



# *Spirit of Wisdom & Revelation*

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By Charlie Avila

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## **The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch** Evangelism Series #5

*"Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" (Acts 8:37)*

Perhaps this is too general of a statement, but I believe that most Christian believers, including Pastors, do little to no real evangelism. We have become comfortable within our four walls, and we've settled for attending services rather than making disciples. Do you know any Christians who are aggressive, intentional and deliberate about winning the lost? Both Campus Crusade for Christ and D. James Kennedy Ministries report that 95% of evangelicals in America have never led anyone to the Lord. Charles Simpson Ministries recently reported that less than one in twenty-five "born-again Christians" talk to the unconverted about accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. Ask yourself these three important questions: How many people have you told about Jesus in the last year? How many of these people believed in Christ and received water baptism? How many of these people who received Christ are still serving Him? For most Christians, the answer to all three is "none."

In an effort to motivate and encourage Christians to reach out to the lost, I would like to look at Acts, Chapters 8, 9, and 10, and see three conversions that changed the world. Each chapter gives us an incredible conversion story. We find in these chapters the salvations of the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius and his family. I believe there is tremendous wisdom and insight into evangelism and soul-winning in these three chapters.

And they will be the subject of the next three teachings in this series. In this study, we'll review the events of Acts 8 and learn some valuable lessons about evangelism. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion is a story of divine appointments. So let me first share my own divine appointment I had a few years ago.

### **The Divine Appointment**

I had been praying on a Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday for the Lord to lead me to someone who was lost and desperately needed Jesus as Lord and Savior. *I was praying for a divine appointment.* I took Thursday off from work and was sitting in a comfortable chair in my living room enjoying my day of rest. I had just picked up a book to read, when suddenly, the phone rang. I answered the phone and the lady on the other end of the line asked, "Is this Sun Insurance?" I replied, "No ma'am, you must have the wrong number. This is a residence, the Avila residence." I added, "But if you'll hang on a minute, I'll get you the right number." I went into the kitchen and found Sun Insurance in the phone book. I gave her the number and hung up the phone. No sooner had I sat down than the phone rang again. I instantly knew it was this lady again. I answered, and the same lady asked, "Hello, is this Sun Insurance?" I said, "No, I'm the same person you just talked to and that

gave you the phone number.” As I finished this sentence, I heard these words in my heart: “Here’s what you’ve been praying for.” So I immediately said, “Maybe this is not a wrong number. Maybe you are dialing the right number. I’m a Pastor of a local church. Would you by any chance need prayer for anything?” A little stunned by my words, the lady said, “Why yes, I’m at St. Agnes Hospital in Room #431. I’ve had a recent flair-up of lupus, and I’m hospitalized. I’m trying to contact my insurance company.” This was amazing! What are the chances of someone dialing two different numbers to reach Sun Insurance, neither of which matched my house number, and reach a Pastor at home on his day off who had been praying for a divine appointment?! My only conclusion was that God had temporarily crossed some wires for her to reach me. I asked her, “Is it Ok if I come visit you in the hospital. I would like to pray for you.” She agreed. I told her that I would be there in about one hour because I had to take a shower and then drop off some papers at a downtown office.

After my shower I drove about fifteen minutes to the offices of Worldwide Ministries to give some paperwork to the director, and my overseer, Don Krider. I told Brother Don the exciting news about this lady that the Lord brought to me. I asked him to pray for me because I was going directly to the hospital from there. As he began to pray for me, suddenly, he began prophesying over me. He said, “Not only is the Lord sending you to this lady, but there is another lady who will be in a bed next to her who needs your help. Minister to her also.” Boy, this story was getting stranger by the minute! As I hopped in my car, I began to run several doubtful thoughts through my mind. Was this really happening? What if the first lady rejected what I had to say about Jesus Christ? What if Brother Krider was wrong about the second lady? How would I even strike up a conversation with the second lady? Then I said, “No, this is exactly what I have been praying for over a three-day period. Why should I doubt that the Lord was answering my prayers and opening doors for me to share Him with unbelievers?”

I went to the hospital and walked into Room #431. Everything was exactly as Brother Krider had prophesied. I first visited the lady next to the window, the one who was trying to call Sun Insurance. To make a long story short, I gave her my salvation testimony and shared some verses from the Bible. I also told her about the impossibility of her dialing two different numbers that did not match my house number, and still get a Pastor who was praying for a “divine appointment.” Even she was a little

shocked by the series of events that had just happened to her. Anyway, she gave her heart to the Lord and asked the Lord to forgive her of her sins. I also prayed for her to be healed of the lupus.

