

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Conversion Story

Acts 8:26–40

Let's turn together to Acts 8. Today's passage, if I could be just a tad reductionistic, is a simple, yet moving, conversion story involving the evangelist Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch. And what's surprising about this story is that it involves just one person getting saved. Just one person! No mass conversions. No thousands of people coming to Christ. Just one guy evangelized by one other guy.¹ In fact the next three chapters of Acts focus on the conversions of individuals: 1) The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8), 2) Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9), and Cornelius (Acts 10).² There's a lot of energy expended for the conversion of just three people in the next few chapters.³

Some of you might be familiar with the famous missionary named William Carey. Carey is often referred to as the "father of modern missions." He was a Baptist from England who had this unshakable desire to preach the gospel in foreign lands. But when he shared his vision, many Baptist pastors refused to support him. Reportedly one older pastor told Carey, "Young man... you are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."⁴

Well Carey was undeterred by that negativity and lack of support. He was able to raise support for his venture. And he travelled all the way to India in the late 1700s, which was no small feat in that day. And yet he struggled, in vain it would seem, for several years. In fact, he didn't see a convert to Christianity until after seven years of faithful ministry. His first Indian convert was a man named Krishna Pal who was baptized in 1800.⁵ [By the way, that's not uncommon for many missionaries traveling to foreign lands.]

But even during those years of "unfruitfulness," God used Carey to translate the Scriptures into different Indian languages. God used him to scatter "gospel" seed and initiate social changes in the Indian culture, including forbidding the practice of *sati*, which was the burning of widows after the death of their husbands.

And the labor of Carey's evangelistic work, which took some time to see, eventually came to fruition. The truth is that God is glorified even when we share the gospel with unbelievers and they totally reject it. God gets glory when we share Christ and people get saved. God gets glory when we share Christ and people *don't* get saved.

¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 420: "Not only large crowds of people but also single individuals need to hear the gospel."

² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 338: "Whereas up to now mass conversion has been in view, our next three scenes contain individual conversions (the eunuch, Saul, Cornelius). This is the more personal side of evangelism."

³ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 285: "Public evangelists are involved in personal evangelism."

⁴ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, "Introduction," in *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 244–6.

⁵ George, *Galatians*, NAC, 182–3: "Throughout the history of the church, and especially in missionary settings, the sharing of a simple meal has often symbolized the unity and fellowship implied in the message of salvation through Christ. When William Carey and his associates carried the gospel message to India, they confronted a situation very similar to that reflected in this passage. From the beginning Carey felt that the holding of caste was incompatible with faith in Christ. He thus refused to baptize anyone who continued to maintain caste distinctions that included the refusal to share together in a common meal. Yet for a Hindu to eat with a European in that culture meant the foreswearing of his caste. When Carey's first Hindu convert, a man named Krishna Pal, became a Christian and decided to break caste by taking dinner with the missionaries, William Ward, one of Carey's fellow workers, exclaimed in words that breathe the spirit of the New Testament: 'Thus the door of faith is open to the Gentiles. Who shall shut it?'"

Now back to Acts 8.⁶ Let's look at this fascinating story in verses 26–40. Let me show you six components to this “Conversion Story.” And see if maybe there are some parallels to your own conversion. Think back and consider how God brought you to saving faith. Probably, it happened something like this.

First of all, for the Ethiopian eunuch, there was...

1) **Divine** Intervention (8:26)

Look at verse 26.

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip,

Angels are highly active in Acts.⁷ We've seen that already. Here we have an angel speaking on behalf of the Lord and telling Philip...

“Rise and go toward the south⁸ to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”⁹ This is a desert place.

Now let me just set the context for this encounter. Keep in mind, what's happening in the book of Acts, and what led up to this event. Philip was one of the seven men in Acts 6 who were appointed by the apostles to apportion benevolence to widows.¹⁰ There was Stephen. He died in Acts 7. And then there was Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. We never hear from those guys again in this book.

But Stephen and Philip did more than just pass out benevolence. They were both bold and effective preachers of the gospel. So much so that Stephen was taken out by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. And after his death, a great persecution erupts in Jerusalem.

And Stephen's buddy, Philip, probably fleeing for his life, goes up to Samaria and preaches his heart out. And people get saved in droves. Samaritans come to Christ *en masse*. The apostles Peter and John come to authenticate this new development in the fulfillment of Christ's mission. And the beat goes on. Stephen dies a gruesome death, and the church marches on.

Let me show you on the map where Philip has traveled (see map below). He's gone about 30 miles north of Jerusalem to Samaria. That's where a huge revival takes place. And if you or I were in charge of this operation, we might say, “Philip, stay here. Let's focus on these Samaritan Christians for a while. Let's consolidate our gains. These guys need discipling!”

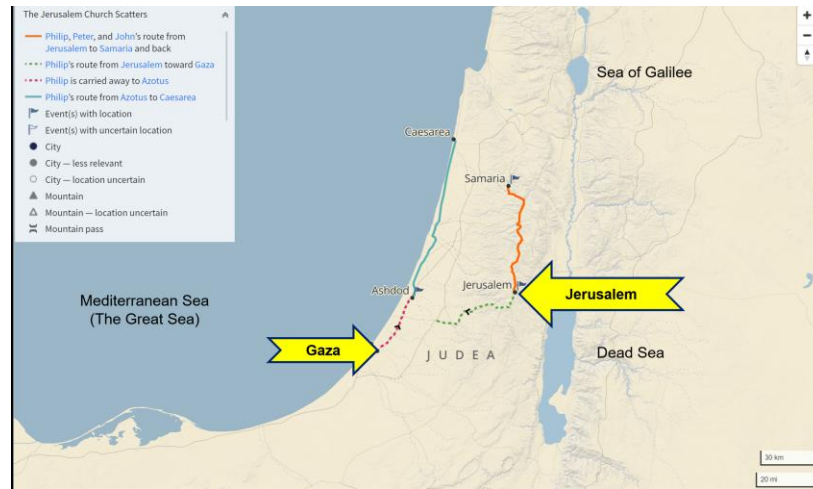
⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 347: “Acts 8 is full of contrasts showing the expansion of the mission: there is work in the north (Samaria) and the south (Gaza on the coast); a magician and a government figure are exposed to the message, as are Samaritans and God-fearers from Africa. God is mightily at work with a wide array of people.”

⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 340: “The angel of the Lord is prominent in Acts (5:19; 10:3, 7, 22; 12:7–15, 23; 27:23; angel in 7:30, 35, 38, 53; also in Luke: 1:11, 13, 26, 28; 2:9–10, 13).”

⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 223n129: “The term μεσημβρίαν in v. 26 is generally translated ‘south.’ Its basic meaning is noon, and it acquired the additional idea of south since the sun lies directly south at noon. If it is translated ‘noon’ here, the unlikelihood of the angel's call is further enhanced, sending Philip into the desert in the hottest part of the day. There is some question about whether the term ‘desert’ should be connected with the road (as in the NIV), which really only becomes strictly a desert road after leaving Gaza for Egypt, or with Gaza itself. The road was not heavily traveled, and this seems to have been Luke's meaning.”

⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 424: “The city of Gaza (Γάζα; Tell Azza), the old city of the Philistines in the southern coastal plain, was destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 BC and sacked by Alexander Jannaeus in 98 BC. It became famous as a center of trade with Arabia, which extended as far east as India. After the death of Herod I, who had controlled Gaza, the city was a semiautonomous polis under the control of the Roman governor in Syria. By the middle of the first century, Gaza is described as an important city with numerous pagan temples. When the new Gaza was built, the site of the old city remained ‘desolate’ (ἔρημος; Strabo, 16.2.30); thus understood, Luke's comment may mean ‘I refer to the old deserted Gaza.’”

¹⁰ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: “Philip's ministry began as a lay-deacon humbly doling out the widow's portions in the Jerusalem church. But it soared to unimagined heights when persecution hit. Though he was not a ‘pro,’ God's power coursed through him to the despised Samaritans, and large numbers of them believed the good news and were saved.”



Philip's Travels¹¹

But God's got more mission work for Philip to do.¹² So he tells him to blaze this new trail on this "road to Gaza" which was some distance from Samaria (see map above). Samaria was about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. Gaza is about 50 miles south and west of Jerusalem.¹³ So Philip's going to take the gospel elsewhere.

And even Peter and John get in on the act, as we saw last week. Look at **Acts 8:25** with me.

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Verse 25 says that as they travelled back to Jerusalem, they were preaching the gospel in all the Samaritan villages. Philip was probably with Peter and John when they returned to Jerusalem.

Philip is a trendsetter. He's a trailblazer. And now these revered apostles are following Philip's lead by evangelizing a non-Jewish community. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth" (**Acts 1:8**). Jesus wants to use these men to preach the gospel outside the Jewish community.

God could save people without witnesses. God could save people without any help whatsoever.¹⁴ But in his divine plan, he uses witnesses. He uses human messengers. That's happening here as the gospel is spreading to the non-Jewish Samaritans. They are the first non-Jews in the book of **Acts** to get saved.

You might even call these Samaritans "Jew adjacent," because they were half-breeds who had a historical connection to the ancient Israelites.

And speaking of Jew adjacent, watch this in **verse 27**.¹⁵ The angel tells Philip to go to Gaza.

²⁷ And [Philip] rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian,¹⁶ a eunuch,¹⁷ a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,¹⁸ who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship¹⁹ ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁰

¹¹ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), May 3, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

¹² Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 200: "Although he already had a successful ministry in Samaria, that did not mean he had to stay there. He was willing to go on to a new ministry if God so led, and God was indeed so leading him at this point."

¹³ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 283: "There is no unanimity about where the evangelist was when the angel of the Lord asked him to go south to a desert road (southwest of Jerusalem, v. 26). Was he still in Samaria, which is north of Jerusalem and therefore far away from that road? Was he in Jerusalem? Or had he by now settled in Caesarea, where he went after this episode and where we find him many years later (21:8)? We cannot be sure.¹ In this vividly written piece Luke is not interested in specifics of geography. Rather, he wants to show how God directly led Philip to do something significant."

¹⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: "From ground level we see the role of human obedience. Would the eunuch have been saved even if Philip had disobeyed? The question is irrelevant. God chooses to use human obedience to carry out his plan."

¹⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 338: "More likely the Ethiopian is a Diaspora Jew or a Gentile who is already tied to Judaism, as his coming to Jerusalem and reading Isaiah suggest... we cannot be sure of his exact status, but it is quite likely that he has been significantly touched by Judaism, since he is reading Isaiah and coming from Jerusalem. As such, he would not be seen as a pure Gentile."

Write this down as a second component to this conversion story. We have divine initiative with an angel, but we also have...

2) A **Faithful** Messenger (8:27–29)

God could save this Ethiopian eunuch with or without a human messenger. But in God's divine plan, and in his mercy, he employs "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20). **He still does, by the way, in the twenty-first century.** In this case, it was Philip the evangelist who was a faithful messenger to this Ethiopian eunuch.

Now let me just point out a few things here. Ethiopia is the ancient land of Cush (see map below).²¹ The OT has multiple references to Cush and the Cushites.²² This was a land of dark-skinned people. Cush is south of Egypt in what is today the nation of Sudan (not modern Ethiopia).²³

¹⁶ BEDE: "In him especially was fulfilled that saying of the psalmist, 'Ethiopia will stretch out its hands to God' (Ps 68:31)." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 97.

¹⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 424n1975: "The Greek term [εὐνοῦχος] is derived from the phrase ὁ τὴν εὐνήν ἔχων ('the one who supervises the bed'). The LXX uses the term εὐνοῦχος (Gen 39:1; 40:2, 7; 1 Sam 8:15) or σπάδων (from σπάω 'to tear out'; cf. Gen 37:36; Isa 39:7)."

¹⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 425: "A queen Nawidemak ruled Nubia in the first half of the first century AD, attested as *gore*; she could be the Candace of Luke's account."

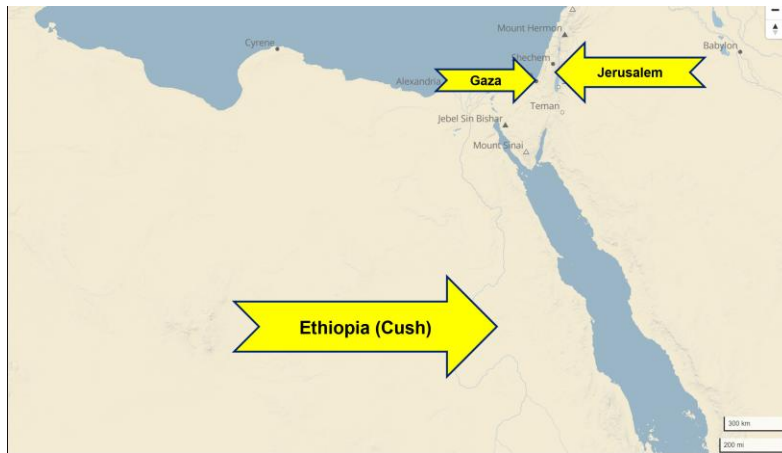
¹⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 425: "He had been visiting Jerusalem in order to worship (προσκυνήσων, future participle expressing purpose). This piece of information makes sense if he was a diaspora Jew or a proselyte, although a visit to the temple in Jerusalem would also be appealing for a sympathizer of the Jews and even for a Gentile... This implies that the Ethiopian was either a diaspora Jew (who might have been castrated at some point, perhaps as a slave), a proselyte (who is described as 'eunuch' on account of his position at the royal court), or a Gentile firmly tied to Judaism—he visits Jerusalem in order to worship Yahweh and he reads Isaiah."

²⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 224: "In all the Old Testament, Isaiah holds forth the greatest hope for the eunuch in his picture of God's ideal future, a future that promises them a monument in God's house, a name better than sons and daughters, an "everlasting name which will not be cut off" (Isa 56:3–8)."

²¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 424: "Ethiopia (Αἰθιοπία) was regarded as the region at the southern end of the world where the sun god arises and where the skin of the inhabitants is dark and burnt (Homer, *Il.* 1.423; 23.206; *Od.* 5.282). The region was called Cush, classical authors use the term Ethiopia for the cultures of Cush, Meroë, and Aksum (the modern states of Sudan and Ethiopia). The Ethiopian language is a Semitic language and thus related to Hebrew and Aramaic. Ethiopia/Nubia became an independent kingdom in 1650 BC but came again under Egyptian rule a hundred years later. Self-government and foreign rule changed several times during the following centuries until Nubia stopped dealing with Egyptian concerns after the seventh century. Ethiopians fought in the army of Xerxes when he invaded Greece (Herodotus 7.70), and Greek explorers visited Ethiopia since the sixth century. In the fourth century Meroë became the capital. The queens of Nubia used the title 'Candace,' often misunderstood by ancient authors as a personal name. The Meroitic period witnessed the cultural zenith of Ethiopia. The caravan trade allowed close contacts with Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. In the first century AD there were regular contacts between Ethiopia and Rome. In 23 BC the Romans sent a military expedition to Ethiopia (Strabo, 17.1.53–54). Nero sent an expedition to Africa with the task of exploring Nubia (Pliny, *Nat.* 6.35.184). Philo asserts that the Jews of Egypt lived as far as 'the boundaries of Ethiopia' (*Flaccus* 43). There is evidence that higher officials of Meroë had been promoted from humble social origins, and in some cases they were of foreign origin."

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 424n1970: "In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (כְּשִׁי, cf. Gen 2:13; 10:6; 1 Chr 1:8; Isa 11:11; Ezek 38:5."

²³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 339, 341: "The region known as Ethiopia in ancient times is probably not the same as today but was located south of Egypt in ancient Cush, in the central part of modern Sudan, at a location known as Meroë (also known as Nubia; Yamauchi 2006). It was one thousand miles north to the Mediterranean... Ethiopia is to the south of Egypt (Ezek. 29:10) and is known as Cush in the earlier books of the OT (Gen. 2:13). It is in what today is known as the Sudan, and it was in the Nubian kingdom, whose capital was Meroë. As an Ethiopian, the eunuch probably is black (Witherington 1998: 295), and so the gospel is expanding to a new ethnic group."



Distance from Jerusalem to Gaza and to Ethiopia²⁴

And the ancients thought of Cush/Ethiopia as the ends of the earth.²⁵ They couldn't envision a civilization beyond that region of the world. The distance between Jerusalem and ancient Cush was approximately 1,000 miles. So this was a long trip from Jerusalem to Ethiopia! **Think about the distance from San Antonio to Chicago, Illinois. That's pretty close in terms of a parallel. Now imagine traveling that distance by chariot!** It would've taken a person about five months to travel this distance, one way. And this guy is on his way back!

Now Luke tells us a few other things about this Ethiopian. First of all he was a eunuch. Eunuch is a term that could be used for someone who was celibate (someone unmarried who stayed unmarried) or for someone who had been physically castrated.²⁶ Jesus talks about this in **Matthew 19:10–12**. Probably this person was castrated because castration of government officials was common in ancient kingdoms. We see that with Babylon and Persia in the OT. Eunuchs, because they had been physically altered, were less aggressive and less likely to revolt against existing leaders. They were often put in charge of a king's harem in the ancient world. I'm sure you can imagine why.

Because of this, eunuchs were often trustworthy for official roles within a kingdom.²⁷ This eunuch was the treasurer for the queen of the Ethiopians. Ancient Ethiopia was a matriarchal society, and the queens were called "Candaces," not unlike how the kings of Egypt were called "Pharaohs" or the kings of Rome were called "Caesars."²⁸ And this unnamed eunuch was the secretary of finance of the entire kingdom.²⁹ **He was the "Federal Reserve Chairman" for Ethiopia, you might say. He was a powerful person! And he was**

²⁴ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), May 3, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

²⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 223n132: "The earliest reference is found in Homer (*Odyssey* 1.23), who referred to Ethiopia as 'the ends of the earth.' The Romans undertook a military expedition there in 23 B.C. and visited it again in A.D. 61–62 in a quest for the source of the Nile. The Nubian Empire is the subject of discussion in many classical writers, such as Herodotus, Pliny, Strabo, and Seneca."

²⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 223–4: "In the ancient world slaves were often castrated as boys in order to be used as keepers of the harem and the treasury. Eunuchs were found to be particularly trustworthy and loyal to their rulers. So widespread was the practice of placing them over the treasury that in time the term 'eunuch' became a synonym for "treasurer" and did not necessarily imply that the one bearing the title was castrated."

²⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 223: "The ancient kingdom of Meroe was a flourishing culture from the eighth century B.C. until the fourth century A.D. Referred to in the Old Testament as the Kingdom of Cush, its population consisted of blacks... Their kings were viewed as incarnations of the sun god and held a primarily ceremonial role. The real administration of the kingdom was in the hands of powerful queen mothers who had the title of 'the Candace.'"

²⁸ Sproul, *Acts*, 149: "In ancient Ethiopia, kings did not take care of the royal business of the nation. Ethiopians believed that the kings were descendants of the gods, and being divinely human creatures they were too holy to be charged with taking care of the business of the empire. The king reigned, but he did not rule. Therefore, the business of the empire was put into the hands of the queen mother, and every queen mother for many generations was given the title or the name Candace."

²⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: "He was a noble man on a noble search."

traveling on the equivalent of a private jet in the first century world, namely the chariot. Luke is telling us that this guy was a person of means.³⁰

And let me say this about this guy. He was a seeker. Somehow he had found out about the God of the Israelites and he had journeyed to Jerusalem, no small feat by the way, to worship Yahweh and conceivably to find God. And part of his search entailed the purchase of a scroll of the prophet **Isaiah**, which he was reading when Philip shows up.³¹ He was seeking something.

Now there's a lot of debate about whether or not this guy is Jewish. I think that's a strong possibility. He may have been part of the Jewish diaspora that had found its way down to Ethiopia. We know that Jewish people groups had migrated to parts of Africa and Arabia, and some of these Jews were known to have darker skin than their Middle Eastern or European counterparts. Even throughout history that has been true.

