

Introduction

1. We have mentioned on a number of occasions how the book of Acts might rightly be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit
2. This is because throughout the book we see God working out His purpose and plan of growing the Church through the ministry of certain individuals like the Apostles, Stephen, Phillip, and ultimately Paul, but all under the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit
3. Something that is often overlooked, however, is that God also used Angels on occasion to guide and direct these individuals:
 - a. For instance, we have already seen an angel free Peter and John from prison in Acts 5:19
 - b. In Acts 10, an angel speaks to both Peter and Cornelius
 - c. In Acts 12 an angel strikes Herod dead
 - d. In Acts 27 Paul mentions that an angel announced to him that there would be no loss of life during a ship wreck
 - e. And, in our passage today we see an angel give Phillip specific instructions on where to travel
4. What the references to the Holy Spirit and angels reveal to us is that what we read in the book of Acts is all God's divine providence; He is working out His plan and purpose according to His will
5. Today's passage is probably one of the clearest examples of this as we see His divine work in nearly every aspect of Phillips encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch

B. The Lord's Divine Directive to Phillip (8:25-26)

1. We were already introduced to Phillip back in Acts 6 and saw the amazing results of his ministry among the Samaritans in 8:4-8:
 - a. He was run out of Jerusalem during the great persecution after Stephen's death, and like so many unnamed others, he "**went about preaching the good news of the word**" (8:4)
 - b. Phillip himself went down to the city of Samaria and began "**proclaiming Christ**" and performing signs and wonders, and the result was that men and women alike were getting saved and being baptized (8:12)
 - c. When the Apostles who were still in Jerusalem heard of it, they sent Peter and John down to witness this new work of God among the Samaritans, including the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritan believers
2. When they sensed their ministry in the city was complete, Phillip, Peter and John all started making their way back to Jerusalem, but along the way Phillip was given a **DIVINE DIRECTIVE** by an angel of God (READ 25-26):
 - a. As they traveled, they continued to preach the Gospel to many of the Samaritan villages along the way
 - b. But, at some point along the journey, an angel appeared to Phillip and gave him a directive to start heading south along the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza
 - c. Now there's something odd about these instructions and it's found in the parenthetical statement at the end of v. 26 which reads "**This is a desert road**" in most translations:

- 1) The more literal phrase is simply “**this is a desert**” but it’s unclear what the word “**this**” refers to:
 - a) It can refer to the word “**road**” from earlier in v. 26 which is how the NASB, NET, and the NIV treat it (e.g. “this is a [or the] desert road”)
 - b) It can also refer to “**Gaza**” at the end of the verse which is how the ESV, KJV and NKJV treat it (e.g. “**this is a desert place**” or “**this is desert**”)
 - c) Now, there were two cities called Gaza in southern Israel, but one of them had been destroyed and abandoned in 96 B.C. and was referred to as “the desert (or deserted) Gaza”
- 2) So, the evidence seems to suggest that Luke wasn’t describing the road as a desert road, but rather indicating that the angel was directing Phillip to old Gaza, a rather remote or deserted place

