



The Book of Acts - Chapter Eight

III. Acts 6:1-11:30 - The Witness beyond Jerusalem (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Verse 1a, although part of Chapter Eight, has already been covered and involved Saul's role in the execution of Stephen; an event which precipitated a wide-spread persecution of the church that saw most of the disciples, but not the apostles, dispersed from Jerusalem. But they did not run and hide. Instead, they travelled throughout Judæa and Samaria, preaching the Gospel message in fulfilment of the Lord's instructions recorded in Acts 1:8.

One of the seven chosen to support the Hellenistic widows in Jerusalem, the evangelist Philip, travelled into Samaria and the Lord used him magnificently, and many of the Samaritans believed the Gospel and were baptised.

Philip encountered a magician, Simon Magus, who was so impressed with the work and wonders Philip was doing that he too became a disciple.

Due to the successes of his ministry, the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to give apostolic oversight to the work and to ensure that the correct message was being preached. They found it to be so and they baptised believers with the Holy Spirit.

While they were there, Simon Magus requested they sell him the gifts of the spirit, so that he could perform the wonders and signs himself. Peter strongly rebuked him, indicating the wrath of God that would come upon him if he did not repent of his ways.

An angel appeared to Philip and instructed him to travel south, to the road that leads to Egypt, where he encountered a God-fearing Ethiopian, who had been to Jerusalem to worship God. Philip was instructed by the Spirit to come up beside the man, and he heard him reading from Isaiah Chapter 53, which states the Christ must suffer. Philip explained the scripture to the man and, using other scriptures, told him about Jesus.

At that time they came to a rare watering hole on the journey and the Ethiopian was baptised. The Spirit immediately took Philip away to leave the Ethiopian to travel on home, his heart filled with joy.

Philip turned up at Azotus on the Mediterranean Sea coast, where he proclaimed the Gospel and eventually settled.

III.c. Acts 8:1b-3 - The church persecuted and scattered

^{1b} On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judæa and Samaria.

Acts 8:1b

All except the apostles were scattered. The scattering or dispersion, Greek diaspeirō, of the believers, throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, was similar to the earlier Diaspora of Jews throughout the world, see the comments on Acts 6:1, but this dispersion led to the fulfilment of the promise in Acts 1:8 that the Gospel would go to the ends of the earth, as confirmed in the opening addresses in these epistles: <<James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings>> (James 1:1), and: <<Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia>> (1 Peter 1:1).

This persecution was as Jesus had lamented: <<O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing>> (Matthew 23:37). Paul wanted the Gospel and its believers to be cut off at the root: <<"Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more">> (Psalm 83:4). The disciples were scattered around the surrounding countryside, to Judæa and Samaria, though not that far from their persecutors. Whether they went in fear or not we don't know but they fulfilled their Lord's command given in Acts 1:8.

The apostles however, stayed mostly in Jerusalem for several years, probably protected in the main from the excesses of persecution by the Holy Spirit. Evidence for their presence in Jerusalem is found in Acts 15:4-6 <<When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders met to consider this question>>, and, in Galatians 1:17a <<nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was>>.

² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Acts 8:2

Some men showed respect and buried Stephen. As a foreigner to Jerusalem he was probably buried in Akeldama (Acts 1:19), bought with the 30 pieces of silver given to Judas on the betrayal of the Lord (Matthew 27:3). Others reacted with great joy at his death: <<I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices>> (John 16:20a), including Saul, who perhaps asked Luke to emphasise his reaction and role in this terrible deed to indicate his own shame and contrition, because he had taken such delight in it at the time.

³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 8:3

Saul had been instrumental in the persecution of the church, as he testified later in Acts 22:4-5 <<I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished>>, and: <<And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them>> (Acts 26:10-11). In his epistles, Paul writes: <<For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God>> (1 Corinthians 15:9), <<For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I

persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it>> (Galatians 1:13), <<They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy">> (Galatians 1:23), <<as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless>> (Philippians 3:6), and: <<Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief>> (1 Timothy 1:13).

