

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 18TH–19TH, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

A DESERT ROAD (ACTS 8:26–35) AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

Philip has been in Samaria serving God and seeing an amazingly fruitful ministry (vs. 4–8).

- People are coming to faith, getting set free from demons, and being healed in Jesus' name.
- Now, God sends to Philip an angel of the Lord with an interesting directive: "go south...from Jerusalem to Gaza. (This is the desert road)" (v. 26).

A DESERT ROAD?

Why would the Lord call Philip away from a vibrant ministry in the city to a road in the desert?

- Why does God sometimes lead us to places we don't see as ideal or would never choose for ourselves?
- "Desert places": 1) Work that seems like a downgrade, 2) seasons of obscurity, or 3) geographic transitions that don't make sense.

MAYBE IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU AT ALL.

God leads us to walk the desert road because His plan for our lives involves far more than our immediate comfort—there's a greater and more eternal purpose at work.

- Are we willing to walk when God says it's time to walk? Are we committed to flourishing in the places God puts us? Or do we gripe, complain, and give in to negativity?

"SO HE GOT UP AND WENT."

Notice that Philip doesn't know where he's going as he starts walking, yet he moves anyway.

- As he moves, God shows him the target—it's not Gaza; it's a person on the road.
- The person is an Ethiopian man who was a high official of the queen.
- "Eunuch": 1) Physical castration, and 2) political office in the queen's inner circle.

This eunuch was on his way home from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem.

- He was probably a "proselyte" or a Gentile who had converted to Judaism.
- He was reading from Isaiah the Prophet as he rolled down the road from Jerusalem.
- As a eunuch, he would have known the reality of exclusion from full participation in temple life (see Deuteronomy 23:1).

He was both Ethiopian (a Gentile) and a court official, meaning his ethnicity, status, and body all set him apart as someone very different.

- In an honor-shame culture, a eunuch lived in an ambiguous and awkward space. He was not fully aligned with traditional male identity nor able to carry on a family legacy.
- Even in a place meant for worship (the temple), he likely felt watched, different, and out of place.

A SINCERE SEEKER WITH BIG QUESTIONS

He had traveled far to worship, yet he left still searching, reading Isaiah in his chariot.

- This was a man who was spiritually hungry but likely wondering, "Is there really a place for me with God?"
- Philip was sent to the desert for this purpose.
- The Spirit said to Philip, "GO," and Philip ran up to the chariot (vs. 29–30).

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND...? HOW CAN I...UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME?"

The eunuch was reading from the prophet Isaiah—a passage about the suffering servant who would come and bear the sins of the people.

- Philip used this passage to explain the gospel and teach the truth of Jesus (v. 35).
- How can those who seek God know Him if we are not willing to come near and guide them?

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE (ACTS 8:36–40)

As Philip explained the gospel to the eunuch, he probably closed his explanation with a description of baptism and its significance.

- It's obvious from Peter's sermon at Pentecost that, to the apostles, baptism was not a suggestion but a mandate for Believers professing faith in Christ.
- As Philip and the eunuch were riding along, they came to some water (v. 36).

The eunuch requests that Philip baptize him, and they both went down into the water, where he was baptized.

- But where is v. 37? The oldest and most complete manuscripts of Acts don't contain that verse.
- Saving faith in Christ was obviously there or else Philip wouldn't have agreed to baptize the eunuch.

As Philip and the eunuch emerged from the water, a miracle occurred as the Spirit "carried Philip away".

- This is one of the only mentions of this kind of miracle (teleportation) happening in the Bible.
- Philip "appeared" in a place called Azotus, where he continued to preach the gospel.
- The eunuch went on his way rejoicing as he saw Philip no more.

FAITH THAT IS GENUINE IS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED BY OBEDIENCE.

Obedience to the truth of the gospel looks like believing in your heart (Romans 10:9–10), confessing with your mouth (Matthew 10:32), and identifying with Christ through baptism (Acts 2:38, Matthew 28:19).

- Delayed obedience and excuses for obedience are elaborate forms of disobedience.

CARRIED AWAY THE SPIRIT?

Philip is led by the Lord in dramatic ways in this passage.

- Don't miss Philip's obedience in the simple things first. His obedience to the simple commands paved the way for God's more elaborate interventions.
- God often entrusts dramatic guidance to those who are already faithful in ordinary obedience.

CONFRONTED BY JESUS (ACTS 9:1–9)

Chapter 9 opens with Saul still breathing threats against the church (v. 1).

- He gets official approval from the high priest and heads to Damascus, planning to arrest any followers of Jesus and drag them back to Jerusalem (v. 2).
- This isn't random violence; it's organized, authorized, and targeted. Saul believes he is defending God.

