

I would encourage you to read the over three dozen cross-references in the printed text of the sermons for more insights. In the previous passages, we saw the church embrace the Hellenist Jews, and then take another big step from being a wholly Jewish church to one in which Samaritans were also included. I neglected to share with you that there are still hundreds of Samaritans today. You can find pictures of their Passover sacrifices on-line. At the time of Jesus they believed the coming one, whom they called the **Taheb, would be a prophet, teacher, perform signs, make atonement, come in peace, reveal truth, be the very voice of God. The name Taheb was translated as "The Return of God."** So you can see how they would be ripe for the Gospel. Whether Samaritans were seen as half Jews or wayward Jews, the manifestation of the Spirit's gifts affirmed that as new believers they were part of the church. Now what about "God fearers," those Gentiles who attended the synagogue and believed in the God of Israel but had not yet been circumcised and didn't try to keep all the Jewish laws? That is step three, expanding the outreach of the church and slowly having the Jewish followers of Jesus break the unbiblical boundaries and prejudices they had from their culture.

²⁶ *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.* Acts 8:26 Philip had led a great movement of conversion among the Samaritans and the apostles. Peter and John, ministered in the Samaritan villages on their way back to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25). Reason tells us that Philip had a lot of teaching to do in the region, just as the apostles had done in Jerusalem. That is what we would expect, but God had other plans. An angel spoke to Philip! We'll see this again in Acts at the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:3) and the second prison escape of Peter (Acts 12:7). In Acts 27:23 Paul refers to "an angel of the God to whom I belong." The important thing is that Philip knew God was directing him. Paul warns us that Satan can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). So we should not obey any supernatural being, only those whose words align with Scripture and are affirmed by the Spirit (1 John 4:1).

How do we hear from God? There are classes on the different ways people have heard from God. Rather than list them, **let me just invite you to a consistent life of dedication and devotion to Jesus and the Word.** A life surrendered to Jesus will learn to know the voice of the Spirit and discern the difference between our own inner voice and the voice of God (John 10:3-4). In this case, Philip received a direction from an angel and must have had the confirmation of the Spirit that it was God's direction, even though it sounded unreasonable. God often stretches our faith by directing us to do what seems unreasonable. Think of Jesus asking the disciples to feed the multitude (Matthew 14:16), or God telling Moses to deliver the Jews from Egypt (Exodus 3:10), or God telling Jehoshaphat to send the singers out in front of the army to praise God (2 Chronicles 20:21). What kind of craziness is that? It's the same kind that tells Philip to leave a successful ministry and go into the desert. When we obey God there will be lasting results, even if we can't see it at the time.

^{27a} *And he rose and went.* Acts 8:27a What if Philip thought, "That's crazy! I'm successful here. Why would I go to the desert?" A hungry soul would have gone on his way not understanding God's grace in Jesus. His region of the world would have waited for many more years to be evangelized (Psalm 68:31).³ Perhaps more importantly, the next step in evangelizing the

Commented [PW1]: Acts 8:25 (ESV)

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.

Commented [PW2]: Acts 10:3 (ESV)

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."

Commented [PW3]: Acts 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Commented [PW4]: Acts 27:23 (ESV)

²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,

Commented [PW5]: 2 Corinthians 11:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Commented [PW6]: 1 John 4:1 (ESV)

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Commented [PW7]: John 10:3-4 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 14:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Commented [PW9]: Exodus 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Commented [PW10]: 2 Chronicles 20:21 (ESV)

²¹ And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Commented [PW11]: Psalm 68:31 (KJV)

³¹ Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

Commented [PW12]: Irenaeus, Against Heresies

3.12.8-10
Socio-Rhetorical Commentary Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.

world, reaching out to “God fearers”, would have had to have come later in some other way. But thankfully, God is on the throne of heaven. He moved the heart of Philip, and Philip was surrendered enough to God to obey and trust the Samaritans to God (Psalm 40:6-8).

