

23b ACTS

Okay, let's resume our study in Acts right at the end of chapter 8. We're finishing up the Whirlwind Ministry of Philip and as usual we had some excellent questions on the break and one of them is what about after the baptism. We read it and then kind of departed from the details of the story. It says right at the end of the chapter here that when they came up out of the water the spirit of the Lord caught Philip away so that the eunuch saw him no more and he went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip was found at Azotus, the passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea. Well if you look at a map and I'm going to do my famous patented air map here, you remember and I'm drawing backwards to me frontwards to you here's the Mediterranean Sea, the coastline Egypt is down here, here's the land of Israel, you got the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, Dead Sea and right on the coastline this is all Philistine country. The Pelesh team were the ancient sea peoples.

The reason they lived there is they came ashore and dwelt in this region and the Israelites of course came from the Jordan side and tried to push them out and for a long time they didn't really succeed and it was never a strongly held Jewish area and even now in the news when you hear about things that are going on in Israel and they talk about the Gaza Strip that's a point of tension because the people in Israel have a hard time holding on to that. Well this is the region we're talking about. You remember Jerusalem is just west of the northern edge of the Dead Sea and Philip traveled down the road heading sort of southwest toward Gaza which is right at the southern extremity of Israel and on the coast and he meets the Ethiopian eunuch and they do all of this we've just studied.

Now it says when they came up out of the water the spirit of the Lord caught Philip away so the eunuch saw him no more and he went on his way rejoicing. Well to fully comprehend what we're about to look at, flip forward in Acts to chapter 21. We have a little bit more information about Philip.

Paul the Apostle has been traveling around this whole bunch of stuff in these next 12 or 13 chapters that we're going to study about Paul and you'll notice that in verse 8 of chapter 21 it says on the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea and entered the house of Philip the Evangelist. So this is years down the road and we just got told at the end of chapter 8 that this is where Philip ended up. Well he is either native to that town, maybe that's where he came from before he was in Jerusalem to serve as a deacon and evangelize the Ethiopian eunuch and all that and then he made a circuit back around and he stopped at this Caesarea.

This is Straton's Towers, this is the Caesarea Sebaste, whatever you want to call it. This is that town on the on the coast. So Paul's companions, this is Luke and some other

guys, enter the house of Philip the Evangelist who was one of the seven, remember, seven deacons, those take care of the widows, and stayed with him.

Now look at verse 9. This man had four virgin daughters who prophesied and as we stayed many days a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea, we'll get into this whole story of Agabus, but we get this little side detail about Philip. He lives in this Caesarea town, he's got four daughters who are not married and they prophesy. Now this is kind of an unusual thing because in the Old Testament we don't have the book of Rebekah and the book of Sarah and the book of all these other female prophets in the Old Testament, do we? We've got, you name all the major and minor prophets, there's not a woman among them.

It's all men. All of those multi-syllable names, Zephaniah and Zechariah and all the rest of them, they're all men. So what's the deal here? Four girls who prophesy.

When it says they're virgin, this means they're not married. That word carries a connotation in our language that talks about physical relationship that doesn't really carry in the ancient languages. It talks about marital status.

Of course, the assumption is that if you're doing what you're supposed to and you're not married, then you've got that physical status as well. But the point here is they're unmarried. They live at home with their father and they prophesy.

It doesn't say Philip prophesies. He's the father. But these girls ever so often just go off and come up with a prophecy.

So why is this? Well, we could take a big long detour here and go back to the Old Testament and look at Deborah who was the famous woman prophet of the Old Testament. But in a nutshell, you know that story in the book of Judges. Israel is what the Baptist would call backslidden.

They're not interested in the things of God. They're not doing what they're supposed to. They're apathetic and indifferent and disobedient and getting involved in the idolatry of the Canaanites.

And so God lets their hold over the land start to slip away. Now, if you begin to lose things, you want to look around and make sure that this is not what's going on. So what does God do? God says, I'm going to get your attention.

I'm going to rebuke you by doing something I don't ordinarily do. God, for the purposes of illustration, says in Judges, there is not a decent man to be found in the entire nation of Israel. In order for me to get my word to you, in order to provide you any leadership at all, my only choice is to raise up a woman.

Now, this is not denigrating to women. It's not. I'm not a Neanderthal.

I haven't forgotten about women's lib and everything that's happened over the last 30 years. This is the biblical perspective. In Israel at this time, it was a rebuke for a woman to take this role.

