

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 11,

Acts 8

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 11 on Acts 8.

In Acts chapter 7, Stephen lays the theological groundwork for the mission away from Jerusalem or beyond Jerusalem and Judea. But Philip is the first one to begin to officially carry it out.

Now actually, there were many people who were scattered, and we read in chapter 11 that many of them were taking the good news with them. But Philip is the one who's narrated. He's one of the seven, one of the leaders of the Hellenist Jewish Christian movement.

And so, in chapter 8, verses 5 through 25, we see Philip's mission to Samaria and in verses 26 to 40, his ministry to an African court official. We'll start with 8.5 to 13, the conversion of Samaria. Chapter 8 and verse 5 speaks of a Samaritan city.

Probably it's referring to the main Samaritan city, Neapolis, which was on the site of ancient Shechem. Probably not the site of the ancient city of Samaria, which no longer was a Samaritan city. It had become a predominantly Greek city.

It had been refounded as a Greek city. So probably Neapolis on the site of ancient Shechem. Shechem, which actually does figure in Stephen's retelling of Israel's history back in chapter 7, verses 15 and 16.

Well, many people are coming to faith, but one of the people that he runs into there is Simon the sorcerer. Now, Gentiles used magic a lot. It was popular in love.

You had love magic to try to seduce people to like you, to charm them into maybe leaving their spouse and coming after you, to burn with passion for you, and so on. It was also used in sports where you would use magic to try to kill your opponents with curses and make their chariots crash and so on. Or if you were rooting for a particular team, you would do that.

So magic was very widely used in Egypt in particular. We have a lot of evidence for it because, well, we have a lot of papyri from Egypt and there are a lot of magical papyri. But Jewish practitioners were sometimes considered some of the best at magic.

Despite the fact that some Jewish teachers said that magic is very bad, and you're not supposed to do it, many of the rabbis said, well, you have to make a difference between illusions, just magic tricks on the one hand, or what you do by means of spirits, demons. And that may have been a good distinction to make. But even though rabbis condemned magic, we see some later rabbis doing something that really kind of looked like magic, trying to use the secrets of creation to create the hind part of a calf and things like that.

The reason that Jewish people were well known for magic was that magic often worked by invoking the name of a higher spirit to deal with a lower spirit. And Jewish people were reputed to know the secret name of their deity because Yahweh, what we really had, YHWH, the letters, we didn't have the vowels to go with it. And so consequently, it was just a tradition of how it was pronounced because Jewish people normally didn't pronounce the sacred name in public anymore.

They called him Lord rather than Yahweh. So, it was considered a secret name. And in magic, sometimes people would try every possible permutation of how to pronounce that divine name.

Although some of the things that people have thought were just permutations of the divine name, the vowels were also used for magic. So sometimes people are just using different vowels. But in any case, Jewish practitioners of magic were highly reputed.

You see a Jewish magician, a Jewish false prophet in Acts chapter 13. You see the seven sons of Sceva who are exorcists, but what they're doing is similar to practices in ancient magic. And you have people who weren't Jewish trying to use the name of a Jewish deity and invoking angels and so forth.

In any case, Simon in this Samaritan town has gained a lot of notoriety from the practice of magic. Now, Sebast was nearby. Sebast, probably our closest equivalent today might be something like Augusta.

Sebast was a Greek city founded on the site of ancient Samaria. And Sebast meant the August one. It was named after the title of the emperor.

And in this Greek city, we have evidence of what was actually going on in some other places too, but was going on there as well, that many were blending all the male deities into one kind of synthesis of the male deity, but with a dyad, all the female deities into a female deity. Justin Martyr, who was actually from Neapolis in the second century, what's called Napolis today, in the second century, Justin Martyr, who was a Gentile from the Samaritan area, although he wasn't Samaritan by religion. He later became a Christian by the time he was writing as a Christian.

He says that the reputation there, the tradition there, was that Simon was being portrayed as the incarnation of the male deity, and his consort, Helena, was being portrayed as the incarnation, the avatar of the female deity. We don't know if that tradition goes back to the first century, but it could well. He's from the right region to know something about that.

And that would make some sense because, in this passage, it says that he claims to be the great power of God. Now, remember that there are people in Acts who claim to be somebody. Gamaliel said that Theudas claimed to be somebody.

And in Acts chapter 12, Herod Agrippa I wants to receive worship as a deity. By contrast, Peter rejects veneration, Acts chapter 3 and verse 12. And also in Acts chapter 10, Paul rejects veneration.