C. The Lord’s Divine Appointment for Phillip (8:27-29)
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1. Now, why would the Lord direct Phillip to go to such a place? The answer is that Phillip had a **DIVINE APPOINTMENT** with someone—he just didn’t know it yet (READ 27-29)
2. Without hesitation or questioning, Phillip does just as he is told (26)
3. Luke describes what happens next as a rather unexpected and surprising encounter (27-28): Unfortunately, almost every English translation except for the KJV, NKJV and the previous version of the NASB leave out a word: “behold!” (e.g. KJV: “...and behold, a man of Ethiopia...”)—this word can be used to express surprise or to call attention to something
4. Phillip encounters a man sitting alongside the road in his chariot—we are told a number of things about this man:
 - a. He was Ethiopian which means he was from the ancient Kingdom of Kush which extended from southern Egypt through what is now known as the Sudan in northern Africa
 - b. He wasn’t just any Ethiopian; however, he was a eunuch and court official of a queen:
 - 1) “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians” was a dynastic title much like Pharaoh, king of Egypt (candace meant “royal woman”)—the most famous was Queen Amanitore who ruled the Nubian kingdom of Meroe in the early to mid-1st century AD
 - 2) We are told he served specifically as her treasurer which means he was a high ranking and rather important official
 - c. We are also told that he had come to Jerusalem to worship and was now on his way back home: so he was likely a Jewish proselyte (a gentile who converted to Judaism), and he must have been a fairly devout one because Jerusalem was approximately 1500 miles from his homeland which means that it would have taken him about three months to make the trip (one way)
 - d. The last thing we are told about him personally is that he was stopped along the road, sitting in his chariot, and reading from the book of Isaiah (28)
5. We get confirmation in v. 29 that this wasn’t just some happenstance encounter, but rather a divine one—first directed by the angel and now confirmed by the Holy Spirit (REREAD)

D. The Lord’s Divine Openness within the Ethiopian (8:30-34)
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1. This next section I've labeled as a **DIVINE OPENNESS** because of what we see when Phillip approaches the man (READ 30-34)
2. In Matthew 9 Jesus told His disciples that the harvest was plentiful but the workers are few—this means that there are people ready to hear and accept the Gospel; they are just waiting for someone to take the Gospel to them
3. This is precisely what Phillip finds when he approaches the chariot—someone whose heart is open to hearing and understanding the Gospel and the Word of God:
 - a. He hears the man reading from the prophet Isaiah, but it's not just any passage but Isaiah 53 which as you know is all about Jesus (now, what do suppose the chances are that he just happened to be on that specific passage, in the middle of the desert, when Phillip—a man with the spiritual gift of evangelism—just happens to appear out of nowhere?)
 - b. Notice that Luke says Phillip **"ran up"** to him which emphasizes Phillip's eagerness to engage the man (oh that we were all so eager to talk about Jesus with others!)
 - c. When Phillip gets to the chariot, he asks the man whether or not he understands the passage he's reading:
 - 1) This wasn't likely a question to which Phillip expected a yes or no answer
 - 2) Rather, it was likely rhetorical in nature, designed by Phillip to engage the man in a discussion about Jesus—Phillip clearly understood the importance of the passage as it related to Christ and saw it as an opportunity to talk about Jesus
 - d. We immediately see the man's openness and eagerness to understand God's Word in his invitation to Phillip to join him in his chariot and in the two questions he poses to Phillip:
 - 1) The first is, **"How could I [understand], unless someone guides me"** (31)—this reveals his openness to be taught
 - 2) The second is, **"Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"** (34)—this reveals his eagerness to understand
4. The reason I refer to this as **DIVINE OPENNESS** is because Jesus said in John 6:44 that **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..."**:
 - a. You know what's interesting about this verse? The word translated **"draw"** refers to pulling or dragging someone by force; I'm not sure why most Bible versions don't translate this more literally: **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me drags him [to Me]"**
 - b. That makes an amazing word picture, doesn't it?
 - c. Because of sin, we rebel, resist and run away from God, but there He is drawing us—pulling us—back toward Himself
 - d. Probably the best description of this comes from Romans 2:4: **"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"**
 - e. That is precisely what we see here; this man's openness to God's Word and his desire to understand it was because of God's divine work in drawing him to Himself; all that he needed was for someone like Phillip to help him put the pieces together

E. The Lord's Divine Conviction of the Ethiopian (8:35-38)

1. What we see next is **DIVINE CONVICTION** (READ 35-38)
2. Beginning with Isaiah 53, Phillip **"preached Jesus to him"**:
 - a. I love this phrase because it reminds me that what unsaved people need to hear about most is Jesus

