

## "On the Way" 365 Bible Reading Plan

## ACTS 8

### Acts 8

Saul of Tarsus, who held the outer garments of those who stoned righteous Stephen, is now on fire with conviction, and rage grew inside of him as he sought to get out from under the resentment he felt in his soul; everything he had given his life to and for was now falling apart, if Jesus is the Messiah. After speaking of events in the life of Philip and his preaching the gospel with great power and effectiveness, we have one of the most beloved stories in the entire book of Acts.

Beginning in 8:26, Luke relates the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, a royal official serving at the pleasure of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Unlike Cornelius of Acts 10, who was a God-fearer, this man would have been a proselyte. The God-fearer was someone who adopted the customs and beliefs of the Jewish people and the Torah but had not followed the prescription of becoming a Jew through the rituals prescribed by the religious leaders of the day. The proselyte was one who studied the Torah, learned the language, and was schooled by a teacher called a Rabbi. He would have been taught the TaNaK and the oral commentaries on the Torah, as well as the commentaries on the commentaries of the Torah. Those were called the Mishnah and the Gemara, which eventually comprised the Talmud. After fulfilling the requirements from a knowledge and practice standpoint, the proselyte would then be circumcised as a symbol of becoming a true son of Abraham and the Jewish covenant people.

During the Greek period, another ritual was initiated to complete the proselyte ritual. It was *baptism*. **Baptidzo**, **English-Baptism**, is a Greek word that means to immerse, plunge, dip or bury. The purpose was to *identify with the message* of the Torah and the TNK, to

identify with the Jewish covenant community, and to *identify with a teaching Rabbi*. The way to remember this is the proselyte was not only to be circumcised but also go through the ritual exercise of being put under the water, *signifying* a death, burial, and resurrection. Death to the old belief system, buried symbolically in water baptism/immersion, raised to **follow a new message and follow a new master**.

Now that you know the background and assumptions of this passage, that is, knowing something of what every Jewish person knew, especially the observant, religious Jew, you can see the story unfold in three-dimensional reality.

When Philip came to the Eunuch, He was reading what we call Isaiah 53. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and his answer followed that of a proselyte student. **"How can I understand unless some man teaches me?"** Philip immediately takes on that role and explains Jesus to him. The eunuch now says, **"Here is water, what keeps me from being baptized?"** This man understood that if Jesus is the Messiah, then He was the one that he had been taught to look forward to coming to earth one day to save people from their sins. The Ethiopian understood this and immediately said, in effect, I want to follow the ritual of dying to my old belief system and show outwardly what has happened inwardly by being immersed. He and Philip both went into the water and then came out of the water. The man had performed the rite, ritual, and ordinance given by Jesus to identify with a new Message and follow a new Master, Jesus.

### Prayer and Action Steps

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the rapid obedience of this Ethiopian eunuch who understood the truth and acted on it as soon as he understood. Please help me to walk in that same mindset of rapid and full obedience to Your Word and Your Way. Amen*