

Baptism

July 26, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Acts 8:26-40

Session Outline

1. The Spirit Prompts (Acts 8:26-31)
2. Revelation of the Word (Acts 8:32-35)
3. Why Not Now? (Acts 8:36-40)

Theological Theme

The story of the Ethiopian official's God-ordained meeting with Philip not only reminds us how powerfully God can work when we are obedient, it also gives us a model for baptism we still practice today.

Call to Action

Have you placed your faith in Jesus but not been baptized? If so, take steps toward baptism today.

Baptism

Introduction

Baptism has always been an important element in the Christian faith.

During the time of Jesus, new converts to Judaism were baptized, and Jesus took this existing practice and gave it new meaning in the Christian church. Jesus Himself was baptized in the Jordan River as an example to His followers (Matthew 3:13-17), and He later commanded the practice of baptism in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

We get the word “baptize” from the Greek word used in the New Testament to describe this practice: “baptizo.” This word means “to dip” or “to immerse.”¹

The act of baptizing new believers is seen throughout the New Testament, and today, we’re studying one such story involving Philip and the Ethiopian that’s told in the book of Acts.

- ❓ Have you been baptized? What was the experience like?
- ❓ Why would you say baptism is important for Christians?

Session Summary

After ministering in Samaria, the Lord told Philip to get up and head to the desert road that runs south from Jerusalem to Gaza. In a beautiful example of faithful obedience, Philip immediately got up and went! When he arrived, God gave him more direction (Sometimes God doesn’t give us the full game plan all at once, but we must take that first faithful step.). Philip was to approach the chariot occupied by the Ethiopian official in charge of the queen’s treasury. When he ran up, he heard him reading from the book of Isaiah.

God gave Philip the perfect setup to share the gospel. The official was a God-fearer and had an open heart ready to hear about Jesus. When he invited Philip into his chariot, Philip was able to explain not only the suffering servant passage that the official was reading, but the full

gospel message. When the Ethiopian believed, he asked to be baptized. After baptizing the official, Philip was whisked off by the Holy Spirit and the official went away rejoicing (and possibly spreading the good news in Africa).

1. The Spirit Prompts (Acts 8:26-31)

- ❓ How was the Lord at work in the events in this passage?
- ❓ What do you notice about Philip? How would you describe his actions?

Philip, who was probably a Hellenistic (or Greek-speaking) Jew², was among the men of good reputation chosen in Acts 6 and appointed to help ensure the widows in the congregation were being well cared for. Shortly before this in Acts 8, Philip was ministering to Gentiles in Samaria.

In our passage today, Philip continued his faithful ministry. God told him where to go, through an angel's message, and there was a person open to the things of God waiting there. When we faithfully listen when God gives us direction, the Lord works in powerful ways.

Just as God positioned Philip for Kingdom impact in this passage, God invites us to Kingdom adventures, too. When the Holy Spirit gives us the nudge to take action, God invites us to be a part of His work. God wants to use us for His purposes, but are we listening? Are we tuned into what the Lord desires? If we aren't careful, we can easily cram so much noise into our lives that we can't hear the Holy Spirit over it. We do well to turn to the Lord intentionally and often, seeking to discern how the Lord is guiding us.

The Lord sent Philip on a specific route. "This is the desert road" (v. 26), the text clarifies. Luke, the author of Acts, seemed to be more concerned with the working of the Lord here than the geography of the situation because we don't get details on where Philip started his journey, but we certainly get a picture of his faithful obedience. An angel of the Lord told Philip to go, and he immediately obeyed. He could have resisted. If Philip was in fact still in the Samaritan city, staying in the city might seem like a better move, right? Philip had a bustling ministry there, and men and women were being baptized (Acts 8:12), but sometimes God calls us to do things that don't make logical sense to us or others. God always has a bigger plan, though, and in this case, God had a person He wanted Philip to meet. God called Philip to leave the multitude of the city to go after the one on the desert road.