He may have been Jewish.³² He may have been a proselyte (i.e., a Gentile convert to Judaism). Or he may have been a God-fearing Gentile who was intrigued by the God of the Israelites, similar to what we'll see with Cornelius in **Acts 10**. I'm more inclined to see him as a Jew or a proselyte.³³ Why else would he travel 1,000 miles for five months one-way to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem? That's why I use the term "Jew adjacent." He's more like the Samaritans than he is like the Gentiles. And besides that, the Gentiles don't really get unlocked for the gospel until Cornelius in **Acts 10**.³⁴

But this man was seeking God. And wouldn't you know it; God was seeking him.³⁵ Look at **verse 29**.²⁹ *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."*³⁶

Who prompted Philip in **verse 26** to go down to Gaza to meet with this Ethiopian? The angel of the Lord! Who prompted Philip to go to the chariot in **verse 29**? The Holy Spirit!³⁷ Nobody gets saved without the Lord's intervention, because salvation is from the Lord. But the Lord uses faithful ambassadors like Philip to deliver the gospel.

When you start thinking about your conversion and how you came to Christ, please don't make it about how clever you were and how much smarter you were than all the others around you who rejected Christ. Give God the glory for what happened. God is the *seeker* who found you. God, the Holy Spirit, is the one that prepared your heart to receive the gospel.

³⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 342: "He is wealthy enough to have his own copy of Isaiah. This would likely be a scroll (about 8 inches x 12 inches and anywhere from 16.5 to 145 feet long), written in square Assyrian Hebrew script or in Greek."

³¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 426: "The book of Isaiah was often copied and read by Jews, as the twenty-one Isaiah manuscripts and the six Isaiah commentaries (pesharim) discovered at Qumran indicate."

³² Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 100–1: "Some [ancient] commentators presume that the eunuch was Jewish, arguing that Luke would not relate the first account of the conversion of a pagan to such a small incident."

³³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 226 disagrees and reads this passage differently: "In this case a double barrier of both physical and racial prejudice had fallen. A eunuch, a Gentile, a black, was baptized and received into full membership in the people of Jesus Christ."

³⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 425: "Luke presumably uses the episode to demonstrate that the promise of Isa 56:3–8, which removes the ban of Deut 23:1, finds fulfillment in the mission of the early church."

³⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 422–3: "Some have suggested that the episode has been shaped in such a fashion that the conversion of the Ethiopian can be seen as a fulfillment of by Zeph 2:4, 11–12; 3:4, 10, where we find references to Gaza, desert, worship by all the nations, Ethiopians, prophets borne by the wind, and God's scattered people from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia bringing sacrifices. There are also references to the worship of Ethiopians in Ps 68:31 (LXX 67:32), and in Isa 11:11; 18:1–7; 45:14, and p 423 there are references to foreigners from distant lands praying in Solomon's temple in 1 Kgs 8:41–43 and promises to foreigners and eunuchs in Isa 56:3–8. It has been suggested that the focus of the episode is not on the fact that the official was an Ethiopian but that he was a eunuch, in whom the promise of Isa 56:3–8 has been fulfilled. While there are no obvious allusions to any of these passages, 'we do have the phenomenon of echoes, intended or otherwise, that might be picked up by the alert reader; what is promised in the OT now finds fulfillment.' A different explanation of the significance of the episode suggests that the conversion of the Ethiopian official represents the movement of the gospel to the second of the three geographical regions in the Jewish "table of nations" (Gen 10), i.e., the mission to Ham."

³⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 284: "Considering the high standing of this official, it would have required some boldness for Philip to obey the Spirit's command to go to the chariot."

³⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: "Being in touch with the Holy Spirit, Philip was open to the Spirit's direction. This sensitivity to divine guidance was a major factor in his becoming the touch of God to others. We must all beware of rigid suppositions as to how the Holy Spirit works or leads. We cannot assume that since God directed men in a certain way in the past, that is the way he will do it for anyone who is truly Spirit-led today."

I believe that what is explicit in this passage is implicit in every salvation story. That is, I believe, that God moves behind the scenes by the Holy Spirit to lead a person to salvation.³⁸ Salvation is not random happenstance.

We don't always know how God does it. We might not be able to pinpoint the exact way in which God drew us to himself, but we can trust that Jesus's words are true when he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (**John 6:44**). What does that look like? An impression here. A faithful messenger there. A Holy Spirit prompting.³⁹ Maybe it's a divine smack in the face like what we'll see with Saul of Tarsus in **Acts 9**. Divine intervention and a faithful messenger. This is how God brings about conversion in the life of a believer.

I heard a story once about this pastor who led a person to Christ. And the pastor got all excited about it. He was like, "Hallelujah, this guy finally got saved!" And the prisoner responded by saying, "Now don't get too excited, pastor, because you are number 25." And the pastor replied, "Number 25? What does that mean?" The prisoner said, "You're the 25th person who has shared the gospel with me, and even though I rejected all the other 24, all those other 24 had a part in my conversion! So don't get cocky, pastor!"⁴⁰ Sometimes the Holy Spirit might prompt you to share the gospel, and you just sow the seed that another person will reap. That's okay. **Be okay with that! Be obedient. You be a faithful messenger, and let God do the rest.**

Write this down as a third component of a great conversion story.

3) An **Encounter** with Scripture (8:30–33)⁴¹

Now just imagine what Philip must have been thinking when the angel told him to go to Gaza. He had just preached the gospel in Samaria and the whole city got converted. We're talking mass revival due to Philip's preaching. And then God's like, "**Philip, leave that revival and go down to the desert.**"

"The desert, Lord, really?"

And then God's like, "**I want you to go up to that *one* chariot with that *one* person who is from the far corner of the world. And by the way he's a eunuch.**"

"Really, Lord? Is this the best use of my time and energy?⁴² Aren't there more important people, more numerous people elsewhere who might need to hear the gospel? I mean, I'm an evangelist extraordinaire, Lord!"⁴³

That's what I might have said if I was Philip. But that's not what Philip says. And here's the thing—God loves this Ethiopian eunuch. And God utilizes his best, most-effective evangelist, Philip, to get the gospel to him. No human strategy would have thought to put this together. No human thinking would have organized this. **"Let's leave this revival in Samaria and go down to the desert to witness to this one, random individual**

³⁸ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 252: "It is ludicrous to assume that anyone, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her lifeless soul, could ever come to saving faith in Christ."

³⁹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 287: "Much of Christian witness inspired by Spirit-led boldness begins with a decision to be obedient to the call to witness. If we take that first step of obedience, the Spirit will guide us and equip us with boldness. We often miss out on opportunities to witness simply because we do not take the first step to turn a conversation into a witnessing situation."

⁴⁰ Taken from Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 288–9.

⁴¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 432: "The good news of Jesus Christ cannot be truly proclaimed if Scripture has not been truly understood, since the gospel does not consist of philosophical or religious truths and ethical maxims but of the historical reality of God's intervention in the history of humankind in Jesus, the Messiah and Savior."

