

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FLAWED MASTERPIECE



wisdom from
ancient voices

WEEK 7



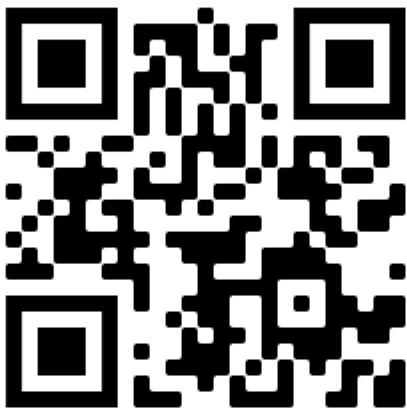
FLAWED MASTERPIECE WEEK SEVEN

These past few weeks we have been teaching some hermeneutical practices (that's just a fancy phrase for "bible study tools") to dive deeper into the biblical text. This week, we are taking a look at historical context and how it can inform us with a more broad scope of what the author or the story is telling.

Looking at historical context starts with a simple reading of the before and after passages of text in which you are focusing on and subsequently even gathering information from other texts and commentaries about the cultural climate in the story.

This week we are looking at 2 Chronicles 34 and the story of the child king, Josiah!

WATCH THIS VIDEO FIRST:



DO THIS PART SECOND:

Read Acts 8:26-40 and ask these questions:

- What is happening in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas?
- What details are unique or seem "excessive"?
- Are there any locations or directions mentioned?
- Why questions about the culture does this passage raise for you?

Cultural Context

Acts 8:4-8 During the persecution in 35AD, Philip (one of the seven Greek-speaking 'deacons' chosen by the church in Jerusalem – see Acts 6:5) travels north with those who have fled to Sebaste, the principal city of Samaria (see 1 on the Map).

Acts 8:9-13 Many Samaritans are healed in Sebaste (Samaria) and Simon the 'magician' believes and is baptised.

Acts 8:14-25 Peter and John arrive in Samaria from Jerusalem (see 1 on the Map) and pray that the new Samaritan believers will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Simon (an arrogant man who boasts about his 'magical' powers) tries to buy the ability to anoint people with the Holy Spirit. He is strongly rebuked by Peter.

