

STORY

Philip and the Man from Ethiopia - Acts 8:26-39

TEACHER PRAYER

Lord Jesus, today is another opportunity for me to share what You want these children to absorb into their hearts. One of them may not yet know You as Savior, so I want to help as Philip did. Others may be ready to go to a neighbor or acquaintance and present Your Word in a better way because of Philip's example. I follow where You direct and ask You to bless every step of my way. Thank You. Amen.

OUTER AIM

God saved a non-Jewish foreigner by means of a Christian missionary.

INNER AIM

God sends us to preach the gospel to all people.

BACKGROUND

(*Rupprecht Bible History References Vol.2, pp. 498-505*)

v. 26

- ▶ Stephen (a Greek name) was the second in the listing of those chosen to supervise the Jerusalem Christian food pantry and see to it that the Greek widows were not overlooked.
- ▶ An angel came from heaven with a special assignment for Philip--one that would take him out of town onto the Jerusalem-Gaza federal highway going to the southeastern corner of Judea.
- ▶ The passing comment that "this is desert" sets the stage as a place where one person will offer aid to a stranger in need.
- ▶ Yet it was not Philip, the man on foot, who needed a helping hand; it was the rich man in the chariot who needed help to find the road that leads from one's own spiritual desert into God's well-watered Paradise.

v. 27

- ▶ *Eunuch*, a man usually of the slave class, castrated in order to guarantee that women he served/guarded would be safe from rape, as well as to protect him from false accusations of rape.
- ▶ He had risen to a high position in government civil service, for as Secretary of the Treasury, he was a Cabinet member of the government of *Ethiopia*, a gentile nation in Africa (probably Meroe, in S.Nubia, not modern Ethiopia) that had a succession of women as rulers during the first century AD.
- ▶ This first angel directive said nothing about mission work or preaching to anyone.
- ▶ But Philip obeyed, of course. (If we wonder why the angel could not carry out the mission himself to the Ethiopian man without Philip's help, apparently God wants to use us humans to reach other humans.
- ▶ Angels do God's messenger service, but humans are used for intensive instruction or the long-term soul-care that we Christians render to one another.)
- ▶ This man was not only a foreigner to Jews, he was also of the Negroid race; thus no Jew would have selected him as mission material unless by direct order from God.
- ▶ Yet an unusual case such as this was soon to become usual for mission outreach, as Christians discovered that people of the Jewish race were less receptive than folks of different race and nationality.
- ▶ The eunuch was not ignorant of the God of Abraham.
- ▶ He evidently was a convert to the Jewish worship of Jehovah and had made a special trip of many hundreds of miles to get to Jerusalem to worship (for the Passover or Pentecost festival) as every devout Jew (or proselyte) wanted to do.



- ▶ He had bought a hand-printed copy of the book of the prophet Isaiah, the premier Old Testament book of the Gospel of the Savior.
- ▶ As his chauffeur handled the horsepower, he occupied himself in reading this gospel.
- ▶ He valued God's Word even though he did not understand everything he read, and at this decisive moment he needed help in understanding a crucial truth which God was about to give him by the hand of Philip

v. 29

- ▶ Up to now Philip did not know his assignment on the highway that day, so the angel told him his next move was to get going and catch up to that chariot on the road ahead .

v.30

- ▶ So Philip broke out into a jogging trot and soon caught up with the idling chariot and its occupants.
- ▶ Evidently the black man was reading the text of Isaiah out loud--and Philip deduced that the man was puzzled about the wording or the meaning of the words.
- ▶ (This would be a good time to ask the students if they have ever been puzzled about something in the Bible--perhaps a passage they have heard in church, or been told to memorize, etc., or even Isaiah 53...and what they have done to solve the puzzlement.)
- ▶ Philip "cut to the chase" with no delay for chit-chat about the heat or the man's fine vehicle. "Do you understand...?" is a fine non-challenging approach because any response is OK.
- ▶ We teachers do well to regularly ask this question in our classes of religion, literature, math, science...and then run with the ball. Invite dialogue rather than pursue a monologue. It is not enough to teach the Bible as one would train a parrot. It is not enough to assert, declare, and drill Bible truths. We must discover whether we have brought the student to understand what God wants him to understand.)

v. 31

- ▶ What a wonderful, ingenuous, sincere reply! And what a motto for every classroom!

v. 32-34

- ▶ The instruction class began at Isaiah 52:7-8, prophesying Jesus' last hours on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.
- ▶ (Ask the class if anyone knows the answer to the man's question. Who is the person referred to as the *sheep*, the *lamb* who had received no fair trial, no justice, and whose life was taken from him...and when was all this to take place?)
- ▶ The eunuch and Philip were ready for the key question: Is Jesus the embodied fulfillment of the human tragedy here predicted by Isaiah?

