



*The Book of Acts*  
**Bringing in a New Dispensation**  
**The Evangelist and the Eunuch**  
**Acts 8:26-40**

Verse 26 —

**And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip**, we should try to determine who spoke to Philip. Luke, the author of Acts, included several instances of supernatural activity in his account. These occurrences usually included a voice or vision. They were focused on sending someone on a mission.

- Acts 10:15,19: A voice came to Peter prior to his mission to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile.
- Acts 13:2,4: The Holy Spirit spoke to the church in Antioch, instructing them to *separate* and send Barnabas and Saul for a mission to preach the gospel.
- Acts 16:6,10: Paul, Timothy and those who traveled with him were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, but were directed by a vision to preach the gospel in Macedonia.
- Acts 27:23: Paul recounts the angel of God which stood by him, telling him not to fear shipwreck and that he *must be brought before Caesar* in Rome.
- In the Old Testament, commands were sometimes given by the angel of the Lord, or angels, even the LORD (e.g. Genesis 16:9, 19:15; Numbers 22:32,35; Judges 6:14, 13:13-14; 1 Kings 19:5,7; 2 Kings 1:3,15).

In our passage, this voice (I assume it is only a voice, although Luke does not say) gives a command (imperative) to **arise, and go**. The identity of the voice is simply stated that is “an angel.” The word **angel** is translated from the Greek word *angelos*, which can mean *one who is sent or a messenger*. The KJV says **the** angel, but the Young’s Literal translates it as *And a messenger of the Lord*. This entire historical encounter in today’s passage occurs in the apostolic era in which God communicated directly through supernatural means.

We shouldn’t base our beliefs on the idea that angels interact with us today just because we find a historical narrative mentioning it.

In our previous discussion, we learned that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13). Now, let’s think more about the role of the Spirit in our lives. Could it be said that we are led by the Spirit of God when we freely choose to follow His word?

We have the complete word of God through Paul (See Colossians 1:25). Therefore, for doctrinal issues, we look to the epistles of Paul for instructions on Christian living.

**“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.” Colossians 1:25**

An *angelic* messenger was sent to Philip to give him specific GPS directions on where he should go to preach the word of God.

**Arise, and go toward the south.** Philip, one of the seven (Acts 6:5), moves now from Samaria in fulfillment of the Gospel being taken to the “ends of the earth.” Jesus told of this happening in Acts 1:8, *Jerusalem, Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza*, evidently indicating which road Philip was to take. This would have been the coastal route as opposed to some other route.

Verse 27 —

**And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia.** The Greek word for **Ethiopia** is *aithiops* (*i-thee-ops*), which is *aitho* (*to scorch*), and *ops* (*the face*). The word *aithiops* can mean *black*. Complexion, however, while seemingly noted here, was not racialized as it is today; humanity was not divided up into “black” and “white” categories in the first century.

And might I say, while cultural differences exist (i.e., food, clothing, language, etc.) the complexion of one’s skin should never be an issue in the Body of Christ (the Church). It plays no part in this narrative.

According to some historians, the Greek title “Ethiopia” technically included all of Africa south of Egypt, known as the Kingdom of Kush. It might refer to the part of Africa below Egypt, not necessarily the current nation of Ethiopia.

**A eunuch.** This could mean one who was emasculated (i.e. castrated), but also, although I don’t think as likely, one who was naturally incapacitated from birth (Matthew 19:12). We might also remember that officials in other kingdoms, like Daniel in Babylon, were made eunuchs (2 Kings 20:18).

Whatever the case here, this man was **of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians**. The idea of **great authority** could mean this man was a prince or a ruler.

**Candace** was a title, like Pharaoh, or Caesar. It was not a personal name. The Candace was a powerful queen who governed a region known for its wealth and trade. There are some accounts, perhaps fictional, that describe Candace as a “masculine sort of woman, and blind in one eye.”

Some historians, like Strabo, who wrote around A.D. 64, describe the kingdom where Candace would have ruled as a formidable force with military prowess that engaged in skillful defense against the Roman Empire. This Ethiopian eunuch was in a position of great trust. He was important enough to have **charge of all her treasure**, which would make him a very high-ranking man, as already noted.

We might picture a large entourage that **had come to Jerusalem to worship** (Greek word for **worship** here is *proskuneō* which is to *prostrate* oneself in reverence. (The church today often associates worship more with music). This would indicate he was a Jew, as Jews traveled to Jerusalem to *proskuneō*. Therefore, we would assume Candace must have known and tolerated Jewish faith. Presumably, the treasurer would have had to gain permission to take such a long journey to Jerusalem. It is reminiscent of another Jew who served in a Gentile kingdom, Nehemiah 2:4-6.

Verse 28 —

**Was returning.** The eunuch's entourage was returning home from Jerusalem. They had gone there to worship. On their way, Philip encountered them. Philip, like most travelers in the Roman world would have been on foot. People of greater means used donkeys, rarely horses, and sometimes camels. Those of greater means could travel in chariots pulled by mules or horses.

**And sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.** Not a book, but a scroll. Scrolls could be cumbersome, and while not wide they could be up to 145 feet long! Some have said the eunuch may have had a servant to aid in unrolling the scroll. The **chariot** must have been large enough to accommodate more than one person (Philip will climb aboard in verse 31).

Some historians believe that this was probably a costly wagon or carriage used by imperial families for travel. These vehicles were described as being adorned with bronze and ivory carvings, and were often covered with silver and gold. This Ethiopian had to have been a man of great means since he had a *scroll of the prophet Esaias* (Greek is *Ἠσαίας*, Isaiah). Another indicator of the prestige of the eunuch was that he was not driving the carriage, but was **sitting** at his leisure, in his chariot, reading. This was an educated man.

