



# Philip

ALL WE KNOW



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ LOUVRE/PARIS (287/20)

Above: Relief, likely from Rome, shows Philip and the eunuch, whom Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, dispatched.

Right: Shown on the Madaba mosaic map is the site of Bethsur. Located on the road to Gaza, Bethsur is the location of the Fountain of Saint

Philip. An early church was built on the site, the Church of Saint Philip (circled). In the front yard of the church is a circular pool, which commemorates Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch. Dated to the 6th cent. A.D., the Madaba map is one of the oldest known maps in existence.





# Philip's action clearly led to the spread of the gospel to the continent of Africa.

**W**HEN THINKING OF famous evangelists, what name comes to mind? You might think of the apostle Paul or maybe Billy Graham. What about the one man identified in Scripture as “the evangelist”—would you think of him?

Philip, a Greek name meaning “lover of horses,” was the name of one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. It was also the name of one of the seven men the church chose to serve widows (Acts 6). At times some have confused these two men with each other. The roots for this confusion date early in church history.<sup>1</sup> The two men are not the same. Luke later identified the

Philip of Acts 6 as “Philip the evangelist” perhaps to avoid just such confusion (21:8). He specifically mentioned this Philip had “four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (v. 9, NASB).

## Philip's Identity

What exactly do we know about Philip? Who was this man called “the evangelist”? Scripture reveals no details about his background, his family relations, or where he was born and raised. Our introduction to him comes in Acts 6:5. A controversy developed between Hellenistic Jews and Hebraic Jews over the neglect of Hellenistic widows. Seven men were chosen to take care of the issue.

Before we go further, let’s explore: Who were the Hellenists? Three views explain their possible identity. One, they were Greeks who had accepted Christ; two, they were Greeks who had previously converted to Judaism, known as proselytes, who had then trusted Christ; or three, they were Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora<sup>2</sup> who had either returned to Israel to live or who had come to Jerusalem from other provinces for the Passover.<sup>3</sup> The third is the more traditional view.

Back to the seven: evidence indicates the majority of the group of seven men were Greek-speaking Jews. Certainly at this point in its history, the Christian community would have been almost exclusively Jewish.<sup>4</sup> The gospel’s expansion to the Gentile world followed the later dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem under the persecution Saul led in



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**Above: Crusader ruins on top of ancient Ashdod (Azotus), which**

**was one of the cities in which Philip preached (Acts 8:40).**

approximately A.D. 35 (8:1-17). The fact that Nicolas—one of the seven—is specifically singled out as being a proselyte from Antioch further supports this interpretation about the identity of the seven. While all seven men have Greek names, this would indicate a distinction between Nicolas and the other six, specifically that he had been a Greek convert to Judaism.

If Philip was indeed a Hellenistic Jew, he was likely one of the many who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from other parts of the world for Pentecost. The account of his selection as one of the seven in Acts 6 seems to rule out that possibility of his being one of the apostles. Specifically we read “the twelve” (6:2), which would include Philip the apostle, charged the congregation to choose from among themselves seven men for the work of distribution to the widows in order



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that they (the apostles) could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (v. 4). The men the congregation selected were then brought to the apostles for the laying on of hands (v. 6). In this story, Philip the apostle would have been laying hands on Philip the evangelist. They were not the same person.

### Philip's Character

While we know scant details of his background, what do we know about his character? We know three things about him from Acts 6. First, we know he had a good reputation among both the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews since the entire community was given the task of selecting these seven men. Second, we know he was filled with the Holy Spirit. This means Philip was a spiritually mature individual whose character reflected his active submission to the Spirit's presence in his life. Finally, he was full of wisdom. This indicates Philip possessed the practical wisdom necessary for handling

the day-to-day distributions to the widows. It also suggests he possessed spiritual wisdom and a high degree of discernment concerning spiritual or theological matters. Being full of the Spirit and wisdom are sometimes viewed as a single qualification.<sup>5</sup> Both concepts equally apply to Philip.

