

# Club VBS®: Route 254™

## What's Your Destination?

### Route 5: Destination Obedience

**Bible Passage:** Acts 8:26-38

**Bible Truth:** Obedience to the Lord is seen in our willingness to seize opportunities to tell others about Him.

**Lesson Aim:** To lead adults to be obedient to the Lord by seizing opportunities to tell others about Him.

Philip was a minister in Samaria. Directed by God to leave the area for Gaza, he quickly did so. On his journey, Philip encountered a high-ranking Ethiopian official who was trying to understand the prophecies of the Old Testament. Philip used the Scriptures to teach the official about Jesus. The man accepted Jesus and was baptized as a symbol of his commitment to Jesus. Philip continued to preach and the official returned to his country.

#### **Philip Went to the Desert** (Acts 8:26-27)

Phillip was a respected member of the church at Jerusalem, chosen as one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5). After Stephen was martyred, Philip carried the message of the gospel to Samaria, where he had great success (Acts 8:5-13). While still in Samaria, an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip. The angel gave Philip some very specific directions.

Philip was directed to head south from Samaria to the city of Gaza. Gaza was a town about 2½ miles from the Mediterranean seaside and about 60 miles southwest from Jerusalem. It was one of the five principle cities of the Philistines. It was in this city that Samson took away the gates of the city (Judg. 16:2-3). The city sat at the entrance of a wilderness and was the last town that a traveler would pass through when going from Phoenicia to Egypt.

There were several roads leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. The most frequent road traveled at that time was also the longest way, in that it passed through Ramleh. At least two more direct roads appear to have existed, both of which exist today. One of them actually passes through the desert.

This desert road cut through a tract of country without villages and was inhabited only by nomadic tribes. It appears that Philip was being directed to take this more direct road that went through the desert. The road he was to take is clearly defined, but what he was to do on that road or how far he was to go is not spelled out.

All Philip knew was to head down this specific road. Without asking for any details and without hesitation, Philip got up and began his journey to Gaza.

Other people in the Bible received directives from God as well. Ananias was directed to find Saul (Paul) and restore his vision. God also identified the street where Ananias would find Saul. Ananias was reluctant at first, but eventually obeyed the directive from God. Likewise, Cornelius had been seeking God and was told to find Peter in the city of Joppa. Cornelius did just as he had been told and eventually learned the truth about Jesus from Peter.

By faithfully following the directions God gave to them, Philip and others discovered God's hand at work in and through them. When God reveals His agenda to us, we too must respond in obedience, seeking to please Him in every way possible.

#### **Philip Met an Ethiopian** (Acts 8:27-32)

Somewhere along the path, Philip came upon an Ethiopian government official. This group of people inhabited the isle or peninsula of Meroe, south of Egypt. This official was also identified as a eunuch, a male deprived of the testes or external genitals. Eunuchs were excluded from serving as priests (Lev. 21:20) and from membership in the congregation of Israel (Deut. 23:1). Frequently employed in royal service, eunuchs were regarded as especially trustworthy in the ancient Near East.

By extension, the Hebrew word translated eunuch could be used of any court official. (In Gen. 37:36 and 39:1 the term is used in reference to a married man.) The Greek term translated eunuch literally is "one in charge of a bed," a reference to the practice of using eunuchs as keepers of harems. In time, the term eunuch was given to persons in authority at court, to whom its literal meaning did not apply. It is likely that this Ethiopian was of the same sort, particularly since he is identified as the treasurer for this country. Candace was a common name for the queens of Ethiopia,

just as Pharaoh was the title used for the rulers of Egypt.

This Ethiopian official had gone to Jerusalem to worship. It was customary for Jews in foreign lands, as far as practicable, to attend the great feasts at Jerusalem. At the very least, this official was a Jewish proselyte who was returning from one of the Jewish festivals. As he traveled, he continued to reflect upon the things he had seen and heard by reading the Old Testament Scriptures, specifically the writings of Isaiah. Most people would have been focused on the travel home, but this official was focused on the truths of God. God honored this official's search for the truth by providing an instructor who could point him to the truth of the gospel. Instead of receiving instructions from an angel, this time Philip was told by the Holy Spirit what he was to do. The angel who had given him the first direction had departed and now the influence of the Holy Spirit gave a clearer picture. What the Spirit did in this case left Philip with no doubt that the instructions were coming from God.

Philip responded by breaking into a run toward the chariot, once again obeying quickly the directives given him by God. It would have been easy to make excuses for waiting to respond—the Ethiopian official was a stranger; he had the appearance of a man of rank; he was engaged in reading; he might be averse to being interrupted or to conversing; and so forth.

But Philip obeyed the instructions of the Spirit without any hesitation. When God gives a directive, it is always best to follow it and to do so as quickly as is possible.

As he approached the official, Philip became aware that the man was reading aloud from the book of Isaiah and apparently in Greek. It appears the man was reading from the Greek version of the Septuagint since the quotation from Isaiah was from that version. Philip, a Greek, would have had no problem interpreting the Greek Old Testament for this official. Philip asked a simple question, opening the door for him and the official to dialogue further about the truths of Scripture. Philip now was discovering why he had been sent down this particular path.