Now, I was trying to figure out how I could talk to this other lady in the next bed. She had not invited me to pray for her. I only knew what Don Krider had said back in the office. I thought to myself, “Why don’t you walk outside into the hallway, pray for a few minutes for the Lord’s direction and guidance, and then come back in and tell her that I am a Pastor and would be glad to pray for her.” As I headed out of the room, this second lady says to me in a loud voice, “Hey you! I need to talk to you! Are you a Pastor?!” The “Hey you” startled me and I sheepishly answered, “Yes.” To make another long story short, I don’t recall that she accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior, but I did spend some time sharing the gospel and finding out why she was in the hospital. I prayed for her healing and then left for home.

As I got in my car, the only thing I could do was lift my hands and praise Jesus for His awesome power and might. Nothing is impossible for Him. He can do exceedingly, abundantly above all I can ask or think. God is good and merciful.

Let’s look at one of the most famous divine appointments recorded in the Bible. Let’s study Acts 8 and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch.

### **The Persecution – Acts 8:1-3**

Acts 8:1 has an interesting phrase – “The church which was at *Jerusalem*.” Jesus had told His apostles in Acts 1:8 that “you shall be witnesses to Me in *Jerusalem*, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” *Here in Acts 8, eight years after Jesus’ command, the church was still in Jerusalem.* We know that the Pentecostal outpouring took place in “Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5), the miraculous healing of the lame beggar occurred in “Jerusalem” (Acts 4:16), multitudes of people “brought sick people and those tormented by unclean spirits to Jerusalem” to be healed (Acts 5:16), the apostles had “filled Jerusalem with their doctrine” (Acts 5:28), and “the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). Everything was happening in Jerusalem. We even know that at one point “five thousand” people (Acts 4:4) became believers in Jerusalem. Many people were being Spirit-baptized, healed, delivered, taught, and discipled – but it was all in Jerusalem. This city was already filled with the apostle’s doctrine, and multitudes/thousands of people

had become believers. It was time to move beyond their native city.

One of the greatest dangers to evangelism is when we become comfortable. It's when we stay in our Jerusalem. *It's when we stay within our four walls and think that all ministry takes place at church services.* We don't like change. We want the status quo. We need to keep the familiar. But when we lose our heart for the lost, we lose our spiritual passion and vision. We maintain a fervent, hot love for Jesus when we go after the lost. It was Charles Spurgeon who once said, "God save us from living in comfort while sinners are sinking into Hell!" The Pastor of the world's largest church once wrote, "When you are comfortable, the Holy Spirit will not work. The Holy Spirit takes you out of your comfortableness."<sup>1</sup> The Spirit can't work where people are "at ease in Zion." Real evangelism will always be uncomfortable, but exciting. It's uncomfortable, but full of surprises. It's uncomfortable, but it keeps us on the go.

Acts 8:1 reads, "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered *throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*, except the apostles." They were now moving to phase two of God's plan in Acts 1:8. The Lord used a very unusual, but very effective, tool to get the apostles and their followers out of their comfort zone. He used *persecution*. Since they would not change from the inside, God brought pressure from the outside. Perhaps the church would have remained in Jerusalem for many more years if the Lord had not stepped in and upset the status quo. In Acts 8:3, Saul thought he could "destroy the church" through persecution, but it only served to spread the believers and the gospel to other areas. What Saul meant for evil, God turned around for good. Someone once wrote, "Christ uses even the rage of His enemies in the spreading forth and enlarging of His kingdom." Persecution has always purified the church and caused it to grow.

### **The Revival – Acts 8:4-19**

There are three Philips in the Bible: 1) Philip the apostle of Christ, 2) Philip the brother of Herod and first husband of the wicked Herodias, and 3) Philip the evangelist. The Philip in Acts 8 is this last Philip. From Acts 6:3-5 we know that he was "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," and was one of the seven men who helped the widows. In Acts 21:8-

9 we see that he is the only "evangelist" mentioned in Scripture, and apparently, he was an excellent father for he had "four virgin daughters who prophesied."