27b And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Acts 8:27b-28 As a eunuch, the Ethiopian could not be a proselyte (Deuteronomy 23:1). He was what the Jews called a “God fearer” (Acts 13:6). What was called Ethiopia then is what is now southern Egypt and northern Sudan. Jews considered it as the “ends of the earth.” He had traveled a thousand miles from this powerful kingdom to possibly worship in the Court of the Gentiles or at least attend a Greek speaking synagogue.

Now consider the providence of God. We don’t know what brought this man to Israel and how he came to fear the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Somehow God reached down into Ethiopia and drew him out. Somehow he learned of the temple and the feasts of Israel and came to worship in Jerusalem. Somehow he could buy a precious copy of the Isaiah scroll and had learned to read Greek (the quotation is from the Septuagint version). That much is amazing. But all that just set him up for this opportunity. He didn’t happen to be reading the fifty chapters in Isaiah that don’t refer directly to Jesus; He was reading the one passage that most clearly speaks of Jesus’ sacrificial death for our sins at the exact time when Philip ran up alongside his chariot. That is what we call Providence or a “God incident.”

Over a century ago most Americans used to capitalize Providence as synonym for God. They saw the circumstances of daily life as directed by the hand of God. Providence saved lives and took other lives. Providence gave good crops and poor ones. It was always for His glory that we might learn to fear God and worship Him as the source of all good things. But then education was increasingly separated from Biblical influence.¹ Literacy rates dropped. We were educated to believe that nature and randomness determined all things. Providence was no longer capitalized and has almost disappeared from our vocabulary. But people who walk with God today, like Philip did in this passage, still see the invisible hand of God in the details of daily life. Followers of Jesus still believe in Providence with a capital P and regularly marvel at God’s intricately detailed plans (Isaiah 14:24).

29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” Acts 8:29 Philip received a message from an angel. He was obedient to that message. He was now in the desert of Judea and has heard the voice of the Spirit. Was it audible or an inner voice? We aren’t told, so it doesn’t matter. He heard and he knew it was the Spirit. The eunuch’s high position and chariot must have shown him to be a person of influence. I suspect he had bodyguards, maybe some big black muscular men with spears. I’m just guessing, but it would be hard to imagine a person of influence in a long lonely journey through bandit infested territory without an entourage, the sight of which would be intimidating. Philip said, “That must not be God. I could be in real trouble approaching that official.” No, he listened to the Spirit not the flesh.

Just as before, he instantly obeyed. *30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”* Acts 8:30 It is so important

Commented [PW13]: Psalm 40:6-8 (KJV)

⁶ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

⁷ Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book *it is* written of me,

⁸ I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.

Commented [PW14]: Deuteronomy 23:1 (ESV)

¹ “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD.

Commented [PW15]: Acts 13:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

Commented [PW16]: Google John Dewey and research his atheist effort to influence education.

Commented [PW17]: Isaiah 14:24 (ESV)

²⁴ The LORD of hosts has sworn: “As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand,

that we learn to hear the voice of the Spirit, but also to have a heart that is willing to obey what we hear without hesitation when we know God has spoken (Acts 7:51). Imagine the surprise when Philip heard the passage the man was reading out loud. Now Philip knew he was in the middle of what I like to call "a Holy Spirit set up." The mysterious leading away from the success in Samaria and to the desert and then to approach this official now all made sense. It's not always that way, but what a thrill when we realize a bit of what God is doing.

In the biography of Charles Cowman, his wife wrote, "If the Holy Spirit dwells in us, there will be a strange accordance with God's working in the world around us. There is a double presence of the Lord for the consecrated believer. He is present in the heart, and is mightily present in the events of life."²

If we are watching with expectation, we can spot those divine appointments. Then we just need to listen to the Spirit. In this case, it was rather obvious. "Do you understand what you are reading?" One time I was led to ask a salesman if he was interested in a deal that was so good, it would be hard to believe it was true. Another time my wife and I met a Japanese man on a secluded bluff on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. He had been searching the world over for truth. We invited him to our home, and what do you know, he showed up. My wife's witness simply started with, "I know you are looking for the truth and haven't found it." For the next couple days, sunny Arizona turned rainy as they sat at our dining table while she explained the gospel from the fall of man to the resurrection in his native tongue. Now that was "a Holy Spirit set up."