There on the desert road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza, he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch traveling home from worshipping God in Jerusalem. This God-fearing Gentile was in a position of power in the Ethiopian court. This kingdom, different than the Ethiopia we know today, stretched from Southern Egypt to Northern Sudan (this was known as Cush in the Old Testament).³ Ancient literature describes this kingdom as the ends of the earth, and Philip was now poised to send the gospel there, as Jesus commanded in Acts 1:8.

The official was reading the book of Isaiah (which would have been hard to come by at this time⁴), the Old Testament book with the most Messianic prophesy. God had ordained the perfect moment for Philip's arrival. When we are similarly obedient (Philip was told to go, and he went!), God paves the way for us, creating the perfect moment to work through us for His plan.

 How might God be calling you to act in obedience to Him now?

Once again, we see Philip's bold obedience in running up to the chariot when the Spirit gave him instruction. Reading aloud was common in those days, and when he heard the prophet Isaiah being read, that was all the context he needed to jump in. Philip was invited to sit with the Ethiopian in the chariot, and the Lord's good plan was well underway.

2. Revelation of the Word (Acts 8:32-35)


 What opportunity did the Lord provide for Philip to share and how did he take it?

 How does this passage from Isaiah give direct opportunity to share the gospel?

When Philip obediently ran up to the chariot at the Spirit's urging, he found that the Ethiopian man was reading a Messianic prophesy from Isaiah! This quotation comes from the "suffering servant" passage in Isaiah (53:7-8), which speaks of Christ's suffering on our behalf.

God paved the way for the gospel to be shared in the Ethiopian man's question: Is this passage about the prophet or someone else?

The tee up could not have been clearer.

 When was a time God gave you clear opportunity to share about Him with another person? How did you respond?

The answer to the official's question, of course, was Jesus, and God had thrown the door wide open for Philip to share the good news. Philip took

advantage of the door the Holy Spirit had made for him and began to share the gospel with the Ethiopian official, starting with the very passage in Isaiah he was reading as Philip joined him.

The words “beginning with that Scripture” (v. 35) indicate that Philip explained more than just these two verses in the suffering servant passage. He took the official on a trip through Scripture that pointed to the truth of the gospel.

We often worry that, when given opportunity to share the gospel, we won't know the right thing to say, or we will mess up the moment, but don't underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do. God goes before us and opens doors only He can. It's God's job to change hearts, ours is to walk faithfully through the doors He provides.

3. Why Not Now? (Acts 8:36-40)

- ❓ How did Philip's faithfulness continue in this passage?
- ❓ What can we learn about baptism from these verses?

The Ethiopian eunuch believed and desired to be baptized, so he asked Philip to baptize him in some water they were near. “What would keep me from being baptized?” (v. 36).

This account not only gives us a beautiful example of God working out His good plan behind the scenes, and how we can join Him by being obedient, it also gives us a great example of believer's baptism in the New Testament. The Ethiopian official believed the good news and then was baptized.

Jesus commanded the practice of baptism in the Great Commission, and we see examples of it throughout the New Testament:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. —Acts 2:38, 41


The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. He escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. —Acts 16:29-33

“That Scripture”

The eunuch was reading from the servant portions of Isaiah, which point to Jesus' atoning death perhaps more clearly than any other Old Testament passage—the perfect preparation for Philip's witness. When the treasurer professed his faith and requested baptism, they immediately arrived at a rare desert oasis. The Spirit had clearly been in everything that happened. As soon as the eunuch was baptized, the Spirit snatched Philip up and transported him to the cities of the coast.

Early church examples like this, and the example from the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official, are why we practice believer's baptism. It's the command of Christ and the model demonstrated by the early church.

The same God who aligned a chance meeting of these two men aligned the presence of a body of water in which the Ethiopian official could be baptized. Luke's note here that they "came up out of the water" seems to indicate that the official was baptized by immersion (v. 39).

 How does this passage and the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17) give precedent for baptism by immersion?

After Philip baptized the new believer, the Holy Spirit "carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer" (v. 39). So, the two men went their own way, the eunuch back to his homeland, rejoicing, and Philip to Azotus to carry on "traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea" (v. 40).