Paul and Barnabas reject veneration in Acts chapter 14. But here is somebody who wants to be exalted. What did Jesus say in Luke's gospel? Whoever seeks to exalt himself will be brought low and whoever humbles themselves will be exalted.

Well, the Samaritans are baptized by Philip. They were already circumcised. So, the issue of whether you have to circumcise them wouldn't come up the way it could come up later on with Gentiles.

But Samaritans, if they converted to Judaism, would have converted to Judaism by baptism alone because they didn't re-circumcise somebody unless they become uncircumcised, for which there actually was a medical procedure back then. Some Jewish people who became very Hellenized in the Maccabean era and wanted to run in races were mocked by Greeks because they were circumcised, they found a way to pull their foreskin forward and make it look like they were uncircumcised. But I didn't know of any cases of people who became circumcised and then uncircumcised and then re-circumcised.

But in any case, a Samaritan's conversion to Judaism, however, was viewed as tantamount to denying their identity as a Samaritan. It was viewed as being a traitor to one's people. For a Jew like Philip to invite Samaritans to follow a Jewish Messiah would also be viewed as something like a betrayal of Judaism because, hey, this is our Messiah and you shouldn't be welcoming these people in so glibly.

But it follows the theological program of decentralized witness that was argued in chapter 7 and was promoted by Jesus in chapter 1 and verse 8 and chapter 8 and verse 13. Here we see a power encounter. Pagan sorcerers sometimes could duplicate some of God's signs.

You see that in Exodus chapter 7 and verse 11, verse 22, chapter 8 and verse 7. But there was a limit. You get to Exodus Chapter 8 verses 18 and 19. Pharaoh's magicians had never been able to duplicate the scale on which God was working.

I mean, God owns the universe. God works in nature. You're not going to ever be able to duplicate that scale of creating another universe or something like that.

But they get to the point, Exodus 8:18, and 19, and then further in chapter 9 and verse 11, where they can't do the things that Moses was doing at all. And in fact, they recognize this is the finger of God. Interestingly enough, in Luke chapter 11, where Jesus talks about casting out demons, Jesus says, if I, by the finger of God, am casting out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you, come into your midst.

In many places in the world today, sorcerers are converted because they see that God's power is really greater. Someone I know who graduated from Asbury Seminary with a D.M.I.N. has sent me some pictures and some reports of how sometimes in one year, they'll have 20 practitioners of witchcraft who openly claim that that's what they do, converted and baptized in just one section of Indonesia, where he's from. And we have reports like that from many parts of Africa and elsewhere.

In one report from Southern Africa, a black South African evangelist, I believe from Zulul, was preaching. And there was a witch doctor, a practitioner of witchcraft, who would throw curses and things like that. But he was curious about what was going on.

And he joined into the crowd and he had all these charms woven into his hair. Well, the power of the Holy Spirit was so strong that he just passed out. He fell down flat.

And when he regained consciousness, all of his hair had fallen out with all the charms. He became a Christian and committed himself to Christ. I'm sure his hair grew back.

But in any case, we have a number of power encounters taking place all over the world today. And I have experienced some of that in the most pleasant ways, but have seen God's victory, God's power is superior to the power of the evil one. And some people are more apt to walk into that than others.

I don't like going into those situations. But God is victorious. Well, in verses 14 through 25, the remainder of this narrative, we learn about the apostolic ratification of the Samaritan conversions.

Now, I mentioned earlier, talking about current debates about baptism in the Holy Spirit, that theologically the Spirit's work is one package. You see that in 238 and 239.

Although some people will say that what you have in 238 and 239 is that repenting and being baptized are the prerequisite and that the gift of the Spirit doesn't necessarily immediately follow.

But I think it's probably a bit messier than that. I have a friend, Danny McCain, who teaches in Nigeria. And I joined him teaching there for three summers, but he's been there for decades.

Danny talks about how he will assign members of the class different passages in the Book of Acts. And he'll say, well, what does receiving the Spirit look like in the Book of Acts? Depending on the passage that they have, well, you get baptized first, then you receive the Spirit, or you receive the Spirit and then you get baptized. Some of those may be exceptional, but the point is God is sovereign.

God isn't limited to doing it just one way. There may be an ideal pattern, but let God be God. In any case, in principle, we receive the Spirit at conversion, but experientially we don't necessarily experience all aspects of it simultaneously.

Scholars have approached this in various ways. Some people say, well, the Samaritans were not really converted yet. That is a decided minority view among Acts commentators or so ever.

