Preparing to Teach Acts 8

If we remember our quick outline of Acts, based on Acts 1:8 [Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth], we have reached a transition point in Acts 8. Saul, who would be so integral to God’s plan in reaching the ends of the earth, is still actively hostile in verses 1-4 but will be converted in the next chapter. In the meanwhile, we see him as an instrument in the scattering of Jewish believers as part of a program of persecution. That covers some of the witnesses in Judea section.

But in verse 4, Philip moves the tracker to Samaria. And though we will see him with a successful ministry in Samaria, the Holy Spirit leads him to an encounter that moves him (and the early church) from what one scholar called a metropolitan mindset to a cosmopolitan mindset [Gleiser, Norman L., *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), p. 128.] The vision of reaching the world for Christ just kept getting broader, a wider horizon for evangelism/missions.

An old book on New Testament Literature broke this entire phenomenon, as expressed in the Book of Acts, in a more detailed approach. The authors built on an earlier work and cited six (6) waves of expansion in the book. **[See the slide]** The first wave we’ve already studied, from Acts 1:1-6:7 we see the expansion of the church throughout the entire city of Jerusalem. The second wave, from Acts 6:8-9:31, is where we’re currently studying and takes us throughout the historical boundaries of what is now Israel. We’ll get to the third wave next week, Acts 9:32-12:25, where the gospel penetrates what we know as Syria today. The fourth wave takes us from Acts 13:1-16:5, the first missionary journey which leads us through Asia Minor, what is now officially called Turkiye. The fifth wave enters Europe through Macedonia and Greece (Acts 16:6-19:9). The sixth wave takes us to the world’s capitol and beyond (Acts 19:10-28:31). [Adapted from a summary of Purinton, Herbert R. and Carl E., Literature of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925), pp. 111-112 as cited in Ryken, Leland, *The New Testament in Literary Criticism* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1984), p. 42.]

I spend all of this time in reminding you of the outward sharing trend in Acts because we are at the pivotal, transitional point here. Verse 1 begins by reminding us where we left off: ***1a) So Saul was in total agreement concerning condemning him [Stephen] to death.* [PJT]** James Moffatt’s translation of this verse is: *(And Saul quite approved of his murder.)*, presented with that delightful British flair for understatement [Foakes-Jackson, F. J., *The Moffatt Commentary: Acts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 69.] The verb, ἀναιρέσει, is stronger than merely killing [Gloag, Paton J. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), p. 271.]. If one considers Stephen’s tribunal to have been “legal,” it would be condemned to death; if one considers it “illegal,” it would be “murder.” I translated it as though it was a “legal” action because Saul would have agreed with it on that basis. Saul’s role ties the account of Stephen’s martyrdom and the resulting persecution of the church together [Conzelmann, Hans, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 60.]

It seems like this is a spark inciting something of a civil war in Jerusalem. “His death, however, was the signal for an immediate campaign of repression against the Jerusalem church. If we read the present paragraph in its wider context, we may conclude that it was the Hellenists in the church (the group in which Stephen had been leader) who formed the main target of attack, …” [Bruce, F. F., *Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974—original, 1954), p. 174.] “THE spite and cruelty of the adversary was not quenched

by the blood of Stephen, but rather inflamed.” [Lightfoot, John B., *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. F. Dove, 1823), p. 120.]

Verse 1 continues: ***Then, it happened on that same day, a great persecution upon the church in Jerusalem, so all were scattered, except the apostles, into the regions of Judea and Samaria.* [PJT]** Naturally, this verse raises a number of questions. If all of the church was driven out, as Johannes Munck argues [Munck, Johannes, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967), p. 71.], why were the apostles allowed to stay?

It makes much more sense to argue: “…perhaps, only the Hellenistic Jewish followers of Jesus were persecuted after the stoning of Stephen, not the apostles (cf. Acts 8:1-3). We should probably suppose that the Hellenists carried out their mission program mainly in Samaria and in the Hellenistic cities of Galilee, the borderlands of Syria and Palestine, and along the Mediterranean coast (cf. Acts 8:4-40) [Schnelle, Udo, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. By M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 194.]. This would seem to make sense because the late Stephen and Philip are the predominant players in this section and both are Hellenistic Jews. It may well be that the Jews simply saw these non-Hebrew-speakers as more radical than the apostles and company that they targeted the Greek-speaking Jews as the bigger threat [Arrington, French L., *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 84; Conzelmann, p. 61; Lightfoot, p. 122.]