God is slapping Israel's face and saying, shame on you. I can't find a single man who will stand up and be counted, who will stand up and be a judge, who will stand up. Barak, the leader of the army, won't even go fight unless Deborah is with him.

He's a pantywaist. He's a milquetoast. He's a sorry, sad excuse for a general.

This is the way the Bible paints him. It's like he won't go outdoors without his mom kind of a thing. I mean, it's pathetic.

Do you see David needing some woman to prophesy to him before he can go fight? In the land of Israel, in the patriarchal society, in the mindset of the ancient Near East, don't read me wrong. This should not be taken as some sort of put down of women or the role of women. But you have to understand the way this communicated in that day.

And in that day, this was a horrible rebuke. Because it meant that there was nobody available to do this job in the world of men in Israel. And it's awful.

It's terrible. And understanding that, in the modern day, in the church, when you have people who say, you know, women should be ordained, many denominations do that now. And they say women should be able to pastor.

It says in the New Testament in Christ, there is no male or female, so why not have a female? And they conveniently omit all of the other passages where the opportunities and the role for women and men is defined in the church. And so they'll appeal and they say, see, God used Deborah. And it's a slap in their own face, because they don't understand what this meant, what its symbolic value was.

So now we understand this, right? I don't have the time to give you all of the support and take you through all of the passages. I could do so, but just trust me on this. We'll never get through Acts.

Woman, prophet, rebuke. Okay? This is the equation. Women in teaching and prophesying roles is a rebuke, because it's not in God's plan.

When God raised up the Levites, there wasn't a single woman in there. When God raised up the prophets of the Old Testament to write and to record scripture, there's not a single woman in there. Now if everything is as egalitarian and equalitarian, then the reason is God is making a point.

I don't have time to go, but let me just give you a tidbit to chew on so that you know I'm not talking through a hole in my hat here. Why does God do this? Why does God choose

to make a point of the role of women versus the role of men? Think about the Trinity. This is the reason the Father, Mother, God prayer that you hear sometimes is so egregiously, horribly, twistedly wrong.

I mean, think about it. Let's just... I'm going to set my Bible down for like two minutes here. I want to make this point because you hear this everywhere.

Doesn't there seem to be a missing element? You look at the Trinity. You've got God the Father and God the Son. Where is God the Mother? How come it's not the Trinity of the Father, the Mother, and the Son? It's the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Well now, where did the Son come from? Every pattern we have, there is a maternal figure somewhere, and yet there is a conspicuous absence. Well, we're not the first people to notice this. Way back 1,600 years ago, the Catholic Church noticed it, and they said, well, we've got the answer.

It's Mary. And so they've been, for the last millennium and a half, they've been busy turning Mary into a deity, to raise her up to be... and you think I'm just talking here. There is a strong move.

Patty and I listened to... how many tapes did we listen to that guy? Eight different tapes on this guy talking about how they are making Mary the co-redemptor. The only thing that has stood in the way of it is Pope John Paul, and he's about to go to glory here, assuming. So when he's gone, they'll do it.

The next Pope is going to show her in. She'll be the co-redemptrix, which means there is no salvation apart from Jesus and Mary. She is co-redemptrix.

Redemption is equally the work of Jesus and Mary, which puts her on an equal footing with God the Son, which by extension puts her on an equal... What are we doing here? We're filling in this missing element. It's screwed up, and here's why. Why did God do this? God the Father, God the Son.

What is the nature of God the Son? He is absolute deity and true humanity combined in one person at the point of the incarnation and will be so forever. What does this do as far as the status of the human race? It doesn't make us all gods. It is not an elevator that takes us to the top floor of heaven and seats us on a twin throne with God.

This is a gap that is bridged. You can go to the prophet Hosea, and God said, I want you to go marry the prostitute. This is a picture for Israel.

It's a picture for mankind. Go marry the prostitute. Hosea is a prophet of God.

He's a holy man. God says, go down to the brothel and grab Gomer and marry her. And people are saying, what? You're a man of God? I mean, how long would you last in your

church if you were a pastor and you went down and married a prostitute? Not long.

God told him to do it. Why? The human race fallen in sin is the prostitute. God in grace bridges the gap between his perfect divine self and fallen humanity, and he unites himself with us.

Jesus bridges the gap. This is a temporary thing. The fact that women are pictured and are symbolically subordinate is temporary.

