

Acts 8:26-40 | Philip and the Ethiopian Man

InterVarsity Bible Study Guide (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: Have you ever had a nickname growing up? What was it and what effect did it have on you?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture. As a heads up, today at the end of the study you'll have the opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to what you're hearing.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Let's remember our group norms as we study together today:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

In Acts chapter 6, Stephen and six other ethnic-minority believers are appointed for leadership to create an effective structure that will provide for the vulnerable people among them (the widows). Then Stephen is killed for his offensive speech against the religious leaders and his declaration that God is not limited simply to the physical location of the temple. Persecution breaks out against the church in Jerusalem and the disciples are scattered throughout neighboring areas, but they preach about Jesus wherever they go. One of the other leaders chosen alongside Stephen is Philip, who ends up in Samaria preaching about Jesus, baptizing, casting out impure spirits, and healing people, which brings great joy in the city!

In our study today, we will encounter a man who is called a "eunuch," which means that he had been castrated and unable to have sex (his testes or entire genitals removed). This allowed men to work closely with the queen without any chance of sexual contact or pregnancy. Jewish people opposed this practice, and eunuchs were excluded from the Jewish community (Deuteronomy 23:1).

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Acts 8:26-40 NIV

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" [³⁷] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Let's compare and contrast Philip and the Ethiopian man. How are they similar and different physically, religiously, financially, etc.?
2. Ethiopia was not just the nation as we know it today but included all of Africa south of Egypt, so the man's travel to Jerusalem would have taken many days or even a few weeks. Obtaining a scroll of Isaiah would have been very expensive. Why do you think this man is going to such great lengths to seek the God of Israel?
3. Notice that verses 32-33 quote Isaiah 53:7-8. Why might the man have been interested in this specific section of the text? How do you imagine Philip used these verses to explain the good news about Jesus?
4. How do we see the Spirit at work throughout this story? How would you describe the impact the Spirit makes in the life of this one man?

5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Like I mentioned at the start, I will now invite us all to take a next step of faith. We don't want to just talk about the Bible, we want to live it out. If you have been following Jesus for a while, I would like you to consider responding by making a plan to have a spiritual conversation with a friend with whom you have not yet talked about faith in God ([resources here](#)).

If you are new to exploring faith, I would like to give you an opportunity to take a next step. First, I will share what it means to follow Jesus, and then we can see how each of us might want to respond. Let's open the [Invitation to Faith – Small Group](#) document and read it together...

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion:

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*