When we obey God's directives and promptings in our lives, we may not know why or what we are to do until we are face-to-face with the opportunity. God is not always looking for the person who understands everything, but He is looking for the person who will follow Him regardless of the path along which the person is taken. We can be assured that if we place ourselves under the leadership of God's Spirit, we will be used by God to make a difference in the lives of others.

### **Philip Taught the Scriptures (Acts 8:32-35)**

The passage being read by the official was Isaiah 53:7-8. This passage points to the suffering that would be experienced by a specific individual. The image of a lamb being slaughtered unjustly apparently had become burned into his mind. It appears that this image described by Isaiah troubled the official, causing him to meditate on the meaning of that passage. The question asked by the official indicates he had been thinking deeply about the identity of the one being described by the prophet.

The official's question about the person the prophet was talking about opened the door for Philip to tell the official about Jesus. Philip began with the passage in question and then pointed to other passages about Jesus. Obviously, Philip would have explained how Jesus had fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies including those defined by Isaiah.

Isaiah told of a sheep being led to a slaughter. During His crucifixion, Jesus was led through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha where He was crucified. It was done willingly and without a fight. Isaiah also declared that this one who would be slaughtered would be silent before the shearers. When lambs are sheared of their wool, they are rarely silent. When Jesus faced His accusers, He did not respond to their accusations (Matt. 26:63). Jesus' silence caused Pilate to work even harder for the release of Jesus, but it was to no avail. Furthermore, the prophet declared that this one would be denied justice. On the night of Jesus' arrest, He endured six trials, all of which were held illegally. The witnesses brought before the courts were not even in agreement, which was immediate grounds for a mistrial. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he permitted the crucifixion to continue despite the facts.

Philip was prepared for this opportunity and was up to the challenge. He had studied and understood how the Old Testament related to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We, too, must be ready to share the truth of the gospel whenever the opportunity presents itself. If we are to follow the example set by Philip, we will not only be able to explain what Jesus has done in our lives, but also show them the Jesus of the Bible.

### **Philip Baptized the Ethiopian (Acts 8:36-38)**

Based upon the question asked by the official about baptism, we can assume that Philip explained everything involved in the Christian faith. Having been a good learner, the official asked whether there were any reason he could not make a public declaration of trusting Jesus by being baptized.

In the New Testament, baptism was for believers (Acts 2:38; 8:12-13,36-38; Eph. 4:5). It occurred only after a person trusted Jesus as Lord. Obedience to the command to be submerged in water and raised from it served as a picture of what had already taken place in the life of the individual. It was a personal testimony for the new believer through the symbol of baptism.

Baptism symbolizes that a person has died to the old way of life and has been raised to a new kind of life—eternal life in Christ. It is not a requirement of salvation, but it is a requirement of obedience. Baptism is a first step of discipleship. The pattern of obedience is to come to Christ in trust and then to picture that through the symbol of baptism. Philip continued to teach the official by reminding him that belief in Jesus was the first step.

The official's profession that Jesus was the Son of God showed that either the official had already considered the possibility that the Messiah would be the Son of God or that Philip had instructed him on this point. Either way, the Ethiopian official was agreeing with everything Philip had told him about Jesus including placing faith in Him.

In many of the ancient manuscripts, verse 37 is omitted. It is also omitted in the Syriac and Ethiopic versions. Based upon their research, many scholars believe this verse was added later to communicate the teaching of faith in Christ alone for salvation, with baptism being a symbol of that faith. If it were not in the original text, certainly the idea of a confession in Jesus as Lord would have been understood.

The chariot stopped, and Philip oversaw the baptism of the official. Just as Philip was obedient to God when told to head toward Gaza, the Ethiopian was obedient to God through baptism. This was his first step in demonstrating his commitment to Christ.

We cannot overlook the importance of an individual's taking that next step of baptism once he or she trusts Jesus as Savior and Lord. It serves as a marker, reminding the person of the commitment required to be a follower of Jesus.

### **Philip Continued to Share the Gospel (Acts 8:39-40)**

As soon as Philip's responsibility had been completed, he was led away by the Spirit once again. The word translated carried means "to seize and bear away anything violently, without the consent of the owner, as robbers do." It also signifies the removal of anything in a forcible manner, making use of strength or power to remove it. Some view Philip's departure as a miraculous kind of rapture. Others interpret the passage as indicating a Spirit-led departure. Either interpretation would hold to the direct leading of God's Spirit in this situation, not denying the power of God to do either. Philip very likely would have continued to dialogue with the Ethiopian official and help him understand more about Jesus. God had more people who needed to know about Jesus, so Philip was torn away, as it were, from this new friend so others could hear the good news as well.

Although Philip was gone, the thoughts of the Ethiopian official were centered on his personal joy rather than on Philip. He went on his way rejoicing. His soul had been freed, and he had been obedient in baptism. Although his teacher had gone, his new life remained.

