

Philip as Missionary



SABBATH—AUGUST 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 4:18; Acts 2:44–47; Acts 4:34–37; Acts 6:1–7; Acts 8; Acts 21:7–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem. You will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria. And you will be my witnesses from one end of the earth to the other’ ” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

WORLD MISSION WAS THE MAIN GOAL OF THE RISEN CHRIST during the 40 days between His crucifixion (death on the cross) and return to heaven. The New Testament has at least five of His direct Great Command sayings: Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47–49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:5–8. Together they form or make up the greatest assignment ever given to Christians. Among the commands was a plan for mission outreach, from its Jerusalem base to all Judea and Samaria, then finally to the ends of the earth. This was a command that Christians took seriously and set out to finish.

This geographical plan is important in the mission work of Philip the evangelist.¹ According to Acts 8, his work moved outward from Jerusalem in widening circles. That means it kept spreading farther and farther as time went on.

Who was Philip the evangelist? What does the Word of God tell us about him and the work that he did during the earliest days of the church? Finally, what lessons can we learn for ourselves from the Bible record of this early missionary?

DEFINITIONS

1. evangelist—a person who goes from place to place spreading the gospel.

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST (2 Corinthians 4:18)



Philip, whose name means “horse lover,” was an evangelist who preached to the Samaritans.

DEFINITIONS

2. eunuch—a man who has had his sex organs removed.
3. Pharisee—Jewish religious leaders in New Testament times.
4. martyr—a person who is killed or who suffers greatly for a religion or cause.

Think about what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 4:18 while we study this week about Philip the evangelist. We know little about Philip except for the few verses about him in the Bible. But, as we will see, Philip did a good work, even though most of what he did we know little about. Who are some people you know of who have done great things for God but have not received much credit? Why is it always important to keep the principle (important rule) of Paul’s words in mind, especially if we do a work that does not receive much praise or attention? Read also 1 Corinthians 4:13.

Philip was a popular Greek name that means “horse lover.” In the New Testament four persons are called by that name. Two had the additional name “Herod” and were part of the Herodian ruling family, which ruled Israel harshly. The remaining two Philips had outstanding roles in mission.

The first Philip brought Greeks to Jesus (John 12:20, 21).

The second Philip was called “the evangelist” in Acts 21:8. This name was used to separate him from Philip the disciple. He first appeared in the Jerusalem church as a “table waiter” (Acts 6:2–5) who turned evangelist and missionary (Acts 8:12). Philip’s missionary service lasted more than twenty years. Four of Philip’s daughters joined their father’s ministry and were known to have prophesied (received special messages from God). We know little else of his background.

“It was Philip who preached the gospel to the Samaritans. It was Philip who had the courage to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch.² For a time the history of these two workers [Philip and Paul] had been closely tied together. It was the terrible work of Saul [Paul] the Pharisee³ that had scattered the church at Jerusalem. The escape from Jerusalem led Philip to change the kind of work he did. It led him to accept the same calling to which Paul gave his life. Paul and Philip spent profitable hours in each other’s company. Thrilling were the memories that they had of the days when the same light which had shone upon the face of the martyr⁴ Stephen when he looked up to heaven while dying also began to bring light into the heart of Saul. The same Saul who had killed and imprisoned Christians and later became Paul. And they also remembered that Paul himself was brought as a helpless sinner to the feet of Jesus by this light.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sketches [Short Stories] From the Life of Paul*, page 204.

WAITING ON TABLES (Acts 2:44–47; Acts 4:34–37)

Read Acts 2:44–47 and Acts 4:34–37. What kind of picture of the early church is given here?

Things were for a time going quite well among the early believers. But everyone is fallen, and before long some tensions (quarrels) started to rise.

Read Acts 6:1–7. What problems arose? And how did the church deal with those problems?