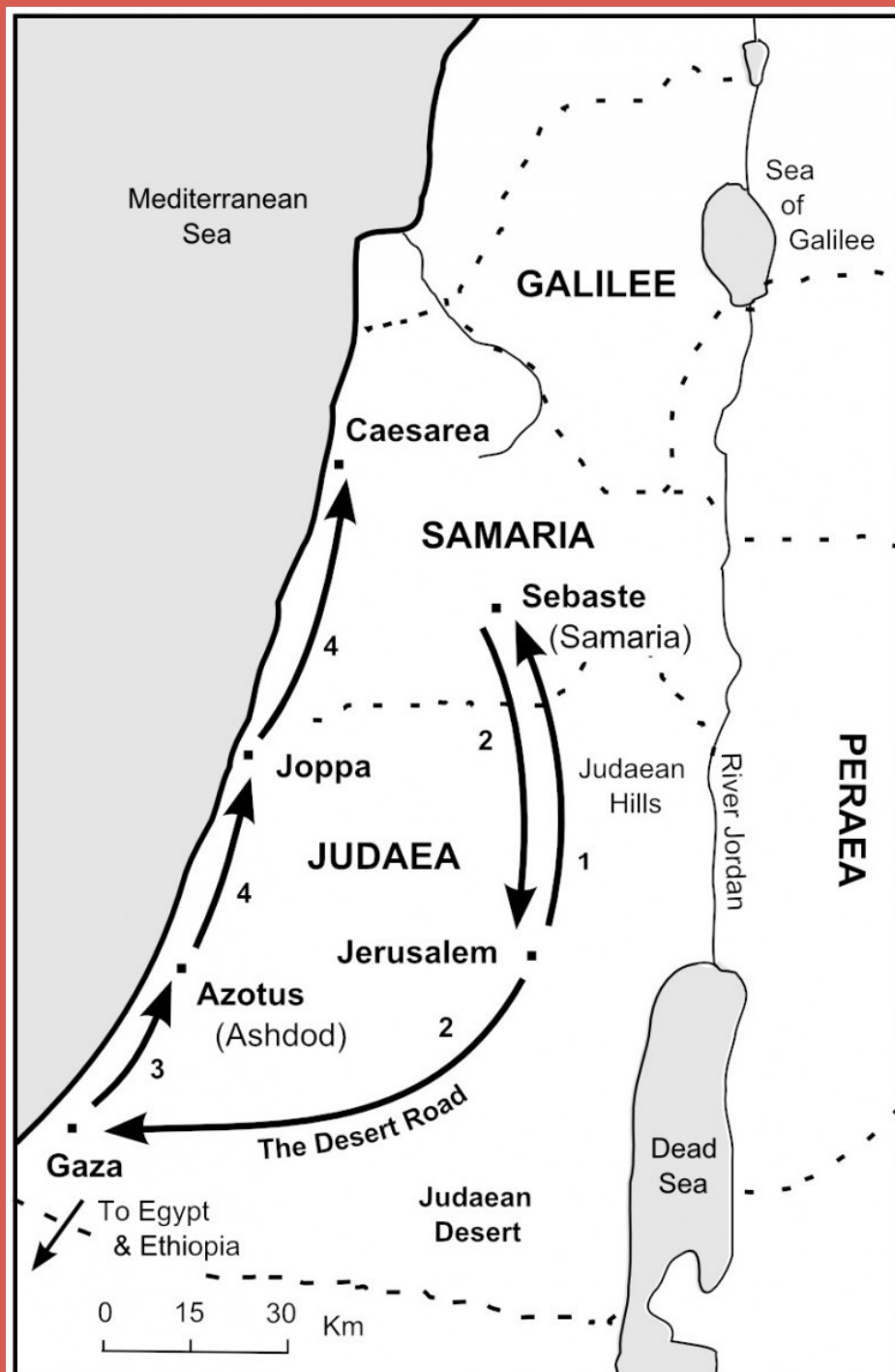
Amazed that even Samaritans (whom the Jews hated) are being blessed by God and filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter and John return to Jerusalem, spreading the Good News of Jesus in many Samaritan villages en route.

Acts 8:26 Philip then travels south on the desert road leading from Jerusalem down to the coastal town of Gaza (see 2 the Map).

Acts 8:27-38 On the way to Gaza, Philip meets a Jewish official from the court of the Queen of Ethiopia (whose kingdom stretched north along the River Nile into what is now northern Sudan). The official is on his way back from worshipping in Jerusalem, though, as a eunuch, he is regarded as ritually 'unclean' and has not been allowed into the Temple itself (see Deuteronomy 23:1).

Philip explains how the prophet Isaiah spoke about Jesus who was "like a sheep being led to be killed" (Acts 8:32) (see Isaiah 53:7-8). The Ethiopian official believes in Jesus and is baptised.

<https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/7-journeys-of-jesus-followers/philips-journeys/>



CULTURAL INFORMATION



There was a road from Jerusalem which led via Bethlehem and Hebron and joined the main road to Egypt just south of Gaza. Along came the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot. He was the chancellor of the exchequer of Candace. Candace is not so much a proper name as a title, the title which all the queens of Ethiopia bore. This eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship. In those days, the world was full of people who were weary of the many gods and the loose morals of the nations. They came to Judaism and there found the one God and the austere moral standards which gave life meaning. If they accepted Judaism and were circumcised, they were called proselytes; if they did not go that far but continued to attend the Jewish synagogues and to read the Jewish Scriptures, they were called God-fearers. This Ethiopian must have been one of these searchers who came to rest in Judaism as either a proselyte or a God-fearer. He was reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah; and, beginning with that text, Philip showed him who Jesus was.

