

Open for All

From the opening chapters of the Bible, we see God dealing with certain individuals. First, we meet the first man and woman Adam and Eve. Later, we meet Noah and his family. The next person we meet is Abram (later known as Abraham). Each of these people are connected through the generations and the record is saved in the Bible. From the study of the Old Testament (of Hebrew Bible), we see God as very focused on one group of people. Early in the book of Genesis, we find a veiled promise that God would extend His focus to include others. God speaks to Abram in the 12th chapter of Genesis and in the 3rd verse, we find this promise.

And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you (or *reviles against you*) I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3 NASB)

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, there are many prophecies that speak of the Messiah who would sit on the throne of David. For many, this prophecy seems to apply to the nation of Israel. We know that we read in the New Testament about Jesus and make the connection. However, when we read in Joel, we find a direct promise of God’s spirit being poured out to all nations. With this outpouring of God’s spirit, we are told that those who call on Him will be delivered.

“It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

“I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; (Joel 2:28-32a NASB)

Peter, as he spoke on the day of Pentecost, quotes this passage from Joel and being fulfilled on that day. We will visit this day again in a few weeks. What we are seeing today is that at some point, God expands His focus to include all nations. God promised blessings to all nations yet during the period of time recorded in the Old Testament, God deals with a select people. Where do we see the transition from God working with and extending blessings to the nation of Israel to include others?

Luke records that ascension of Jesus in two different places; Luke 24:50-51 and in Acts 1:9-11. Jesus was speaking with His disciples prior to His ascension and instructed them with these words: **but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NASB)**

The promise that God would bless all nations became a reality on Pentecost. Jesus laid out the order in which the gospel message would be shared. First, the good news was to be shared in Jerusalem and Judea. Next, it was to be proclaimed in Samaria. Then into the rest of the world. Luke serves as a historian as he writes the book of Acts. He ties the events of the early days of Christianity to the life of Jesus. In those early days, most of the preaching occurred in and around Jerusalem. The church grew to the point that deacons were selected to help with the daily needs of the church.

During these early days, we meet two important people. Stephen was chosen to be one of the deacons became the first recorded Christian martyr. Saul (later known as Paul) was on hand when Stephen was stoned and then began to lead a persecution of the Christians in an effort to bring them back into the orthodox Jewish teachings. With Saul mounting intense persecution, many Christians fled from Jerusalem. As they left Jerusalem, they were sharing the gospel message.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. (Acts 8:4-6 NASB)

The city of Samaria was an ancient capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel in the 9th and 8th centuries BC. Thus, we see that Philip initiated the second phase of the spreading gospel message. He had taken the good news of Jesus to the Samaritans. When the apostles heard that Philip had shared the word with those in Samaria, they sent Peter and John. We are told that Peter and John also preached in the area as they were returning to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25).

In the 26th verse of the 8th chapter of Acts, we see that Philip is directed, by an angel, to seek out an individual and teach him about Jesus.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert *road*.) So, he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. (Acts 8:26-28 NASB)

We find a lot of information in these 3 verses. First, we are introduced to an Ethiopian eunuch. Luke does not identify the eunuch as either a proselyte, a Gentile convert to Judaism, or a God-fearer, a Gentile adherent to the Jewish monotheism, ethic and piety. He presents him only as pious according to the Jewish faith. The eunuch is returning to Meroe after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the feasts, and he is *sitting in his chariot* reading Scripture. The chariot is probably a four-wheeled covered vehicle, like an oxcart, large enough to accommodate the eunuch, his driver, Philip and possibly another servant (who would be reading the manuscript aloud if the official is not doing so himself). The carriage is moving slowly enough to allow for reading and for Philip to approach it on foot. Reading aloud was the common practice in ancient times, and was especially necessary when words were strung together on a manuscript without spacing or punctuation.

Second, we are told that the Ethiopian was a eunuch. Many of us understand this as an emasculated male and this may be the case. However, sometimes the word eunuch has been used to indicate an official in whom the ruler had complete trust. In the sense that eunuchs (as we understand the term) were trusted to guard the king’s wives, these officials had the same level of trust. I point this out because under the Mosaic law, eunuchs were forbidden to enter the assembly for worship.

“No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 23:1 NASB)

Third, the eunuch had a copy of the scroll written by Isaiah. This would be difficult for someone other than a Jew to obtain. Since he had this scroll, it would indicate that he was a serious student of God's word. He wanted to learn more than he could through going to the temple for special feast days or celebrations. He wanted to draw closer to God on a personal level.

Fourth, this man from Ethiopia was a dark man—a man of color. It is another step of the gospel of Christ beginning to spread out from Jerusalem into all of the world. While he most certainly was not of Abraham's seed, he was associated with Jewish law and customs.

So, Philip had gone to the road where the angel had directed and he sees this chariot and is instructed to make contact with the eunuch.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:29-30 NASB)

The opening line from Philip is to ask the eunuch if he understands what he has read. With this, the eunuch invites Philip to join him and discuss the passage found in Isaiah.

And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

"HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;

AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,

SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

"IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;

WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?

FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" (Acts 8:31-34 NASB)

This passage from Isaiah 53:7-8 is one familiar to many of us. We often read this as we reflect on the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. The Jewish leaders and teachers of that day could not comprehend the Messiah being a suffering servant. Many of the Rabbis interpreted the suffering to either the nation Israel or to the wicked Gentile nations. It is true that some Jewish elements had formed the concept of a suffering Messiah, a doctrine of a suffering Messiah was generally considered unthinkable. The eunuch wanted to better understand what he was reading so he asked Philip.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And 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." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:35-39 NASB)

One more step has been accomplished in opening up the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ has been achieved. Soon, we will see the gospel message shared with the Gentiles and then spread throughout the known world. The steady progression was promised to Abraham and through many of the prophets. It leads us to the absolute truth found in Acts 17:26, where we are told: **and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. (Acts 17:26 NASB)**

As we conclude, I share the words to the first verse of a song written by John Moody McCaleb around 1921. These words remind us that God's love and mercy are truly open to all.

Of one the Lord has made the race

Thro' one has come the fall

Where sin has gone must go His grace

The gospel is for all