v. 35

- ▶ Philip's heart was already open, and now his voice opened the mysteries of God's redeeming love in Jesus the Messiah.
- ▶ Starting at the puzzling text, he followed Scripture's signposts to lead the eunuch to deduce that Jesus the Nazarene was none other than the long-awaited Messiah.
- ▶ (The class may be asked to come up with additional Scriptures that Philip probably used to draw this man to Jesus as his Savior. If we note that no mention is made here of sins, judgment, repentance, or any other Law-word, it becomes clear that at such a time in his life, what the eunuch needed was not a stronger thirst, but a good long drink of the Water of Life.)

v. 36- 38

- ▶ During the process of this Bible class, the eunuch's heart became convinced that Jehovah had given Jesus to be the Messiah-Savior, and thus Jesus was his personal Savior. He had also become ready to commit himself, body and soul, into Jesus' hands by Holy Baptism.
- ▶ The question, "What hinders me from being baptized?" may indicate a concern that perhaps his Gentile or Negro heritage could be an obstacle to his being accepted into the Christian fellowship. It would not, of course.
- ▶ Note: Though v. 37 is not found in the most reliable ancient texts, it is consistent with common practice that such a confession would be asked of and given by the convert about to be baptized. As to the mode of

baptism (either immersion or hand application of the water) the wording of the text tells us only that what was done by the one person was likewise done by the other (“both Philip and the eunuch went down,...they came up out of the water”). Those who hold to the theory that this was an immersion style baptism should admit that this would require the pastor to be immersed along with the convert, which is rather unlikely.

- ▶ This entire encounter lasted only a few hours, but it brought this soul to the Savior, who claimed the eunuch for all eternity.

v. 39

- ▶ As Philip was spirited away to do other privileged work, the eunuch steered his vehicle homeward, absolutely thrilled over what he had received from God and ready to share with folks back home.
- ▶ Although he did not have the support of a Christian congregation when he arrived home, we expect that--due to his government position and his joy-filled heart--he would be able to gain an audience for the Scriptures.
- ▶ We also expect that many souls in that heathen foreign land were led to the Savior by his service to Jesus, and we will someday meet these folks who are now awaiting our arrival at the throne of grace.

STUDENT PRAYER

Teacher: Lord, don't give up on anyone who gets a hold of a Bible; give him/her the urge to read the parts that tell of Your love in Jesus, and send someone like me to help him understand what Jesus is all about. Amen.

Student: Lord, don't give up on me when I don't understand something in Your Word. Get my brain working on it, and get my heart open to accept what You want to tell me. Especially bless my pastor and teacher to get my attention and to hold it when they tell me Your Word. Thanks and Amen.

PRESENTATION

The story should be told in the words of the teacher using appropriate background information from the Background section. The Middle and Upper levels could read the story from the student folder.

APPLICATIONS

1. We all have to start somewhere in our Bible studies. Where do YOU want to start?
2. When a person searching for relief from a sin-burdened conscience, salvation from a bad life, and freedom from evil influences, finally discovers that God has already taken care of all this for him in Jesus, he can hardly *slouch* his way through life after such a discovery.
3. We want to be ready to present Jesus at any time to anyone. Thus we want to prepare in advance for such “chance” encounters by studying the Bible as God's personal Word on everything of value for souls headed into eternity.
4. We may meet someone new to us at school, at a sports event, during a vacation, at the place we work, at the dentist's office, or on the Internet. Let's keep an eye and an ear open for an opportunity to share a Bible thought or to ask the other person's opinion on a moral subject. This can lead to searching the Bible for God's viewpoint.
5. The way God works to save souls is to send a Christian to individuals who do not yet understand God's Word, especially the parts about our Savior. God does not want us to hold back from these opportunities to serve people of a different race from a foreign country, for He can open hearts when people understand what He has done for their salvation.
6. There can be no greater goal in life than to aid a soul in finding the Savior and there is no greater pleasure than being God's spokesperson in using His Word to enlighten and nurture another soul in God's will and ways. And the Christian person can do it. Remember? *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* (Mt.7:7)

7. Besides, if challenged without advance warning, we have this assurance: *“But when they arrest you, and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11)* All glory to God, Amen!
8. For an adult who has already been brought to faith, Baptism serves as a wonderful means of grace through which God offers and gives spiritual and eternal blessings.
 - a. On Pentecost, the apostle Peter said to his adult listeners, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)
 - b. Ananias said to Paul who had already come to faith, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)
 - c. Finally, Jesus gave this wonderful promise, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16a)

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

Acts 8:37 - I believe that Jesus Christ (Messiah) is the Son of God

Acts 4:20 - For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Middle any of the above and...

Acts 4:12 - Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 2:38-39 - Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

Upper any of the above and...

Acts 10:42-43 - And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

Eph.2:11-13 - Therefore remember, that...at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.

James 5:19-20 - Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

HYMN CHOICES

“Today Thy Mercy Calls Us” (TLH #279)

“God’s Word is Our Great Heritage” (TLH #283)

“We have a Sure Prophetic Word” (TLH #290)

“Spread, Oh, Spread, Thou Mighty Word” (TLH #507)