As Saul comes to the end of what was likely a six-day journey, he is nearing Damascus.

- Then, suddenly, a light from Heaven flashes, he hears a voice, and he falls to the ground (vs. 3–4).
- For a devout Jew, that kind of moment isn't confusing; it's unmistakable.
- This is clearly God speaking (Ex. 3; Ezekiel 1:28). It was a light "brighter than the sun" (Acts 26:13).

"SAUL, SAUL, WHY ARE YOU PERSECUTING ME?" (V. 4)

Saul's response is so interesting: "Who are you, Lord?" (v. 5).

- This is clearly either God speaking or someone from God speaking. Yet, as Saul is overwhelmed by a true encounter with God's glory, he has to admit in a very real way that he might not know who God is as much as he has led everyone to believe.
- An encounter with God is quite different than simply believing some ideas about God.

The response must have stunned him: Jesus was God, and this was who he was persecuting.

- Saul believed it was the "blaspheming" Christians who were persecuting God, not him.
- To persecute Christ's Body (the Church) is to persecute Christ Himself.
- If the Church is Christ's Body, and to harm it is to harm Him, how are we loving Jesus by caring for His Body?

Before Saul can recover from his shock, he receives orders from Jesus to go into the city.

- From Saul's viewpoint, one of the worst aspects of Christian blasphemy was their claim that Jesus of Nazareth was alive. Now, he has undeniably and personally encountered the resurrected Christ and must face the reality that he has been wrong about everything.
- An encounter with God changes everything.

Saul's traveling companions "stood speechless," hearing a voice but seeing no one.

- Saul pulled himself up from the ground in a state of physical, psychological, and spiritual shock—he was not even able to see (v. 8).
- Saul's blindness was probably symbolic of the darkness in which he had been walking.
- As Saul entered Damascus, he couldn't see and didn't eat or drink for three days.

The proud, ruthless, and violent terrorist was now a broken, helpless blind man who stumbled into Damascus devastated by this unexplainable experience he had just had with Jesus.

- In our hardness of heart and stubbornness, we can be so convinced that our ideas about God, Jesus, priorities, and life's meaning are all correct, but an encounter changes everything.

THE CHOSEN INSTRUMENT (ACTS 9:10–18) WE'RE INTRODUCED TO A DISCIPLE OF JESUS IN DAMASCUS NAMED ANANIAS (V. 10).

God appears to Ananias in a vision, telling him to find Saul and lay hands on him so he can receive his sight (vs. 10–12).

- This is a terrifying revelation for Ananias! Imagine God appearing to you and telling you to find and pray for a known ISIS terrorist who kills Christians.

Ananias is understandably reluctant and wastes no time expressing that to God (vs. 13–14).

- Verse 15 identifies not only the fact that God called Saul but also His intended purpose for that call.
- Saul would become a chosen instrument who would carry the name of Jesus to "the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (v. 15).
- Saul was saved not just for his own sake but for the sake of countless others.

God saves us for more than just going to Heaven when we die. We are saved to bring Heaven to wherever He places us in the here and now!

- You have a purpose in the story of God that is significant and unique to only you.
- Saul was God's instrument for a work in the First Century, but you can be an instrument for His work NOW, in this moment and hour.

After hearing God explain His purpose for Saul, Ananias travels to the house and addresses Saul as his brother.

- He tells him what God had spoken to him and told him to do, then places his hands on him to pray (v. 17).
- Immediately, something like flaky scales falls from Saul's eyes (v. 18).
- This was a physical miracle with spiritual meaning.

Saul's idolatry of religion and hatred of the person of Jesus had blinded him to the truth.

- But God had pursued Saul—by both appearing to him on the road to Damascus and by sending him Ananias.
- The scales that "fell from his eyes" symbolized the spiritual blindness he had been walking in for so many years.
- Now, God open Saul's eyes to a new reality.

Saul is baptized, receives the Holy Spirit, takes food, and is strengthened (vs. 18–19).

- He's the same, but he's not the same. Saul has been radically changed into a completely different person by the power of God.
- Nothing about his life will ever be the same. In fact, in a few chapters, he will not even be referred to by the same name ever again.

FAITH IN A LIVING GOD

- Some of us have settled for a strange form of "Christian Deism," where God was once active but isn't now.
- We think our job is now just to believe some facts, do our best to follow some rules, and wait until we die to go to Heaven.
- This isn't the Christian life at all.
- God is active in leading His disciples as we walk through life.
- God has a direction for where we are to go, and He places people in our path who need Him.
- Are we willing to be led and directed? Is our faith displayed in our obedience?
- Have you had your encounter with the resurrected Christ? Do you see and hear Him as He is, not as you have supposed Him to be?
- Are you letting Him use you as an instrument? Is your life about His will or your own?