Paul wrote about this so frequently, not just because of his own shame and contrition at his past actions, but because of this overwhelming thankfulness and joy of God's grace and mercy in his life. Something we can all share in, because we all have a past. It reminds me of the song 'Who Am I?' by Casting Crowns, which states:

Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are

III.d. Acts 8:4-40 - Philip witnesses beyond Jerusalem

Persecution of the church had the effect of Samson's riddle: <<Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet>> (Judges 14:14b). With his message of a God not bound to one people or place, Stephen had laid the foundation for a worldwide mission. Philip, who like Stephen, was a Hellenist and one of the seven chosen to care for the Greek-speaking widows in Acts 6:5, was the first to put Stephen's vision into practice, witnessing to the Samaritans (vv.4-25) and to a God-fearing Ethiopian (vv.26-40).

Note that this is not Philip, one of the twelve apostles, named in Luke 6:14-15.

III.d.i Acts 8:4-8 - Philip in Samaria

The Gospel spread to the Samaritans through the witness of Philip and the apostles Peter and John. Philip's journey to Samaria was not in defiance of Jesus' command in: <<These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans">> (Matthew 10:5), but in accordance with his later command given in Acts Chapter One: <<But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth>>. The two commands served different purposes to show that the Gospel was first taken to the Jews, to give them the chance to turn back to God in accordance with the promises given in the OT covenant, which God will always keep for those who obey him.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.

Acts 8:4-5

Philip most likely visited ancient Sebaste, the main city of the Samaritans, lying at the foot of their holy mountain Gerizim. The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, who were disdained by both Jews and non-Jews. They believed in Israel's God and, in many respects, maintained their Jewish heritage but were not considered Jews by those from Judah.

In 2 Kings 17:24-31, we can read how the king of Assyria brought foreign people to settle in Samaria in 722BC. Over time they had intermarried with some Jews who had remained in the area. Many inhabitants of this region between Judæa and Galilee were descendants of the OT northern kingdom of Israel, although from the Jewish perspective these Samaritans had assimilated strongly into non-Jewish culture and had intermarried with Mesopotamian colonists.

The Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch, their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and their own rendering of Israelite history. Copies of their Pentateuch in Hebrew and in Targumic Aramaic remain extant, as do their basic historical narratives. Tensions often ran high between Jews and Samaritans; thus Josephus recounts fighting between Jews and Samaritans during the reign of Claudius in the 1st Century AD being so intense that Roman soldiers were called in to pacify, and to crucify, many of the rebels (Jewish War 2.232-246).

Samaria (Sebaste) was the capital city, built on land purchased by King Omri (1 Kings 16:24), which then became the major city for the Northern Tribes of Israel until they were taken into captivity by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser in 722BC.

⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.

Acts 8:6

The Samaritans would have been prepared for Philip's message about the Christ, i.e. Messiah. They had their own expectation of a prophetic Messiah called the Taheb, who they believed would come to their holy mountain.



This was confirmed by the woman at the well in Sychar, who had a conversation with Jesus and said: <<Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem>> (John 4:20). John the Baptist and Jesus had previously ministered in this area, see John 3:23 and 4:4-42.

The remains of the Samaritan Temple that is at the top of their Holy Mount Gerizim.

Like the apostles, Philip had received the Holy Spirit's power to cast out demons and to heal, which served as a sign confirming the truth of his message.

⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.

Acts 8:7

Philip faithfully taught the Gospel of Christ, backed up by miraculous healings and the cleansing of evil spirits, for we are called to be holy, not unclean: <<For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life>> (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Again, the spirits cry out as they encountered the far greater power of the Holy Spirit, as in Mark 1:26, 3:11, 9:26, etc.

⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:8

Just as the angels had proclaimed to the shepherds: <<I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people>> (Luke 2:10b).

Joy should be one of the key features in a Christian's life, for no matter what else is going on, we have Jesus as Lord in our lives, with all the hope and promise that brings, irrespective of the trials and tribulations we are called to endure.

III.d.ii Acts 8:9-25 - Simon the sorcerer

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,

Acts 8:9

Simon claimed to have divine powers, calling himself ‘the Great One’.

