

My name is Philip. Not Philip the Apostle, but Philip the Evangelist, and Philip the Father of Four Daughters. If anybody needs a good bride, I know just where you can find one.

You can tell by my name, I am Greek. My name means “lover of horses.” Whenever the Romans drove their chariots through our town, I took every opportunity to feed and care for their horses. Chariot horses were not the large horses that you have, but were much smaller, almost the size of your ponies. But we were much smaller people than you.

Like a good Jew, I was in Jerusalem during many Passover feasts and other religious ceremonies. The most special feast day was the day the early church started. I first heard the Gospel from Peter on that Pentecost day, and I became completely converted. For the first time in my life I had the hope of eternal life. I was baptized, and Peter laid his hands on me. I became full of the Holy Spirit, and I have remained full ever since that time.

The early church was an experience not to be repeated. It was...one big happy family. We shared the things we owned, nobody had too much, and nobody had too little. We were concerned with growing our church congregation, so nobody really cared about useless stuff. We were filled with the hope that Jesus would be coming back any day, so stuff had no value. We were sending our treasures to Heaven, not stacking up dusty, rusty old junk. I guess if you had the hope as strongly as we had, you wouldn't be so attracted to having so much stuff either.

As the months went by, the daily cares of life began to bog down the ministry of the apostles and those of us who were sharing the Gospel. Then a crisis arose – some of my fellow Greek Jews began to complain that their widows weren't being

fed as well as the Hebrew Jewish widows. This issue sounds like a minor issue to you, but it was only a symptom of a much larger problem.

Since the time of Moses, the Jews had insulated themselves from all other societies. Even in the time of *Acts*, the Jews were allowed to run their society as long as they paid taxes to the Romans and didn't cause civil disturbances. The Jews had the unique privilege in the Empire of not having to provide soldiers to Rome. Since the Jews were segregated from Roman society, they were not allowed to join the Roman trade guilds, so Jews had to develop specific vocational skills or become traveling traders.

On an individual level, Jews were tied very closely to their families, and secondarily to their local social group as represented by their town or synagogue. Traveling Jews and poor Jews were taken care of by Jewish communities and individuals. The religious leaders were taken care of by the taxes, sacrifices and offerings which came from individual Jews throughout the world.

From the very first, it was unclear how much of this social structure would remain available to the Jewish Christians. The euphoria of Pentecost! The early growth of the church! They passed, and the Christians had to start replacing the Jewish social structure with their own.

At first, this problem was overcome by people selling what they had and sharing with each other, but that was a short-term solution. As the Christians separated more and more from the Jews, they needed to replace the whole social structure of taking care of families, traveling Christians, poor Christians, and their religious leaders, all while moving to different communities and replacing their old jobs.

That would have been complicated enough, but we Jews were separated into many groups. There were the Jews living in Israel who spoke Hebrew¹ as their native language. Another group were Jews living in other countries who spoke Greek as their common language. Since the early church was located mainly in Jerusalem, the first group had quite a natural advantage over the second.

¹ Very likely many of the Jews in Israel spoke Aramaic as their native language.

The apostles determined that their evangelical, teaching and healing ministries were far too important to pay attention to less important worldly matters which would undoubtedly require an increasing amount of effort. So, they had the church find a solution to the unequal treatment of those two groups. The believers chose six men and me, who were all full of the Holy Spirit, to administer God's grace in matters like food distribution. One aspect of the church's wisdom was to appoint all seven to be Greeks, not Israelites. We became known as 'the Magnificent Seven'.

Nah, but we were known as the Seven. I don't want to brag, but not all of us were equally popular and well-known. If we had been a rock band we would have been named Stephen, Philip and the Fab Five.

It was the Fab Five who ended up doing most of the hard work and they went unrecognized by history, like most of the Christians who do the hard work without recognition. Stephen's story... you know he didn't live very long. After his death, I was soon forced to leave town to avoid deadly persecution from the Jerusalem Jews. That left the Fab Five to do all the hard work.

I left Jerusalem to go to Samaria and spread the Gospel. Although Paul gets all of the good publicity for taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, I took the Gospel to the Samaritans long before. I shouldn't be too proud about it, Jesus had been to Samaria a decade before me and had laid a solid foundation for my work.

The Samaritans were considered to be partly Jewish since they were descendants of the original tribes of Israel who had intermarried with other peoples or had other religious differences. Samaritans were somewhere far below Jews on the good guy list, but still somewhat above the Gentiles. Unless Jesus had told his story about the Good Samaritan, and personally converted an entire Samaritan village, I doubt we early Christians would have considered the Samaritans much different than the Gentiles. You might remember, my friends James and John

wanted to call down fire on one of their villages just because they were unfriendly.²

I left Jerusalem to go to Samaria to spread the Gospel. I was blown away by what happened next. I suddenly had powers like Peter. I could cast out demons, do miracles, heal people of all kinds of physical diseases and ailments. It was crazy, I was a rock star. People listened closely to everything I said, accepted Jesus as their savior and were baptized. Such joy in Samaria. It was so nutty that even the apostles in Jerusalem heard about it, and sent Peter and John to check it out.