Acts 8:4-5 reads, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them." Philip crossed not only a geographical line as he went north from Jerusalem to the city of Samaria; he also crossed lines of religious and racial hatred that had been in place for nearly 700 years. Philip, a Jew, went to evangelize a people who hated Jews! Remember, Jews and Samaritans would have nothing to do with each other. The apostles James and John wanted to call down fire and consume the Samaritans in Luke 9. When the Jews told Jesus in John 8:48 "that You are a Samaritan and have a demon," they were saying something terribly offensive. But Philip was doing what His Master had done years earlier. Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman in John 4 and healed ten Samaritan lepers in Luke 17. Today, Arabs hate Jews. Pakistanis hate people from India. The French hate Germans. The Swedes hate the Norwegians. The Chinese hate Japanese. Muslims hate Christians. In almost every part of the world, there are ethnic and religious groups that hate each other. Are you willing to climb over barriers of religious and racial hate to preach a gospel of peace and reconciliation for the sake of God's kingdom? Would you reach out in love to a Muslim who needs Jesus Christ? In Acts 9, Jesus saved the greatest persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus. Is there a Saul in your life?

According to Acts 8:6-13, a great revival of physical healings, miracles, and salvations broke out in the city of Samaria. "Multitudes" of people believed what Philip said and they saw God perform incredible miracles through him. "Unclean spirits" were cast out, "paralyzed and lame" people were healed, and even "Simon" the sorcerer believed. Acts 8:12 concludes: "They believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and both men and women were baptized." This brought "great joy" to the city. The apostles Peter and John came several days later and laid hands on these new believers so they could receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14-19).

You might be asking yourself at this point, "I thought this teaching was about the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch. Why all of this information about the revival in Samaria?" We'll get to the eunuch in a minute, but we must understand that Philip left a great revival of healings, miracles, salvations, baptisms, and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Yonggi Cho in the Forward of John Gilman's *They're Killing an Innocent Man*, page 10.

Holy Spirit encounters just to win one lost soul out in the desert. We might even be tempted to question God's wisdom in pulling out this evangelist at a time when so many people were being miraculously touched by the Lord. But Philip was on the go. He was on the move. He was not going to settle down into a comfort zone, even if it was a revival. Obedience was more important than popularity or fame. As subsequent history reveals, Philip had not only touched the country of Samaria with the gospel, but he was going to impact the continent of Africa. He would now lead a man to Christ who would bring the gospel to Ethiopia. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

### **The Angel – Acts 8:26-34**

What would you say *today* if someone told you that an angel spoke to him? In most Christian circles, this would be viewed with deep suspicion and doubt. We would probably say to ourselves, "He's watching too many episodes of *Touched By An Angel*." But in the Book of Acts, angels were a very natural part of the narrative. Luke mentions the word "angel(s)" twenty-one times in Acts, and in his gospel, he mentions angels twenty-four times, more than any other gospel writer.

Acts 8:26 states very plainly, "Now *an angel* of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" Angels are mentioned often in Acts. In Acts 5:19, "an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out." In Acts 10:3-7, an angel of the Lord appears in a vision to the unsaved Cornelius and gives him detailed instructions on how to contact the apostle Peter in Joppa. In Acts 12:7-12, an angel supernaturally releases Peter from an inner prison where he was bound by two chains, surrounded by soldiers inside and guards outside, and an outer iron gate. Acts 12:23 reveals an angel striking down and killing Herod the king because he did not give God the glory. When Paul was in the storm-tossed ship of Acts 27, he told 275 people: "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve." Angels helped with evangelism, brought about miraculous deliverances, and strengthened believers with encouraging words. In one instance, an angel led a believer (Philip) to an unbeliever (eunuch); in

another, an angel led an unbeliever (Cornelius) to a believer (Peter).

To go from Samaria to this road near Gaza is about 50-60 miles. The terrain starts out very hilly and then ends in a hot desert. It probably took him 3-4 days to make this trip. *Consider how miraculous it is to walk for several days, and by divine appointment, run into a man riding a chariot and reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, which just happens to be a prophecy about Jesus!* If he was one minute late, he would have missed him. If he was one hour early, he would not have been reading Isaiah. Philip arrived at the exact moment that the eunuch was reading about Jesus. This is supernatural timing!