Most Acts commentators recognize they were converted, but at least this aspect of the Spirit's work they hadn't experienced yet. I think Calvin said they hadn't experienced the outward signs of the Spirit yet. However you take it, there's something that the apostles felt they needed to have that they didn't have yet.

The biggest point here is that the Samaritans received the gift also, and the Jerusalem church recognizes and approves of that, or at least their leaders do. Peter and John want this. They want them to receive the Spirit.

The Spirit, according to Luke's emphasis, Acts 1:8, the Spirit is power for witness. Thus, Samaritans become partners in mission. Now this is not what Jewish people normally expected.

Most Jewish people, when they were going from Galilee to Jerusalem, if they were Galileans like Peter and John were, they would travel through Samaria. It was a three-day journey. It was longer if you took a roundabout way.

Some people did that, but most Jewish people did travel through Samaria. Samaritans sometimes mocked them as they were going to Jerusalem. The story is told of this one Samaritan who was saying, why are you going up to Jerusalem? Mount Gerizim, our holy mountain, is higher than Mount Zion.

In fact, it's the only mountain that wasn't covered during the flood. The rabbi didn't know what to say to him, but the rabbi's assistant, who was his donkey driver, on which the rabbi was riding, said, well, according to the Torah, only the mountains of Ararat were not immersed. The Samaritan was ashamed, and thereupon, according to the story, the rabbi got off his donkey and let his donkey driver ride it instead because he was so adept in scripture.

But this had happened in Luke chapter 9, where they were passing through Samaria, and the Samaritans were very displeased that they were heading towards Jerusalem. And Peter and John, sorry, not Peter and John, John and James wanted to call on fire from heaven on the Samaritans. They wanted to act like Elijah, but they didn't understand really what God really wanted.

God really cared about the Samaritans. So, John is performing a very different role at this point. But you can see things moving towards that also in Luke chapter 17, where Jesus heals a number of lepers, and the only one who comes back to give thanks is a Samaritan, and Jesus commends him.

So, they were learning some things. And of course, we know from John chapter 4 that they had other dealings there. But in any case, this is a remarkable thing, that they want Samaritans to receive the Spirit.

This is definitely a change for the Galileans. It's a transition. They haven't gotten to Gentiles yet, but they're moving in the right direction.

Chapter 8 and verse 17. We have some rare Jewish examples of laying on hands for prayer. Of course, hands were laid on to impart blessings and prayer in the Old Testament.

We talked about hands being laid on in chapter 6 for the coming of the Spirit, for ministry, and the Old Testament background for that. But laying on of hands for prayer in general was not all that common. But here, Peter and John, who have laid hands on the seven earlier, including Philip, now lay hands on the Samaritans.

The goal is not to keep the power for ourselves, or to keep knowledge for ourselves, for that matter, or whatever else. The goal is to disseminate it, to multiply it as much as possible so that we have as many co-workers as possible. The harvest is great.

The laborers are few. Let's seek to multiply it. Chapter 8, verses 18 through 24.

Well, sorcerers work signs, and Simon sees something that lets him know that the people have received the Holy Spirit. Different views on what it may have been, whether it was something like maybe when Stephen looks like an angel in 6.15. A lot of people think it's tongues because tongues appears elsewhere. But I think that Luke

has such a heavy emphasis on cross-cultural communication that he would love to narrate tongues if he knew for sure that it happened on this occasion.

So, I'm inclined to think it probably wasn't tongues, but probably that's the majority view of people who try to narrow it down to anything. James D.G. Dunn thinks it probably was tongues. Fitting Luke Axe, it could have been any kind of prophesying, although again Luke might have mentioned that if he knew exactly what it was.

He may just not have the details for this occasion. But whatever it was, it was something that Simon saw, he witnessed, and he said, I want that same power that these apostles have, because, whoa, that's really dramatic. Well, sorcerers were used to buying magical formulas.

And so now he wants to buy this power to impart the Holy Spirit. But no one could buy the Spirit. This is God's gift.

And there's no money in the world that would be enough to acquire God's gift worthily. We have to just accept it as God's gift. We don't all have the same gifts.

We just have to be faithful with the gifts we have and open if God wants to give us more gifts. But Simon took the wrong approach. And the other Simon, Simon Peter, says, you and your money perish with you.

So, Simon asks them to pray for him. So it ends on a somewhat positive note. At least Simon realizes he's in trouble and he wants them to pray for him.

And he acknowledges their right to be the ones to do this prayer. It doesn't say that he repented for himself. And according to later tradition, he didn't.

