

Acts 8:26-40

Aim of Lesson

To show that God reveals himself to all those who seek him, and that an understanding of the Bible teaching about Jesus leads to a desire for baptism.

Background study

Isaiah 53; Matthew 7:7-8; Mark 16:15-16.

Suggested outline of lesson

Try to obtain a picture or model of a scroll, and a map of Palestine in New Testament times. Show the children Jerusalem, Samaria to the north where Philip had been preaching, and the valley from Jerusalem towards Azotus with the river crossing the route to Gaza.

The narrative can begin with Philip's diversion towards the road to Gaza where it passed through desert land, or with a description of the eunuch's status. He was a man of high authority, in charge of the treasure of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, and he had a chariot of his own, which was a mark of wealth and position. The long journey from Egypt to Jerusalem would not have been easy but the Ethiopian was prepared to undertake it as he evidently wished to please God. Although he was not a Jew, he had learned to believe in the true God. No doubt he used his limited time in Jerusalem to the full, spending as much time as possible in the temple, hearing the scriptures read, and discussing with other devout worshippers. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus and the controversial preaching of the apostles. He determined to use the opportunity of the long journey home to search the scriptures. Explain that the "book" meant a scroll, which was quite rare for an individual to own, and it must have cost a great deal. At this point, turn to the passage which the Ethiopian was reading and read it to the children (Isaiah 53:7).

The meeting of Philip and the traveller was dramatic. It was not a coincidence, but a meeting especially arranged by God through his spirit. The question and response, the invitation and its acceptance lead into a description of Philip teaching, and the Ethiopian learning, the greatest lesson it is possible to learn. Outline Philip's instruction which led to an understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in fulfilment of prophecy, and the call to all men to follow him. Describe the keen attention of the Ethiopian, his growing understanding, and his excitement as everything began to fall into place. By the time they had reached the water he knew he must respond to the command to be baptized.

Describe the scene as the two men entered the water and Philip immersed him, and the joy the man felt as he climbed out. He would be grateful to God for calling him, and to Philip for showing him the way. How fondly they would take their leave of each other before Philip was taken miraculously away by the power of God, and the Ethiopian returned to his chariot to continue his journey, knowing that he was a new man.

Since baptism is the focal point of the lesson, relate this to the children's experiences. Ask if any of them have attended a baptism. Consider alternative venues when the sea or rivers are too cold for outdoor immersions. If there is a baptismal bath in your meeting room, this could be shown to the children.

Relevance to the children's lives

Why did God send Philip to meet the Ethiopian? What was the Ethiopian trying to find out? Do we sometimes have difficulty understanding what we read in the Bible. Jesus promised that if we really want to know all about him, we will be helped to understand. Who will help us to understand the gospel message?

Worksheets

The foot prints read 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for your precious book, the Bible. Help us to read it regularly, as did the Ethiopian, and to understand it, because we know that it contains a message for us, too. Amen.

Memory verse

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).