⁴² Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: "Put yourself in Philip's place. You are not one of the Twelve or the Big Three, but you really have something going in the Samaritan crusade. Simon the magician has been defeated. The entire town thinks your message is God's truth and knows you are from God. It is a happy time — a marvelous revival, and suddenly the Lord tells you to take a hike to, of all places, the desert!"

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 431: "As important and as helpful as strategies, methods, and planning are in the task of missionary proclamation and evangelistic outreach, Christians need to take care not to miss the promptings of God's Spirit to initiate spontaneous conversations in unforeseen circumstances that some might deem even inappropriate... Evangelism before larger groups of people involves preaching; evangelism of individuals is never preaching in the formal sense of the word but involves a conversation with questions and comments by the person who is willing to hear the gospel."

from the far corner of the world.” And it just goes to show that God’s ways are higher than ours. And what he wants from us is faithfulness and obedience.

Look at **verse 30**. The Spirit tells Philip to go over to the chariot,

³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet⁴⁴

This is great! Let’s just envision this for a moment. **The average human runs about 8–10mph unless you’re a sprinter. If your life depended on it you could probably run faster.** And so this horse-drawn chariot was probably traveling, at least, 10mph. And so here’s Philip running alongside the chariot. Philip the evangelist becomes Philip the hitchhiker. And the Holy Spirit didn’t even tell him what to say. He just told him to go up there and join the chariot.

And so as he’s running along next to the chariot, he hears the eunuch reading the prophet Isaiah. Is that a random coincidence? How many people think God orchestrated this?⁴⁵

And so as he’s running, probably breathing heavily, he asks,

“Do you understand what you are reading?”⁴⁶

Who knows what this Ethiopian was thinking right here. **“Where’d this guy come from? I’m out here in the middle of the desert and this guy just show’s up!”**

Look at **verse 31**.

³¹ And [the Ethiopian] said, “How can⁴⁷ I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.⁴⁸

I’m sure Philip was relieved to hear that! **“Yes, please. I’d be happy to stop running next to your chariot and take a seat with you!”**

Like I said already, I don’t know why the Ethiopian travelled to Jerusalem. But I bet it was because he was looking for something. And I don’t know why this Ethiopian was reading this Isaiah scroll. Scrolls were expensive. So this guy wasn’t just a man of means, he was a man who used his means to buy a very expensive scroll of Scripture to explore the Jewish faith. He must have had a hungry heart that hadn’t yet been satisfied.

It’s interesting, because at the temple there were restrictions against eunuchs entering the temple complex. He could have worshipped outside the temple. But because he was a eunuch, he couldn’t go inside the temple. Maybe that’s why he never went to Solomon’s Portico to hear the apostles preach. Maybe John and Peter were in Samaria when he was in Jerusalem, so he couldn’t hear them anyway. I don’t know. But this guy wants to know what the Scriptures are teaching, and he doesn’t have anyone to guide him.⁴⁹

And by the way, we’ve already seen the religious leaders in Jerusalem in the book of **Acts**. If he went to them near the temple looking for answers, they were no help. They killed Jesus, and they were actively

⁴⁴ Sproul, *Acts*, 149: “We see from the passage that he was reading aloud. That may seem unusual to us, but it is normally the way people learn to read. It takes a certain sophistication to be able to read silently. Reading aloud was normal in those days because the manuscripts they had were very difficult to follow. Space was conserved by jamming words together.”

⁴⁵ Sproul, *Acts*, 151: “Why didn’t Philip just turn to Matthew or Mark or Luke or John or Acts or to one of the Epistles? He could not, because those books hadn’t been written yet. Nevertheless, when the gospel went to Ethiopia through the evangelist Philip, it went through the preaching of the Word of God, because we are told that faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of God, and Philip preached Christ, not from the New Testament but from the Old Testament. I am sure he covered not just the few verses from Isaiah 53 mentioned here, but the whole chapter of Isaiah 53, and then brought him up to date with the work of Christ in His atonement, His resurrection, and His ascension.”

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 224: “Philip’s question to the eunuch contains a play on words that is not reproducible in English: ‘Do you understand [*ginōskeis*] what you are reading [*anaginōskeis*]?’”

⁴⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 426n1998: “The optative translated as ‘can’ (δυναίμην) is a potential optative ‘denoting what is merely thought’ (BDF §385.1, noting that this construction, rare in Koine Greek, reflects literary language); NET translates the optative with the expression ‘how in the world can I.’”

⁴⁸ ATHANASIUS: “He was not ashamed to confess his ignorance and implored to be taught. Therefore, to him who became a learner, the grace of the Spirit was given.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 98.

⁴⁹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 290: “There is a humanly unexplainable power in the Word when it is appropriately presented to hungry people (Isa. 55:10–12). Our presentation of the gospel must always be based on Scripture. We may decide not to quote Scripture verbatim with people who do not accept its authority, but the ideas we present must spring from Scripture.”

persecuting Jesus's followers. I bet this eunuch went to Jerusalem looking for God. And knowing the state of Israel at this time, he probably was returning to Ethiopia disappointed.⁵⁰

But God is about to reward this Ethiopian's hunger for truth. Look at **verse 32**.

³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth."⁵¹ ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."⁵²

The passage that he is reading is **Isaiah 53**. Part of **Isaiah 53**, that the Ethiopian would have read just before this passage is **verses 4–5**, which reads as follows: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

Isaiah 53 is one of the most unambiguous messianic prophecies in the OT. It speaks with incredible specificity of the death of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion, with all its bloody gruesomeness is described in astonishing detail by Isaiah 700 years before Christ was born. And Isaiah's prophecy was written years before the Romans were a force to be reckoned with in the ancient world and years before crucifixion was even invented as an instrument of torture and death. Was this a coincidence that this Ethiopian was reading **Isaiah 53**, the exact hour that Philip came racing alongside his chariot? I don't think so!

Write this down as a fourth component to this conversion story.

4) The **gospel** explained (8:34–35)

Look at **verse 34**.

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

That's an amazing question right there. And it's the kind of question that a person would actually ask who didn't understand what the Bible was teaching. What he's asking is essentially this—is Isaiah talking about Isaiah? Or is Isaiah talking about someone else? What's this passage about? Who's **Isaiah 53** talking about?

From our standpoint, **Isaiah 53** is crystal clear. It's about Jesus. But the Ethiopian didn't know about Christ yet. Even the Jewish leaders didn't understand **Isaiah 53** in their day. They thought the "suffering servant" was Israel or Isaiah himself, not the Messiah.⁵³ They totally missed Christ's fulfillment of this passage.

So Philip does what a good evangelist should do. Look at **verse 35**.

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth,⁵⁴ and beginning⁵⁵ with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

He εὐαγγελίζω. Philip εὐαγγελίζω'd this Ethiopian. He "gospelized" him! Just like he did in Samaria a little bit before this, Philip told him the good news about Jesus.

⁵⁰ Jerome says, "He found the church's font there in the desert, rather than in the golden temple of the synagogue." Quoted by Bede in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 97.