I'm thrilled with those events, but I'm also saddened to think how many I have probably missed in life because I was too distracted with the passing things of daily living. Participating with God is a thrilling privilege! I must add that some Holy Spirit set ups take months, even years, of faithfully showing the love of Jesus before they culminate in transformed lives.

Now listen to the Ethiopian's invitation and imagine how it must have thrilled Philip's heart.

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8:31 Ask the right questions, those Spirit led questions, and you might get the right question asked of you. Show the unselfish love of Christ and the joy of the Lord and someone might ask you why you are that way. For some reason this official didn't think it strange to ask this man running alongside his chariot to join him and to explain the prophecy of Isaiah. God planted a hunger in this Ethiopian's heart.

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. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." Acts 8:32-33 This is just a small portion of one of several of Isaiah's suffering servant songs that predicted the suffering of the Messiah. Others predicted the Messiah being a light to the nations of the world from which this Ethiopian had come (Isaiah 49:6). This song starts in chapter 52 verse 13 with the crucifixion and the covenant blood of Jesus being sprinkled on many nations (Isaiah 52:15). It goes on to speak of Him being rejected and not esteemed by man, considered to be smitten by God. It predicts Him being slaughtered without His resistance and being buried in a rich man's tomb. But most importantly for this Ethiopian

Commented [PW18]: Acts 7:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

Commented [PW19]: Cowman, Lettie *Charles Cowman Missionary Warrior*, on Cowman meeting Mr. Nakada

Commented [PW20]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW21]: Isaiah 52:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

were the verses that followed. He bore our sins. His death was our guilt offering. The punishment that brings us peace was upon Him. Not only that but He would rise (see the light of life and be satisfied) and justify many. This Righteous One will cause many to be accounted righteous (see [Isaiah 53:6-12](#); [Isaiah 24:16](#))!

³⁴ *And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"* Acts 8:34 What a great question! Jews today have been taught that this is about the Jewish people. If someone tells you that, take them to verse 11 and ask if the Jewish nation is the Righteous One. Ask them if they knew that the early sages all said this was about the Messiah. It wasn't until after many Jews became believers in Jesus as the Messiah that rabbis changed the accepted interpretation to mean that of the Jewish people. The first three verses of Isaiah 53 tell us this One is rejected by men. How could they reject themselves ([Isaiah 53:1-3](#))? The Ethiopian asked if it was about Isaiah or someone else. He knew it was about an individual.

³⁵ *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.* Acts 8:35 From looking at the Hebrew text and the context, [Isaiah 53:11b](#) can be read, "By knowledge of Him, the Righteous One, God's servant, bearing their iniquity like the scapegoat, will many others be made righteous." That is the gospel written 700 years before it came to pass. I want you to think for a moment how wonderful that is! We are perfect in Christ or lost in our sin and separated from God. How overwhelmed we should be with the wonder of imparted righteousness ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#))!

Philip was ready to share with this official the Scriptures that pointed to Jesus and how they were fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus took our sin and is willing to give us His righteousness. Are you prepared to share that? We should all be ready ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). Philip was ready because he had been with the Apostles as they taught the Apostles' Doctrine and was yielded to the Spirit. That teaching included what Jesus taught them after the resurrection regarding the Old Testament passages that were about Him ([Luke 24:44](#)).

The Ethiopian must have soaked it up like a sponge. No wonder God called Philip to go down to meet him. ³⁶ *And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"* Acts 8:36 Gentiles that converted to Judaism were baptized. He saw Jews baptized as cleansing rituals. Perhaps Philip had explained how Jesus had told the disciples to teach others about Jesus and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ([Matthew 28:19](#)). There isn't much water in that region. The water was probably an animal trough or a cistern. The Ethiopian was ready to start a new life in Christ, to be made righteous by accepting what the Righteous One had done for him by becoming his sin offering. And what a relief it must have been to see that, unlike Judaism that would not allow a eunuch as a proselyte, he could be a full child of God in Christ ([Isaiah 56:3](#)).