It is a temporary thing. Jesus was humiliated before he was exalted. The last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

So don't let anybody beat you over the head with the Bible and say that women are in submission and that women have no role. People are going to be in for a big surprise in the future. We'll look at that in more detail one of these days.

Suffice it to say that for now, in time, this submissive role, this subordinate role, has been assigned. And when it is topsy-turvy, there's something wrong. This is the way of God sending a message.

So now, we're back in Acts chapter 21. We're back in Caesarea, having taken a huge detour into the Old Testament because Philip, who is the subject of our chapter, has these four daughters and he lives in Caesarea. He is one of the seven.

Acts 21 brings us back to where we are. And all of that impinges on the answer to our question, why does the Spirit of the Lord catch Philip away so that the eunuchs saw him no more and he went on his way rejoicing? Because here's my question for you. How does Luke get the information about this story? Did he go down to Candace and say, excuse me, could I talk to your treasurer? I'd like a few details on this whole baptism in the wilderness thing.

No. Where does Philip's story, Philip's account of this, because Philip is the one that told it, how does it come to Luke? Well, look at Acts chapter 21. Luke, one of the companions of Paul, stays in the house with Philip and the four daughters and gets the account.

So, how does Philip know, having been caught away by the Spirit, that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing? He wasn't there. So how does he know? I could lay all this great information on you and jump up and lay my laptop aside and run out the door, and I wouldn't know what reaction you had, because I've left. If the Spirit caught me up by the hair and jerked me out of here, I would have no idea what your reaction to that event is.

Luke says here that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing, so how does he know? This is how he knows. The Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who caught him up, the same Spirit that gave Jesus information about what was in the hearts of people, Philip's knowledge of the eunuch, he's been riding in the chariot with him now for however long it took to explain

and to baptize and everything else. He knows the man is happy.

He knows he understands what has just taken place. He knows that he's on his way, that he's not going to turn around the chariot and go back to Jerusalem, and he's also not going to do something else. He's not going to Azotus, and he's not going to Caesarea.

Why? He can't, because Philip leaves no tracks. Philip is caught up by the Spirit and exits, spiritual stage left, leaving the eunuch happy, but unable to follow. There is no discussion.

There's no argument. Philip doesn't say, no, go back, don't follow me, go tell others. Jesus, remember the man he cast the legion out of, wanted to follow him.

He said, no, go home and tell people. There's no such conversation. God just ends that discussion.

It is not an option. We were talking on the break about choice, about human choice. Sometimes God faces us with a choice, and it's a test.

Our choices are always tests. Other times, we have no choice. The situation is what it is, and you have to do what you have to do because there is no other choice, right? What choice does the eunuch have here? He does not have the choice of following Philip, because Philip has been removed from the equation.

So, what is the eunuch's divine guidance in this case? To go on his way rejoicing, continue down the path that he has started, because he doesn't have the option. Let me just give you a hypothetical. Suppose the eunuch is exceedingly grateful to Philip, and he says, you are the man that has opened the scriptures to me.

I want to stay with you always. God says to the eunuch, you can't do that. You've got this other path.

You have no choice. It's just removed as an option. There is no teaching point here.

There is no opportunity for growth or whatever. God wants the eunuch to go down to his governmental post and spread abroad whatever he knows there. So, the option is just removed.

He cannot stay with the man who explained the scripture to him. Does this make sense? Here's the other thing. Now, the Spirit of God has come down and snatched Philip away.

I'm going to tell you how I know that this is what's going on. How far does he move him? If you look at a map, here's my air map, Mediterranean Sea, here's Gaza, here is Azotus. It's just a couple of miles.

It's a hop, skip, and a jump. God the Holy Spirit moves Philip just far away that the

eunuch can't see him anymore. Why didn't he move him to Caesarea? He's not supposed to be in Caesarea.

He's supposed to basically continue his journey that began in Jerusalem. He picks up the eunuch, tells him what he needs to know. There's this separation by God the Holy Spirit so that they are disconnected by God.

The eunuch knows, well, God's caught Philip away. Guess I'm not supposed to stick with him. I'll just continue my original plan.

Philip is just over a couple of ridges in Azotus and so he heads for home. As he goes, he speaks the truth and love to the people that he meets, all in this largely Gentile area. Passing through, he preaches in all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

This does two things in Luke's account. One, we have the non-Hebrew of the Hebrews Christian here evangelizing a completely non-Israelite person and continuing through preaching to other largely non-Israelite people and taking up residence in a largely non-Israelite city. And this is a portent.