Saul will be the bridge again in verse 3, but verse 2 returns us to Stephen. ***2) So, reverent men buried [arranged the funeral for] Stephen and beat their breasts [aka “lamented”] greatly concerning him.* [PJT]** Luke uses classical Greek vocabulary to portray making all of the funeral arrangements and offering an impressive vocal remembrance of him [Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume III: Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), pp. 100-101.]. It may well be that this mourning added flames to the fire. Conzelmann (p. 61) observed that Luke seems to have ignored the Mishnah’s Sanhedrin 6:6 that reads: “After the flesh of an executed person has decayed, they would gather the bones and bury them in the deceased’s family plot. The deceased’s relatives would come to greet the judges and the witnesses in order to demonstrate that they did not bear a grudge because the verdict was just. The family would not mourn publicly for the one executed but they could grieve for him in their hearts.” So, between the unusual word Luke uses for loud mourning and this violation of orthodox Jewish practice, it seems like things would get worse and they do.

When we get to verse 3, I translated this as: ***3) So, Saul was committing atrocities against the church by means of entering the houses, netting men and women, handing them over into prison.* [PJT]** That verb I translated as committing atrocities has its root meaning in excessive violence and destruction. In the first half of the 20th century, a professor translated it as Saul “making havoc” of the church [Sands, P. C., *The Literary Genius of the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1932), pp. 121-123, cited in Ryken, p. 59.] and the NRSV makes it “was ravaging the church.” A 19th century commentary says that Saul did more damage than the rest [Du Veill, Carolus Maria, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. Haddon, 1851), p. 194.]

The Bible testifies to Paul’s state of mind in the apostle’s own words [George Eldon, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 365.]

Galatians 1:13: **13**You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. [NRSV]

1 Corinthians 15:9: **9**For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [NRSV]

Philippians 3:6: **6**as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [NRSV]

It may sound like the secret police forcing their way into private residences and dragging away families [as implied in Du Veill, p. 194], but we need to realize that the early church worship services were conducted in private homes [Ladd, p. 353.] You should also see that this was a pretty brutal event since the word Luke chooses to describe capturing the adult worshippers is a common word for capturing in a net. In other words, they were rounded up indiscriminately and dragged into prison [Robertson, p. 101.].

And I find it interesting that the word used for putting them in prison is the same word that Paul uses in explaining that the traditions concerning the Lord and the Lord’s Supper were turned over to him. Should we suggest that this means carefully guarded and watched over?

***4) Therefore, the ones who had been scattered migrated, evangelizing the Word.”* [PJT]** We’re not talking about an orderly approach to missions here. This isn’t a purposeful evacuation. It is action in a crisis, a forced evacuation caused by Paul’s misplaced, by his own admission, fervor. I think the best way to summarize this passage is with the following quotation: “The enemies of Christ sought to destroy the church but the persecution only led to a wider and fuller proclamation of the gospel. The believers could have been satisfied to settle down in Jerusalem, but God forced the church’s hand and used persecution to fulfill Acts 1:8.” [Arrington, p. 85.]

***5) Then, Philip went down to the city of Samaria proclaiming to them concerning Christ. 6) So, the crowds, all as one, paid close attention to what was said by Philip by means of hearing him and seeing the signs he accomplished, 7) For many of the ones having unclean spirits, those same came out crying with a loud voice, for many, paralyzed and lame were healed. 8) So, it happened there was much joy in the city.* [PJT]**

The city of Samaria (probably Sychem/Shechem as the major city [Lightfoot, p. 122.] was a city with a large pagan contingent [Foakes-Jackson, p. 70.]. So, even more than the usual first century populations, it was open to the idea of superstition. We can imagine a society much like Pompeii, full of perceived protective spirits, curse tablets, and household shrines. Some, like many in Pompeii were about fertility like the one pictured on the slide [Longenecker, Bruce W., *In Stone and Story: Early Christianity in the Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 233.]