Just a martyr and others. Although you also have to keep in mind that the later church, when they were dealing with false prophets of their own day, it helped if they had somebody they could link them to in the New Testament. And some of those false prophets actually wanted some precedence in the New Testament that was other than the public apostolic tradition.

So, we don't know for sure whether he historically repented or not. But Luke ends it on a fairly positive note, where at least he has the opportunity to do so. In chapter 8, verses 26 to 40, moves to the conversion of an African official.

By the way, Philip functions as a forerunner. Maybe not in the same way that John the Baptist does for Jesus, but Scott Spencer has pointed out that Philip often functions as a forerunner for Peter in the book of Acts because it's Philip who preaches first to the Samaritans. Well, as Peter and John are on their way back home, they preach to the Samaritans also.

They've learned from something that Philip did before them. And they weren't too proud to do that. And they could preach in the villages of the Samaritans.

Philip being a Hellenist probably could only speak Greek. He could speak in the major town. A lot of the Samaritans there spoke Greek, but in the surrounding villages, they would just speak Aramaic.

So, Peter and John can preach in the villages in a way that Philip couldn't. Unless he's with them and they're translating for him. And the reverse might have been more likely.

But in any case, coming to verses 26 through 40, we learn about the conversion of an African official. And this is significant. This is the first fully Gentile convert.

Five times the narrative says that he's a eunuch, even though it might be more dramatic to say he's the treasurer of Queen Kandaka. The narrative keeps emphasizing that he's a eunuch. So, it probably means it literally rather than just as an official.

There were a number of officials, in fact, in antiquity who were eunuchs. The male servants of queens were often eunuchs. And he is the male servant of a queen.

Now in the Roman world, it was despised. People looked down on eunuchs. They considered them, they called them often half-men.

It was understood that sometimes people were born with certain things missing. But especially when most eunuchs were people who had been made eunuchs humanly, by human means. This was sometimes done for servants who were male so that they wouldn't enter puberty in the normal way and could continue to be sexually abused by male masters.

But especially it was associated with people from parts of the world where this was done, like Parthia. Well, if a person was literally a eunuch, according to Deuteronomy 23.1, this person could not become a proselyte. They could not join the community of Israel.

They could be a God-fearer, and this man obviously is. I mean, he's reading from Scripture. He's been to Jerusalem because he fears God.

But he wouldn't be allowed to actually be a full proselyte. And he's the first fully Gentile Christian. The first fully Gentile Christian is from Africa.

Later on, because people today, call them the Ethiopian eunuch, and sometimes we think of the current nation of Ethiopia. And the nation of Ethiopia has a wonderful Christian history. In fact, they were converted through the witness of a couple of Syrian Christians around the year 333, the Emperor Izanus, the emperor of the relatively new empire of Aksum in East Africa, in what's now Ethiopia, converted to Christianity.

Much of Ethiopia converted with him. It's one of the few places in the world where the gospel initially spread without martyrs. But probably this court official is not from what we call Ethiopia today.

Ethiopia had a wider meaning back then, and the mention of Kandaka lets us know that he was actually from the Nubian kingdom of Neroe, which existed before Aksum did, and actually goes back to around 750 BC. Well, how do we know that this conversion is so significant in terms of Luke's narrative? He's already mentioned a proselyte in chapter six. We have Samaritans in the first part of chapter eight.

Cornelius is clearly a Gentile in chapter 10, and some people say, well, he's the first convert. He's actually the first public Gentile convert. He's the one that the Jerusalem church knows about.

But there were things happening before the things that became commonly and widely known. So, this is the first Gentile convert. Philip, remember, Paul and his companions, including Luke, in Acts chapter 21, spent time in Philip's home.

Well, what would Philip and Paul be talking about when they're together? Probably one of the things they'd be talking about would be old times when maybe Paul was still a persecutor and had scattered the church. And then, well, what did Philip do when he went out? And Luke may have been staying even with Philip later on in Caesarea when Paul was in Roman custody there for up to two years. But he certainly would have had other occasions to talk with Philip, whom he'd already met.

Well, he would have heard this story, but this might be a story that only Philip knew. There's no indication Philip went on to Caesarea. He didn't go back to Jerusalem.

So, this isn't something where word necessarily got back to the Jerusalem church. In contrast with the conversion in Samaria, that would have to get back to the Jerusalem church. You had travelers going back and forth.

So, word would have gotten there fairly quickly. There's a message here, one that Luke undoubtedly finds very ideal to emphasize in light of the Old Testament. Isaiah chapter 56, verses 3 through 5, we see that God himself welcomes foreigners and eunuchs.