When he became a believer, he was baptized. It was by baptism and circumcision that a Gentile entered the Jewish faith. Baptism symbolized three things. (1) It symbolized cleansing. As the body was cleansed by the water, so the soul was bathed in the grace of Christ. (2) It marked a clean break. We are told how one missionary, when he baptized his converts, made them enter the river by one bank and sent them out on the other, as if at the moment of baptism a line was drawn in their lives which sent them out to a new world. (3) Baptism was a real union with Christ. As the waters closed over an individual's head, that person seemed to die with Christ. The emergence from the water was seen as rising with Christ (cf. Romans 6:1-4).

Tradition has it that this eunuch went home and evangelized Ethiopia. We can at least be sure that, as he went on his way rejoicing, he would not be able to keep his new-found joy to himself.

William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *The New Daily Study Bible*. 3d; Accordance electronic ed. (Louisville: Barclay NDSB; Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 79-80.

DEFINITIONS:

Candace: the queen of the Ethiopians whose “eunuch” or chamberlain was converted to Christianity by the instrumentality of Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:27). The country which she ruled was long the centre of commercial intercourse between Africa and the south of Asia, and hence became famous for its wealth (Isa. 45:14).

Eunuch: Typically a castrated official in the royal courts of ancient Israel and surrounding kingdoms who is appropriate to serve the queen (2 Kgs. 9:30-32; Esth. 4:4-5; Acts 8:27)

F. Scott Spencer, Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. “EUNUCH,” 434.



DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- What stands out to you because you have taken the time to look over the cultural context behind the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch?
- What do you learn of the gospel through this story?
- What is the significance of Baptism in this story?

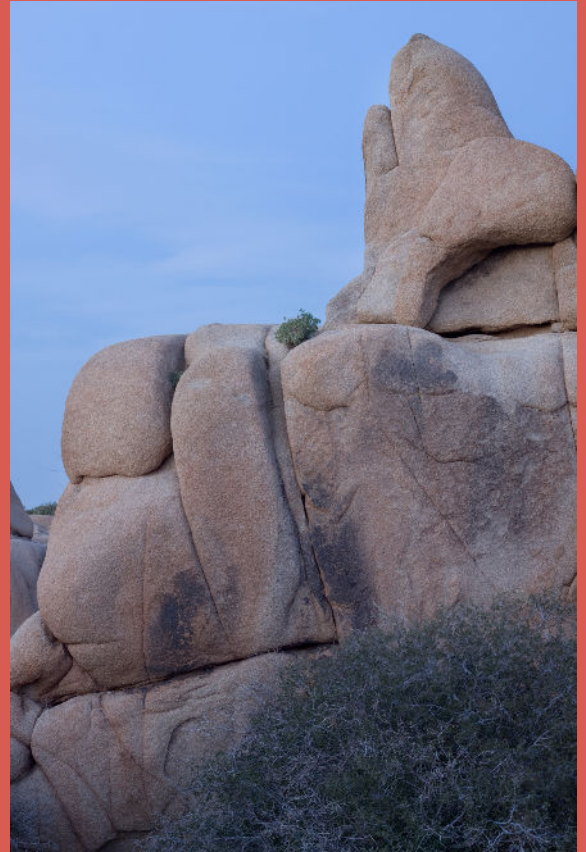
And he said, "How can I,
unless someone guides me?"
And he invited Philip to
come up and sit with him



FINAL THOUGHTS

Take a final few minutes to apply this passage to your lives:

- What do you see is the application for our lives as it relates to evangelism?
- How might God be inviting you to be bold like Philip or humble like the Ethiopian diplomat?
- What does evangelism look like in your life?



**Here are some online commentaries
you can consider:**

Free:

biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/
blueletterbible.org/study.cfm

Paid:

accordancebible.com
logos.com