It seems like the more humans open themselves up to the supernatural, the more the supernatural (whether real or self-induced) takes control of them. It can be addictive and follow the ideas of “instant gratification” that ends up in “endless consumption” until it controls you. How do you think the church can “exorcise” modern forms of superstition and control?

But Samaria was also a city open to Messianic expectation. I like how Ralph P. Martin engages with Oscar Cullmann’s observation about how John 4 sets up the Samaritan mission. [Martin, Ralph P., *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students: Volume 2: The Acts, The Letters, The Apocalypse: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986—original 1978), p. 91.] If you look at this closely, here are the parallels:

1. **Jesus met woman (John 4)**
2. **Woman leaves jars in urgency (John 4:28)**
3. **Woman testifies (v. 29)**
4. **Fields are ripe (v. 35)**
5. **Jesus establishes the mission objective (v. 38)**

We need to remember also that Jesus had already shocked the disciples in John 4 when He said that He NEEDED to go through Samaria. Good Jews didn’t go through Samaria; they would literally cross over the Jordan into what is now Jordan and follow the Jordan River up to just below the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias) where they would cross back over into Galilee. They would rather deal with the overt pagans in Perea (now Jordan) than with the Samaritans. As John 4:9 explained, the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Indeed, when Jesus’ enemies wanted to insult Him, they called Him a “Samaritan” (John 8:48) [Willimon, William H. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 68.]

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, described the Pharisees as, essentially, double-dealers: “And when they see the Jews in prosperity, they pretend that they are changed, and allied to them, and call them kinsmen, as though they were derived from Joseph, and had by that means an original alliance with them; but when they see them falling into a low condition, they say they are now way related to them, and that the Jews have no right to expect any kindness or marks of kindred from them, …” [Josephus, Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews: Book IX, Chapter 14, Section 3* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1957), p. 298.]

Of course, when Jesus established the mission objective toward Samaria in John 4, the wording sounds like He is talking to the disciples who would, in turn, become the apostles. It’s particularly interesting here on two levels: 1) Matthew 10:5’s instructions when He initially sent out the disciples said not even to enter the home of a Samaritan, and 2) there aren’t any apostles present when the revival in Samaria initially takes place because, remember verse 2, the apostles had stayed in Jerusalem. Of course, when we get to verse 14, the Jerusalem church hears about the miracles and the confessions of faith, so they send Peter and John, two of the original disciples, now apostles, to Samaria. There, they are to lay on hands and ensure that the converted Samaritans know that they have access to the Holy Spirit.

But before we talk about laying on of hands, we should probably consider that wherever God is at work, there are always going to be people confessing, even being baptized for the wrong reasons. There are always frauds. A stone found in the Tiber River offers evidence that shows the name Simon to be associated with the cult of Hercules [Robertson, pp. 103-104.]. ***9) But there was a man whose name was Simon who had practiced magic in the city and kept the nation of Samaria off-guard [“amazed”], saying he himself was great. 10) All of them paid attention to him from least [“micro”] to the greatest [“mega”], saying: “This is a person of the power of God that is called Great!” 11) So, they paid attention to him since for a long time he had kept them off guard [“amazed”] with his magic. [PJT]***

So, there isn’t joy for everyone. Simon, who may have had some special insight like a lot of so-called psychics who get people to reveal their own situations, suddenly has his livelihood threatened. He may even have had some power granted by our adversary, but the word used to describe the crowd’s amazement has the root idea of displacement, being out-of-kilter, off-balance. So, I think most of his accomplishments had been through other means. But we would be wrong to simply discount his magic as being all fraudulent, since we will later see Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas, who gets blinded by Paul (Acts 13:6-12) and the healers in Ephesus who get out-performed by Paul (Acts 19:11-20), making this yet another way of reminding us of how God’s power overshadows that of God’s rivals [Munck, p. 74.].

