

Philip meets the Ethiopian Eunuch on a road in the middle of nowhere - A chance meeting, hardly. God has planned this meeting of these two people, at this very place, at this very time, for generations - and He does the same for you. God's plan for your life has been in the works for many years.

Back in chapter 4, we saw the Apostle Peter claim that it is through Jesus alone we gain forgiveness and redemption. We saw that we have to make a decision in our life, is what Peter says about Jesus true or not, is Jesus the only one who can offer true redemption or, can it be found elsewhere? Then in chapter 7 we saw Stephen claim that Jesus is greater than any Temple; Stephen essentially argued that Jesus is all we need, and since Jesus is all we need, all other religions are ineffective in their attempts at redemption.

This morning, we see this idea pushed further. See, so far the Gospel of Jesus Christ was at first only offered to those who were culturally and ethnically fully Jewish. Then, last week we saw that the Gospel was offered to the Samaritans, who were culturally Jewish, but ethnically, they were only half Jewish. Today, we see the Gospel pushed a step further, Philip presents the Gospel to a man from Ethiopia.

Now, we look at this story of the Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip we see it as a great leap in presenting the Gospel to a people outside of Jewish origin - but that is simply not the case. This Ethiopian was in many respects, very Jewish, we will see how in a bit.

What we see in this story is the jubilant celebration of a people who sought the true God, and patiently waited for the true God, and what we see in this story today is the blessing of a patient faith falling abundantly upon one man who would in turn bring healing to his people.

This Ethiopian that Philip speaks with, he is African, just like many of the people we find in Scripture. See, Africa plays a very prominent role in the biblical story, both in the OT and in the NT. Without the involvement of the ancient Africans, I dare say, we would not have Christianity with us today, much less the nation of Israel.

Without Africa - you and I, we would be toast.

Modern Myth: Christianity first came to Africa in the seventeenth-century.

Reality: Christianity has existed in Africa for over 2000 years. Africa was the first place the Christian Church existed outside of Palestine.

Modern Myth: Christianity is culturally foreign to Africa. Therefore, Africans should reject the Gospel.

Reality: The oldest Christian denomination in existence in the world today, resides in Africa, the [Ethiopian Orthodox Church](#). Culturally, Christianity is more African than it is American.

Modern Myth: Africa is a spiritually dark continent, the United States is the center of Christian missions to the world.

Reality: Africans are sending missions to Europe and the United States to Christianize pagan Europeans and pagan Americans.

You and I, when we think of where the early Christian church first existed, we may think of the church in Jerusalem - the Middle East; We may think of the church in Antioch - Asia Minor; We may think of the church in Thessalonica or Rome - Europe, but we never think of the church in Africa. When we read our NT these are the locations we see the early church spreading the Middle East, Asia Minor, and Europe, and all that is very true, however, biblically, we see Africans as some of the most prominent people in the Bible.

Think I'm crazy?

All right, let's name some famous Africans in Scripture:

Moses. Born in Africa, educated in Africa, led the people of God out of Africa.

Aaron, African.

Marian, Joshua, Caleb, African.

The Ethiopian Eunuch, African.

You know, with only a few exceptions, all those who crossed the Red Sea from Egypt to the Sinai Desert were African. All those Hebrews born in captivity were born in Egypt and Egypt, after all, is in Africa.

Africa plays an import role in the Scriptures. Jesus himself was taken to Egypt by Joseph and Mary after they fled from Bethlehem. Remember, when Moses remarried, he married an Ethiopian woman. For Philip to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch is absolutely no accident, for God had prepared the hearts of the Ethiopian people many years before. Yes, God has

chosen the people of Israel as his people - but now, through the person of Jesus Christ, all people can be grafted into the people of God and the people of Ethiopia are the first.

