

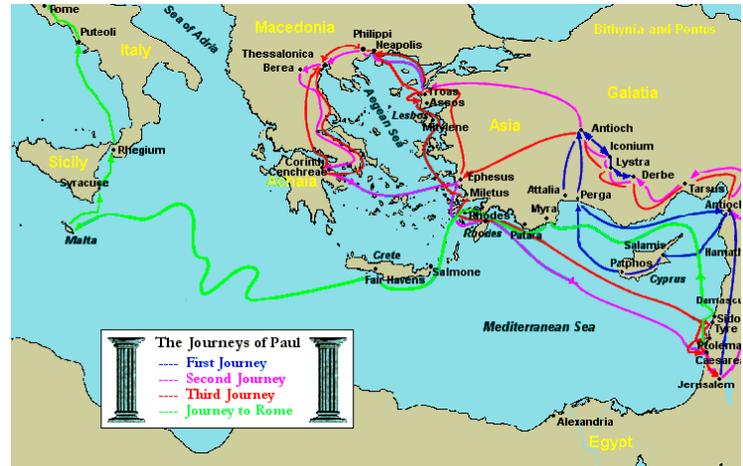
International Conversation Cafe

New Testament: Philip and the Ethiopian, Acts 8

Jesus' last command to his disciples was, "Go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The book of Acts is the story of how followers of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, spread the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Thousands of people believed and began to follow Jesus. Soon, the good news spread throughout all Jerusalem, into the surrounding countryside, and eventually to Syria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, Rome, and Africa. Sometimes Christians like Paul and Silas intentionally went to faraway places to tell others. Sometimes, Christians were forced to leave their homes because of persecution and took the good news of Jesus with them to new places. Always, they went in the power of the Holy Spirit to tell others.

The following story found in Acts 8, is about an official from Ethiopia who came to believe in Jesus as a result of Philip's witness.



This map shows some of Paul's travels to tell others about Jesus.

<http://gbgmumc.org/umw/corinthians/journeys.stm>

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. "Go south to the desert road," he said. "It's the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So Philip started out. On his way he met an Ethiopian official. The man had an important position. He was in charge of all the wealth of Candace. She was the queen of Ethiopia. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship. On his way home he was sitting in his chariot. He was reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Holy Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot. Stay near it."

30 So Philip ran up to the chariot. He heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you're reading?" Philip asked. "How can I?" he said. "I need someone to explain it to me." So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 Here is the part of Scripture the official was reading. It says,
"He was led like a sheep to be killed.
Just as lambs are silent while their wool is being cut off, he did not open his mouth."

When he was treated badly, he was refused a fair trial. Who can say anything about his children? His life was cut off from the earth."

(Isaiah 53:7,8)

34 The official said to Philip, "Tell me, please. Who is the prophet talking about? Himself, or someone else?" Then Philip began with that same part of Scripture. He told him the good news about Jesus.

36-37As they traveled along the road, they came to some water. The official said, "Look! Here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 He gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the official went down into the water. Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. The official did not see him again. He went on his way full of joy. 40 Philip was seen next at Azotus. From there he traveled all around. He preached the good news in all the towns. Finally he arrived in Caesarea.



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. 1626. Oil on panel. 63.5 x 78 cm. private collection.

Discussion

What was the job of the Ethiopian official and why was he in Jerusalem?

What book was he reading and who is being described?

What is the analogy about Jesus in Isaiah?

Does anything surprise you in this story?

What do you learn about God's love for all people?

Can you explain how the good news of Jesus went to Africa?

Tell about how you first heard about Jesus.

What is Baptism?

The word, "baptize", means to dip, or "to place under the influence of". The church has practiced three ways of water baptism: sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Baptism is a symbol or a picture of two things. First, it shows that a person believes and follows Jesus. Water, a symbol for purity, reminds us of how Jesus sacrificed his life for our sins so that we can be pure in God's sight. For those churches practicing immersion, the gesture of going down into the water, pictures Jesus dying and our death with Him to our old life of impurity, Romans 6. When lifted out of the water, it reminds us of Jesus rising from the dead and our new life and identity in Him. For those traditions, which practice pouring, they are reminded of the Holy Spirit being poured out to them; Acts 2, Joel 2. Sprinkling is a reminder that hearts are purified by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 9.