Well, here's a guy who's both of these. That's the context of the passage that Luke cites earlier, where Jesus cites from Isaiah 56 and says, this house should be called a house of prayer. The context is a house of prayer for all the nations.

Also, there's an Ethiopian eunuch in the Old Testament who turns out to be one of Jeremiah's few allies and saves his life. He doesn't get as much play in the book of Acts as Cornelius does. The Cornelius story is repeated three times in the book of Acts, but that's because of Peter's role in that story.

Cornelius was the first official convert. One of the most important things about that story was not just the conversion of Cornelius, but the conversion of the Jerusalem church, the change in their thinking about what could happen. Now, they were regarding that as an exception rather than a precedent until you get to Acts chapter 15, when Peter's listening to what's going on through Paul's ministry and cites that as a precedent.

But this conversion of Cornelius wasn't the first Gentile Christian. This African court official was the first Gentile Christian. Now, Luke traces the mission of the church to the West, to the heart of his audience's empire.

But that doesn't mean he doesn't care about the gospel going to the rest of the ends of the earth. And he narrates here it going to the southern ends of the earth. And, you know, because he cares about it going to the ends of the earth, that would also include the east and the north.

So, this is given as much space as the Samaritan revival. And it may show us something significant, too, in terms of reaching out to international visitors in our midst. Some of these visitors are from places where it would be very hard to reach people in their own contexts where they're from.

But if they come into cities where we are able to minister and where there's more freedom to minister, by all means, we should be reaching them. It's so tragic, I think, that in some countries where there's freedom to preach the gospel, you have people who are not doing anything to reach the unreached. And God is sending often the unreached to them.

Many of our cities have just a mixture of cultures. We need to be proactive in reaching out to people. I mean, it's their choice how they respond.

But we certainly need to be loving them and sharing with them. And in this case, God certainly orchestrates the events. In A26, Philip is told to go possibly south or possibly, the Greek wording means midday.

It actually can be translated either way. If it's midday, if he's being sent at midday, that's very urgent because normally at midday, a person would stay in the shade often for an hour or two hours. Shepherds would take their flocks in the shade of trees if possible.

Carpenters, whatever kind of work people were doing, they'd stop it at midday and they'd eat a light meal or take a siesta and sleep for a while. But more likely, the term means to go south, which is also interesting because it's the south road, he said, toward Gaza. Well, what is he expecting to find on this road, especially as it's apparently a deserted, either a deserted road or going toward old Gaza, deserted Gaza? There were two major roads from near Jerusalem that led southward.

One led through Hebron and into Idumea or Edom. The other was adjoining the coast. The other one went south but then joined the coast road before it reached Gaza, heading for Egypt.

So, this specifies which road he's to take. And we have, archaeologically, we have Roman milestones as road markers showing where these roads were. But he speaks of something deserted, either a deserted road or more likely deserted Gaza.

There was old Gaza and new Gaza. The city had been rebuilt. The old Gaza was the deserted town near the culturally Greek Ashkelon, Old Testament Ashkelon, and the new Gaza.

After the revival in Samaria, the command to just go walking where you don't know what's going to happen, must appear absurd. Although you can think of Abraham being sent out or other things in the Old Testament. It must appear absurd.

God often tests his servants' faith through apparently absurd commands. Moses leads his people. They came up to the Yam Suph, the sea, and he was told to stretch out his hand in his rod and part the sea.

That sounds like an absurd command. 1 Kings 17, Elijah tells a widow in Zarephath, well, you prepare the food for me first. She said, I just had enough.

I was going to prepare it for myself and my son. Then we were going to die. But she goes ahead and obeys it.

2 Kings chapter 5, Naaman is told by Elijah's servant that he's to go and dip in the river Jordan. He says, are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than this? He's offended because he wanted Elijah to wave his hand over the leprosy or something. But his servants are the ones who aren't too proud.

And they say, look, if he had asked you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? So, they persuade him to obey this absurd command. And he's cleansed, he's healed. Well, in the same way, Philip is given a fairly absurd command.

But when God gives us a command, we should obey it. 8.27, Ethiopia, literally the Greek is Ethiopia. Ethiopia, was a Greek term for all of Africa, south of Egypt.

It wasn't just what we call Ethiopia today, although if they thought of that, that would have been included. Mediterranean legends placed Ethiopia at the southern end of the earth. And there were a number of myths about Ethiopia.

Memnon, who was a mighty and valiant warrior, son of Eos, the dawn goddess. Or Andromeda, who was an Ethiopian princess who was rescued by Perseus in Greek mythology. Sometimes in Homer, it spoke of the gods going and hanging out with the Ethiopians.