Salvation isn't random. Hearing about Jesus isn't like winning some sort of theological lottery. God has a plan for salvation for people, a plan that doesn't reach back a few weeks or a few months, but a plan that goes back literally generations. As we look at this Ethiopian Eunuch this morning we will see that Philip and the Eunuch do not meet by random chance, but this is the culmination of the love of God that was built up for generations, and was now unleashed upon one who humbly searched for the presence of God and would then obediently teach his people about Jesus.

In the same way, you are not here by accident, you are not here by a random act of kindness. God has a plan for you, reaching back generations before you were born. Your response to the Gospel is so important to God, that God was preparing a place for you before your parents were born, before your grand parents were born and even before your great grandparents were born.

God will go through great lengths to prepare for those who will believe. Listen to this, God so intensely desires your love, God so desires your soul, He will alter the space time continuum to accomplish His will.

That's powerful.

If God plans your salvation for generations, for you personally, and this is not hyperbole, if God plans for you for generations, how serious should this thing called Christianity be in your life?

Dead serious.

Philip and the Ethiopian.

There in verse 26 we see that an angel tells Philip to go to Gaza. We all know where Gaza is on the map in Israel, we see it on the TV News, or read about it in the paper all the time. Note that Philip is to take the desert road to Gaza. There were probably several ways to get to Gaza, but Philip is specifically to take the desert road which the Greek indicates isn't just a road in the desert, but a road that is literally less traveled, meaning there aren't many folks who take this road - so the chance of even seeing another person

on the road is quite remote - you see, way more people on the Dalton Highway than you would see on the road Philip is asked to walk on.

What we see here is the hand of God in action. The chances of the Ethiopian Eunuch meeting anyone on this road is very slim, and for the Ethiopian Eunuch to meet someone who can interpret a very controversial passage from Isaiah at the exact time he is reading is, the chances are absolute zero.

A total set up if there ever was one.

So, Philip meets this man, literally, out in the middle of nowhere, and the man is reading a scroll from Isaiah in his chariot. Now, I don't know about you, but the first question that pops into my mind is: How come this Ethiopian Eunuch isn't car sick? Doesn't reading in the car make you car sick? For me, I can only read a short time while in the car before I get nauseous. How come this guy isn't sick? I'll tell you why, this man is so intent on learning all he can about God that he is so intent in his study, so focused, the motion of the chariot is irrelevant. What we see is a man who is ready to hear Gospel, what we have is a man immersed in the OT Scriptures, a man God readied for generations to hear what Philip is about to tell him.

The kingdom of Ethiopia lay on the southern Nile River with its two chief cities being Meroe and Napata. It is considered a great kingdom in ancient history, so much so that at various times in history it controlled portions of Egypt. Ethiopians are prominently featured on Egyptian tombs, not only as enemies and slaves, but also as rulers and royalty. At times the Egyptians hired Ethiopians as mercenaries to fight for Egypt.

The Ethiopian Eunuch is the Secretary of Treasury for queen Candace of [Ethiopia](#) (known as Nubia at this time in history). Actually, He isn't literally serving queen Candace, for Candace is a name of a dynasty in Ethiopia. The kings of Ethiopia were traditionally venerated as the children of the sun and were regarded as too sacred to perform the secular functions of royalty - these functions were performed on his behalf by the queen-mother who bore the dynastic title, Candace (Kandake). Ethiopians did not reveal the fathers of their kings, but traditionally handed down that they were children of the sun. All this said, the Eunuch serves the queen as she is the one who politically administrates Ethiopia.

## Road Less Traveled

Acts 8:26-40

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The reason Philip knows what the Eunuch is reading is because the Eunuch is reading out loud. In the ancient world one always read aloud. It was almost unheard of to read silently. Remember, everything was handwritten, and most fonts were very difficult to read. The best way to understand and distinguish what was handwritten on a scroll was to read aloud, for many times the letters literally needed to be sounded out to accomplish a correct reading. In his 'Confessions' Augustine thought it quite something unusual, that Ambrose of Milan read silently.

