

## CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

### *I.*

#### *Introduction*

Conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ took place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Under inspiration of Holy Spirit it was recorded for us in Acts 8:26-40. Before we will approach the story itself, let me give you some background information.

Each of us can probably picture where the city of Jerusalem is located. The city of Samaria was 36 miles (cca 58 km) north. Southwest from Jerusalem near Mediterranean Sea was the site of the ancient Philistine town Gaza that was completely destroyed by king of Judea Alexander Jannaeus in 96 BC and deserted as it was prophesied by prophets Amos and Zephaniah (Amos 1:6-8, Zephaniah 2:4).

Let's read Acts 7:59-8:6 to see the events that preceded to our story. We have read that after Stephen was stoned a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem. Number of Christians were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. This could happen around year 36 AD. Those who were scattered went about preaching the gospel to Jews only as gentiles had not received the word of God yet (Acts 11:1, 19). One of them was Philip, who went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. This Philip was not the apostle, as the apostles remained in Jerusalem, but he used to serve as a deacon in Jerusalem's Church as we can read in Acts 6:2-5. He was a man full of the Spirit. This Phillip was proclaiming Christ to Jews in the city of Samaria. The result of Philip's evangelistic work in Samaria was that both men and women were baptized Acts 8:12.

As we will read in our story about conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, one day this evangelist Philip was told by an angel of the Lord to go toward south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert. The angel was very specific about where Philip should go, so that there would be no mistake, but the angel did not tell him why he should go there, to a deserted place, when he could do so much good work in city of Samaria. However, Phillip did not question God's will. Only God knows the whole picture and Phillip and any human being know only limited part of it. Therefore if God commands something in His Word, we better follow Phillip's example and do God's will, because God knows why he commands us such thing.

Before God sent Philip away from Samaria he had the new Christian converts equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted to them through the laying of hands of apostles Peter and John who were sent to Samaria. It was because these new converts did not have written NT unlike we have today and Philip was the only source of the truth they had. Thus God provided them help before sending Philip away. (Acts 8:14-17) We need to realize that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not just healing of the sick or speaking in foreign tongues, but also teaching and prophesying – 1. Corinthians 12:8-11. This is how the new Christians could be informed about the will of God so they could know what they should do in order to please God.

Now, let's read the story in Acts 8:26-40 and notice that v. 37 may not be in some of your translations, because it is missing in the ancient manuscripts and appears only in late manuscripts.

We have just read the story of conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ.

Most of us here have a story of our own conversion to Christ. At a certain point in our life when we were seeking God, at a certain point in time when we desired to obey Christ and have our sins forgiven, our life crossed with the life of an evangelist of the hour who received our confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord and baptized us. Sometimes the story maybe simple, other times it maybe quite elaborate like the story of the conversion of Ethiopian eunuch. There were thousands and thousands of conversions to Christ that took place in the 1st century AD. Out of all those thousands of stories, the Holy Spirit chose several and had inspired writer Luke record them for us in more detail in the book of Acts, beginning with the story of 3,000 Jews converted in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and ending with the story of 12 men converted in Ephesus in Acts 19. The book of Acts is truly a book dedicated to conversions.

## **II.**

### ***Why do we need the stories of conversions?***

First of all they are examples of real people, what real people did and there is power in examples, whether good or bad examples. However, here we are dealing with good examples. Philip can serve as a good example for us Christians in our efforts to help other people to be converted to Christ and be saved. The Ethiopian eunuch, on the other hand, may encourage a lost soul to follow his example and be converted to Christ.

At the same time, these stories contain pattern of how God's gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8) from sins is delivered to and received by individual people. In other words, pattern of true conversion of individuals to Christ.

Sin is the greatest problem of mankind, from the time when Adam and Eve sinned, till today's times when each of us sins. Many people do not realize it. Many people do not recognize it. Many people do not do anything about it. But God's Word is clear: *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23) *"the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). The problem that everyone has is sin and the only solution of the problem is Jesus (because of His sacrifice for our sins), which was proved by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In order that the problem of sin can be resolved, one must be converted to Christ and become Christ's disciple. Jesus commanded His followers to help the lost to resolve their problem of sin. Let's read Matthew 28:19-20. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

Now let's see in detail the pattern of true conversion to Christ in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch.

I suggest that we answer the following questions:

- 1] What do we know about the man of whose conversion we have read?
- 2] What was his spiritual condition?
- 3] What was done for him?
- 4] What was said to him?
- 5] What requirements concerning salvation were communicated to him?
- 6] What did he do?

### 1] What do we know about the eunuch?

He was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure. He held a high and responsible office, which required a responsible, decisive and honest person.

