

New Testament Conversions – No. 4

Conversion of the Ethiopians Official

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While Philip was in Samaria, the Lord directed him through an angel to travel to the road leading southward from Jerusalem to the deserted town of Gaza (Acts 8:26). Upon arriving there, he encountered the treasurer of the nation of Ethiopia in his chariot, returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem. This devout man was reading from the book of Isaiah as he passed Philip, and the Spirit directed Philip to approach the chariot (vv. 27–29). Upon doing so and hearing the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah 53, Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading (vs. 30). The Ethiopian asked for assistance and invited Philip into his chariot where the evangelist preached unto him “Jesus” (vv. 31–35).

Luke next says that they came to a “certain water,” indicating a body of water, and the Ethiopian asked Philip to baptize him (vs. 36). Philip complied with the man’s request and being baptized, he “went on his way rejoicing” (vss. 38–39).

Consider the following observations:

1. While the Lord sometimes used miraculous means to bring the messenger of the Gospel and the sinner together in the first century, He never used anything besides a human messenger to teach the sinner, as in this case. Of course, the New Testament teaches that miracles were only temporary and would cease when the revealed Will of God was completed (1 Cor. 13:8–13) so we do not have angels or the Spirit directly communicating with us now.
2. Luke says Philip “preached Jesus” to this man, which is the same as “preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” and “proclaiming the Christ” which he did in Samaria (Acts 8:5, 12).
3. “Preaching Jesus” includes preaching baptism. This Ethiopian learned that he must be baptized by hearing “Jesus” preached. “Preaching Jesus” includes much more than baptism, however, Jesus is not faithfully preached if baptism is omitted.
4. The baptism that preaching Jesus requires is water baptism, not Holy Spirit baptism.
5. Scriptural baptism involves going down into the water and coming up out of it (Acts 8:38–39). In the New Testament, baptism is always a burial or immersion (Rom. 6:3–4).
6. The baptism Jesus commanded the apostles to preach and which they preached on Pentecost was one that brought salvation, remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Philip was preaching that same message about Jesus that was authorized by Jesus and therefore, he was preaching the same “one baptism” that brings one into a saved relationship with God (Eph. 4:5). This is why the Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing” **after** he was baptized, not before (Acts 8:39).

7. We can be sure that Philip taught this man that he must **believe** in the Jesus he was learning of for the first time, and that he must **confess** that belief. Indeed, the King James Version contains a record of his confession of faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), although these are not mentioned in other versions. We can also be sure that Philip stressed the necessity of **repentance**, although such is not mentioned specifically. Yet, much of the Protestant world would argue adamantly that this man was saved when he merely believed and before he was baptized, when his faith is not even mentioned (except in the KJV), but he obviously understood the necessity of **baptism**.
8. Unless different preachers extended divine pardon upon varying conditions, to various sinners, in the first century (which makes God a respecter of persons – Acts 10:34-35), then this man was told the very same things to do in order to be saved that all others were and still must be told. This will always result in one's being baptized in water for forgiveness of sins.

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