The Ethiopian Eunuch obviously quite educated and is reading the [LXX](#) (Septuagint) version of the OT. We know he was reading from the LXX and not from the original Hebrew because how the quote from Isaiah he reads to Philip is rendered, is how it is rendered in the LXX, and not the original Hebrew.

So, why is this man from a distant country on the road from Jerusalem pondering the Word of God? Doesn't this strike you as very out of place that this man is so interested in everything Jewish since he is from a place so far away from Jerusalem?

No, this is very much as it should be.

See, Ethiopian Jews, known as the [Falasha Mura](#) have lived in Ethiopia for centuries. Exactly how all these Jews appeared in Ethiopia is up to debate, much of what we have on how all this came together is considered only legioned, never the less, the nation of Ethiopia has had people who worship the Lord God Yahweh long before the rest of the world, outside of Israel.

Today, nearly 85% of the Ethiopian Falasha Mura, approximately 130,000 people, have emigrated to the modern state of Israel under its legislation the "[Law of Return](#)" which gives Jews and those with Jewish parents or grandparents the right to settle in Israel and obtain citizenship. It was during [Operation Moses](#) (1984) and [Operation Solomon](#) (1991) that most of the Falasha Mura arrived in Israel. Israel has put the brakes on this immigration as they found that many of the Falash Mura Jews were believers in Jesus Christ. If you tour Israel today, you will see many of the men and women who are in the [IDF](#) (Israel Defense Forces), which you see everywhere in Israel, are clearly, and without a doubt, of Ethiopian ancestry - yet they are Jewish.

How Ethiopia came to have such a large community of Jews is up to debate, but the fact is, there they are, these people have proven to the government of Israel their authentic

Jewish ancestry - and what's more, at the time of Jesus, it appears that there were also many Ethiopian Jews - the Eunuch Philip approaches, is apparently one of them.

See, God does not operate in a vacuum. This is meeting on a lonely road in the middle of nowhere is not by chance, it is by design. God, somehow, by his abundant grace, prepared a people, far distant from Israel in both ethnicity and culture, God prepared these people for generations - for this exact moment, for this exact place, with these exact people.

Awesome.

Notice, Philip is a Jewish believer who speaks and reads Greek, which is what the Eunuch is reading. Many of the Aramaic speaking Jewish believers would not have been able to read the Greek text the Eunuch had in his possession, or would have had difficulty since Greek would be their third language. Philip probably knows Greek better than any of the Apostles. The LXX is the translation that Philip himself would use, and this is the translation Philip would have studied from all his life, so Philip knows this translation very well. The perfect man for the job.

For miles, there is not a soul in sight, and then, there next to the Eunuch is Philip running (verse 29). The right place, the right time, the exact relevant OT passage and the only person insight for miles and he can interpret this very problematic passage. This whole situation would blow the minds of the odds makers in Vegas. Ka-Boom!

Now imagine this: A highly educated man, a well dressed man, a very powerful man, a very wealthy man, a very prominent man, a man who answers ONLY to the queen, is asked by a man who obviously only owns the clothes on his back, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

His response should be: "If I cannot understand what I am reading, I who have years of education and experience, if I can't understand this, what are the chances that you can understand? You, a common everyday man."

But, see, this man has been prepared by the Lord for this very moment. A man such as this, in a position such as he has, would normally blow off a man of no standing like Philip. But, this man was nurtured in the Word of God by his parents, by his grandparents and he studies the Word of God himself - and know this: The Word of God will not come

back void. This man is so hungry for God, because he is prepared for the Word, prepared by the Word, so that such a thing does not even cross his mind.