### Philip's Work

The New Testament does not mention Philip preaching or performing signs and wonders while in Jerusalem. That does not mean, however, he was not involved in evangelism while there. What we read later in Acts seems to indicate that Philip—like Stephen—was doing the work of an evangelist even while in Jerusalem.

Acts 8 indicates Philip was among those forced from Jerusalem under the persecution led by Saul and the martyrdom of Stephen. Having left Jerusalem, Philip preached the word of God in Samaria (Acts 8:4-13). We get a glimpse of the greatness of God's presence and power in Philip's life when we consider the animosity that

existed between Jews and Samaritans (John 4:9). Yet, the Bible says the Samaritans had great joy because of Philip's ministry. As a result of Philip's preaching, many who had unclean spirits were cleansed, many who were paralyzed and lame were healed, and many believed and were baptized.<sup>6</sup> So powerful was Philip's preaching in Samaria that among those who believed and were baptized was a man named Simon who had practiced magic and had great influence among the people.<sup>7</sup>

We know so little of Philip's life, yet we must stand in awe of his faithfulness. Philip obediently left his ministry in Samaria, where he

**Below: A wide-angle view of Philip's Martyrium outside Hierapolis, Turkey. The building was completed in the 5th cent. to commemorate Philip's founding a church in Hierapolis and his martyrdom. Early**

**church tradition holds that Philip had a lengthy and fruitful ministry in Hierapolis. The bishop of Ephesus, Polycrates, wrote a letter to the bishop of Rome around A.D. 191 indicating Philip had died at Hierapolis.**



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# Philip's Travels



ILLUSTRATOR MAP/ LINDEN ARTIST/ LONDON



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (9/25/11)

**Above: The odium at Samaria. After Herod the Great gained control of the city in 30 B.C., he renamed Samaria "Sebaste."**

**Below: Cornice piece from Herod's palace at Caesarea Maritima. Paul visited Philip and his family in Caesarea on his last journey to Jerusalem.**



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (10/28/13)

was reaching great numbers, so he could preach to one specific person. Acts 8:26-40 details the account of Philip's departure from Samaria to witness to and baptize an Ethiopian eunuch, an official of the queen of Ethiopia. Though this may have seemed to be a lesser ministry, Philip's action clearly led to the spread of the gospel to the continent of Africa.

After baptizing the Ethiopian, Philip was carried away and found himself at Azotus, the ancient

Philistine city of Ashdod. From there, he continued his preaching ministry until he came to Caesarea. He was still at Caesarea about 20 years later when Paul returned from his third missionary journey (21:8). Traditions vary about where and how Philip died. Some believe he died a martyr in Hierapolis. Others claim he died of natural causes at Tralles in Lydia.

Philip was the church's first known missionary with his ministry in Samaria. He preceded both

Peter and Paul as the first missionaries to the Gentiles through his witness to the Ethiopian. His preaching crossed social, racial, and political barriers and demonstrated the wonderful truth that God's grace is available to all people. **B**

1. See Eusebius, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 3.31, pp. 96-97. This confusion between the two Philips in Eusebius is also referenced in the article "Philip" by D.H. Wheaton in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I.H. Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, and D.J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 917-18.

2. Also referred to as the dispersion, these were Jews scattered throughout the Gentile world primarily through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities in 722 and 586 B.C.

3. For a further information on the meaning of the term "Hellenist" and its use in Acts, see Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles in The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 327-330; also, John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 179.

4. Exclusively Jewish in the sense of religion, not necessarily nationality. Gentile proselytes would be considered Jewish religiously.

5. Simon J. Kistemaker, *The New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 222.

6. Acts 8:1 provides further evidence the two Philips were not the same, telling us the apostles were not among those forced from Jerusalem. Additionally the laying on of hands signified an apostolic affirmation of what had taken place in Samaria. If this Philip were the apostle he would certainly have been able to affirm that or at least take part with Peter and John in the laying on of hands. For a more detailed discussion of the unusual nature of the receiving of the Spirit by the Samaritan believers see Polhill, 217-21.

7. Some among the early church fathers doubted the genuineness of Simon's conversion and questioned his relationship to early gnosticism. For a more detailed discussion see Polhill, 215-17.

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