Traditionally, Simon is referred to as Simon Magus, which means conjurer. Simon’s powers intrigued and impressed the people at a time when the Messiah had been expected and many thought this might be him, or at least a prophet sent by him: <<Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many>> (Mark 13:6). When Philip came proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, they recognised a much greater power than Simon was at work, believed and were baptised. Simon too was baptised, but it seemed only for the purpose of learning the ‘secret art’ displayed by Philip. Simon’s ‘magic powers’ were perhaps similar to those of Pharaoh’s magicians (Exodus 7:11), or the ‘lawless one’ referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, but just as Aaron’s staff is to that of the magicians, so is the chaff to the wheat (Jeremiah 23:28 KJV).

Magic in antiquity was practiced by both pagan and Jewish people, with the goals of healing diseases, bringing physical blessings, cursing or otherwise harming others, and guarding against both curses and demons. Magicians also claimed to foretell the future. Ancient literature, e.g. Pliny, Natural History, and discovered magical books, probably similar to those destroyed in Ephesus (Acts 19:19), indicate that magic often involved special incantations, frequently invoking magical names of deities and demons, potions, and the use of magical objects such as amulets, incantation bowls or figurines.

¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.” ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Acts 8:10-13

Not only the Samaritans but Simon also believed and was baptised. Commentators differ over whether Simon had genuine saving faith but God knows. Peter’s strong rebuke to Simon soon after would suggest that Simon did not have genuine saving faith (vv.20-21).

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Acts 8:14

The apostles in Jerusalem retained their authority over the entire church. When they heard of Philip’s Samaritan mission, they sent Peter and John to verify its legitimacy.

¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:15-17

They received the Holy Spirit. Apparently, in this unique case, where the Gospel was first moving beyond the bounds of Judaism, the Lord sovereignly waited to give any manifestation

of the full power of the Holy Spirit (vv.15-16), until some of the apostles themselves could be present, as Philip was not an apostle, and therefore, there would be no question at all that the Samaritans had received the new covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Jewish Christians had. This would show that the Samaritans should be counted full members of the one true church, the new covenant community of God's people, founded and based at that time in Jerusalem. It would also guarantee that the Samaritans, who for many generations had been hostile toward the Jews, would not establish a separate Christian church or be excluded from the church by Jewish believers. The Spirit was given only at the hands of the apostles, to show convincingly to Samaritan and other later, non-Jewish leaders of the church, that both Jews and non-Jews, who believed in Jesus, now had full membership status among God's people; see also Romans 11:13-24 and Ephesians 2:11-22.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money

Acts 8:18

Simon saw that the Spirit was given. Since this was outwardly evident to Simon, and no doubt to others as well, there must have been some outward manifestation of the Spirit. This may have been speaking in tongues, prophesying, or both. This would be seen when the Spirit came upon the Gentiles at Cornelius' house: <<For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God>> (Acts 10:46), and in Ephesus: <<When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied>> (Acts 19:6), and it was an evident sign to the apostles that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Samaritans in a similar way to what had happened to the apostles and those with them at Pentecost.

Speaking in tongues and prophesying are just two of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Believers should not be concerned if they haven't been given these gifts and it is certainly not a sign that they have not yet been saved as some churches have claimed. But Paul tells us to: <<eagerly desire the greater gifts>> (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Offered them money. Simon was acting in character because magicians often exchanged secrets for money.

¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:19

We must never see the gifts of the Holy Spirit as some superior gifting within us that gives individuals higher status, as it is a gift from God to enable us to fulfil the work he has designed and equipped us to do in his name (1 Corinthians Chapter 4, Chapter 8, 14:26). But we should <<eagerly desire the greater gifts>> (1 Corinthians 12:31). This is achieved through prayer, for God says: <<And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws>> (Ezekiel 36:27), and, Jesus told us: <<If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!>> (Luke 11:13).