In fact, this idea of Simon being great might suggest that he had Messianic ambitions much like Theudas in Acts 5:36 [McGregor, G. H. C., “Acts” in Buttrick, George A. and others (eds.), *The Interpreter’s Bible: Volume 9: Acts-Romans* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 109.] So, when Simon sees real power, he’s smart enough to hang around and observe so that he can see what’s happening. He even seems to believe. But what does he believe? He simply believes that Philip is demonstrating the true power of God [Robertson, p. 105.]. Unfortunately, even though he believes that there is power in Philip’s ministry, he seems just to want to amortize it.

So what we have taking place here is a genuine revival with the occasional decisions for the wrong reasons. ***12) So, when they believed Philip, who was sharing the life-changing news [gospel] concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, men and women, 13) So, Simon himself believed and was baptized, sticking to Philip and amazed seeing the signs and great power happening.* [PJT]**

The verb I translated as “sticking to Philip” [Robertson, p. 105.] gives us a hint as to Simon’s ulterior motive. Another translation that is not quite as literal is suggested as “insinuating himself” into Philip’s company [Lightfoot, p. 124.]. This is a hint as to what is going to happen when the apostles from Jerusalem arrive.

***14) Then, the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, commissioning Peter and John. 15) Going down, they prayed concerning them that they would receive the Holy Spirit 16) because so far He had not yet fallen upon them, they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17) Then, they [Peter and John] laid their hands upon then and they received the Holy Spirit.* [PJT]**

The commissioning of Peter and John to visit the Samaritans was a shrewd move by the church. Remember, there was a great deal of hostility and suspicion directed at Samaritans, but a great deal of respect for Peter and John. So, if Peter and John could verify what was happening, it could reduce potential friction in these new believers being accepted [Robertson, p. 106.]. It does seem strange that this mission and action was necessary since other believers in Acts were recorded as receiving the Holy Spirit either with or even before baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:44-48) [Munck, p. 75.]

At this point, it is probably useful to remind ourselves that God doesn’t always work with individuals or populations the same way. The sequence per Frank Stagg [Stagg, Frank, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1962), pp. 218-219.] would be:

1. **In Samaria (Acts 8:12-17), the sequence was preaching, faith, baptism, laying on hands, gift of Holy Spirit**
2. **With eunuch (8:26-39), the sequence was the reading of scriptures, preaching, and baptism, preceded by confession of faith in some texts.**
3. **With Paul’s conversion accounts, it is conviction, trust, laying on of hands, gift of Spirit and sight, and baptism.**

Nor can we say that the laying on of hands is absolutely necessary for the reception of the Holy Spirit [see Munck, p. 75.] Rather, we should see that the laying on of hands was used for many different purposes. It was used for commissioning (Acts 6:6; 13:3), for receiving the Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; 9:12, 17; 19:6), and for healing (possibly in Acts 9:17, but definitely in Acts 28:8) [Fee, Gordon F., *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), p. 786 n 136.].

My take-away from this is: “Never settle for formulae.” God doesn’t use a checklist to accomplish His will among human beings. God is flexible. Laying on of hands is a marvelous symbolic action of transferring power from someone perceived to display it to a person who needs it. The symbolism of placing hands on an individual also implies approval, possibly even sponsorship. That would make definite sense for Peter’s and John’s mission. Their laying on of hands would have the effect of not only symbolically transferring God’s Power as demonstrated in their ministry and miracles, but also symbolically transferring their (and by extension the Jerusalem church’s) approval and support to the new converts.

No, I don’t believe God had to do it this way. I follow that old Baptist scholar, A. T. Robertson, who wrote: “Hence it cannot be concluded that the Holy Spirit was received only by the laying on of hands of the apostles or by the hands of anyone.” [Robertson, p. 106.] But I believe God did it this way for a reason—to affirm reaching out to those who were not necessarily considered “good Jews.” And so, the passage continues: ***18) So, when Simon observed that by means of the laying on of hands the apostles gave the Spirit, he offered them money, 19) saying, “Give me this authority [tied to power] also in order that if I lay hands on someone, they may receive the Holy Spirit.” 20) But Peter said to him, “Your silver be annihilated with you because you thought you could acquire the gift of God by means of money. 21) You don’t have a part or an inheritance in this matter [lit. “word”] because your heart is not adjusted [lit. “straight” or “correct”] in God’s presence. 23) REPENT, therefore from this evil of yours and petition the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven, 24) because you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of what is not right.”* [PJT]**

