Philip Teaches the Man from Ethiopia



Scripture Reference: Acts 8:26-40

Suggested Theme: The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible. We can ask the Holy Spirit, teachers, preachers, elders and other Christians to help us understand the Bible.

Memory Verse: “Remember what you are taught. And listen carefully to words of knowledge.” Proverbs 23:12, ICB

Story Overview:

Philip followed instructions from an angel of the Lord and went to a very important man riding in a chariot.

The man was a chief official of the Queen’s Court of Ethiopia. He was reading from a scroll of Isaiah but could not understand it. Philip joined him in the chariot and explained that the Scripture was talking about Jesus. The man began to believe in Jesus, and when the chariot passed by some water, the official asked Philip to baptise him (and he did!).

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

Philip was a respected and faithful man who was one of the seven helpers first appointed in a congregation of disciples of Jesus. The church first began in Jerusalem among the Jews, but following the Stoning of Stephen, a great persecution rose up against the followers of Jesus, and they left Jerusalem in large numbers. Followers of Jesus, like Philip, began teaching people about Jesus wherever they went. This meant the good news of King Jesus spread out from Jerusalem to a wider and wider circle of people. Philip’s first stop was Samaria, where he taught many, including Simon the Sorcerer.

Ethiopia probably refers to ancient Nubia, present-day southern Egypt and northern Sudan. “Candace” was a title used for the leading woman of the country, meaning that this Ethiopian man would have had a trusted position as an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Queen. Men placed in charge of the living quarters, the harem in particular, were sometimes made eunuchs (castrated) but the term “eunuch” could also be used in a more general way for an official or officer.

Special Note to Teachers: More than one teacher has been flustered when a child asks the completely natural question, “What is a eunuch?” For younger children, I have just answered that a eunuch was a special servant to the queen and was not allowed to have girlfriends, wives or children. For the older child, I have just said that a eunuch is a man who has had an operation that makes him unable to father children. If an older child were genuinely curious (and not asking to seek attention), I would consider telling him or her that castration involves removing the testicles. But, in that case, I would mention it to the parents afterwards so they can follow up at home if needed. We want to encourage children to ask questions about God’s Word, so never make them feel it is unacceptable to ask. Be a teacher that children can trust to give

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straight answers.

The Ethiopian was probably a proselyte (a Gentile who has converted to Judaism) but would not have been allowed full privileges at the temple because he was a eunuch (Deuteronomy 23:1). As he was on his way home from Jerusalem, he interestingly chose to read from Isaiah. As a eunuch, he must have been drawn to Isaiah's writing because Isaiah talks about God's acceptance of those, including eunuchs, who worship Him (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Isaiah was his chosen reading to pass the hours away, and he must have wondered about the Servant Lamb Isaiah was referring to. When Philip ran up beside the chariot, the eunuch told Philip that he was confused by what he was reading in Isaiah 53:7-8.

Philip went on to explain the good news of Jesus Christ. His words aren't recorded, but he probably explained the whole context of Isaiah and connected the suffering and sacrificial lamb in Isaiah, dying on behalf of the people to rescue them, to the suffering and sacrificial death of Jesus, who died on behalf of the people to rescue them. See John 1:29-31 and Hebrews 9:24-28.

Part of the good news that Philip shared must have included a discussion about being baptised into King Jesus to become members of the forgiven people of God. It was the Ethiopian eunuch who requested to be baptised. See Acts 2:22-39 and Romans 6:3-10.

As soon as they came up out of the water, the Spirit took Philip away so that Philip "finds himself" in the town of Azotus. He continued preaching in the area and finally settled in Caesarea (88.5 kilometres/55 miles northwest of Jerusalem). We next read about Philip 20 years later when Paul stops in Caesarea on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8-9). At that late date, he is called "Philip the Evangelist" with "four unmarried daughters who prophesied."

Understanding the Bible:

Children can relate to the man from Ethiopia because they often hear preaching or read Scripture they do not understand. Just as the Spirit sent Philip to help the Ethiopians understand, God provides a family of faith to surround children and help them learn what is needed for a growing and maturing faith. Think of the people in your congregation who provide this for children. This can be elders, preachers, teachers and other Christians. The children might also have other people, like relatives, who help them understand what the Scripture says. Are you that person to the children whom you know?

Way to Introduce the Story:

Before the group gathers, use a sheet of paper to write the words from Isaiah that the Eunuch was reading:

> "He was like a sheep being led to be killed. He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is being cut. He said nothing. He was shamed and was treated unfairly. He died without children to continue his family. His life on earth has ended." Acts 8:32b-33, ICB

Roll the paper up to form a scroll. When the children arrive, open the scroll and have one of the children read it. It is expected that this will be difficult to understand.

Ask them what this verse means and then discuss that sometimes the word of God can be challenging to understand. Elders, preachers, bible teachers, and others who study their Bibles can often help us to understand what we read. In today's story, we will read about a man who read the same verses that we just read. Someone helped him to understand.

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The Story:

To persecute someone is to cause harm to them on purpose so that they suffer. A man named Saul was one of the Jewish leaders who persecuted followers of Jesus. He even went from house to house and dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Soon, many followers of Jesus began to leave Jerusalem and move to other places.

