

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Acts 8”

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With

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Acts 8

Acts 8 features snippets from the ministries of Peter and Philip. Against the backdrop of Jesus' words that the disciples would take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the "uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8), as well as the messaging of the place names in Acts 2, it is no accident that the material of Acts 8 focus on Samaria, Ethiopia, and the little-known Azotus. This podcast episode discusses the significance of these places, the events associated with them, and two featured converts: Simon the magician and the Ethiopian eunuch.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 44, Acts 8. I'm your residential layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

MSH: Very good. Good to talk to you, again, Trey.

TS: Absolutely, so this week, we're going to get right into Acts 8.

MSH: Yup, right in. Let's go. Of course, Acts 7 ends with Steven's arrest and his sermon and execution. And Acts 8 opens, and the very first verse says, 'And Saul approved of his execution.' Of course, at the end of chapter 7, those who were stoning Stephen laid their garments down at the feet of a young man named Saul, that's chapter 7 verse 58. And, of course, we know that character is going to become Paul in a little bit. But chapter 8 opens with this note about Saul approving of what happened and let's just jump in with the rest of it and we'll stop here and there and I'll make a few comments about some things I think everyone will find interesting, or at least most people will find interesting.

And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

MSH: So, again, we have this scene where things are just not going well, great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. The believers get scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. The apostles are going to be focused in Jerusalem. The reference to Judea and Samaria is important because Acts 1:8, remember? Let's us have this verse in our heads as we keep reading. But Acts 1:8 had said, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' So there is a reference there to Samaria and that's going to become important in what we read in this chapter because we're going to see Samaria show up. We're going to see Ethiopia show up in another place that's kind of a surprise. There is a reason that these places are part of the narrative. Remember Acts is selective just like the Gospels were. So let's continue in verse 4.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

MSH: So Philip winds up in the Samaria, and what is it about Samaria that is significant? We just read Acts 1:8 and this is part of the plan. But what was Samaria and, specifically, the cities mentioned here, sort of, the capital? Well, this was the place in Old Testament history, this region and, of course, the particular city, is where the 10 tribes of Israel had forsaken the line of David. They forsake the Davidic dynasty, and they go off into their own area, their own kingdom, set up their own government under the authority of, then, Jeroboam in the Old Testament, and they apostatize. They set up their own system of worship, commit idolatry and whatnot, and they become apostates. They forsake Yahweh in this region. Of course, in 722 BC, God sends them into exile at the hands of the Assyrians. And the rest, as they say, is history. So this is this area. And, again, when the Gospels are taken into Samaria, what's the messaging? This is always about messaging.

Up until this point, it's been about, okay, Jesus was the Messiah. He's the Jewish Messiah. He's descendent of David, the line of David, the king, and all this sort of stuff that we associate with Israelite religion, the theology of the Jews in Israel, the chosen people of Yahweh. We're still continuing that but we pick up with Samaria here. It's not listed in the nations in Acts 2 but it's an important region. And the messaging is, look, the northern tribes, the 10 tribes, were scattered, the "10 lost tribes of Israel". This region, God is reclaiming them. Just like we had Jews from all over the Mediterranean, all over the nations that had been disinherited, come to Pentecost, hear the truth, embrace it, accept that Jesus is Messiah, and then go back in those nations and begin the process of reclaiming believers out of all those nations, reclaiming them for the kingdom of God, for the family of God. The messaging here is that Samaria wasn't missed. Samaria is part of this process. Samaria, which had apostatized, is going to be reclaimed. Now this is obviously the location where you have Samaritans living. We're going to get Samaritans elsewhere in the New Testament. Of course, in the Gospels, you have episodes that concern the Samaritans.

These are people living in Samaria, in the tribal regions of what would have been Manassah and Ephraim, again, the northern kingdom where the 10 tribes apostatized. When they were taken away in exile, the Bible presents the Samaritan population as sort of being the product of, or at least, the fallout of this exile. So when the Assyrians had a policy. When they conquered a people, they would deport them to other lands and then they would take other people they had conquered and bring those people into a specific region. So what they're doing is they're breaking up regional loyalties and national loyalties. They're mixing populations under the thought, and it makes sense if you're conquering a nation, under the thought that people are less inclined to rebel when it's not their home territory. They have less to fight for, that sort of logic. So the Assyrians do this and 2 Kings 17, you get a description of this happening. And so when people are brought into this area, what would've been Manassah and Ephraim, they eventually have children.