What prevented him from baptism? Nothing was required but faith ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). He would symbolically be buried with Christ in the water and be raised to new life with Christ in His resurrection. The old would go and the new creation would now be his life ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). If you haven't been baptized, what hinders you? Declare your death to your old life and

Commented [PW22]: Isaiah 53:6-12 (ESV)

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a ... [1]

Commented [PW23]: Isaiah refers to the Righteous One as God in this verse: [Isaiah 24:16a](#) (ESV)

¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One.

Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 53:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that ... [2]

Commented [PW25]: Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)

^{11b} by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Commented [PW26]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (KJV)

²¹ For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Commented [PW27]: 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

Commented [PW28]: Luke 24:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Commented [PW29]: Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Commented [PW30]: Isaiah 56:3 (ESV)

³ Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

Commented [PW31]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Commented [PW32]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

be raised with Christ to a new one in Him (Romans 6:4). Verse 37 is not in the oldest manuscripts, though it is certainly true that we must believe in Jesus with all our heart.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. Acts 8:38 I think we can watch the rerun in heaven. Not only that, but we can watch what happened when he went back to Ethiopia and shared what he experienced and the truth he had discovered. We can watch the generations of souls that came to life in Christ because Philip cooperated with the Spirit.

39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:39 It sounds to me like a Star Trek adventure. The Spirit beamed Philip off to a new location. This happened to several prophets in the Old Testament as well (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16; Ezekiel 3:12-15). The Ethiopian was filled with the fruit of the Spirit, joy, which means his baptism in the Spirit and in water took place at the same time. Don't put God in a box. As we saw last week, you can be filled when you believe, or when you are baptized, or after. Just get filled and keep being filled (Ephesians 5:18).

40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. Acts 8:40 Wow! "How did I get to Ashdod (the Old Testament name for Azotus), twenty miles north of Gaza?" he must have asked himself. Going up the coast of the Mediterranean, Philip preached the good news of Jesus and ended up staying in Caesarea Marittima. It was a huge port city of Jews and Romans used by people of all nationalities. It was a perfect spot for an evangelist whose beginnings in evangelism were with Samaritans and an Ethiopian. God knows right where to put us.

Philip wasn't an apostle. He was a deacon who was chosen to serve tables. He was an ordinary man with a testimony of loving God with his whole heart. The fruit from his surrendered life is still reproducing to this day. **He was willing to hear and chose to obey** (James 1:22). This is all that is needed for a life that makes an impact. Jesus does all the work. Jesus prepared good works in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). And when Jesus looked for a willing vessel, He saw Philip's heart (2 Chronicles 16:9a). Somewhere along the line, Philip said to Jesus, "Take me! I'm yours!" Will you say that to Jesus today?

Questions

- 1 What steps of progress were taking place in the church?
- 2 How did Philip hear from God?
- 3 Can we figure out what God might want?
- 4 List a few of the "Godincidences" in this account.
- 5 What passage was being read? Why is that special?
- 6 Why is the right question so important?
- 7 How do we know the song isn't about Israel?
- 8 What did baptism declare?
- 9 When was the Ethiopian filled with the Spirit?
- 10 Will you put your life in Jesus' hands?

Commented [PW33]: Romans 6:4 (ESV)

⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Commented [PW34]: 1 Kings 18:12 (ESV)

¹² And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth.

Commented [PW35]: 2 Kings 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And they said to him, "Behold now, there are with you servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send."

Commented [PW36]: Ezekiel 3:12-15 (ESV)

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake: "Blessed be the glory of the LORD from its place!"

¹³ It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake.

¹⁴ The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me.

¹⁵ And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

Commented [PW37]: Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

Commented [PW38]: James 1:22 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Commented [PW39]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [PW40]: 2 Chronicles 16:9a (ESV)

⁹ For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

Isaiah 53:6-12 (ESV)

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.