### 2] What was the eunuch's spiritual condition?

We have read that he came to Jerusalem to worship, which tells us that he was either of Jewish origin or a proselyte to the Jewish faith. In other words he was worshipping God in accordance with Moses' Law. Now, let me to make a little detour. It takes Tami and I about 25 minutes to get from our apartment in Prague downtown Prague where we assemble with Christians to Worship God. I cannot imagine how many weeks it took the Ethiopian eunuch to travel all the way from Ethiopia in Northern Africa to Jerusalem for worship, and then back to Ethiopia. Considering the simple means of transportation of that time, like a chariot. Considering they did not have highways with motels and restaurants like we have. Good paved roads were scarce and it was not always safe to travel such great distances. Although it was probably safer in eunuch's time than today in that part of the world anyway. Yet, this would not deter the eunuch from going to worship God to Jerusalem. What is even more striking is that although he had a great responsibility as minister of treasury, he put on the first place his responsibility to God. He found time to absent himself from his job so that he could go worship God according to the knowledge of Moses' Law that he had at that time. Does this tell us something about his faith in God?

Probably none of us has such a responsible job. None of us has to go through such hardships to worship God. Yet, can we say about ourselves that we put our responsibility to God before our other responsibilities and do our best to be at worships of God? This man put God and His will on the first place in his life and God is never far from such people. In His providence He will provide the way for such a person to be called out of darkness of sin into God's marvelous light of life. (1 Peter 2:9).

Further, when we are introduced to the eunuch, he is on his way back to Ethiopia. He fulfilled his religious obligation, but he did not put up the scrolls with the OT Scriptures to open them only on the day of the next worship. On the contrary, while on his way back home he was reading Isaiah's prophecies, thinking about them, raising questions, trying to understand God's will. Do we study Scriptures during the week to try to understand God's will like the eunuch did?

From God's perspective, this man had a problem of sin that had to be solved and because the eunuch was seeking God and put his obligation to God on the first place in his life, God provided the way for him to learn about salvation in Christ.

### 3] What was done for the eunuch?

First an angel was sent, but not to the eunuch who needed the help, but to Philip, an evangelist preaching the gospel, who was in the city of Samaria some 36 miles (58 km) north of Jerusalem, and told him to go to a road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip had no idea why he should go to such and such road, but he obeyed God's messenger and went there. Soon after Philip got to the road, he saw the eunuch's chariot. Now the Holy Spirit was involved, but He did not address the eunuch, but again Philip, the preacher of the gospel. God's angel and God's Spirit were working for the salvation of an honest man, but instead of approaching directly the man who needed salvation, they addressed the evangelist and gave him instructions. And what kind of instructions they gave him? Go to such and

such road. Go up and join the chariot. And that was all they told him. Philip did exactly what he was told. He ran to the chariot. He got so close to it that he could hear a person in the chariot reading aloud from Isaiah. Since there was no more instruction from the Holy Spirit, should he stop and go back to Samaria thinking why in the world did the angel and the Holy Spirit make him to see that chariot?

For Philip it was more than a chariot. It was an opportunity to share God's Word. How did he recognize it? As I have said, while running close to the chariot he could hear the eunuch reading aloud from Isaiah. Without wasting his time on introductions, courtesies, or explaining that he was actually sent there by an angel and the Holy Spirit, Philip went directly to the heart of the matter and asked eunuch: *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* - Acts 8:30 Some people – and they do not have to be ministers - could take such a question from a stranger as an offense. But not the treasurer of the queen of the Ethiopians. Although his status was much higher than that of the stranger, he had enough humbleness to admit to the stranger that he did not understand, that he needed help in this matter and he invited Philip to his chariot – Acts 8:31.

#### 4] What was said to the eunuch?

The passage of the Scriptures that the eunuch did not understand is in Isaiah 53:7-8. The eunuch turned for help to Philip asking: *Who was the prophet speaking about?* - Acts 8:34. The eunuch did not know it. Philip knew it and we know it too, but only because Jesus Christ fulfilled it and Holy Spirit revealed it through inspired apostles and writers of the NT. Without it, we would have no idea who Isaiah spoke about. Since the eunuch apparently did not know that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies, Philip could now realize that this man was in a lost condition before God, that he had a problem of sin. Further Philip knew what Jesus had commanded concerning helping other people to solve their spiritual problem of sin, by converting them to Christ and making them His disciples. Only now, Phillip could understand why angel and Holy Spirit sent him to this deserted place, because there was a lost human being there who was seeking God. Philip did not need an angel, or the Holy Spirit to tell him any more instructions about what he should do now. He began at this Scripture and preached Jesus to the eunuch. - Acts 8:35

Now, how would you preach Jesus to someone who does not know anything about Him? Would you point out to him the OT prophecies prophesying about Jesus? Would you explain to him how they were fulfilled in Jesus? Would you tell him why Jesus came to earth, what He taught, what miracles He did to prove the truthfulness of His message, how He suffered and died for our sins on the cross as Isaiah had prophesied, how He was buried and how He was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven from where He reigns, sent the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel through inspired men to humanity. Would you tell him God's requirements he must fulfil in order to have his problem of sin resolved? That he must believe that Jesus is Lord and Christ, repent of his sins, confess Jesus as Lord and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. If you told a person the truth about Jesus that is relevant for solving his spiritual problem of sin, you preached Jesus to him. Such a person knows what he should do to be saved. Did the eunuch know what he should do to be saved? Yes, he did.