Fast growth of the Jerusalem church brought with it social problems. Philip was chosen to be a part of a team to deal with the problems. Converts (new believers) included undereducated and poor persons who took part in the daily common meals. This caused problems. And it put more demands on church leaders. Complaints that Greek-speaking widows got less than their fair share of food came up. This was a very sensitive issue because of reminders by the Hebrew prophets (special messengers) not to neglect widows and orphans.

To solve this serious problem, all 12 apostles (teachers; leaders) got the believers together and brought up the idea of choosing seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who would “deaconize [Greek for ‘serve’] tables” so the 12 could “deaconize the Word [the good news]” (read Acts 6:3, 4). (All seven men had Greek names.) Perhaps this revealed a desire on the part of the apostles to be thoughtful and open to the needs of the Greek-speaking widows. Among the seven was Philip. This is the first time that this Philip is mentioned in the Bible.

The apostles argued that more leaders were needed so that no one would be overworked. They felt that their call was to devote (to give fully) themselves to the Word of God and to prayer.

What are some of the serious problems in your own local church? And how can you let God use you to solve these problems and make things easier for the church to run well?



Philip was chosen to see to the needs of the Greek-speaking widows.

PHILIP IN SAMARIA (Acts 8:1–6)

Saul, a future apostle and missionary, showed up for the first time in the Bible at the stoning of the deacon Stephen, the first Christian martyr. But these attacks against the church helped to push the spread of the gospel farther.

Read Acts 8:1–6. What was the result of the attacks against the church in Jerusalem?



God called Philip to wait on tables, but now He called him to be a missionary to the Samaritans.

Christianity first spread to Samaria. Samaritans thought of themselves as having come from the Israelites left behind when Assyria took away most of the Israelites in 722 B.C. But the Jews thought of Samaritans as foreigners whom the Assyrians forced to settle in Israel. Jewish-Samaritan relationships during the New Testament period were filled with problems, quarrels, and fighting. But, as we saw earlier, Jesus had already opened the way for mission work there when He dealt (took action) with the woman at the well. The woman, in turn, began to “evangelize” (spread the gospel to) her own people.

God had called Philip to wait on tables, but now He called him to be a missionary evangelist to the Samaritans. After Philip fled the attacks against believers in Jerusalem, he did not waste his time. He preached that the Messiah (the Chosen One), awaited by both Jews and Samaritans, had come (Acts 8:5, 12).

Read Acts 8:6–15. How successful was Philip’s ministry (work done for God) in Samaria?

Philip was used powerfully by the Lord in this early foreign mission field. The statement of the woman at the well, that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9, NKJV), was now no longer true. It was now “old history”—a thing of the past.

What negative feelings and prejudices⁵ that have poisoned your soul need to become “old history”? Is it not time to let it all go?

DEFINITIONS

5. prejudices—unfair feelings or dislike for a person or a group because of race, sex, religion, and so on.

WITH THE ETHIOPIAN (Acts 8:26–39)

According to Acts 8:26–39, Philip’s next opportunity to witness was to the Ethiopian treasury administrator. This means that Philip took the gospel and mission another step toward “the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NKJV). Philip was the connection between Samaria and the Gaza mission. Philip was called to Samaria, north of Jerusalem. Then he was called to Gaza. Philip’s work in the north focused on a group. But in Gaza in the south, it focused on a single person. In Samaria, Philip could preach Christ only from the five books of Moses. Why? This was all the Samaritans accepted. But in Gaza, Philip could also use the book of Isaiah, which was probably translated into Greek.

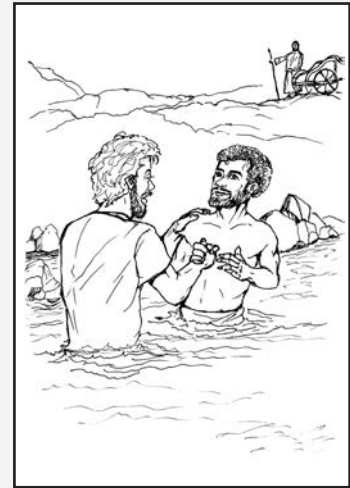
Read Acts 8:26–39. As you read, answer the following questions:

What were the verses in Isaiah (from Isaiah 53) that the Ethiopian was reading? And why would they have given Philip the perfect opportunity to evangelize to him?