(8:32-33) 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.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

Then the Eunuch infers about the great debate that was hotly debated in rabbinic circles of the day about this particular passage, (34) “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

This question isn't simply a personal misunderstanding, this was THE question that was unresolved about this passage by scholars of the day. The rabbis could not figure this passage out as no one in the history of Israel fit the bill. Some claimed it may be about the prophet Jeremiah and others said it was the nation of Israel, but neither solution was truly satisfactory. Understand, there is no evidence of any person fulfilling these words, that is, until Jesus Christ came and fulfilled them. This man is not, ignorant, most likely he is quite competent - he would not have risen to such a prominent place in his kingdom otherwise. This man doesn't ask a question out of ignorance, this man asks a question out of great knowledge. In essence, he assumes Philip is also aware of this debate and he essentially asks, which theory do you side with?

The answer the Eunuch expects, probably is some version of what any number of rabbinical schools taught on the subject, but to his surprise, Philip tells him about Jesus.

- Jesus is silent before his accusers.
- Jesus was led to his death without protest.
- Jesus was humiliated (death on a cross was thought to be the most humiliating way to die).
- Jesus trial deprived him of justice.
- Jesus never was married, and never produced any children, even if the Ron Brown and the [Da Vinci Code](#) falsely claims otherwise.

## Road Less Traveled

Acts 8:26-40

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Remember, the NT had not been written yet. There were no Gospels or Epistles to refer to yet. But, for a person schooled in the OT, this is the perfect passage to use to explain who Jesus is.

The man sees that what Philip is telling him exactly correct - he believes. And, then he asks to be baptized.

You may have noticed that verse 37 is missing. Why is that?

Well, as you know, the Bible was originally written on various scrolls in Hebrew and in Greek. There are literally thousands of biblical scrolls. Some contain complete biblical books, others are fragments of biblical books.

These scrolls have been carefully studied for many years by biblical scholars and have been graded from very reliable to questionable. Your study bible may contain notes referring to certain scrolls at various points throughout your bible. The content of these scrolls has been compiled into the [Hebrew bible](#) and the [Greek bible](#) we have today. From these established Hebrew and Greek Texts we then have the many different translations we use today.

What this means in short, is that the Bible we have today, is very, very accurate. You can be assured that when you read the words of Jesus - they are the words of Jesus.

Verse 37 is not found in the most reliable manuscripts, therefore it has been taken out of most modern translations. Verse 37 says in rough translation, "and he said to him, 'If you believe with all your heart you may, and he said in answer, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'

These words are found in early Christian confessions, but they are not in the most reliable manuscripts.

Now, in context, what happens between Philip and the Eunuch very much alludes to what is said in verse 37, surely the Eunuch believed and theologically, what verse 37 says is not out of line, but it originally wasn't there.

This is one of those very rare occurrences where it appears a commentary was added by a copyist, and then at a later date the explanation was taken by others as part of the text, and not just a commentary.

Philip, baptizes the Eunuch and then, poof, Philip is gone. Apparently, God feels that Philip has done what was needed, and he takes him away. God may have done this so that the Eunuch did not linger in Palestine following Philip. God may have wanted the Eunuch to get back to Ethiopia ASAP.

The instantaneous taking away of Philip highlights the fact that this was not a random meeting. This highlights the fact that God's plan was that these two should meet, at this exact time, act this exact place.

Let's be clear, God's plan for you did not start last week, God has moved people for generations this way and that way, with you in mind, with your salvation in mind, with your life in mind. We see God going out of his way for this Eunuch, and as we read this account it is marvelous how all the pieces come together for this man - the circumstances make it obvious to us that this was no chance encounter, however, understand God does the same for you.

The events and circumstances may not be so obvious, or so blatant, but the moment of your salvation and the events leading up to your salvation were planned long ago. Now, I am not claiming that we are subject to fate. If Philip did not obey the Holy Spirit promptly, he would have missed this meeting. God works hand in hand with those who believe in Him.

I think for us this morning this biblical account of Philip and the Eunuch is a call to the serious nature of our Christian walk. God does not lightly call men and women to the Gospel, further God does not call men and women to the Gospel for their own happiness, rather God calls us to the Gospel for His sake.

Perhaps there is more to your commitment to Jesus Christ than you are willing to own up to.