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a *Grace Notes* course

ACTS 200

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

an expositional study  
by Warren Doud

Lesson 203: **Acts 8:26-40**

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## ACTS, Lesson 203, Acts 8:26-40

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**Acts 8:26-40****Acts 8:26**

**And the angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.**

Whether you think Philip had come back to Jerusalem with the other apostles depends on what you infer from this verse. The angel directed Philip to a highway going from Jerusalem to Gaza; but that road could have been reached from Samaria, as well, so that Philip could have still been in Sebaste when the angel spoke to him.

Gaza is a Persian word meaning “riches.” The city was called Gaza because Cambyses, king of Persia, stored his treasures and military stores there, at the time he was waging war with the Egyptians. The closest Arabic word is makhzen, containing similar syllables, g-z, so Spaniards, in their dealings with the Moors, coined the Spanish word *magazen*, whence the English word *magazine*, which signifies a store or treasure or cache of military weapons and ammunition. Even the clip in an automatic weapon is called a “magazine.” Printed publications are called “magazines” because they are a store of treasures, or a place where valuable things are found (or should be found).

**Acts 8:27**

**And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,**

Once more we are permitted to see Philip on his labor of love. We obtain a glimpse of him on the road which leads down by Gaza to Egypt. The chamberlain of Queen Candace is passing southwards on his return from Jerusalem, and reading in his chariot the prophecies of Isaiah. Ethiopia is “stretching out her hands to God” (Psalm 68:31), and the cry is not unheard. A teacher is provided at the moment of anxious inquiry. The stranger goes on his way rejoicing, a

proselyte who had found the Messiah, a Christian baptized with water and the Holy Spirit.

Philip, having finished the work for which he had been sent, is called elsewhere by the Spirit of God. He proceeds to Caesarea and we don’t hear of him again, until, after the lapse of twenty years, he received under his roof in that city the Apostle Paul who, like himself, had traveled in obedience to the Divine command “preaching in all the cities.”

**a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority ... had charge of all her treasure**

This word was applied to many types of persons in authority at court to which its literal meaning did not apply. A man set to guard a king’s harem might have been a literal eunuch. This man was a “lord chamberlain” because he had charge of the treasure. (*gazh~*, common in late Greek and Latin in referring to royal treasure).

**Candace, queen of the Ethiopians**

“It is known from credible writers engaged in no controversy that this Candace reigned upon the Nile in Atbara, near Egypt. Her capital was taken in the time of Augustus, a few years before the conversion of the slave by Philip. We shall have occasion often to mention her successors and her kingdom as existing in the reign of the Abyssinian kings, long after the Mohammedan conquest. They existed when I passed through Atbara, and do undoubtedly exist there to this day [late 18th Century. wd]”. James Bruce (1730 to 1794), *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Vol. II, Page 431.

Bruce demonstrates in his documentation that Atbara was formerly called Meroe, probably named this after the daughter of Cambyses, king of Persia. Meroe died in Ethiopia during the expedition which her father undertook against the Ethiopians (and the Egyptians).

The historian Strabo (Geography, about AD 20) mentions a queen in this district named Candace, and his words are very interesting. He says “Among these were the officers of Queen Candace, who in our days reigned over the Ethiopians. She was a masculine woman, and blind in one eye.” Now, this could not have been

the Candace mentioned in Acts, but it establishes the fact that a queen of this name did exist there, and we learn from other people that this was common name for queens of Ethiopia.

The later historian Pliny, writing about the reports of Nero's messengers who had been sent to examine the country of Ethiopia, said "a woman reigned there of the name of Candace, which name had passed to their queens, successively, for many years."

### come to Jerusalem to worship

From Clarke: Which is a proof that he was a worshipper of the God of Israel; but how came he acquainted with the Jewish religion? Let us, for a little, examine this question. In 1 Kings 10:1ff we have the account of the visit paid to Solomon by the queen of Sheba, the person to whom our Lord refers, Matthew 12:42, and Luke 11:31. It has been long credited by the Abyssinians that this queen, who by some is called Balkis, by others Maqueda, was not only instructed by Solomon in the Jewish religion, but also established it in her own empire on her return; that she had a son by Solomon named Menilek, who succeeded her in the kingdom; and, from that time till the present, they have preserved the Jewish religion.