⁵¹ BEDE: "Just as a sheep 'does not resist when it is led away to be a sacrificial offering, so too he suffered by his *own* will' [Jerome *Commentary on Isaiah* 14.53.8–10 (CCL 73A:592)]. Or, according to a more profound understanding, just as a lamb was customarily immolated at the Passover, so too 'Christ our Passover lamb has been immolated' (1 Cor 5:7)." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 99.

⁵² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 427: "Luke does not quote the statement in Isa 53:12, which speaks of the Servant's vindication, nor Isa 53:5–6 or the last line of 53:8, which describe the purpose of the Servant's suffering and death who was 'pierced for our transgressions,' 'crushed for our iniquities,' 'cut off from the land of the living,' and punished 'for the transgression of my people' with the result that 'the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.' The fact that the effects of the Servant's suffering are not mentioned explicitly agrees with Luke's tendency in Acts—he does not focus on the significance of Jesus' death in terms of a vicarious sacrifice which creates the possibility of forgiveness and salvation for sinners who repent (but see 20:28). Rather, he uses Scripture here to emphasize that Jesus is God's agent and that his suffering and death do not negate the fact that he was the promised Messiah since they were an essential part of his divinely ordained mission as expressed in Scripture."

⁵³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 225: "Contemporary Jews debated about whether the prophet was speaking of his own suffering or of that of the nation as a whole or of the Messiah."

⁵⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 344: "The expression 'open the mouth' is in Acts 10:34 and 18:14 and often means lecturing on Scripture in Judaism."

⁵⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 203: "The word 'beginning' indicates that Philip also used other Scriptures besides Isaiah 53 to proclaim the gospel to the Ethiopian."

That statement “beginning with this Scripture” indicates that Philip had a long fruitful, Scripture-filled conversation with this guy. Probably he started by telling him that **Isaiah 53** was about Jesus. **“Jesus, like a lamb, was led to slaughter. He didn’t try to defend himself; he willingly gave himself up for us. He was humiliated and ridiculed by his own people. And justice was denied him. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; by his wounds we are healed.”**⁵⁶ And then he went on from there to tell him about other Scriptures.

Maybe Philip did something like Jesus did on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13–35**). Maybe he started with **Isaiah 53** as a launching point, but then made numerous references to how Christ fulfilled Scripture. Maybe Philip evangelized with **Isaiah 53** and other OT Scriptures like Peter did earlier in **Acts**.⁵⁷

Maybe Philip did something like Stephen did when he preached the gospel in **Acts 7**. Maybe he started with Abraham and told him the whole history of Israel as God’s plan of redemption climaxed with Jesus, the fulfillment of OT prophecy. **I don’t know what all Philip said to this Ethiopian eunuch, but I would love to have been there.**

Maybe Philip told the Ethiopian some of the gruesome details of the crucifixion followed by the resurrection. Maybe Philip told him about Christ’s mission. “Go into all the world and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (**Matt 28:18**). Maybe he told him about the thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who had been baptized after coming to faith in Christ. Maybe he told him about the numerous Samaritans in Samaria who had responded to the gospel and had been baptized.

Something like that must have been communicated to this Ethiopian.⁵⁸ Because in **verse 36**, it’s almost as if the Ethiopian said, **“Did Jesus die for me too?” “Can an Ethiopian eunuch be saved? Can an Ethiopian like me be baptized in the name of Jesus?”** Of course you can!

Look at **verse 36**.

³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water!⁵⁹ What prevents me from being baptized?”⁶⁰

Good question! “What prevents me from being baptized?” **Newborn believers should take to the water like newborn baby ducklings! Salvation, then water baptism! Salvation, then water baptism! It’s that simple in the book of Acts. I heard a pastor say once that getting wet in baptism is the quickest and easiest step in your sanctification process.**

If you have an ESV Bible, you’ll notice that **verse 37** isn’t included in the Scriptures. That’s because **verse 37** isn’t found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the book of **Acts**.⁶¹ It was most likely added by an

⁵⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 344: “This tragic, unjust death, which looked as if it had resulted in all being lost, in fact resulted in everything being gained.”

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 225: “What we would like to know is what other texts Philip shared with him. Perhaps we have them already, in the many scriptural proofs in Peter’s speeches earlier in Acts.”

⁵⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 428: “The earlier speeches in Acts suggest that Philip would have spoken about the need for repentance, God’s offer of forgiveness of sins and salvation through faith in Jesus, the crucified, risen, and exalted Messiah and Savior, expressed as personal commitment through immersion in water (cf. 2:22–36, 38–40).”

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 345: “The following possible locales are discussed among scholars: (1) Wadi el-Hasi, located north of Gaza and a traditional locale for the event; (2) ‘Ain ed-Dirweh near Beth Zur, north of Hebron; (3) ‘Ain Yael, five miles south of Jerusalem; and (4) ‘Ain Hanniya, one mile west of ‘Ain Yael (Larkin 1995: 135, note on 8:36; Polhill 1992: 226). No clear candidate exists because the text provides no detail to help pinpoint the locale.”

⁶⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 341: “Gaza was the last water stop in southwestern Israel before entering the desert on the way to Egypt and was 2,400 feet lower than Jerusalem.”

⁶¹ Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 114: “All the [reformation] commentators excerpted here agreed that it is authentic.” As an example THEODORE BEZA: “I discovered that this whole verse is missing in five codices, and even in the Complutensian edition, as well as in the Syriac and Arabic translation. Although this verse is missing, I think it has been expunged. For it contains a clear summary of the formula of confession which was required from baptized adults, truly used in apostolic times, and it openly declares what it is to be baptized in the name of Christ.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 117. This is not surprising in light of the developments of archaeology and textual criticism since the Reformation.

over-eager scribe in the second century who wanted to make the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch more explicit.⁶² For more on that, stay tuned for our “footnotes” podcast later this week.⁶³

But there’s no reason to doubt the fact that this eunuch got saved. **Verse 36** indicates all we need to know. What he’s saying there implicitly is, **“I believe in Christ. Why shouldn’t I get baptized?”⁶⁴ Those guys in Jerusalem got baptized. Why not me? Jesus told you to baptize new disciples, didn’t he? I’m a new disciple. Here’s some water. Let’s go!”**

Look at **verse 38**.

³⁸And he [probably Philip, I’m guessing] commanded the chariot⁶⁵ to stop, and they both went down into the water,⁶⁶ Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized⁶⁷ him.

Listen, tell me if you’ve heard this before. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (**Gal 3:27–28**).

In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, eunuch nor non-eunuch, Ethiopian, non-Ethiopian, American, non-American, etc. In Christ, none of that stuff matters, because the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all one in Christ Jesus. Jesus died to make disciples of all nations.

Here’s the fifth component of a great conversion story.