This is a harbinger of things to come. People who have the light of God's truth and God's word being dispersed to dwell amongst the pagans and to let their light so shine. This is what's going to take place.

Where has the church been for these first seven chapters? Jerusalem. What did Jesus tell the disciples? Where is their area of ministry going to be? See, this is the great thing about having Acts 1.8 figured out. Jesus told the disciples, you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria until the end of the age.

Your witness is located right there. He didn't say anything about the people to whom they witness. The Philips and the Barnabases and the Apolloses and all of these others, the Timothys and the Tituses, who are going to be scattered abroad.

The John Marks, the Lukes, who are going to have their witness far beyond that locus. It is like the cue ball shot down the table hitting all of these others that are going to scatter. You don't sink the cue ball, hopefully.

It's these others you want to sink. The witness of the Apostles is in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and in the pages of Scripture. And it is that witness that is going to scatter forth.

And you're not supposed to stick and cling to the disciples. What's Paul going to chew on the Corinthians for in chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians? You people are clinging to the Apostles. I am of Paul.

I am of Simon. I am of Apollos. I am wedded and connected and inextricably linked with

the messenger that gave me the good news.

This is a portent. This is a harbinger. You're going to get the information you need and then you may be cut loose.

This has happened to me all my life and has happened to most of you. You go to a church. You learn things.

You grow. God uses that. And then you may get relocated.

You may get PCS orders, change of station. Got to be here. Got to do this.

And it may be traumatic, but it's all a part of this great unfolding plan of God. So that is precisely what is happening here. And I didn't time it this way.

The pool of water, we have arrived at it because this is where we are in Acts. And this is the message of this particular episode. And this introduces what's coming up in chapter 9. Because if you look at chapter 9, what you see here is the conversion of Saul who is going to become Paul.

This is the moving now. There's going to be a giant movement of the momentum and the emphasis. The first ripple of this rock that got thrown in the pond has gone through Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

And most of what those original 11 are going to say and do has been said and has been done. And the people who needed to hear it and were going to respond have done so in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Now the ripples are going to extend outward.

Now what God has previewed here is going to happen on a large scale. This is one individual talking to one individual. Now it's going to happen city by city, region by region.

And it is going to ripple outward as the word of God spreads from one to another. Faith is shared with those of faith. So Saul, still breathing threats and murders against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus.

And he's going to get these letters. What is this? This is authority to go chase people down and persecute them. And this looks like the worst possible thing.

What do you think people felt like in Jerusalem when they heard that the council had granted authority? Those who had been able to get the Christians out of town and safely into other towns and got them away before they could be locked up and persecuted and possibly stoned to death, they escaped. They gathered belongings, went in the middle of the night and they went off to Damascus or they went off to Antioch and went off to other cities and towns. Now the council has authorized going forth and corralling these

people and bringing them back.

So was this good news? The answer is yes. Nobody can see it and nobody can anticipate it. It looks like the worst possible turn of events.

People might have been praying, having prayer vigils, oh Lord pray that the council doesn't deputize people to go beyond the borders, to go outside of Jerusalem and to dog the footsteps of people that have safely escaped. And they get the word. The council has approved it and this man Saul of Tarsus has got a posse and he's on the road.

He's heading for Damascus right now. And we just sent a crowd of 56 people to Damascus last week and he's going to go lock them all up and bring them back. And this had to be depressing, terrible news.

But this is going to be the beginning of the Gentile church. It starts with this authorization, these letters, this trip by Saul. And God is going to turn cursing to blessing.

He's going to turn it around. So what is the difference that this makes to us when we look at these two things? We look at Philip, we look at Saul. Philip was told to go to a desert place with no explanation and he took it on faith and he went.

Did you notice that God didn't tell him what to say? Because he already knew what to say. When he finds the eunuch reading Isaiah 53, it doesn't say, and behold, the spirit of the Lord came upon Philip mightily and he did prophesy and have great insight into Isaiah 53. Philip already knows that passage.

He says, look, I can tell you all of the Christology in Isaiah 53. Why? Because he's been sitting at the feet of the apostles. He's been learning this from Peter and John and it's already in his soul.

He is a prepared individual. He has to have the faith to go where he's told to go. But he doesn't have to be told what to say once he gets there.

How can we be a prepared person? How can we be used this way in God's plan? It's what I suggested in the first lesson tonight. It needs to be fresh in our minds. When you get a spare minute, when you're sitting someplace and you've got to wait, call it up.