Another interesting point is that the angel did not tell Philip *why* he should go to this road to Gaza nor *who* he was to meet. The angel didn't say, "And when you get there, you will find an Ethiopian riding a red chariot that is pulled by three white horses, about 13 miles east of the city of Gaza." The angel simply said, "Arise and go." This is a very important lesson for us about trusting the Lord and obeying. Acts 8:27 gives the full sentence of Philip's response: "So he arose and went." This was an immediate response, as the Greek text also implies. *It seems that God's guidance is very clear where He finds a willingness to obey.* Also, as in the case with Cornelius in Acts 10, the angel did not try to evangelize anyone. Only Peter could tell him about Jesus. Only Philip could tell the Ethiopian about the Lord. We are the ones who have been saved by His grace, not angels.

The angel told Philip to "go." *This little word is the biggest word in evangelism.* Go! The word "go" is used 52 times in Acts<sup>2</sup> so I cannot cover it thoroughly here, but consider how it is used in the three main salvations of Acts 8, 9 and 10:

- The angel said to Philip, "Arise and go." (Acts 8:26)
- "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near that chariot.'" (Acts 8:29)
- Jesus told the blind Saul, "Arise and go." (Acts 9:6)
- Jesus sent Ananias to Saul with these words: "Arise and go." (Acts 9:11)
- When Ananias hesitated, Jesus told him again, "Go! For he (Saul) is a chosen vessel of Mine." (Acts 9:15)
- The Spirit told Peter, "Arise, go down and go with them" to Cornelius' house. (Acts 10:20)
- As Peter was recounting the story of Cornelius' conversion, he said, "Then the

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<sup>2</sup> Although not all references pertain to evangelism.

Spirit told me to go with them, nothing doubting.” (Acts 11:12).

Someone once said, “*The focus is too much on going to church rather than going to the world.*”<sup>3</sup> The first word of the Great Commission is still “go.” Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, “Go and make disciples,” and in Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world.” Go! When the Spirit prompts you to visit someone – go! When He tells you to write that letter – go! When He says to reach out to your neighbor – go! When He speaks to you to visit that person in the hospital – go! When he says to make a meal for that elderly person – go! Philip was on the go. Ananias was on the go. Peter was on the go. Go and tell people about Jesus! Recall Paul’s famous cry of evangelism in Romans 10:14-15: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” The ones who “go” are the ones “sent.”

In Acts 8:26, “an angel” spoke to Philip, but in Acts 8:29, “the Spirit” speaks to him. We don’t need to know everything up front. We just need to go, and when we get there, the Spirit will speak to us. *Some of us are waiting for the Spirit to speak, but He is waiting for us to go.* Verse 29 says, “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’” If we compare verse 30, “So Philip ran to him,” with verse 38, “So he commanded the chariot to stand still,” we can conclude that Philip was running along next to the horses and chariot as he heard the eunuch reading out loud from Isaiah the prophet. In verse 30 Philip asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replies in verse 31, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” He then invited Philip to come up into the chariot and sit with him. He shows the scroll to Philip and points out that he is reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. These two verses describe Jesus’ death on the cross. Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The eunuch found Jesus’ work on the cross in Isaiah. Unbelievers can get saved just reading the Old Testament.

As we examine the interaction between Philip and the eunuch, notice how the Spirit and the Word worked together. It was the “Spirit” who brought Philip in (Acts 8:29), and it was “the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 8:39) who took him out. In Acts 8:28 it reads, “He was reading Isaiah the prophet” and in

Acts 8:30, “Philip heard him reading the prophet Isaiah.” In verse 32 it says, “The place in the Scripture which he read,” and in verse 35, Philip “began at this Scripture.” The Spirit and the Word of God work together to bring salvation to the lost.

To be born again, we must be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5, 8) and “convicted by the Spirit” (John 16:7-8). Titus 3:5 says, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” In 1 Corinthians 6:11 it says, “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified...by the Spirit of our God.” So Paul concludes in Romans 8:11, “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

To be born again, you need the Word of God. 1 Peter 1:23 says, “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” James 1:18 and 1:21 say, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” and “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” *The Word of God is absolutely essential in our evangelism.* This incorruptible seed that saves souls is God’s Word. Ted Cooper, the creator of the excellent Bible reading program, *The Bible in 90 Days*, received Christ on his own while reading the Old Testament prophets. Daniel Defoe’s famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe* tells (in part) the story of a man shipwrecked all alone on an island and believes in Christ while reading the Bible on his own. David was right when he wrote in Psalm 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” God’s Word converts the soul.