Mr. [James] Bruce throws some light upon this subject: the substance of what he says is the following: "There can be no doubt of the expedition of the queen of Sheba; as Pagan, Moor, Arab, Abyssinian, and all the countries round, vouch for it, nearly in the terms of Scripture. Our Savior calls her "queen of the south"; and she is called, in 1 Kings 10:1, etc., 2 Chronicles 9:1, etc., queen of Sheba or Saba; for Saba, Azab, and Azaba, all signify the south: and she is said to have come from the uttermost parts of the earth. In our Savior's time the boundaries of the known land, southward, were Raptam or Prassum; which were the uttermost parts of the known earth, and were with great propriety so styled by our Lord.

The gold, myrrh, cassia, and frankincense, which she brought with her, are all products of that country. The annals of the Abyssinians state that she was a pagan when she left Saba or Azab, to visit Solomon; and that she was there converted

and had a son by Solomon, who succeeded her in the kingdom, as stated above.

All the inhabitants of this country, whether Jews or Christians, believe this; and, farther, that the Psalm 45 was a prophecy of her journey to Jerusalem; that she was accompanied by a daughter of Hiram from Tyre; and that the latter part of the Psalm is a prophecy of her having a son by Solomon, and of his ruling over the Gentiles." James Bruce (1730 to 1794), Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, Vol. II, Page 431.

All this being granted, and especially the Scripture fact of the queen of Sheba's visit, and the great probability, supported by uninterrupted tradition, that she established the Jewish religion in her dominions on her return, we may at once see that the eunuch in question was a descendant of those Jews; or that he was a proselyte in his own country to the Jewish faith, and was now come up at the great feast to worship God at Jerusalem.

### Acts 8:28

#### Was returning, and sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet.

This official had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was not wasting his time in idleness while he traveled; he was carefully searching for truth in the Word of God.

He had probably purchased a scroll of Isaiah in Jerusalem; and he was very likely reading the Greek text of the Septuagint. In Luke 4:17, Isaiah is called "the book of the prophet Esaias". The prophets were sometimes kept in separate books (scrolls).

The books of Isaiah is very evangelical, so it would be profitable to read, because of the many prophecies concerning the Messiah, especially in the portion the eunuch was reading. Since he had just been in Jerusalem, and may have heard of the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, it would be natural for him to be looking at these prophecies

### Acts 8:29

#### Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join yourself to this chariot.

It is not known what type of chariot this was; there were many types in use. From the fact that the eunuch asked Philip to come up and sit with him, it was likely that this chariot was more like a four-wheeled wagon. It was not a two-wheeled war chariot which required the driver and rider to stand. Also less likely is that it was a palanquin, which was a cabin without wheels, set upon poles and carried by slaves.

Philip is now informed by the Lord of what his mission is to be.

**join yourself** = kollhqhti “to be glued to”. Quite a vivid word; there might have been some sort of running board on the chariot on which Philip could have stood, once he had approached the chariot.

#### Acts 8:30

**And Philip ran to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you read?**

We see here that Philip heard him reading, so he was reading aloud; possibly, as Gill thinks, because he would enjoy the sound of the Hebrew.

The question which Philip asks begins with two interrogative particles in the Greek; these indicate that there is some element of doubt in Philip’s mind that the eunuch really understands the passage in Isaiah. This doubt is justified in the next verse, when the eunuch admits that he does not understand the text.

#### Acts 8:31

**And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.**

This reply of the eunuch has been taken by some religions to mean that “the Scriptures cannot be understood without an authorized interpreter.” But how could he have known anything of the Gospel, or the new dispensation, to which the prophecy referred?

Wherever the Gospel was preached it was readily understood by any ordinary person with an open mind, whether the evangelist was an apostle, a deacon like Philip, or any disciple, male or female.

Of course there are difficulties in some parts of the Bible, some of which even the most enlightened scholars have not been able to remove; but these problems do not deal with matters of common faith in Christ and salvation by grace.

Undoubtedly a man like this court official, if he had had the completed canon of Scripture before him, could have come to a saving knowledge of Christ without help.

Note the humble and submission attitude of this official! He was not haughty or disdainful of Philip, whom he must have seen as a quite ordinary man. He didn’t resent Philip’s interruption, and he was very gracious in inviting Philip to ride with him in the chariot and help him come to some knowledge of the truth.

#### Acts 8:32

**The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth:**

Read Isaiah 53.

Luke, in recording this passage, quotes from the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which has some variations from the original Hebrew. Some have taken this to mean that the eunuch was reading the LXX, and it may well have been that the Holy Spirit, inspiring Luke, saw to it that this was carried over into the New Testament canon.

Indeed, Luke had contact with Philip a few years later (Acts 21:8ff), who might have filled him in on some of the details of the encounter.

The rest of the notes on this verse are taken from the commentary of John Gill.