Can we remember what we learned? We've covered eight chapters in Acts. What was it about? What was in the first few chapters? What was that deal about Stephen getting stoned? What is this about Philip and the eunuch? What can I remember about Exodus? What can I remember about 1 Samuel? If we keep that fresh in our minds, when God is ready to do something great, when God is getting ready to do something lasting, He's not going to reach down for somebody that says, Oh Lord, not me. He's going to look for somebody that's got the Word of God circulating in their soul.

Somebody that all he has to do is point them in a direction and when they get there, they'll know what to do. That's you. That's me.

How can we be that sharp chisel, the implement that God wants to use to make a difference someplace? We've got to keep our edge sharp. If you wonder, where is the presence of God in my life? Where is the power of God in my life? What is it that's powerful? What is it that's alive? What is it that's present? It's God's Word. It's God's Spirit.

We just have to be ready when He deploys us. I don't know why I'm going down the desert road, but if I meet anybody on the way, I'm sure going to know what to say. I don't know why God yanks me up by the hair of the head and separates me from someone, but when I find myself at Exodus, Philip says, I'm going to preach my lungs out until I get home.

And that's what he did. So there is a plan and there is a purpose in your life and in my life. We are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have a mission. We have a function. We have equipment.

Our equipment is information. You read over in Ephesians, what is the full armor of God? It's the Gospel. It's faith in the Word of God.

Our sword is the Word of God. The shield is the shield of faith. The breastplate is righteousness.

We make those daily decisions to do what is right, to do what we do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. And it is an exciting life. Wouldn't it be neat to get some divine transportation once in a while? Wouldn't it be neat to see, as you look at your tracks through life, that God has been able to accomplish purposes and things in His plan with us as the implement? All it takes is that choice.

All it takes is that faith. Confidence that God knows what He is doing. Being ready.

He didn't take Simon Magus and send him down to the eunuch. He took somebody who knew what he was talking about. Somebody who could interpret Isaiah 53 cold.

No preparation. Oh, just a minute. Let me get my notes.

I'll be right back. Saddest thing. This is my closing remark here.

One of the saddest things I've seen in a while is a message board up on the internet populated with people who attend a teaching church where the pastor teaches verse by verse and word by word and knows Hebrew and Greek and categorizes and does isagogics and all this. A stranger, an unbeliever, came to that board and posted some biblical questions. Why should I believe in this God that you all are talking about? I look

in the Old Testament and I see everything we covered in Exodus the other day.

I see him telling them to go in and kill women and children. Is this the kind of God you're asking me to believe in? Is this the gentle Jesus? It seems contradictory to me. Good question.

Great opportunity. Here's somebody asking and seeking and knocking. Somebody who seems receptive.

Asking good questions. Thinking. And these people, believers, well, that's a real good question and I don't know the answer, but let me give you the URL to the website of a good pastor.

Let me go back. I'm going to cut and paste from the notes that my pastor gave a couple of years ago on this subject. Let me give you the title of a book that you can read.

I want to scream. I want to throw a shoe through the... God didn't send the pastor to this questing individual. This individual has come to you.

I yell at the screen. This person has come to you. Where's your truth? Where's your faith? Where's your synthesis? God sent this person to you.

You are the Philip for this eunuch. What are you doing pointing them elsewhere? Oh, well, let me give you a pamphlet. Let me give you a tract.

Let me give you a book. Let me point you to somebody else. Hand off.

I just almost pass out. The blood leaves my brain. You all, I pray, we all, I pray, are not going to be of that ilk.

Whatever God details us for, it's us. We've been handed the ball. We've been passed the baton.

Let's pick it up and carry it and not try to hand it to somebody else. That is the goal of our study of the Word of God is that we have it in our hearts, but the only way it's going to be ready and the only way it's going to be effective is if we think about it, if it makes sense to us, if we're excited about it, if we know it makes a difference to us, we can help it make a difference to someone else. That's one of the great opportunities that we have.

We don't want to miss it. Well, this is a good place for us to close. We'll hit chapter 9 with a running start next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your Word. Thank you for the presence of your Spirit. Thank you for the provision that you've made for us, the plan that you have implemented and placed us in.

We ask that these truths will be impressed in our hearts in such a way that we will be motivated to live in their light, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work, whatever it may be, wherever it may be. We pray that our lives will reflect the glory of our Savior who died to give us this opportunity. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.