Before they arrived, I converted a former sorcerer named Simon. Simon was used to being the center of attention, and badly wanted to be his old famous self. When he saw Peter lay hands on someone and give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, Simon the Sorcerer spotted his big chance. He offered Peter a lot of money to give him the ability to lay hands on people so they could receive the Holy Spirit. In Simon's former life, that was what sorcerers did. Peter was incensed at Simon and condemned him for offering the bribe. Simon had the wisdom to quickly repent, and he was forgiven.

Peter and John laid their hands on the new Samaritan believers and they received the Holy Spirit. When Peter and John were satisfied that the Samaritans really had been converted, they went back to the big city, Jerusalem, and continued their ministry there, but they did preach to the Samaritans on the way back. So, between them and me, we had started fulfilling Jesus' commandment to go to Judea and Samaria and spread the Gospel.³ It was now time to fulfill the rest of the commandment by going to the ends of the earth. I didn't know it at the time, but I was going to be a big part of that story

So maybe, my story isn't all that exciting, and you are probably wondering why Dr. Luke bothered to have me tell it. It's the next event in my life that got my name in the bright lights. In fact, I would probably would have gotten big offers to be a late-night TV preacher if there had been such a thing. I was in the middle of

² Luke 9:54

³ Acts 1:8

doing some of my every day miraculous healing when the Holy Spirit told me to “hurry down to the road going south out of Jerusalem.” You tell me how I was going to “hurry” all those miles south. I don’t even remember the trip it seemed to go by so fast.

The next thing I knew, I was on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza when I saw this royal chariot coming my way. Now, when I say royal chariot, it wasn’t just one little rig with a horse in front, it was an entire group of chariots. I found out later, this parade was there to accompany the treasurer of the country of Ethiopia. People that important don’t travel alone.

The Spirit tells me to run up and talk to the guy in the fancy chariot. Now, I don’t talk back to the Spirit, but I was wondering how he planned to protect me from all the horses and soldiers. I ran toward the chariots, I began to call to the horses to slow down. As always, horses listened to my voice and slowed down and stopped, to the dismay of their drivers. The soldiers were so caught up in the chaos that I ran up unchallenged to the guy in the biggest chariot, and began to chat him up just like he was my long-lost friend.

“Hey, whatcha reading,” I say. “Isaiah,” he says.

“Do you understand it,” I say. “Are you kidding, nobody understands Isaiah,” he says.

“I do,” I say. “Then jump in, and tell me what I’m reading,” he says. And, I did.

I got in, the horses started behaving perfectly and the chariots went down the road as before. I explained how the passage in Isaiah talked about Jesus, I told him the Good News. The guy was a quick study, as you would expect from his high position, and he completely understood what I explained to him. He even gloated a little that he was the first Ethiopian to understand Isaiah.

Here we are in the middle of the desert, I’m speaking Ethiopian like a native, we are talking about being baptized while there isn’t any water within twenty miles.

Just like a comedian, the Spirit says to me, “Ask him if he wants to be baptized.” And I do, and he says, “Yes.”

What happens? There’s a pool of water by the road. We climb down and I baptize him. He becomes full of the Holy Spirit and starts rejoicing as he climbs back in his chariot and goes on his way.

This has been made into a cute story that kids love. But most of you miss two important things about it. First, the Ethiopian was a eunuch, which meant that he could not enter into an assembly of the Lord.⁴ He had come all the way to Jerusalem to learn about God, but he was still an outsider. In fact, that was one reason why nobody had ever explained Isaiah to him. He was probably surprised that I would baptize him, because the Jewish leaders had surely refused him for baptism as a proselyte because he could not be circumcised. Once he became a Christian, he was fully accepted by God and a community for the first time in his life. No wonder he rejoiced.

Second, although he was probably a God-believer and followed some of the laws of Moses, he was not fully Jewish. Just like with the Samaritans, I was making believers of people who were outside of the Jewish community.

Have you ever driven for a hundred miles and can’t remember making the drive? Well, that’s not like what happened next. One moment I’m standing next to a dripping wet Ethiopian, and the next moment I am thirty miles away in Azota, the old Philistine city, formerly named Ashdod. Sci fi needs a transporter beam, the Holy Spirit did it in an instant.

What do you think Philip the Evangelist does next? That’s right, I evangelized all the cities as I walked north. I had some pretty good success, too, since many of the people became long-term Christians.

When I got to the port city of Caesarea, the Holy Spirit told me to make my home there. I had to stop somewhere. Under Herod, Caesarea had become the only

⁴ Deut. 23:1

deep-water port in Israel, and God knew that Paul and other evangelists would need me there to help them in coming years as they began their missionary journeys.

What does an Evangelist do while waiting for Paul to be converted and other missionaries to begin their work? Right, or at least partially right. I evangelized, and ... and, I made babies. I eventually had those four daughters I told you about. But I must tell you something about them. Of course, they are beautiful, just like their mother, and, they will make wonderful wives in case you know of anybody who needs a good wife. But they also are full of the Holy Spirit (pauses and leans in) and they prophesy.⁵

⁵ Acts 21:8