Since God was drawing this man to himself, he questioned Philip in verse 34: “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” Philip will now point him, not to his church, or his Pastor, but to Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

### **The Conversion – Acts 8:35-40**

The first five words of Acts 8:35 seem strange and out of place. But God wastes no words, and I believe the Holy Spirit put these words in here to teach us something valuable. It reads, “Then Philip opened his mouth.” The verse also says that he “preached Jesus to him.” Well, this is obvious. If you are going to preach to someone, then you have to open your mouth. Would it sound strange to you if I was going to speak at some conference, and the person introducing me says, “And now Brother Charlie is

<sup>3</sup> Not becoming a part of the world but going *into* it.

going to open his mouth and teach us.” It would sound weird. But I think the Holy Spirit included these words because Philip could have kept his mouth closed. He could have concluded that this was a high-ranking government official with bodyguards, chariot driver, an official Ethiopian chariot, and royal horses, and maybe he is too important to hear about my Jesus. *These words are included in the text because this is the great error many of us make regarding evangelism. The Lord opens the door to share Him with an unbeliever, but we don’t open our mouth.* I can think of many, many opportunities that I squandered because I didn’t open my mouth. The fear of rejection and unbelief shut my mouth. Brothers and sisters, when God has opened the doors for you to tell others about Jesus, OPEN YOUR MOUTH! Speak the truth in love. Pray for boldness. Be courageous. The only time everyone loses is when we say nothing.

Philip did not complain to him about Saul’s terrible persecution. He did not share about all the healings and salvations in Samaria. He mentions nothing about an angel or the Spirit speaking to him. Philip tells the eunuch about Jesus! Verse 35 says simply, “He preached Jesus to him.” Let’s not beat around the bush with the unconverted. It seems at times that Christians are doing everything possible to not mention that name – the name of JESUS! “God” is too general. “The Man upstairs” is foolish. Tell people about Jesus – not about your church, your Pastor, or your troubles. No Christian can ignore Acts 4:12: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Matthew 1:21 reads, “And Mary will bring forth a Son, *and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*” No one can save but Jesus. So let’s preach Jesus.

Here is another miracle that takes place in these verses. What are the chances that they will find a large pool of water out in the middle of the desert – large enough that “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water?” And they stopped the chariot right at the spot where the eunuch asks Philip to baptize him. This again is a miracle of timing and provision. The Lord had provided everything for Philip. He simply obeyed and did what God was telling him to do.

I must stress here the importance of water baptism in the conversion process. The Lord supernaturally provided water in the middle of a desert to show the seriousness of water baptism. If it wasn’t important, why provide it? No, baptism does not save you, but the Great Commission statements in Mark 16 and Matthew 28 command us not only to “go and preach,” but “go and baptize.” The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:18), and Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:47-48) were all immediately baptized. They did not go through a new believer’s class for six months. They did not receive an outline or go to a special seminar on baptism. They received baptism immediately following their conversion experience. The ten baptisms mentioned in Acts all follow this model. Philip had just baptized the Samaritan believers and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:12-13). And notice here in Acts 8:38 that Philip did not sprinkle water on him or pour a little water on his head. They “*both went down into the water, and he baptized him.*” *The only requirement for baptism is salvation; the only method is by immersion.* Don’t wait. Don’t hesitate. Baptize new believers immediately following their conversion.

Acts 8 is the only place in the Bible that shows us a New Testament evangelist in action. Philip was preaching Jesus, healing the sick, baptizing new believers, and evangelizing one-on-one. He was on the go seeking the lost. Paul teaches all believers, not just Timothy, to “do the work of an evangelist” (See 2 Timothy 4:5). No, not everyone is an evangelist, but everyone is a witness. We can all do *the work* of an evangelist, which is to win the lost to Christ. Don’t just read this teaching and do nothing. Rick Warren is right: *There are only two things you can’t do in heaven, one is sin, and the other is win the lost.* Our time is short. Let’s go after the lost!

The next teaching will be on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. The Lord took the greatest persecutor of the church and made him the greatest preacher. From persecutor to preacher in one chapter. It is perhaps the most amazing conversion in the history of Christianity, and gives us proof that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God.

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