We don't know for sure what happened to the Ethiopian eunuch, but according to church tradition, he went on to act as Jesus's witness in Africa.⁵ He held a position of influence, so he certainly had the means to be a powerful tool for the gospel there. This reminds us of the impact a small act of obedience (even one that doesn't make sense) can make for the kingdom.

Conclusion

Small steps of obedience can have untold kingdom impact as a part of the good that God is doing in this world (some of that impact may be to others, and some of that impact may be to ourselves).

Philip immediately followed the word of an angel of the Lord and got up and headed south on the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza, and then later boldly ran up to a chariot at the Holy Spirit's urging. His obedience led him straight into the path of the Ethiopian official. The Lord arranged for Philip to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. The official was reading a passage in Isaiah with an open heart and a desire to understand. God arranged every detail.

God works to put us into the paths of the right people at the right time. Maybe it's someone curious about faith, and they happen to strike up a conversation with you. Maybe it's someone that needs help you can give, and through that help, you're able to not only model Christ but also share the gospel with them. The scenarios are endless, but the lesson is clear: When we walk in obedience, God uses it. God doesn't waste any moments.

But we must be paying attention. We must tune into the Lord and watch and listen for His nudges. And when we feel them, we must boldly approach the situations God has placed before us. It won't always be easy (running up to a rich person's chariot on the desert road was probably uncomfortable, too), but obedience is always worth it.

This account also gives a model for baptism. The Ethiopian official was first saved and then baptized, and we practice the same model of baptism today. When we are baptized, we follow in the footsteps of generations of faithful believers before us, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. Yes, and amen.

- ❓ Has God ever placed you in someone's path at the right time? What happened and how did it impact you?
- ❓ What can we learn from Philip's actions and obedience to the Holy Spirit's instruction in this passage?
- ❓ What does this passage teach us about baptism? Why is baptism important for the people of God?

Prayer of Response

Thank God that He is willing to leave the many to go after the one. Thank Him for letting us be a part of His work in the lives of those around us. Ask for His help to be obedient and on the lookout for open doors, like Philip was.

Memory Verse

As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would keep me from being baptized?"
—Acts 8:36

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Acts* by Tony Merida
- *Acts* by R.C. Sproul
- *Be Dynamic* by Warren Wiersbe



Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Extended Commentary

Acts 8:26-40

8:26–29 Through the agency of an angel of the Lord, God arranged for Philip to stand in a place that would bring him into contact with an important Ethiopian man who would listen, believe, and in turn spread the gospel to other lands. Candace was not the queen's name but a title. Reading aloud was common, especially if the scroll was not in his native language. The eunuch was a Gentile God-fearer who had come to worship in Jerusalem. The Ethiopia of that time was not the modern country of Ethiopia but the ancient kingdom of Meroe, which covered what is now northern Sudan south of Aswan to Khartoum.

8:30–31 Philip's question and the Ethiopian's response imply that the OT passage the eunuch was reading (Is 53:7–8) required interpretation in light of what God had done in Jesus of Nazareth.

8:32–34 The Ethiopian was reading Is 53:7–8, apparently from the Greek text. It is likely that he was reading the entire Suffering Servant section of Isaiah (52:13–53:12). The eunuch's question, who is the prophet saying this about, allowed Philip to explain Jesus as the subject of the passage. It is Jesus, not Isaiah, who suffered for the sins of humanity (Is 53:6). From the earliest days of the church, the Suffering Servant section has been seen as an ideal starting place for explaining the gospel.

8:35 The phrase, beginning with that Scripture, may indicate that Philip went on to explain other relevant OT passages besides those in Isaiah.

8:38–40 The Ethiopian requested and was granted baptism just as soon as he believed (see note at 10:47–48). That they went into the water and then came up out of the water apparently indicates baptism by immersion. The eunuch came out of the water and found himself alone. The Holy Spirit had miraculously carried Philip away to his next appointment, a place called Azotus, the OT Philistine city of Ashdod, about thirty-five miles from Gaza.⁶

References

1. Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 232.
2. Stanley E. Porter, "Acts," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1727.
3. Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1006.
4. Ibid.
5. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts," *Sonic Light*, 2026 edition, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/acts/acts.htm>.
6. Porter.