They were considered a very special group of people. The most commonly mentioned feature of Ethiopians or Africans south of Egypt in Greek literature was their black skin. And that's also in the Old Testament.

Also, you have busts of them, statues of them. Elsewhere in the writings, it speaks of other features. It's just absolutely clear that this is talking about Africans south of Egypt.

There had been Nubian empires since around 3000 BC. In this particular empire, he speaks of the kingdom of Meroe. Well, Meroe was a black Nubian kingdom south of Egypt in what is now the Sudan.

And it had been around since 750 BC. Its main cities were Meroe and Napata. Now, eventually, this empire fell about the time that it was being eclipsed by the powerful East African empire of Axum.

But the gospel spread again in Nubia. In the fifth and sixth centuries, it became a major stronghold of Christianity. In fact, it remained a Christian stronghold for almost a thousand years.

Eventually, because they couldn't get their own, they couldn't get priests with teaching because the patriarch of Alexandria couldn't spare them and Ethiopia couldn't spare them. Eventually, they succumbed to invaders from the north, but they were able to stab them off for many centuries. So, for most of history since this time, actually, it was a Christian kingdom.

But we don't really have, apart from oral tradition about Ethiopia, we don't really have anything concrete about what happened after this official went back. Probably

he shared his faith, but we just don't have any details. The Kandaka, or Candace, we sometimes say in English.

Greeks thought of this as the title of the ruling queen mother. So, according to Greek usage, probably this would have been not just a queen, but the ruling queen. But Africans probably used the title more widely, not just for the queen who reigned when there was no king, but any sort of queen.

One of them, a ruling queen mother, actually beat Augustus. He had to retreat. And there are a number of other ancient reports about these powerful Ethiopian queens.

According to Jewish legend, Moses had married one. There was one ruling in this period. Her name was Queen Nawadimak.

We don't know if this was the one or not, but that was one of the queens who actually was ruling Nubia, or ruling the empire of Meroe. In Nubian art, portrays the queen with many jewels and also depicts her wide girth, which means that she had a lot of food available. That was considered a great thing in this culture.

This was a powerful queen. Whether she was reigning or whether she was married to a husband who was reigning, we don't know for sure in this period because the dates of the rulers of Meroe are not quite fixed yet by archaeologists. But the queen's treasurer would definitely be a powerful person because the queen was very wealthy, and this was a very wealthy kingdom.

Archaeologists have found considerable wealth in the ruins of Meroe, which was way further south than Egypt on the Nile. Greek would be used in trade ties with Egypt. Maroe had many trade ties with the north.

That's where Rome got many of its African substances. If they wanted peacocks or anything, it normally came through Meroe. Greek was the language of the cities of Egypt by this period.

Many of the common people still spoke what we call Coptic, but Greek would have been used for official things. The Nile was very good for trade because you could sail southward on the Nile because of the wind, or you could sail northward on the Nile because of the current. This official undoubtedly spoke Greek since he was involved in economic issues for the kingdom, which is important because, remember, Philip is a Hellenist.

Greek is his language, so this is the common language in which they could communicate. It's probably also the language of the scroll that this official is reading, which he could have easily acquired. He could have acquired a Greek scroll even in

Jerusalem but probably acquired it most easily in Alexandria when he was on his way north.

Verse 28, he's in a chariot. Only the wealthiest people had chariots. People occasionally read sitting in expensive chariots.

He might have been reading himself. Undoubtedly, he was literate. He was of a class that could afford education for sure, but he might have a reader who would be reading it to him.

And presumably, this is in Greek. Otherwise, there's no way that Philip would have recognized what text he was reading. In verse 29, the Spirit has told Philip to run up to the chariot.

Philip is still a young man, apparently. He's in good health. Sometimes we see that positive aspect of youth in Scripture.

Peter and John, well, John in my view, but different people have different views. Peter and the beloved disciple in John chapter 20, kind of competing who can run fastest to get to the tomb. And the beloved disciple outruns Peter, and he remembers that.

But then Peter swims to Jesus, and shows his devotion, lugging a whole bunch of fish in chapter 21. Well, Philip was a young man, probably a young man. When we see him later in the book, we don't know actually what age he is, but he has four virgin daughters.

So probably, given what we know of the usual age of virgins, probably he was a young man at this point. And so, Philip runs up to the chariot, may not outrun it like Elijah outran Ahab's chariot, but he runs up to the chariot. Reading silently was very rare in antiquity, not as some older commentators say that it never happened.