“The metaphors of sheep and lamb express the innocence, meekness, and patience of Christ in his sufferings and death; and his being like these when led to the slaughter, and dumb before the shearer, show his willingness to suffer and die for his people, and to become a sacrifice for their sins.

“The allusion is to the sheep led either by the butcher to the slaughter house, or by the priest to the altar, and to the lamb of a year old being silent while it is shearing. Both denote the voluntariness

of Christ in his sufferings, the stripping him of his good name, credit, and reputation among men, and of all worldly substance, though Lord of all, and even of the common blessings of nature, as of meat, drink, and raiment, and the light of the sun.

“In particular the stripping him of his clothes, when his raiment was parted, and lots cast on his vesture, is very aptly signified by the shearing of the lamb, all which he took very patiently; and his being led forth to be crucified, when he was offered up as a sacrifice on the cross, very fitly answers to the sheep being led to the slaughter, without showing any reluctance.

“It was a custom with the Heathens to offer no creature in sacrifice that struggled as it was led, or made an opposition, or showed any reluctance. It is remarkable, that there was nothing of this kind to be observed in Christ, who gave himself an offering, and a sacrifice; the reasons of which were, because of the great love he bore to all people; and because of the good and advantage that would come to them thereby, he was content to be poor, that they might be rich; to be made sin, that they might be made righteousness; to become a curse, that the blessings of the covenant might come upon them; to be stripped of all things, that they might enjoy all: and because no other sacrifice could atone for their sins; and because it was his Father’s will, which always involves his own.

“So opened he not his mouth: In defense of himself, when such false things were laid to his charge, and which he could have so easily refuted, and yet answered to nothing, to the astonishment of his judge. The reason was, because he had the sins of his people on him, for which he was willing to suffer; and therefore he declined self-vindication, lest he should hinder the judicial process against him.

“Nor did he open his mouth against his enemies by way of threatening or complaint, when they spat on him, blindfolded, and buffeted him, and bid him prophesy who smote him; and when the chief priests, Scribes, the common people, and thieves mocked at him, and reviled him on the cross, he opened not his lips unto them, nor against them, only for them, saying, Father, forgive them; nor

did he open his mouth against the justice of God, as bearing hard upon him; neither did he complain of the strictness of its demands, abating him nothing; nor of the severity and weight of its strokes, not sparing him at all; nor did he say one word against his people, whose sins brought all his sorrows and sufferings on him, but made intercession for the transgressors, whose sins he bore.”

### Acts 8:33

**In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.**

Again, Gill:

“In his humiliation his judgment was taken away. The humiliation, or low estate of Christ, lay in his assumption of human nature, with the weaknesses and imperfections of it; in the meanness of his parentage and education; in the sorrows he endured from his cradle to his cross; in his last conflict with Satan in the garden; in his being apprehended, bound, scourged, and condemned, both by the Sanhedrin, and the Roman governor; and in being enclosed with the assembly of the wicked soldiers, who put on him their own clothes, and a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hand, and then in a mock manner bowed to him as king of the Jews; and last of all in his obedience to death, even the death of the cross, and in his being laid in the grave.

“Now in this his low estate, “his judgment was taken away”; in the text [of Isaiah 53] the words are, “he was taken from prison and from judgment”; which some understand of his sufferings, and render the words thus, “by an assembly, and by judgment he was taken away”; that is, by the Jewish Sanhedrin, and by the judgment or sentence of Pontius Pilate, his life was taken away. Others interpret it of his resurrection from the dead, when he was taken or delivered from the prison of the grave, and could not be held any longer by the cords and pains of death; and from the judgment or condemnation under which he lay, being justified in the Spirit, when he was raised from the dead.

“The words, as here cited, differ from the original text; which have caused some to think that there was a different reading of these words, which the Septuagint followed, and Luke after them.”

#### Acts 8:34

**And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray you, of whom speaks the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?**

answered Philip: that is, he “addressed” Philip.

This is a very natural question. There is nothing in the Isaiah text naming the person being described. The eunuch has obviously thought a lot about this and was at a loss for an answer, as anyone would be who had only the book of Isaiah for reference.

The ancient Jews applied the teaching to the Messiah. Thus, in the Targum of Jonathan, Isaiah 52:13, which in the Bible reads “Behold my servant shall deal prudently...” is expanded “Behold, my servant, the Messiah, shall be prospered...” It is very unlikely that the eunuch would have had knowledge of this teaching.

His questions shows that he was thinking deeply enough to consider whether the passage could have referred to Isaiah himself, or to any of the other prophets. The Lord provided Philip with the answer.

