

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-16 Philip's Spirit-directed Ministry

God sometimes asks us to do things that do not seem to make sense. That is because God sees the big picture and we see only a small part of it. In our story today, God asked Philip to do something that, at first glance, did not seem to make sense.

Following the outpouring of the Spirit in Samaria, the revival intensified. That's when God did something that may have puzzled many of the disciples there. In the midst of this powerful move of the Spirit, an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip. The angel told him to leave Samaria and go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza—a distance of about 80 kilometers (50 miles). Philip obeyed and went.

On his way, he met an Ethiopian nobleman riding in a chariot. This was no chance encounter. God himself had arranged this meeting between Philip and this high governmental official in the court of the queen of Ethiopia. The man was returning home from a trip to Jerusalem to worship at the temple there, though he was a Gentile, not a Jew. As he rode, the man was reading aloud from the Book of Isaiah where it says, "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isa 53:7).

That's when the Spirit of God told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

So Philip ran up to the chariot. Hearing the Ethiopian's words, he asked the man, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The Ethiopian replied, "How can I unless someone explains it to me? Tell me who the prophet is talking about, himself or someone else?" He invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Then, from the very passage, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. Soon they came to a body of water. So the man said to Philip, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized immediately?"

Philip answered, "You can, if you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God." The man responded, "I believe!" At that, they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. Immediately the Spirit of the Lord whisked Philip away, and the eunuch continued on his journey rejoicing (Acts 8:26-39).

The next time Philip was seen, he was in Azotus, a Philistine city about thirty-two kilometers (twenty miles) to the north of Gaza. He continued his journey northward along the coastline, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he arrived in Caesarea.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said that his disciples would be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth." In the ancient world, the term 'Ethiopia' referred to all of Africa south of Egypt. The word literally means 'people with dark skin.' Ethiopia at that time represented the ends of the earth to the south. In Acts, the Ethiopian nobleman is the first pure Gentile to receive the gospel.

The story of Philip's witness to the Ethiopian is an example of how the Holy Spirit acts as 'Superintendent of the Harvest.' As such, he guides and directs the work of the church. In our story he tells Philip where to go and what to say. In future lessons we will see the Holy Spirit directing the harvest in various ways.

From this account of Philip's ministry on the road to Gaza, we learn three important lessons:

First, we learn that God is concerned about all people from all nations and tribes. Philip first preached the gospel to the Samaritans, a mixed-race people who were part Jew and part Gentile. Now the Spirit sends him to share Christ with an African man who was pure Gentile. God wants all people to know about his Son, Jesus. In sharing the good news with a Gentile man, Philip was following the example of Jesus who himself often ministered to non-Jews. Further, the book of Acts often speaks of those who ministered to people of different tribes and nationalities.

We should do the same today. Jehovah God is the God of all nations and peoples and he loves all people equally. We must therefore commit ourselves to taking the gospel to people of all nations and tribes.

The second lesson we learn from Philip's ministry on the way to Gaza is that God often arranges for us "divine appointments"—and he expects us to keep them. A divine appointment is a witnessing opportunity arranged by God himself. This is what happened in our story. God divinely set up the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian. He then oversaw the timing and circumstances of the encounter. Finally, the Spirit directed Philip into the witnessing event. As a result, Philip was able to present the gospel with maximum effect.

However, had Philip not been able to hear the Spirit's voice, he would have missed his appointment. How many divine appointments have we missed because we were not listening to the voice of the Spirit? Do we know how to recognize his voice when he speaks to us? We can learn to hear God's voice if we will walk in the Spirit and live prayerful lives. When the Spirit does speak to us, we must be quick to obey.

A third lesson we learn from Philip's ministry on the road to Gaza is that we must always be quick to tell others about Jesus. When Philip heard the Ethiopian reading from the book of Isaiah he asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied that he did not, unless someone could help him to understand?" At that, Philip climbed into his chariot, and from the very passage he was reading, told him the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

We should do the same. We must use every chance we get to tell people about Jesus. He is the only one who can save them. Remember Peter's words, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Preachers who spend all of their time talking about other less important things make a serious mistake. Jesus must remain the central focus of all our preaching.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches that we must reach out to all people with the gospel. We must learn how to follow the leading of the Spirit as he guides us into divine appointments.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God is concerned about all people of all tribes and nations. He wants to use us to reach them for Christ.

Let's **review** some of the significant things we have learned from studying the story of Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian nobleman.

1. What is God's attitude concerning people of all tribes and nations?
A. [PAUSE] If you said that God is concerned about all people of all nations and that he wants all people to know about Jesus, you answered correctly
2. What is a divine appointment?
A. [PAUSE] If you said, "A divine appointment is a witnessing opportunity arranged by God himself," you are right.
3. How can we ensure that we do not miss the divine appointments that God makes for us?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that we must learn to hear the voice of the Spirit and be quick to obey when he speaks, you answered correctly.
4. What is our responsibility concerning the gospel?
A. If you responded, "It is important that we share Christ with others at every opportunity," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it over and over until you can tell the story and its lessons to others. Also, gather a group of Christians together and discuss how you may reach out to people of different tribes and nationalities living in your area.