This portion of the passage shows Simon’s intent. When you are used to using certain tricks and deceit to convince and manipulate people, you naturally expect that there must be some methodology (or trick) for other people’s power. He could see the results of legitimate power in the signs and wonders that Philip had performed (and presumably other believers who had responded to the Holy Spirit), so he wanted a short cut. But there are no short cuts; there is no manipulation of God. The Holy Spirit is a “gift” and a “gift” cannot be purchased.

If you’re looking for an application here, “It should not be difficult—in a world of television evangelists, ‘super churches,’ and politically-powerful preachers—to think of someone who like Simon projects himself as ‘somebody great’ and equates the gift of the Spirit with worldly standards of power and success.” [Willimon, p. 70.] However, sometimes it isn’t as obvious as someone offering money for God’s blessing—even though we might see it in certainty designated offerings, memorials, endowments, and the like. Sometimes, it is about programming and methodological short cuts rather than truly finding God’s will and centering oneself in the focus of God’s purpose.

I also want to emphasize that even though Peter’s response seems like a curse, he says it with the intent of challenging Simon to get free from his impure heart. Unfortunately, the grammatical case that Peter uses along with “if possible” in verse 23 would normally mean that the matter is decided. Yet, Peter seems to use this as a warning to indicate that if it is possible (though he doesn’t believe it’s likely), Simon could change [Robertson, p. 108]. That should be a lesson to all of us. We shouldn’t close the door on what God can do.

The Bible doesn’t confirm as to whether Simon follows through, but he appears to be concerned enough in verse 24 that: ***24) But Simon replied and said, “Pray concerning me to the Lord that nothing that you have said may occur to me. [PJT]*** We can certainly hope.

Regardless of the effectiveness with Simon, I am truly encouraged by the fact that the revival didn’t simply stay in Samaria, but that the whole process encouraged Peter and John enough that they shared the life-changing, world-changing news [“evangelized”] in all the villages that they passed through on the way back to Jerusalem (v. 25), truly fulfilling the mission that Jesus had set out for them.

Then, the narrative takes a different approach. We would normally think that Philip was doing such a good job in Samaria and had so many new believers to disciple that he couldn’t be spared. But we would be wrong. ***26) Then, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, Get up and travel down south on the way going down from Jerusalem to Gaza. (This is a wilderness). 27) And he got up and traveled and, check it out, a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch, a court officer of Candace, the Queen of Ethiopia, who was over all of her treasure. He had come to worship in Jerusalem.* [PJT]**

Please let me take the time here to disabuse you of the notion that angels are always just supernatural creatures. They don’t even necessarily have wings, though the fiery seraphim of Isaiah’s vision definitely did. But when we read “angel of the Lord,” it usually, from Old Testament to New, indicates God accommodating Himself to human ability to perceive and comprehend. “It is to be noted that, as in chap. x [10], the angel of the Lord and the Spirit seem to be interchangeable (viii. 26 and 29 [8:26, 29], x. 3 and 19 [9:3, 19].” [Foakes-Jackson, p. 75.; McGregor, p. 113.]. This is an indication that God’s plan for Philip had clearly changed.

And do you know what I like best about it? I like the fact that Philip doesn’t say a word [Willimon, p. 71.]. God speaks and Philip acts. But I also like the reference, outside the quotation so that it seems Luke is explaining it to us, that this is a wilderness. What a comedown, humanly speaking! Philip has a metropolitan ministry that seems to be going and growing by leaps and bounds BUT, God sends him to a wilderness. It had to be discouraging and disappointing, but Philip doesn’t complain. He just goes where God says to go.