Simon did not desire the gifts of the Spirit for this purpose but he wanted the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others in order to enhance his own standing, and he was willing to pay for this gift as he was still tied to the world and not the Gospel. As a baptised believer, Simon should not have thought this way, but it showed his heart wasn't yet right. It was right though that Philip had baptised him, as he had repented and accepted Christ publically. Philip accepted this and it is for God alone to know the heart and he will judge accordingly. However, we should still be aware of those around us in the church and take appropriate action, as Peter did, when it comes to light that someone is not truly following the Gospel. However, excluding someone from fellowship is something that church leaders

do not do in haste, and we must always try to reconcile those who are willing to truly repent, following the advice of Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 <<If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent – not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes>>.

²⁰ Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

Acts 8:20-21

No part or share. Some translations have ‘neither part nor lot’, which is OT language for having no share in something. Moses records this of the Levites’ inheritance: <<And there rejoice before the Lord your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own>> (Deuteronomy 12:12), and: <<And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own>> (Deuteronomy 14:27), and this seems to indicate that Simon had now disclosed the condition of his heart, and that he did not truly belong to the people of God. The strong language in v.23 also seems to class Simon as an unbeliever but see the comments on v.13.

²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

Acts 8:22-24

Whether Simon was truly repentant or not is unclear. Against that possibility is the tradition tied to Simon that he was the first heretic and the fact that he does not indicate he will do anything to show repentance. Had he felt true remorse he might have asked the apostles to pray ‘with him’ rather than to pray to the Lord for me as he had requested.

²⁵ When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Acts 8:25

This transitional verse shows the apostles preaching in many Samaritan villages along their route back to Jerusalem – a fulfilment of Acts 1:8 concerning expansion of the Gospel into Samaritan territory.

III.d.iii Acts 8:26-40 - Philip and the Ethiopian

Philip was next led to witness to an Ethiopian. This passage strongly emphasises the Spirit’s leading.

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his

way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

Acts 8:26-27

Go south to the road. This incident reminds us of Psalm 68:31 in the KJV: <<Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God>>, and also the command of Jesus: <<Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find>> (Matthew 22:9). Philip obeyed without question!

Candace is a title in Ethiopia like Pharaoh in Egypt. Here the salvation of one man could lead to the salvation of a nation as he was a man of some influence and already known to be a man of God. No doubt, his new found faith in Jesus would be something he would then have spread far and wide in his own country.

Gaza was the last watering place before the desert on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt. Ethiopia was the ancient Nubian Kingdom, south of Aswan on the Nile. The designation eunuch was often used as a title, for he was the official in charge of all the treasury and a trusted royal servant, but it could refer to his having been emasculated.

Nubians are the people of southern Egypt and northern Sudan, settling along the banks of the Nile from Aswan. Their Nubian language is an Eastern Sudanese language, part of the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

The Old Nubian language is attested from the 8th Century BC, and is thus the oldest recorded language of Africa outside of the Afro-Asiatic group. It was the language of the Noba nomads, who occupied the Nile between the First and Third Cataracts, and the Makoræ nomads who occupied the land between the Third and Fourth Cataracts, following the collapse of the Kingdom of Cush sometime in the 4th Century AD.

The Makoræ were a separate tribe who eventually conquered or inherited the lands of the Noba: they established a Byzantine-influenced state called the Kingdom of Makuria, which administered the Noba lands separately as the eparchy of Nobadia. Nobadia was converted to Miaphysitism by the Orthodox priest Julian and Bishop Longinus of Constantinople, and thereafter received its bishops from the Pope of Alexandria.

Miaphysitism, sometimes called henophysitism, is a Christological formula of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and of the various churches adhering to the first three Ecumenical Councils. Miaphysitism holds that in the one person of Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity are united in one or single nature, the two being united without separation, without confusion, and without alteration.

Since he had been to Jerusalem to worship, the eunuch was certainly a God-fearer, a Gentile who worshiped Israel's God but had not become a full convert, i.e. proselyte. If he were a physical eunuch, he would have been barred from the inner courts of the temple, which makes his reading the prophet Isaiah in v.28 especially significant. Isaiah held out the promise that God would grant devout eunuchs a better heritage: <<Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off>> (Isaiah 56:3-5).

