God; from that chapter Philip preached Christ. He began where the man was and took him through the Scriptures, explaining who Jesus was and what He had done. There can be no real conversion apart from the Word of God.⁴

The Fruit of Philip's Ministry – Acts 8:36-40

12. What does the Ethiopian Desire according to verse 36? What does this mean about the topics Philip shared with him as he outlined the Gospel? Do you think there "just happened to be water" there, or was God once again directing the course of events?
13. Read verse 37... unless you have a KJV or NKJV translation, you may find it is not in your Bible. Ever wonder why?

(Ac 8:37 is wanting in the principal manuscripts and most venerable versions of the New Testament. It seems to have been added from the formularies for baptism which came into current use).⁵

14. What action does Philip perform in response to the Ethiopian's request (v. 38)? How significant is this?

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament*](#) (p. 298). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 182). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

15. What happens after Philip has completed the baptism service (v. 39)? How does this compare to Luke 24:31?
16. What was the response of the Ethiopian to being baptized as a new believer (v. 39)? (NOTE: the word here for rejoice is in a Greek tense that says he started rejoicing and kept on rejoicing).
17. Where did Philip “find himself” according to verse 40? (this is a city along the Mediterranean) Where did he end up? (we do not see him there until Acts 22!!) What was he doing all that time?

Conclusion

Philip is sent by the Holy Spirit down a road leading away from Jerusalem. There he encounters a rich man from Ethiopia who is hungry to know that God has a place for him too. The rich man has purchased scroll of Isaiah but cannot understand it. He says he needs someone to “show him the Way.” Philip gladly declares to him the Gospel about Jesus Christ, “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” In verse 36 we read that after the Gospel presentation is received, the two “went on their way,” together. They were on the same way, God’s way. A few moments before they were strangers – now they are brothers of the Way. In chapter 9 we read that the fellowship of believers is called “the Way” (Acts 9:2). This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, binding together people of very different cultures, languages and even socioeconomic backgrounds. And now the Gospel is spreading to “the ends of the earth...”