5) **Public** Profession through baptism (8:36–38)⁶⁸

Baptism is your coming-out party. Baptism is your statement to the world that I belong to Christ. Listen! This is important. Water baptism doesn’t save you, but water baptism is what saved people do. And in the book of **Acts**, when people get saved, they almost immediately get baptized. **And if you are here this morning and you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you haven’t been baptized... you need to make that right.**

I heard a Presbyterian pastor criticize a Baptist once for making every sermon about baptism. Even if he was preaching on a totally unrelated passage of Scripture, he would always steer the sermon at the end to why a person should get baptized. I’ve tried not to do that in my preaching ministry. But this is

⁶² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 348: “Acts 8:37 appears only in MSS of the Western family. It is not in $\mathfrak{B}^{45, 74}$, κ , A, B, C, 33, 81, 614, or many Vulgate texts. It is in E, several minuscules, a few versions of the Itala, and some Vulgate texts (Metzger 1971: 359–60). It appears to have been added because there is no mention of a confession of faith by the eunuch. The text reads, ‘And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ ’ The call to believe with all one’s heart in a confession is unusual. The verse was not in the original version of Acts and so is omitted in the translation... It is probably a second-century addition that reflects practice at that time.”

⁶³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 226: “The added verse, however, has considerable value. It seems to embody a very early Christian baptismal confession where the one baptizing asked the candidate if he believed in Christ with all his heart, to which the candidate would respond by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This old confession is of real significance to the history of early Christian confessions and would be appropriate to the baptismal ceremony today. To that extent we can be grateful to the pious scribe who ascribed to the eunuch the baptismal confession of his own day.”

⁶⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 345: “How the eunuch knows about baptism is not made clear. Has Philip explained it to him, or has he heard about it in Jerusalem? His willingness to receive baptism means that he is responsive to the gospel.”

⁶⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 425: “The comment in v. 38 implies that the Ethiopian was using a carriage which needed at least a driver, if not also a man at the bridle. As a court official he would not have traveled alone, which means that he used one of the larger carriages and was accompanied by one or presumably two people.”

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 345: “Philip baptizes the eunuch after they enter the water. The verse suggests some type of immersion, since the baptism follows going into the water, although pouring is also possible... In the early church immersion seems to have been the preferred but not the exclusive mode for baptism, as baptisteries show that effusion was also used.”

⁶⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 226: “Since the verb employed is *baptizō*, which always carried the idea of total submersion, there is no reason to assume that the eunuch was baptized in any other way than the consistent New Testament pattern of immersion.” Sproul, *Acts*, 152 demurs: “There is not one word in this text about the mode of baptism. They may have walked down to water, where Philip took a handful of it and poured it over the eunuch’s head. We have baptism depicted that way in paintings of the early church. That was one way of baptism; others reference immersion. We do not know whether the eunuch was sprinkled, sprayed, or dunked. All we know is that he was baptized in and with water.”

⁶⁸ BALTHASAR HUBMAIER: “If we had no other Scriptures than these, they would be enough to prove that baptism should be given to believers and not to young children—until they also have been instructed in the Word of God and faith, confessing and expressing the same with their mouths.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 117.

a passage right here that is just screaming out for the application, “Get baptized! If you haven’t been baptized already, now’s your time to do it.”

But if you’re like, “Pastor Tony, I don’t even know if I am saved.” Well then, what are you waiting for? Put your faith in Christ! You can do that right now. Don’t wait till the end of the service. Don’t wait till I close the message and the worship team comes back up here. Do it now. The Bible says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom 10:9). Don’t let anyone distract you from that. Do that right now. And then, get baptized as a public demonstration of your faith.

Now, one more thing. One final element to this conversion story. Look at **verse 39**.

³⁹And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away

Poof! He’s gone. This is pretty wild. The word used here is ἀρπάζω (*harpazō*), which is the same word Paul uses in **1 Thessalonians 4:17** to describe the rapture. Philip got raptured. He got “caught up.” But he doesn’t get deposited in the presence of the Lord. Instead, he gets deposited in a new location for evangelism and ministry.

Like I’ve said before in this series, there are some unique things that God did in the book of **Acts** that we should not consider normative for us in our own day. The supernatural disappearance of Philip here is a great example of that. Baptism... that’s normative. Supernatural disappearance by the Holy Spirit, not so much.

Sharing the gospel with unbelievers... that’s normative. Teaching the Bible and telling people about Jesus... that’s normative. Angels speaking to humans and telling them exactly where to go... *not* normative. I believe God *can* do that in this era of human history, but I don’t think that’s the norm.

Notice, though, what happens to the eunuch. Here’s something that *should* be normative when people get saved.

and the eunuch saw [Philip] no more,⁶⁹ and went on his way rejoicing.⁷⁰

“Hallelujah, my sins are forgiven! Hallelujah, my hunger has been satisfied! My thirst has been quenched.” How could you not rejoice? How could you not be joyful? He was separated from God due to his sin, yet, as the Bible says, “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (**Rom 5:8**). And “whoever believes in [Jesus] should not perish but have eternal life” (**John 3:16**). Of course he’s rejoicing.⁷¹

Jot this down. Here’s the sixth component of a great conversion story.

6) **Liberating** Joy (8:39–40)

I’ve never heard a conversion story where someone said, “Yeah, I became a Christian 20 years ago and I’ve been miserable ever since.” I don’t hear that a lot. “Yeah, Christ saved me from my sins, but whoop-de-do!” I’m not sure that’s possible if you really understood what Christ has done for you.

And as far as the Bible is concerned, there is no such thing as a cantankerous, miserable, joyless Christian. I’m not saying they don’t exist. Maybe they do. But I don’t see them in the Bible.⁷²

⁶⁹ RUDOLF GWALTHER: “By this example we learn that we must not so cling to our ministers that once they are gone, we must despair in matters of faith and religion. Let us acknowledge them as God’s coworkers and stewards of the mysteries of God by whom he gives us faith. Again, let us understand that the Spirit of Christ truly fulfills the tasks of a teacher and that Christ will not fail us, although sometimes he takes away those to whom we know we are very attached. For God’s Spirit cannot be bound to persons or places but blows wherever he likes.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 118.

⁷⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 346: “Acts notes such rejoicing seven times with the verb χαίρω (*chairō*; 5:41–42; 8:39; 11:23–24; 13:48–49; 15:22–23, 31; 23:23–26; note also Rom. 14:17; Ps. 68:31).”

⁷¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 227–8: “What became of the Ethiopian eunuch? Later church fathers relate that he became a missionary to Ethiopia. Such traditions are often legendary and should not be accepted uncritically. More certain evidence dates the evangelization of the Nubian area as beginning in the fourth century. Archaeology has uncovered a flourishing Christian community there between the fifth and tenth centuries.”

⁷² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 429: “The Ethiopian official continued his journey ‘rejoicing,’ a remark that reflects the reality of his faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and the Savior from sins, implying that he had received the Holy Spirit; the present participle (χαίρων) suggests a permanent reality of his commitment to Jesus.”

