

Kairos moments: Acts 8:26-40

by [William R. O'Brien](#) in the [May 5, 2009](#) issue

The record of an Ethiopian eunuch and Philip meeting on a road to Gaza ignites the imagination. Why was this Ethiopian eunuch traveling on this road?

Tradition relates that Ethiopia was founded by the great-grandson of Noah. It has been identified by various names: Abyssinia, Kush and Axum. The empire of Axum lasted from the first through the late 13th century AD. Israel's religion and influence were already felt across this vast area.

Much earlier, the queen of Sheba had visited the wise King Solomon in order to "test him with hard questions" and to tell him "all that was on her mind" (1 Kings 10:2). Some believe that the Falasha Jews of Ethiopia are direct descendants from Solomon's time. A long history binds Israel and this region together.

The eunuch described by Luke was the treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia. He may have been a proselyte to Judaism, or a God-fearer wanting to know more. He went to Jerusalem for the purpose of worship but was unaware of what had been happening there.

The number of Christian disciples was growing exponentially. When Grecian Jews complained because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, the solution was to choose for the job Greek men who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Stephen's name appears first in the list, then Philip, then another five. They functioned very effectively, doing more than distributing food. Stephen's miraculous acts stirred up opposition among Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria. They seized Stephen, brought him before the Sanhedrin on false charges, then took him out and stoned him to death. Saul looked on with approval.

A great persecution ensued, and most of the believers fled Jerusalem. Philip went to Samaria and was preaching with power and with miraculous signs. News soon spread back to Jerusalem, and Peter and John came on a reconnaissance mission. Seeing that God was truly at work, they laid hands on these new believers, and the converts received the Spirit.

In that kind of atmosphere Philip knew what it meant to follow the “wind of the Spirit.” His to-do list for each day was not so rigid and demanding that it precluded his feeling the breath of God nudging him.

“Go where, God?” we imagine him asking. “Take a desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza? Why, Lord? Samaria is where the fish are biting. How long will it take? I have an important meeting this afternoon with a group of new believers.” These are our questions, but they were not Philip’s questions. An angel of the Lord had instructed him to go south to a desert road, and he went.

When a person’s heart is hungering and thirsting for righteousness—and Philip’s heart was in the eternal ready-to-go mode—a unique encounter at the intersection of need and opportunity awaits. A kairos moment is in the making.

Who can predict the consequences of decisions made on a given day in a given place?

When Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee into the area of the Gerasenes, did he know beforehand that he would encounter a demoniac among the tombs? Was it the nudge of the Spirit that prompted Jesus to deny the man’s request to go back with him, and to instead instruct “Legion” to return to his own people and share what God had done? Who could have guessed the consequences of that decision: when Jesus returned to the Decapolis later in his ministry, 4,000 men plus women and children came to see the man who had turned Legion right side out.

What about the centurion in Caesarea after his encounter with Simon Peter? What happened when he returned to Rome? Is it possible that some Romans became Christ-followers? If Peter had not gone to Caesarea, would the centurion be known only as devout and God-fearing? It was a kairos moment.

But back to the eunuch who turned his chariot toward home. Was there an emptiness in the eunuch’s heart that drew him to the Hebrew scriptures? Was it coincidental that he was reading from Isaiah when Philip came alongside the chariot?

Philip asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. Once he was invited into the chariot, Philip’s knowledge of the prophecy, mixed with his knowledge of the Christ, allowed for the marriage of need and opportunity. What is not recorded is a probable conversation about baptism and its role in sealing a commitment to the

Lord of life.

The eunuch went home rejoicing—the first biblical record of a gentile convert taking the good news back home. Was that the prelude to Ethiopia's becoming a major stage for the Christian faith in the years ahead?

Meanwhile, Philip wound up in Caesarea. The last time he had seen Saul was at the stoning of Stephen. Now years later, Saul-cum-Paul asked to stay with Philip on his way to Jerusalem from his last missionary journey. Wouldn't you like to have listened in on those conversations?

In walking back through this story I cry out to be freed from the tyranny of the urgent, from dependence on humanly designed methods. I pray for a submissive spirit that greets the dawn with "Where do we go today, Lord? I am ready and willing. Just let me draft the wind of the Spirit as you give birth to the kairos moments that bring honor to you."