#### Acts 8:35

**Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.**

Philip showed the Ethiopian official that Jesus of Nazareth exactly fulfilled the description that Isaiah had written, so that Jesus was the Messiah. The statement “he began at the same scripture” indicates that he probably ranged outside of chapter 53 in his teaching, to show that Jesus was born of a virgin, was made under the Law, obeyed the Law perfectly during his lifetime. After all, Isaiah is rich in references to the Messiah.

#### Acts 8:36

**And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said,**

**See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized?**

The eunuch’s chariot continued to move down the road to Africa, with Philip aboard. The could have traveled several miles while this conversation and Philip’s teaching were carried on.

We suppose from the fact that the eunuch wanted to be baptized, that Philip had even taught him about water baptism as a means of identifying with Christ. The eunuch was convinced of the truth of the Gospel and was quite ready to proceed.

There is a lot of discussion in the writings of the apostolic Fathers, and in other sources, as to where this water was located. Assuming they were some miles south of Jerusalem, or between Jerusalem and Gaza, the location could have been Beth-horon, formerly Bethzur in the tribe of Judah, a place about two miles from Hebron, twenty miles from Jerusalem. For all that, we don’t know.

#### Acts 8:37

**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 eunuch was a proselyte of the Jewish faith, to be sure, but he had no right to the ordinance of baptism unless he had faith in Christ for his salvation. And Philip would not administer baptism without hearing such a profession of repentance and acceptance. The eunuch gave a very clear profession.

Note: this verse is not included in some manuscripts; however it is included in the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions.

#### Acts 8:38

**And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.**

TOPIC: BAPTISM

The eunuch commanded his chariot to halt by some stream of water that ran beside the road. The text says that both of the men went into the water (the NAS says “both”), and Philip actively

performed the baptism of the eunuch, very likely immersing him in the water. However ...

This verse has been used by some people to point up the necessity for full immersion for baptism, or even for salvation. But the Greek does not allow for that proof from this verse. The preposition *ei~* could be read “to” or “unto”, as it is used in John 11:38, “Jesus, therefore, groaning in Himself, cometh to (*ei~*) the grave...” and He was surely not going “into” the grave.

Now, verse 39 states that they “were come up out of the water,” which also makes us think that the men actually were in the water.

#### Acts 8:39

**And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.**

caught away = *hjrvpase*; from *aJrvpazw*, “caught away; snatched”. This is a word for a forceful removal, taking away by force.

This is the same word used in 1 Thess. 4:17, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (*aJrvpazw*) together with them in the clouds...” In the Latin, this very is translated *rapere*, from which the word Rapture is derived.

The language here suggest that the Holy Spirit removed Philip abruptly from the scene, possibly by some sort of miraculous transportation. However, there was no need of a miracle here; it was certainly not the will of God that Philip continue with the eunuch to Ethiopia. He was to continue his ministry somewhere else. As we see next, he was in Azotus (Ashdod).

went on his way rejoicing

What a wonderful change in this man’s life! In just a few moments his life is transformed by the work of Christ in his heart and by having the Spirit bestowed on him.

#### Acts 8:40

**But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.**

Philip would have worked his way up the coast from Azotus to Caesarea, and the cities he preached in were probably Joppa, Lydda, Askelon, Armarhea, and others along the coast. We will soon be visiting those cities ourselves in our studies in Acts 9 and 10.

Azotus the Greek name of Ashdod of the Philistines, famous in Samuel’s time for the temple of the god Dagon (1 Sam. 5:1) It was about 55 miles from Jerusalem, and 35 miles from Gaza.

Ashdod was one of the cities not taken by Joshua; and it remained in the possession of the Philistines. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it to the temple of Dagon here, and Dagon was cast down before it (1 Sam. 5:2,3). King Uzziah of Judah broke down Ashdod’s wall and built watchtowers around it (2 Chron. 26:6).

There is quite a bit of historical mention of this location. In the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, there are several comments, most having to do with the wars of the Jews, in which Jonathan burned the temple of Dagon, along with those who had taken refuge in it, and the town of Azotus and its suburbs.

Ashdod was about 30 miles from Gaza, on the coast and having a seaport in those days; now the sea is several miles away.

See Acts 21:8ff, regarding Paul’s visit with Philip in Caesarea, about 20 years later.

Caesarea is also on the coast and it has a good harbor. The ancient city, possibly the Hazor or Joshua 11:1, was rebuilt by Herod the Great and renamed in Augustus Caesar’s honor. Herod built many great houses and buildings, and he built a Temple of Caesar, near the harbor, and placed a statue of Augustus in it. It was the headquarters of the Roman government as long as Judea was a Roman province.