Verse 29 —

**Then the Spirit said unto Philip.** Note the KJV and other translations use of the capital "S." This is an interpretive matter in which the translators assume the Greek word *pneuma* here is referring to the Holy Spirit. The plain sense seems to connect this *pneuma* as the *angel (spiritual being)* who directed Philip in verse 26. I take this as *the spiritual being, or the angel*. But, it could be the Holy Spirit (*pneuma* is used again in verse 39).

**Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.** The angel pointed out the specific chariot in the entourage to catch up with and, literally, *keep company* with **this chariot**. Keep in mind that Philip, at this point does not know why he is being instructed to join up with the chariot. It may have been difficult for him to approach an obvious foreigner on the road. Philip was a Hellenistic Jew, so perhaps it might have been easier for him. He was given an imperative (command) to obey. We will in a later chapter that Peter struggles with a command to go speak to Gentiles.

Verse 30 —

**Philip ran thither to him** (toward him), **and heard him read the prophet Esaias**, apparently out loud. Believe it or not, how people read in antiquity vs. how they read today has been studied. With some exceptions, reading aloud was standard basic grammatical education in the ancient world. Ancient writers expected their works to be read aloud. Reading aloud was also a tool for memorization. I think this is a good practice even for today. There is evidence that Jewish students also learned the Torah by reading it out loud. Therefore, to Luke's readers, there was no need to explain why Philip heard the man reading.

**Understandest thou what thou readest?** This is a good question to ask someone even today when they read the Bible. It is a good way to get a conversation started.

Verse 31 —

**How can I, except some man should guide me?** The timing is right for Philip to join up with the Ethiopian since he needs some help in understanding what he is reading. God's timing is perfect. Philip must have said something to the man to indicate he could help since the Ethiopian **desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.**

Verse 32-34 —

To show how much of a divine appointment this was (directed by God through the *pneuma*), the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53:7,8. This is a passage we apply directed to Jesus as *the suffering servant*.

He doesn't know it yet, but the Ethiopian is on his way to understanding that Jesus was the Messiah. His question to Philip was, **of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?**

The correct questions lead this man to belief in the Messiah.

Verse 35 —

**Then Philip...preached unto him Jesus.** This is where many misinterpret what is happening here. To preach Jesus is not to preach the gospel of grace that we believe today. Philip is preaching the kingdom message of belief through repentance and baptism (as we will see in verse 38).

The gospel we preach today is one, not of the kingdom, but of grace. The gospel today requires only belief, and not repentance or baptism.

Realizing the difference in those two gospels is called *rightly dividing* (2 Timothy 2:15). Many today preach that one must "repent" in order to be saved, but if they were asked, "What about baptism?" they would say, "No, not baptism." We can't pick a salvation message that fits our theological ideas.

Philip is preaching Jesus from the Isaiah passage in which there are too many correlations between Isaiah's suffering servant and Jesus to be anyone else.

*So opened he not his mouth*, Jesus did not open his mouth at his “trial” because he accepted his death as God’s plan;

*In His humiliation* we see many passages in Luke that connects the Isaiah passage with Jesus’s humility, beginning with his birth (Luke 1:48; 3:5; 14:11; 18:14);

*His judgment (or his justice) was taken away* as Jesus was Holy and Just (Acts 3:13-15), but was condemned unjustly (Luke 22:66-71; 23:23-24).

Verse 36-38 —

As Philip taught the gospel of the kingdom, i.e., repentance and baptism, the Ethiopian said, **I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God** (vs. 37) and he repented. That is, he had *faith* that Jesus was Messiah, but his *faith* did not and could not justify him (Justify means to be declared righteous by God).

While he had to have faith (belief) he would still be required to perform all the Jewish rites and ceremonies under the law of Moses. Philip taught a gospel that emphasized the need for repentance and baptism in order to receive forgiveness for sins. This is the same gospel we have seen preached thus far in Acts, and that the same gospel Philip preached in Samaria, in Acts 8:12. There has not been a dispensational change. A work had to be performed. The Law had to be obeyed (Romans 2:13). In Romans the apostle Paul, made it crystal clear that during the dispensation of the law (this apostolic age), that the “doers of the law shall be justified.” Later, we will see a dispensational change and that will no longer be true.

Now, in the dispensation of grace, salvation which comes to an individual is by grace, as a gift, through faith and not of works (Acts 13:38,39; 15:11).

**And he baptized him.** During this apostolic dispensation, baptism as a ceremonial ritual cleansing was still required. Today, in the dispensation of grace, baptism is no longer required. We will look at baptism more closely later in the book of Acts.

Verse 39,40—

A miracle happened in front of the Ethiopian’s eyes. Philip is **caught away** by the **Spirit of the Lord**. The Greek word for **caught away** is *harpazo*. It is the same word found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. We get our concept of the Rapture from this word. This must have been tremendous confirmation that what Philip had explained to him was true. Signs were important for the validation of the spoken word. Today, we have the completed word of God for us. We no longer need a sign.

The official **went on his way rejoicing**, presumably taking the gospel of the kingdom of God with him back to Candace and her kingdom.

**But Philip was found at Azotus (Ashdod). Till he came to Caesarea** (Acts 21:8). This verse confirms for us that the Philip we have been reading about was not the apostle Philip, but the Philip who was part of the seven in Acts 6:5.