- b. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul wrote that God had given him grace “**to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ**”
 - c. Let that sink in for a moment—while it’s important to preach the whole counsel of God’s Word and address the wickedness and sin we see around us, what the unsaved needs most is to hear about Jesus
 - d. Maybe if we preached as much about Jesus to the unsaved as we do evils like abortion, immorality, homosexuality, politics, etc. we’d see more reactions like we see in the Ethiopian eunuch
3. Upon hearing about Jesus, he is immediately convicted and asks to be baptized (36-38):
- a. His question to Phillip, “**What prevents me from being baptized?**” is rhetorical and best understood as a request to be baptized and reveals the **DIVINE CONVICTION** that has taken place in his heart
 - b. John 16:8 says that the Holy Spirit “**convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...**” and that is exactly what we see here
 - c. As Phillip used the Scriptures to teach him about Jesus, the Holy Spirit convinced him that it was all true and that he needed to express his new found faith in Jesus through baptism
 - d. Most Bibles exclude v. 37 because it’s not found in the earliest manuscripts, but appears in some older manuscripts and is thought to have been added by scribes; but there is nothing in it that contradicts Scripture and likely does represent his conviction

<p>F. The Lord’s Divine Direction for Phillip (8:39-40)</p>

- 1. These last few verses describe the Lord’s **DIVINE DIRECTION** for Phillip
- 2. We learned earlier that Phillip was from Jerusalem, had been run out of Jerusalem due to the severe persecution, and then was headed back to Jerusalem before the angel sent him to Gaza
- 3. As far as we know, Phillip never made it back to his home because the Lord had other plans for him (READ 39-40):
 - a. Immediately after baptizing the Ethiopian, the Holy Spirit supernaturally “**snatched Phillip away**” and transported him to Azotus (Ashdod) which is about 34 miles north of Gaza
 - b. From there, Phillip continued to preach about Jesus as he traveled about 80 miles north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea until he arrived at Caesarea in northwest Samaria
 - c. Some 25+ years later Phillip was still living in Caesarea and still preaching Jesus (READ Acts 21:7-9):
 - 1) He had taken up residency there because he was living in his own house
 - 2) He was still preaching Jesus because Paul refers to him as “Phillip the evangelist”
 - 3) He had a family, including four daughters who were prophetesses
- 4. One of the things that stands out about Phillip is the Lord’s **DIVINE DIRECTION** in his life and his willingness to follow it:
 - a. He was an evangelist who was committed to preach the Gospel no matter where God directed him
 - b. The Lord used the persecution in Jerusalem to drive him to Samaria—where he preached the Gospel
 - c. The Lord then sent him to Gaza through the angel—where he preached the Gospel
 - d. The Lord then transported him to Azotus—where he preached the Gospel
 - e. Finally, the Lord led him permanently to Caesarea where even after setting down with a family—he preached the Gospel

Conclusion

****The most important thing we can take away from this passage is God's work in building His church**

1. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter that He would build His church, and that is precisely what we see here, and in the entire book of Acts in fact
2. We see it in a pretty striking fashion here with how God directed where Phillip went and how He brought about his encounter with the Ethiopian
3. While most of us haven't been privileged to receive such audible commands from angels or the Holy Spirit telling us where to go or what to do, does this mean that He's not just as active building His Church today by guiding us?
4. I would answer no—while it might be more subtle, God still sends us where He wants us to go, still sets up divine appointments for us, still prepares people to be open to the Gospel, and still convicts

How did I get from an unsaved college kid in Eau Claire, Wi, to pastoring Renew Bible Church in Central, Ohio?

5. Maybe the things that have happened in our lives or the opportunities we have been/are presented with are God's way of directing us to where He wants us to be so He can use us to build His Church
6. Maybe some of the situations we find ourselves in or the people we encounter are actually divine appointments
7. Maybe some of these people are ready to hear and accept the Gospel, they simply need someone like us to help them understand
8. Maybe God has settled us in a particular place at this particular time—be that a city, neighborhood, job—and plans to use us there to build His Church