²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

Acts 8:28-30

The Holy Spirit directed Philip to approach the Ethiopian. People usually read aloud in those days, so Philip was probably aware that the man was reading Isaiah 53:7-8. A more appropriate passage could not have been chosen as a witness to Christ, attesting to the Holy Spirit’s leading. The passage cited, focuses on the injustice done to Jesus, something that reflects Luke’s presentation of the Cross, see Luke Chapter 23, as well as the death of Stephen, who followed in his way.

Do you understand? The Ethiopian was a man of high office and social status, yet he desired further teaching, even by a stranger: <<“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked>> (Matthew 13:51a), <<He replied, “Do you not know what these are?” >> (Zechariah 4:13a), and Paul writes: <<If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified>> (1 Corinthians 14:16-17).

The scripture quoted by the Ethiopian is from the LXX. Since Ethiopia is a country neighbouring Egypt, where the Septuagint originated, and the two countries had a close association: <<so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt>> (Isaiah 20:4 - KJV). Note that many translations state Cushite rather than Ethiopian as is the case with Psalm 68:1 quoted earlier. Therefore it makes sense that the Ethiopian had the LXX translation of Isaiah. If he did not, but had the Hebrew version instead, then it is likely that Luke would have chosen to quote from the Greek anyway.

The main difference in this passage is that the LXX states: <<In his humiliation his judgement was taken away and who shall declare his generation>>. The Hebrew is translated as: <<From force and from judgement he was taken away>>, i.e. it was from the fury of the people, or mob, and their continual clamours and the judgement of Pilate and the religious leaders. Although innocent, Jesus was handed over to die on a tree, considered to be humiliating, and his judgement, of innocence by both Pilate and Herod Antipas, was taken away.

‘Who shall declare his generation’ probably refers to eternal life: <<Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever>> (Ecclesiastes 1:4), for he shall: <<prolong his days>> (Isaiah 53:10).

To properly understand the word, it is appropriate for us to have someone more knowledgeable explain it to us, as was the case with Philip and the Ethiopian, to seek guidance and understanding from those who know: <<For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty>> (Malachi 2:7).

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptised?”

Acts 8:31-36

The direction of the Holy Spirit in this incident is apparent again as Philip and the eunuch arrived at a rare watering place in the desert precisely when the eunuch requested baptism.

{{³⁷ Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”}}

{{Verse 37 is taken from some later manuscripts but it is not included in the NIV translation}}

³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:38-39

The Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away seems to be some sort of translation, perhaps similar to, but much less dramatic than, Elijah’s in 2 Kings 2:11 <<As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind>>. Or perhaps in the way that Jesus frequently managed to avoid the mobs that were intent on harming him: <<At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds>> (John 8:59).

⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Cæsarea.

Acts 8:40

Philip was then taken to witness in the coastal region, first in Azotus, known in the OT as the Philistine city of Ashdod, then in Cæsarea, where he seems to have settled, as Luke writes: <<Leaving the next day, we reached Cæsarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven>> (Acts 21:8).



A Sketch Outline of Philip's Journey

God had prophesied the fall of Ashdod along with the other Philistine cities: <<Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins. At midday Ashdod will be emptied and Ekron uprooted>> (Zephaniah 2:4).



Herod's Palace in Cæsarea

Cæsarea was a city with a large Greek-speaking population. Originally a small harbour town known as Strato's Tower, it was rebuilt by Herod the Great in magnificent Hellenistic style, with a greatly improved harbour.

In Philip's day, it was the seat of the Roman government of Judæa. Excavations have yielded significant finds, including the Herodian port and theatre, an amphitheatre shaped like a hippodrome for horse races, a palace built on a promontory out into the sea, which is frequently identified as Herod's palace (see the image), and a great raised aqueduct. Herod built a temple to Augustus here, and an inscription found in the theatre mentions Pontius Pilate's dedication of a Tiberium, a sacred site devoted to the emperor Tiberius.

Tense relations existed between the mixed Jewish and Gentile inhabitants, and one cause of the First Jewish Revolt (AD66-73) was the Gentile desecration of the Jewish synagogue in Cæsarea.