“Pastor Tony, I got converted twenty-years ago and I’ve been miserable ever since.” Really? Maybe you should revisit your conversion. Because the fruit of the Spirit is joy. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, etc. (**Gal 5:22–23**).

One of the reasons I’m emphasizing this so much is because the Bible emphasizes it so much. When people get saved in **Acts**, they rejoice. When Paul gives commands to the churches he tells them, “rejoice” (see e.g., **Rom 5:8; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16**). When Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit who indwells the life of a believer, the second term he uses after “love” is “joy” (see **Gal 5:22–23**).

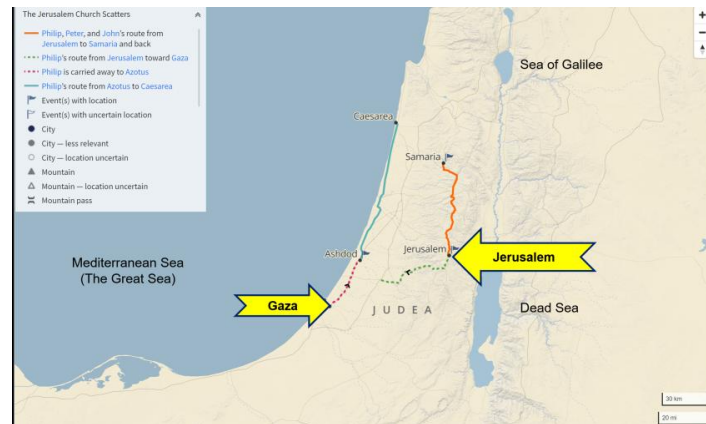
And when I say joy, I don’t mean sappy, mushy, cornball sentimentality. **“Just plaster a smile on your face for Jesus. Everything’s happy, happy, happy. There’s never anything bad.”** That’s not real joy. **Joy is not like taking Prozac.** Joy is a deep abiding sense of contentment, no matter what happens in this life. It’s delight in God, the God of our salvation. **And even when your life is falling apart, joy is possible.**

By the way, Philip’s friend, Stephen, was murdered. Philip was driven out of Jerusalem by Saul and his murderous mob. This guy has been through the wringer. But he just keeps going and going and spreading the joy of the Lord to new converts.

Look at **verse 40**.

⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus,⁷³ and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.⁷⁴

Philip’s not resting on his laurels. He’s not packing it in. He just keeps going, preaching the gospel, leading more and more non-Jews to Christ, even blazing a trail down the “Via Maris” that later evangelists would follow.



Philip's Travels⁷⁵

By the way, Caesarea is where Paul finds Philip twenty years later.⁷⁶ You can read about that in **Acts 21**. Paul, or “Saul of Tarsus,” the guy who wanted to kill Philip and other Christians in **Acts 8**, eventually becomes a co-laborer of Philip’s. Twenty years later in Caesarea, they are friends working together.⁷⁷

You might say, **“How is that possible? What happened to Saul of Tarsus? Wasn’t that the guy who was killing Christians and persecuting the church? Didn’t he collect garments at Stephen’s execution?”**

⁷³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 429: “The Spirit takes Philip to Azotus (Ἀζωτος), the ancient Philistine capital of Ashdod, about twenty-two miles (35 kilometers) north of Gaza.”

⁷⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 228n145: “Caesarea was also a Hellenistic city. Originally known as Strato’s Tower, it was rebuilt by Herod the Great in lavish Hellenistic style and was particularly renowned for its harbor. Renamed for Caesar Augustus, it was the seat of the Roman prefect beginning in a.d. 6. It is appropriate that Philip the Hellenist worked primarily in Hellenistic cities that shared his Greek language and cultural background.”

⁷⁵ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), May 3, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁷⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 228: “He had pioneered the Samaritan mission. He had paved the way for the Gentile mission. Peter would later follow him in this with the conversion of Cornelius—interestingly in Caesarea—just as Peter followed him in Samaria.”

⁷⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 346: “So Philip engaged in ministry up the coast and finally reached a major center as he was preaching (imperfect tense again) to the towns in the area. Philip is still here in Acts 21:8, twenty years later.”

Wasn't he ravaging the church, and dragging men and women off to prison (Acts 8:3)? What happened to him?" Come back next week and I'll tell you.

Let me close with this. What's your conversion story? Can you identify these six things in your own salvation story? 1) Divine Intervention, 2) A Faithful Messenger, 3) An Encounter with Scripture, 4) The Gospel Explained, 5) Public Profession through Baptism, and 6) Liberating Joy.

Let me tell you another conversion story. Let me take you back a few decades to the 1980s for a good conversion story. That was a good decade. Ronald Reagan was president. Nobody had cell phones. You could disappear into the woods for hours and nobody knew where you were. It was fantastic.

During the 1980s, there was a chatty, gangly, awkward kid in south Austin who found himself in a chapel service at his Christian elementary school. It was the Nazarene Christian School, right near the corner of Manchaca and William Cannon. And I can still visualize the setting of that chapel. I still remember the blue upholstery on those long pews.

And it was there that the pastor of the church where my school met gave a chapel message. And I gave my life to Christ. The pastor preached a simple gospel message. And I believed. I knew I was a sinner and needed God's grace. My parents had been working on me for a while. They knew I was a sinner who needed saving. And it was in that chapel, forty years ago that I got saved. And the Holy Spirit has been working on me ever since.

That's where I had my moment like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. And a few months later I was baptized at Bannockburn Baptist Church on William Cannon and Brodie Lane. I had to go up to the pastor and tell him about my faith. And that was so terrifying. But it was good. And I got baptized.

Some of you today need to do like that Ethiopian eunuch did in Acts 8. You need to get saved. Or you need to get baptized. If the shoe fits, you wear it.

And some of you need to do like Philip. You need to share Christ with those who don't know him.⁷⁸ You need to give someone the opportunity to rejoice like this guy rejoices when he finds out his sins are forgiven.⁷⁹ Let's get after these things.

⁷⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 431: "If Christians can talk about the weather, or baseball, or their children, or their dog, they should be able to find words to talk about what they claim is their first love and their most important priority. It is in personal conversations that people can ask questions—both the person who has not yet heard or understood the gospel and the evangelist sharing the gospel—questions which can then be used to explain the meaning of the word of God and the significance of Jesus Christ."

⁷⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 14, Kindle: "Reportedly a man stood up in one of D. L. Moody's meetings and said, 'I have been for five years on the Mount of Transfiguration.' 'How many souls have you won to Christ?' was the sharp question that came from Moody in an instant. 'Well, I do not know.' 'Have you won any?' persisted Moody. 'I do not know that I have,' answered the man. 'Well,' said Moody, 'sit down then. When a man gets so high that he cannot reach down and save others, there is something wrong.'"