It was sad that they had to leave Jerusalem, but the good thing was that wherever the followers of Jesus went, they preached about King Jesus. Because of that, many more people heard the good news. One of these followers of Jesus was named Philip. He was a man who was wise and lived according to the Holy Spirit. Philip travelled to Samaria and told the people there about Jesus.

After this, an angel of God gave Philip special instructions to go down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip knew that angels were servants of God who sometimes delivered messages from him. So he did just as the angel directed. When he arrived at the road, Philip saw an important-looking man in a chariot.

The man was from Ethiopia. At that time, this country was very rich and powerful. The man was an important official in charge of the Queen’s treasures. He was on his way back home after going to Jerusalem to worship. The man was reading from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He was reading about a suffering lamb sacrificed on behalf of others, but he did not know what that meant.

The Holy Spirit of God told Philip to go up to the chariot, so Philip ran up. Philip asked the Ethiopian, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Sometimes, it is difficult to understand what we are reading in the word of God. Sometimes, we need help from people who understand the Bible better than we do. The man had many questions and asked Philip to help him understand.

The Ethiopian showed Philip the Scripture he was reading and explained it to him.

Then Philip went on to tell him more and more about Jesus Christ so that the man could understand that Jesus was the Lamb of God. The man must have thought, “Oh, I see; now I understand what Isaiah was talking about.” The Ethiopian was so happy to hear the Good News of Jesus.

The Ethiopian was so excited. He wanted to have his sins forgiven so that he could be a follower of Jesus and be part of the people of God. When the chariot passed near some water, the Ethiopian said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptised?”

The Ethiopian ordered the chariot to stop, and he and Philip went down into the water so Philip could baptise him. The Holy Spirit took Philip away when they came out of the water. He later appeared in another town and taught many other people about Jesus.

Even though the Ethiopian man never saw Philip again, the Bible says he “went on his way rejoicing.” He was now a follower of Jesus and part of the people of God. His life would never be the same.

The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible. Before reading the Bible, try praying for the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you read.

Other Christians can help us understand the Bible, too. Philip helped this man understand the Scriptures. When you have questions about what you read in the Bible, who can help you understand?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

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Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Who told Philip to go to the desert road to Gaza? (An angel of the Lord)
- Who told Philip to go to a chariot and stay near it? (The Holy Spirit)
- What was the Ethiopian Official riding in? (A chariot)
- What was the Ethiopian Official doing when Philip first saw him? (Reading a scroll of the Book of Isaiah)
- What did the Ethiopian Official invite Philip to do? (Sit in the chariot with him and explain what he was reading about in Isaiah)
- What else did Philip explain to the Ethiopian Eunuch about? (The good news of Jesus)
- What did the Ethiopian Official want to do after Philip taught him about Jesus? (He wanted to be baptised)
- What did the Ethiopian Official do after he was baptised? (He continued going home, full of joy)
- What did the Ethiopian Official learn in this story? What did Philip learn?
- What did you learn about God (the Father, Son or Spirit) from this story?
- What did you learn about people from this story?

Reflection:

- What do you think the Ethiopian official's chariot looked like, or how did it feel to sit in it?
- What do you think the angel of the Lord whom Philip saw looked like?
- How do you think the Ethiopian Official felt when he was reading Isaiah but didn't understand what it meant?
- How do you think Philip felt when the Ethiopian Official asked him to explain the scripture to him?
- If you were Philip, how would you feel about explaining the scripture to the Ethiopian Official?
- Have you ever read or heard something from the Bible you didn't understand? How does it make you feel?
- What do you usually do when you don't understand something about God or the Bible? What could you do to better understand?
- Who would you feel comfortable asking for help to understand what you read in the Bible?
- The Ethiopian asked Philip a question about Isaiah, and Philip used the opportunity to tell him about the good news of Jesus. What questions have others asked you about God, Jesus, or being a believer?

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- Who can help us learn how to answer these questions or share the good news with our friends? (Suggestion: pray together, asking the Holy Spirit to help everyone with this)
- What part of this story was most interesting to you?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Roll Roll Chariot Roll Song
- We Will Roll the Gospel Chariot Along
- Love is Something if You Give it Away
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Have one of the elders or preachers visit today to tell the children what they do to help explain God's word to people, as Philip did. They may explain their education and experience. Ask them to show some sermon outlines or bible study courses.
- Direct the children to mime the story today as a review
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make a scroll.

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: 3D picture with free template (Jesus without language)
- Craft: “Baptism in a bottle” (Doc Thelma kitchen)
- Craft: Written instructions for a paper chariot (ehow)
- Craft: How to make a chariot out of a cardboard box. You’ll have to scroll down to the bottom as there are lots of items on a list. (DLTK)
- Printable Bookmarks. Enter your own personal text and then print them. (Activities for kids)
- Game: Pass It On game with ping-pong balls (Christian crafters)
- A collection of activities (teachusthebible)
- Map showing locations of ancient Ethiopia and cities in this story (openbible)
- A video depicting the story. Lifekids on YouTube.
- Visual Aid: Colour pictures that cover both Philip and the Ethiopian and the story of Saul’s conversion (Acts 9). It is in pdf. and can be viewed on screen. However, I found it easier to save it to my computer and then view it. (Bible for children)
- Online quiz: How well have you studied for this lesson? I challenge you to try this yourself! (Fun trivia)

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