#### 5] What requirements concerning salvation were communicated to the eunuch?

The necessary conclusion is that all requirements were communicated to the eunuch – faith in Jesus, repentance of sins, confession of Jesus as the Lord, baptism for the remission of sins. How can we make such conclusion? Well, at some point the eunuch said, *"See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"* – Acts 8:36 How did he know he had to be baptized, and how do we know that

nothing prevented him from being baptized? He knew it, because he heard Philip preach Jesus to him, including God's requirements for salvation, out of which, the baptism is the last step. He knew it, because based on Philip's message he must have fulfilled requirements preceding baptism. We know it, because the same Holy Spirit, who sent Philip to the eunuch revealed these requirements to inspired apostles and writers of the NT and we can read about them in other stories of conversion to Christ (Acts 2:36-41, Romans 10:9-10). We know it, because Philip did not object to the eunuch's desire to be baptized.

6] What did the eunuch do?

He was baptized, that is immersed under the water for the remission of his sins by Philip. – Acts 8:38-39

### ***III. Conclusion***

The Holy Spirit gives us here the pattern of true conversion to Christ. We can apply this pattern to ourselves and to any other person to see whether we or any other person were truly converted to Christ. The eunuch was and notice that he was rejoicing from his salvation only after he was baptized, not before!

Now, let's imagine that after a few miles this rejoicing eunuch meets a Jew who would like to know what had happened to him, why was he rejoicing. What do you think that eunuch would tell him? Where would he begin the story? With the angel? With the Holy Spirit? Both of them had much to do with his conversion, but Bible does not tell us that he knew anything about it. What could the eunuch tell the person that he knew from his own experience? I am from Ethiopia. I was in Jerusalem to worship God in accordance with Moses' Law. On my way home I read Isaiah's prophecy and did not understand it, but I met a certain man, he preached Jesus to me, explained me that Isaiah prophesied of Jesus and I understood that God replaced the old covenant with the new covenant through Jesus. I did everything that God required of me to be saved, i.e., I believed in Jesus, repented of my sins, confessed Jesus as my Lord and was baptized in water for the remission of my sins. The man is gone - I do not know where - and I am on my way home, as happy as I can be.

What do you think about the story of eunuch's conversion told from his own experience? Is it much different from our stories? It was not an angel, nor Holy Spirit, but another man who brought the message of the gospel directly to the eunuch. The same happened in our case. Was Holy Spirit involved in conversion of Ethiopian eunuch to Christ? Well, He was involved in our conversion as well through the message of gospel of Jesus Christ that He revealed to apostles and inspired writers of the NT that we have today.

There is one more very important aspect of the eunuch's conversion and that is his readiness with which he immediately obeyed gospel. He did not say to Philip that he will think about gospel and if he happens to meet him again maybe next year he would tell him his decision, nor did he stop to think about what folks back home would say to him that he became Christian, abandoned Moses' Law and the traditions of fathers. Now was the time when he learnt the truth and nothing could hinder him from obeying it!

Is not that the same thing that 3000 Jews did on the day of Pentecost after gospel had been first time preached by Peter and other apostles, or what Paul did after Ananias had told him message from Lord Jesus, or what centurion Cornelius and those in his house did after Peter had preached them

gospel, or what Philippian jailor did after Paul and Silas had preached him gospel? When we read the stories of conversions to Christ that are recorded in Acts, we can find number of examples of people who immediately responded to Jesus' gospel by obeying it the same day or night they heard it preached.

This is the kind of people from whom God is not far, the people that respond to their duty when they are convinced of its correctness. We all need to be like that.

#### ***IV. Invitation***

If you are out of Christ or your conversion did not follow the pattern of the true conversion to Christ authorized by Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, which is: 1] the truth concerning salvation – gospel, preached by an evangelist and 2] obedience to that truth consisting of a) belief that Son of God Jesus who was crucified and rosed from the dead is the Lord and Christ, b) repentance of sins, c) confession that Jesus is the Lord and d) baptism in the name of Jesus Christ performed by immersion under water for purpose of forgiveness of sins, please do not hesitate, follow the example of Ethiopian eunuch as well as of many others you can read about in Acts and make your soul right with God today. For you are in lost condition in the sight of God. You have a problem of sin and the wages of sin is death. If you know the truth, know what to do and you do not do it before your time is gone, how much worse will the eternity be for you in the place of torments and separation from God, which you could have avoided. Please consider that Jesus offers you forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. Are you willing to obey gospel? Do it today!

Prague, January 6, 2007  
Last revision December 12, 2010

Robert Hodanko

based on N.B. Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons  
"The conversion of a civil officer"