

# Acts 8:26-35

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-8/acts-826-35/>

*An angel tells Philip to start a journey toward Gaza. On the way, Philip encounters an African eunuch, an official in the court of a Queen. The eunuch is reading a prophecy from Isaiah about the suffering servant, but he doesn't understand who the prophecy is about. Philip explains that the prophecy is about Jesus's death for the sins of the world.*

After preaching the gospel to the Samaritans and bringing many to faith and baptism (v. 13), Philip is called by God to evangelize elsewhere: *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)*

Visited by *an angel* (in this case a messenger sent from heaven) *of the Lord*, he is given specific instructions of where to go next to preach. He must take the *southbound road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza*. Luke, the author of Acts, informs his reader that *This is a desert road*. It leads southwest from Jerusalem toward Gaza, and then onto Egypt and the continent of Africa ([see map](#)).

Below Egypt was the kingdom of Cush (or Kush), thought to originate from Cush, the son of Ham (Genesis 10:7). There are many encounters with Cushites throughout the Old Testament, some involving wars fought (2 Chronicles 14:9) and marriages (Numbers 12:1). But there were also Cushites who lived in Israel, such as Ebed-melech the Cushite who rescues Jeremiah the prophet from drowning (Jeremiah 38:7-13).

Philip obeys the angel: *So he got up and went.*

We are not told how long he walks on the road. Luke, the author, informs us that *there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

The territory of Cush was what is now modern-day northern Sudan and southern Egypt, not modern-day Ethiopia. Ethiopian was merely a Greek word, "aithiops," that meant "burnt-face" and did not refer to a precise people or place during the time of the Roman Empire. Ethiopia as we know it today did not exist then, so it seems very likely that this *Ethiopian* was a Cushite, just as Ebed-melech was.

This *Ethiopian* was both a *eunuch* and a *court official*, which was common across the many kingdoms of antiquity. A *eunuch* was a male servant who was castrated so that he would be considered harmless, having no ability or physical drive to start a family (to create an heir) or pursue the women of the court. Thus he could focus on his service to the king, and could be better trusted. Daniel was possibly made a eunuch during his captivity, placed to serve in the court under the chief eunuch, Ashpenaz (Daniel 1:3).

This *Ethiopian eunuch* was a high-ranking *official*, in charge of all the treasure of the queen of the Ethiopians, Candace (Greek, “kandakē,” a title, not a name).

The fact that the *Ethiopian eunuch* had come to Jerusalem to worship means he may have been a convert to Judaism, a “proselyte” (Deuteronomy 29:11, Acts 6:5).

Philip’s meeting with this man was not by chance, but was divinely appointed by God. The *Ethiopian* was making the return journey in a *chariot*, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Perhaps he purchased a copy of Isaiah’s prophecies while in Jerusalem to worship God.

Then the Spirit prompts Philip, perhaps speaking to him audibly, “Go up and join this chariot.”

Philip, ever obedient to God, ran up and heard the traveler reading Isaiah the prophet.

Philip sees this as a window of opportunity to start a conversation with the *Ethiopian*, one where he could tell him the good news of Jesus Christ. He asks the traveler, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

The *Ethiopian official* replies with honesty, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” The prophecy of Isaiah is beyond his understanding. He needs a teacher. Philip implied that he knew the text’s meaning, so the traveler invited Philip to come up and sit with him while he was riding along in his chariot.

The passage of Scripture that the Ethiopian was reading was from Isaiah 53:7-8:

“He was led as a sheep to slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
So He does not open His mouth.  
“In humiliation His judgment was taken away;  
Who will relate His generation?  
For His life is removed from the earth.”

The eunuch explains his confusion to Philip. He does not know who this prophecy is about: “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. It seems Philip explained this Scripture from Isaiah 53 to the eunuch only as a starting point, beginning from it, and then preached Jesus to him by tracing other messianic prophecies, leading up to Jesus’ life and death.

He may have sat in that chariot for hours, teaching the eunuch how the Old Testament scriptures pointed to Jesus, that the Messiah of Israel had finally come, and, as a sheep to slaughter, Jesus was led to His death. One can wonder whether this might have been a similar presentation that Jesus made to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27).

Jesus submitted fully to His crucifixion. He willingly was arrested, to the point of rebuking Peter for interfering by fighting with physical force (Matthew 26:52-54). Jesus did not make a defense for Himself at His trial (Matthew 26:62-63). He did not speak against the Romans as they beat Him and nailed Him to the cross. *As a lamb before its shearer* He was silent; a *lamb* has presumably never been sheared before, but it is so simple and gentle a creature that it trusts whatever situation it is led into, whether to the *shearer* or the *slaughter*; Christ, knowing His purpose was to die for the sins of the world, still submitted to those who would strip and slay Him as quietly as a *lamb* might. He experienced *humiliation* in the extreme, going from His place in Heaven as the Son of God, to a man executed unjustly (Philippians 2:5-8).

*In humiliation his judgment was taken away* is awkward phrasing. The basic idea is that in his *humiliation*, fair *judgment* was not given to him—it was *taken away*. He was vulnerable in the hands of His oppressors.

The prophet asks *Who will relate or declare His generation?* This question is connected with Jesus being killed, His life being *removed from the earth*. So the question seems to be asking, “Who will declare to others *His generation?*” The word *generation* in the phrase *His generation* is generally used to describe the age in which someone lives. So the prophet seems to be asking who is going to share what Jesus came to share after He leaves. If that is the case, then Philip is answering that question in the presence of the eunuch. Philip is declaring the gospel of Christ as an ambassador of Christ, after He departed. The Great Commission answered the question, in that each believer is asked to make disciples, and teach them to obey Jesus’s commands (Matthew 28:18-20).

The point of the prophesied suffering was the end result that *His life is removed from the earth*. Jesus came to die, it was always the plan, the only way to redeem the fallen race of humankind and reconcile us with God. The full chapter of Isaiah 53, known as the Suffering Servant prophecy, is ripe with descriptions of how Jesus would suffer and for what reason,

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.  
All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him.”  
(Isaiah 53:5-6)

The chapter paints a picture of one man, Jesus, paying the penalty for others, and in doing so, He “will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11).

Years after Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension, the Apostle Peter will also declare that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy through His trial and sufferings:

“Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, **nor was any deceit found in His mouth**; and while being reviled, **He did not revile in return**; while suffering, **He uttered no threats**, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

(1 Peter 2:21-23).

Here in Acts 8, Philip explained these things to the eunuch, *he preached Jesus to him*. He told him that Jesus had resurrected, and now had ascended to sit at the right hand of God, which Luke conveyed to us earlier in Acts (Acts 1:9).

[For a detailed look at the full prophecy, read our commentary on Isaiah 53.](#)

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>26</sup> **But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)** <sup>27</sup> **So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,** <sup>28</sup> **and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.** <sup>29</sup> **Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”** <sup>30</sup> **Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”** <sup>31</sup> **And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.** <sup>32</sup> **Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:**

**“He was led as a sheep to slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
So He does not open His mouth.**

<sup>33</sup>**“In humiliation His judgment was taken away;  
Who will relate His generation?  
For His life is removed from the earth.”**

<sup>34</sup> **The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”** <sup>35</sup> **Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.**