Philip resurfaced in Azotus, a city located about 34 miles from Gaza. This city was also one of the five lordships that had belonged to the Philistines. It was a seaport town on the Mediterranean Sea between Gaza on the south and Joppa or Jaffa on the north. Philip visited a series of cities along the Mediterranean coast. In each city, Philip continued to share with the townspeople just as he had shared with the Ethiopian.

Philip's purpose was clearly defined as that of being an evangelist, one who pointed others to the truth of Jesus. Eventually, he made his way to the harbor town of Caesarea. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, this city became the capital of the land of Judea, quickly rising in prestige and significance. It appears, from Acts 21:8, that Philip settled at Caesarea where he had a house and family with four daughters who each became a prophetess. While no longer a traveling evangelist, Philip continued to share with the people in his new hometown about Jesus.

Throughout his life, Philip was characterized as one who faithfully followed Jesus, doing whatever was required for the cause of Christ. For believers today, he continues to serve as an example of total obedience.

## Route 5: Questions to Consider

1. How did Philip know that the instruction to go to the Ethiopian was a command, not a suggestion?
2. What does Philip's response teach us about the necessity to be obedient to the commands and invitations of Jesus?
3. Philip was going on his way when God commanded him to respond to a natural encounter. What are some natural encounters we have today where God might use us to respond to someone's need?
4. How does God give us commands today?
5. What must we do to be ready to respond to God's command to share with people who need to know about Jesus?
6. What are hindrances to a believer's being obedient to share the gospel?
7. What decisions do you personally need to make to be able to respond with obedience?
8. What are ways an obedient believer can help a new believer begin his journey with Jesus?
9. Recall a time God made you aware of a ministry possibility. Were you obedient to follow through? If so, what was the outcome? If not, what was the hindrance?

## Route 5: Case Study

### Hearing Voices

"I'm really struggling with committing to this trip," Ken confessed to Marty. "I'm just not sure God wants me to be involved in missions. After all, I've never felt comfortable talking to people about Jesus. And besides, my family is determined that this is the summer we're going to Knott's Berry Farm. I don't think I can save enough money to do both."

"Maybe the real question is, 'How do you know God doesn't want you to go on the mission trip?'" Marty replied.

"Have you heard any voices lately saying, 'Kenneth, this is God speaking: Congratulations! You are the one Christian on the face of the earth who is exempt from obeying my command to tell other people about my Son, Jesus.'"

"No," Ken laughed. "I haven't been hearing voices; at least none that sounds like your Darth Vader impression. It's just that I don't feel a real passion about talking to people about Jesus, at least not like you seem to have."

"Well, if you're waiting for passion," Marty responded, "you could be waiting for a long time. Being passionate helps, but you already know that the first requirement is obedience."

"I know, I know," Ken interrupted. "I've heard Pastor Mike say every Christian's responsibility is to tell people about Jesus. He says it every Sunday! I don't know who he thinks would be left to listen to him preach if everyone became missionaries like he wants."

"Come on, little brother," Marty replied with a smile. "It's not Pastor Mike who wants you to be a missionary. After all, he won't even let you fish in the same boat with him. He says you start singing and scare away the fish."

"Don't even start to go there," Ken said, laughing. "You know I can out-fish you and Pastor Mike any day of the week."

"Since when?" Marty interjected as he leaned his chair back on two legs.

"I'll make you a deal," challenged Ken. "We'll go fishing tomorrow, and if I catch less than you, I'll go on that mission trip sitting beside you all the way."

"Okay, I'll admit you're the better fisherman, so no deal," responded Marty. "But seriously, Jesus is the One who told us to be missionaries. His last act in Matthew was to commission each of us to be His representative and to tell every person in the world about Him."

"That doesn't necessarily mean you have to go on a mission trip, but it does mean that you're supposed to be a missionary right here at home. You know the guys down at the plant—who needs someone to tell them about Jesus more than they do?"

"You're right as usual," responded Ken.

"Well, it's about time you admit that I'm always right. Just remember it the next time I suggest my favorite fishing hole," Marty laughed.

"No, I'm serious," Ken continued. "I know what you are saying about being obedient, and I know Jesus told me to be a missionary at the plant. I keep telling myself, if I will just live like a Christian in front of the guys, that's all I need to do. But deep down, I know I need to do more. It's just so hard to get the words out."

"Let me tell you something that might help," encouraged Marty. "A few weeks ago my men's group studied about natural encounters."

"I didn't know you guys were into science fiction," Ken laughed.

"We were studying," Marty continued, "about a man name Philip who was walking down the road when God told him to talk to an Ethiopian man riding in a chariot. The Ethiopian was reading the prophecies of Isaiah, but he didn't understand them. God used Philip to explain the Scripture's meaning and tell the Ethiopian about Jesus."

"Philip had a natural, day-to-day encounter and was obedient to follow God's direction to tell someone about Jesus. Every day we have natural encounters like Philip's. The difference is that Philip was listening for God's voice and obeyed while we sometimes hear God's voice and ignore it."

"Like I asked you earlier, Ken, have you heard any voices lately?"

Challenge: Be aware of natural encounters in your daily life and be obedient to God by using those opportunities to tell others about Jesus.