But I love that old phrase, “Disappointment—His appointment.” It aptly demonstrates how much God surprises us. You wouldn’t expect there to be any opportunity for ministry in the wilderness, but “check it out” (as I regularly translate “Behold!”) here is not only a person in need of the interpretation of scripture, BUT a high-ranking official in a foreign land. By being willing to go where there didn’t seem to be much opportunity for ministry, Philip is going to plant the gospel in the highest realms of a foreign kingdom. We know from Pliny the Elder that Candace is not a personal name of “a” queen, but it is a title for the queen in charge [Smith, T. C. , “Acts” in Allen, Clifton J. and others (eds.), *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 10: Acts-1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 59.]. He thought he was going somewhere where it didn’t count, but he was going to share with an important influencer. Talk about moving the gospel to the ends of the earth!

There’s also an intriguing irony here. We are told that the eunuch had been worshipping in Jerusalem, but that is counter to Deuteronomy: ***“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.”* -- Deuteronomy 23:1 [NRSV]** He had wanted to become a Jew, but he was scripturally excluded, whether he knew so or not.

***28) And he was returning and seated in his chariot and reading aloud the prophet Isaiah. 29) So, the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and glue yourself to it.” [PJT]***

Now, it’s interesting that the eunuch is reading the prophet Isaiah, especially when you consider the bad news he would have gotten if he’d been reading Deuteronomy. Why? Because Isaiah 56:3-5 reads: **Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people, *neither let the eunuch say,* Behold I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant, Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters…**

 Even the eunuch doesn’t have an excuse not to become part of the Lord’s household. God’s expanding grace is demonstrated in Isaiah, just a little bit beyond the suffering servant prophecy in Isaiah 53:7-8 that we are told that he was reading. And Philip, once again obeying God’s instruction, glues himself (figuratively speaking) to the chariot and asks if the eunuch knows what he is reading.

He doesn’t start off explaining it. He piques his interest. He’s interested in what the eunuch is interested in. So, he asks a question. He listens before he evangelizes—something missing from a lot of our modern attempts to share the gospel. They go through a series of questions and answers which Philip uses as an opportunity to explain that Jesus is the fulfilment of the passage he was reading. I don’t think I need to explain how this applies. If I were teaching, I’d look at those verses quoted from Isaiah and ask my students to show how they related to Christ.

Apparently, Philip’s message is successful because the eunuch believes and wants to be baptized. Here is where some of you may have some confusion. A lot of modern translations take verse 37 and put it in a footnote, in brackets, or in a marginal note. That’s because the verse doesn’t show up in a text of Acts until hundreds of years after Acts was originally written. That doesn’t mean it’s false. The Holy Spirit could have inspired a later interpreter to insert it because of what an oral tradition had remembered about the story. Most likely it is a part of the creed baptismal candidates were supposed to recite in the period when it was added [Bruce, p. 190; Conzelmann, p. 69; McGregor, p. 116; Smith, p. 59.]. I believe the Holy Spirit caused it to be inserted to play an emphasis on believer’s baptism over the forced conversions and baptisms, as well as infant baptisms, so prevalent in much of church history.

Regardless, the eunuch is baptized into the Body of Christ, the church, and he goes his way. The Western texts have Philip snatched up by the Holy Spirit as though he disappears, making an interesting parallel between this narrative and Jesus’ encounter with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road after His resurrection. In Luke 24:13-35, a mysterious stranger appears and joins Himself to two travelers. Here, Philip shows up in the middle of nowhere and joins himself to an Ethiopian court official. The travelers on the Emmaus Road don’t understand the significance of what has happened as a result of the crucifixion, so Jesus (the mysterious stranger) explains the scriptural basis for it to them. In Acts 8, Philip explains the significance of the passage in the Isaiah scroll to the traveler. Jesus opens the eyes of the travelers as he explains the scriptures and Philip opens the eyes of the eunuch as he explains the scriptures. After the travelers start to understand, Jesus disappears. After the eunuch is baptized and starts to go his way, Philip disappears. [Resseguie, James L., *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 79.]

Why is that significant? It is significant because when we follow the example of Jesus (which Philip essentially did), the teaching and explanation which we provide should enable people to move on and serve the Lord where they need to serve Him. It also suggests that we should go where we’re told (even if it doesn’t look promising) and leave when we’re done (even if we don’t know exactly where we’re going).

There is a lot in this passage and I hope I’ve shared enough to get you excited about it.