Philip’s work in Samaria gave him opportunities to do miracles (Acts 8:6). But all he did with the Ethiopian was study the Bible. What point can we learn from this for ourselves as we work with others?

The Spirit of the Lord called Philip away as soon as he had finished explaining the “good news about Jesus” and had baptized the Ethiopian. Philip had no opportunity to share more of his beliefs and teachings with his new convert (one who has changed beliefs). The Ethiopian was left to just accept the Christian faith within the framework of his African culture. The Ethiopian was guided by the Old Testament and the Spirit of God, which had already been working in him. This is because he already was a worshiper of the Lord and a believer in His Word (the Bible).

Philip explained to the Ethiopian important Old Testament verses about the death of Jesus. Why must Jesus, His death, and resurrection (return to life from the dead), be the central message we give to the world? What would our message be without Him?



Philip explained the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and baptized him.

**PHILIP AS EVANGELIST, FATHER, AND HOST
(Acts 8:40)**

Clearly, Philip was chosen to do the Lord's work. Bible thinkers disagree on what is meant by "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (Acts 8:39). Was Philip simply told to go to Azotus (verse 40)? Or was he miraculously "taken" there? Either way, the important point for us is that Philip was a man filled with the Holy Spirit. So, God was able to use Philip to do a great work for Him.

Read Acts 8:40. What does it tell us about Philip that helps us to understand why he was named the "evangelist"?

Read Acts 21:7–10. What can we learn about Philip from these few verses?

At this point in the story, we learn that Philip was a family man with four unmarried daughters. Philip's call into evangelism⁶ meant that he traveled a lot. We know about Philip's journey from Jerusalem to Samaria, then on to Gaza, followed by "all the towns" on the 50-mile (80-kilometer) coastline between Azotus and Caesarea. There were probably unknown journeys. Like all the first missionaries, Philip would have been attacked, felt frustrated, and gone through the "ups and downs" of such journeys. Still, Philip managed his family so well that four daughters were judged by the Holy Spirit as suitable to receive the gift of prophecy. This points to good parenting and true godliness in this early Christian missionary family.

Acts 21:8–10 tells us that the apostle Paul stayed with Philip "a number of days" (NIV). Twenty-five years earlier, Paul, then named Saul, had been an aggressive and fierce attacker of the Christians (Acts 9:1, 2). His attacks against Jerusalem believers forced Philip to flee to Samaria (Acts 8:1–5). Now, years later, Paul and Philip meet in the home of Philip, who hosts Paul's visit. What an interesting meeting of brothers and fellow workers with Christ!

In our work for others, why is it so important never to forget our first responsibility, our families?

DEFINITIONS

6. evangelism—the act of spreading the gospel around the world.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 103–111.

“Attacks against the early Christian church forced the disciples to scatter. So they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a ‘hungry’ world. And they were driven by the love of Christ to break this bread to all who were in need.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 106.

“And when His disciples were driven from Jerusalem, some found Samaria a safe place. The Samaritans welcomed these messengers of the gospel, and the Jewish converts gathered a rich harvest from among those who had once been their bitterest enemies.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 106, 107.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① As we have seen, the gospel breaks down barriers (walls) between people. This sounds perfect, right? But the real experience has at times been very different. Christians understand that we are all the same before God; the Cross shows that we are all equal. Yet, we still let cultural, social, and other prejudices divide us bitterly. How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is so worldwide, discourage such prejudices?

② As we saw, attacks against the early church caused believers to flee. As a result, the gospel started spreading in ways that it might not have done without these attacks. God was able to bring good out of it. But we must remember that attacks against religion are never good, never right. What should our attitude be toward those who are facing religious attacks, even if we do not agree with their religious beliefs? (Read Luke 6:31.)