It did happen sometimes, but usually, people read aloud. They hadn't developed reading silently as a separate skill for the most part. He runs up to the chariot, and here's the man reading from Isaiah.

And the man says, of whom is the prophet speaking, of himself or someone else? Well, that's a divine setup. You have those sometimes in scripture, like in Genesis 24, where Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac from his own household. And the details just fall into place in ways that make the confirmation crystal clear, which is very important for the message of Genesis because the line must be carried on.

So, Genesis 24 is narrated at great length, and the story is told at least twice, as the servant narrates in detail to the family to whom he comes, how the Lord confirmed this for him. Well, probably most of you, if you've been followers of Jesus very long, have experienced some of these divine setups. They happen, well, I would say they happen fairly often.

I've seen them happen. I've experienced them fairly often. But this one is a pretty dramatic one.

It's very important that the good news be able to go even to this far-off land, farther than Philip can go, farther than Philip's language abilities can take him. Here is a key moment. Well, the text that's being read is from Isaiah 53.

Now, who is the servant in the book of Isaiah? Well, sometimes Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 42 and some subsequent passages, the servant is explicitly Israel. So, if anybody says, no, the servant can't be Israel, I'm sorry, but you're contradicting what the text explicitly says. In Isaiah 49, the servant is also Israel, but in 49.5, the servant seems to be distinguished from the rest of Israel and suffers on behalf of Israel.

And then again, in chapter 53, verses 1 to 3, the servant is rejected by Israel. In 53.4 through 12, it says that the servant bears the sins of Israel, even though Isaiah has been talking about Israel being punished for her sins. Chapter 40, double for her sins.

And in Isaiah 53, verse 9, it says, this servant is not guilty. And 53.12, this servant suffers voluntarily. That doesn't sound like it's describing Israel.

It sounds like it's depicting somebody who acts on behalf of Israel. One person within Israel, a righteous remnant who acts on behalf of Israel. And of course, this is applied in the New Testament to Jesus, who in retrospect we can see is the one who fulfilled this.

In Acts chapter 8, verses 36 to 38, going along, the man is so delighted. Well, he wasn't allowed to convert to Judaism. He couldn't as a eunuch, but now he's welcome.

He can convert. There were wadis near Gaza. They come to a place where they say there's water here.

What prevents me from being baptized? Full immersion was presupposed in Jewish baptism. So, if a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism, they would be immersed in water. In fact, normally the immersion went much more immersively than is practiced even in immersion-practicing churches today, in that the person normally had to be completely naked.

Later rabbis said that if so, much of a string of a bean was between your teeth, it invalidated the conversion because you weren't fully immersed. Now, I don't think that John the Baptist was immersing people in the River Jordan naked out in the site where you've got men and women together. I don't think that's very likely, knowing what we know about Judaism abhorring nakedness and so on, except in the case of executions.

And so, this may not have been a naked baptism either. But in any case, there's a wadi there. They're able to do that.

And as a God-fear, the Ethiopian probably understood the need for baptism. Well, I can't be circumcised, but at least I can go through this ritual. Now, by the way, I'm not trying to get into the issue of what churches should do in a later period.

I'm just explaining this is the background for how it was done then. When you get to the Didache, ideally, you should be immersed in running water. If you don't have running water, then you use still water.

It goes on down the way where you may have to pour if you don't. So, the most important thing was this was an act that was understood as an act of conversion. And how your church tradition does it based on whatever period they're looking at; I'm just talking about what it was here in the book of Acts based on how it was normally done in this period.

But in Acts chapter 8 and verse 39, the spirit catches Philip away. The Ethiopian doesn't see him anymore, but he goes on his way rejoicing, which is also a sign of the spirit in Acts, like in Acts 13, the end of the chapter. The spirit catches Philip away.

Now, it had been thought that could happen to a prophet in the Old Testament, like with Elijah. Obadiah said, oh, maybe, you know, I was afraid when you're telling me to go get Ahab. Well, nobody's been able to find you.

You're so elusive. The Lord has hidden you. I'm just afraid I'll go tell Ahab and you won't be here.

The spirit will snatch you away and put you somewhere else. Or in the second, which didn't happen in second Kings chapter two and verse 16, some of the sons of the prophets say to Elisha, well, you know, we knew that your master would be taken from you today. So maybe, maybe the spirit of the Lord has carried him away on some mountain or something.

We need to go look for him. In Ezekiel chapter three, verses 12 and 14, the spirit actually does catch Ezekiel away, but it's not clear whether it's in his body or whether

it's in a visionary way. He, you know, in one, he's actually picked up by his hair and carried away in the spirit, but it's in the visions of God.

So, was it literal or not? But here it's clearly real and it's clearly physical. He's really relocated. And I've actually talked with people who have experienced that, not very often.

It's not very common in the New Testament either. We have it here, but, and then in Revelation, depending on how you take that, probably in a visionary way in Revelation. So, and then Paul says, whether in the body or out, I don't know, but I have gotten reports of that.

And there are reports of that in Indonesia, some of the some of the ministry teams that they were walking and something that should have taken a week and it only took them a day or something like that. God has ways of doing those things if he wants to, but it's not very frequent. The African court official goes on his way.

Philip, however, the spirit carries him away and he starts going to the coastal cities. Azotus, which was the ancient Philistine stronghold of Ashdod. Azotus was the current name of the city.

It was about 25 miles north of Gaza or about 35 miles west of Jerusalem. He preached in these cities until he came to Caesarea, Caesarea Maritima, as opposed to Caesarea Philippi, what used to be known as Stratos Tower. And then Herod renamed it in honor of Caesar.

So, and settled Jews there as well as other people. So, Caesarea Maritima was over 50 miles north of Azotus. So, over 70, 75 miles north of Gaza.

And it's off the same coastal road. So, Philip is just walking on the main, on the main road at this point. Now, it leaves Philip here.

It's going to come back to him later and he's still going to be in Caesarea. So, you know, there are different seasons in our lives. Philip was itinerant at one point as an evangelist.

Here, Philip apparently settles and does ministry in Caesarea. Caesarea is going to be very significant for this narrative. That's where Peter is going to share the gospel with Cornelius.

Well, Philip has already been there, but Peter, a leader in the Jerusalem church, is the one who's sent because the Jerusalem church needs to learn some things too. Caesarea was more multicultural than Jerusalem. Jerusalem was pretty much monolithically Jewish.

Caesarea was divided between Jews and Gentiles. And there was a lot of interchange and there was also a lot of suspicion and mistrust. But Philip is going to settle there and presumably do ministry there.

But that's where Peter is going to meet Cornelius in chapter 10. But before chapter 10 is chapter 9, which is where Saul becomes a believer. And for a few chapters, it's going to be cutting back and forth, transitioning gradually between Peter and the Jerusalem church on the one hand and Paul and the Gentile mission on the other.

Caesarea also was probably widely known because of the Judean-Roman war. When war broke out, Jews and Syrians started massacring each other in the streets of Caesarea. We are told by Josephus that in a very short amount of time, the Syrians gained the upper hand and slaughtered around 20,000 Jewish residents of the city.

So, it was an awful thing. Although we're told by later church tradition that Philip was no longer there. Philip and his four daughters had emigrated to Asia Minor and were part of the Johannine-related church there.

Philip functions as Peter's forerunner here with the Samaritans, with the Gentiles, and even with Caesarea. Luke probably has these stories from Philip. Sometimes we have a lot of unsung heroes in history.

Philip, we wouldn't have known about any of these things if Luke had only had access to the stories from the Jerusalem church. We have a lot of unsung heroes in church history. There are some of those of us who are out in front of people, there are people who know about us, but we've got people behind us who are praying for us.

We have other people that you never heard of who are doing ministry. You think of some major evangelists, you think of the people who led them to the Lord. The people who led me to the Lord, who brought me the gospel on the street when I was an atheist, and I argued with them for 45 minutes, and they didn't even find out that I was converted until a year later.

I tracked them down and made sure that they got to know, and by then I'd led 10 other people to the Lord. I know their names, but most people have not heard of them. Most people have not heard of most of us, in fact, but our names are written down in heaven.

They're written in the Lamb's Book of Life, as it says in Luke chapter 10, and that's what matters most. God knows who we are, and we're all brothers and sisters, we'll all be together forever. I remember one time I was walking into a place of prayer.

People were praying there, they were worshiping there, and I was so wrapped up in all the things I was doing for the Lord, and those were good things. As I got into there, I felt like the Holy Spirit spoke to me, these are all good things, this ministry you're doing, this ministry you're doing, but someday you won't be this, and you won't be that, but what you will always be is my child, and that's the heart of our identity. Whether people know who we are or not, Philip does the mission before Peter, and Philip doesn't get the same notoriety that Peter does.

But God used Philip to break new ground, and God knows in God's book, and that's what matters, that God's work goes forth. We seek first the kingdom, and everything else will be added to us, and in the end, it's the kingdom that matters, because that's what's forever.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 11 on Acts 8.