They eventually get married, have children, and you get these, to the pure Jews and Jews in the south, the Samaritans were half breeds, for lack of better term. They were not pure in their lineage or in their ethnicity because of the exilic situation. Now the Samaritans themselves, if you went over today, there are still Samaritans, very small number of them, they would claim that they're direct descendants of northern Israelite tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, who survived the exile. In other words, who weren't deported and they somehow escaped the act of the Assyrians in getting rid of them. So they're going to reject this notion that they're half breeds. But in the New Testament, you have the sense of a racial problem from the perspective

of the Jews because of 2 Kings 17. The other problem is that the Jews thought Samaritan theology was suspect. It was not purely Israelite and that's because of something you read in 2 Kings 17, specifically about what happened religiously. Verse 25, this is from 2 Kings 17:25-26, it said,

²⁵ And at the beginning of their dwelling there, **[MSH: Again, when the Assyrians were bringing in people into this part of the country, in the northern part of Israel.]** they did not fear the LORD. Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. ²⁶ So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.”

MSH: And then the king of Assyria has a response to that. But it's interpreted, these events are interpreted to the Assyrians and by the Assyrians that something is going on here that the God of this land that we conquered his is interfering in a hostile way with what we're doing here. He's causing trouble because the people there, who are living there now, don't know him. They don't know his laws. They're not worshipers of this God. So Jews would look at this passage and say, see, there you go. The theology of the Samaritans that comes out of that situation is just not good pure Israelite theology.

So when you get into the context of the New Testament, this is why the Samaritans are viewed suspiciously. They're viewed suspiciously, because of ethnicity and also because some of their beliefs. And so when you get here in Acts Chapter 8, the messaging is important. People, who live here, regardless of how they got here, can be the people of God. The gospel is taken to Samaria. God has people in this area. This area is now going to be reclaimed as turf for Yahweh. And we're not going to let these historical circumstances be a rationale for skipping Samaria, and so Samaria is mentioned here specifically. Let's continue on in Acts 8:9, we get a specific episode in Samaria that concerns Simon, Simon the magician. So in verse 9 we read,

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” **[MSH: We're going to come back to that line]** ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **[MSH: Again the name, it's not just Philip running around and saying Jesus Jesus Jesus. He's preaching a person. The name is the person.]** they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, **[MSH: Again, catch that phrasing]** they sent to them Peter

and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

MSH: Now I want to say a quick comment about this. We'll go back to the Simon in a moment. But this connects what's going on in Samaria back to Acts 2. That's the messaging connected back to this program of reclaiming the nations, building the new people of God from every nation. So when they hear this happening, they're like, boy, we got to check this out. And so they sent Peter and John and they pray that they might, that the new converts in Samaria might receive the Holy Spirit because look at the line. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Is there something wrong with Jesus's name? Is there something wrong with being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus?

No, but they need to verify that what's going on here in Samaria is part of the program that was begun in Acts 2 at Pentecost. And so they pray that these new converts would receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had come in Acts 2 at Pentecost to start this whole thing off. So they want to know if God is really behind this and if this is part of what they should be doing. Is Samaria going to be reclaimed, because Samaria just had this spiritually awful place and you got a bunch of ethnic problems up there? You got this whole history with the Old Testament. It's kind of icky. So they want to know, is this part of what's going on because we didn't have representatives from Samaria in Acts 2. So that's why they go and check it out.

¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." [**MSH: It's kind of a naïve request. Peter doesn't like it obviously.**]²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

MSH: So we have here Simon, again. Was Simon a believer? Well the text says he believed so I don't think there's any question he was actually a believer. But he asks a naïve kind of dumb question because he wants to be part of this. There's no indication in the text he wants to sort of go off in his own tangent and be a wizard or something like that. It is sort of is a sincere but stupid naïve kind of a request. Peter is really hard on him. And don't forget, Peter wasn't there at the beginning, Philip was. So Peter doesn't really know Simon from Adam, pardon the

expression here, but he doesn't know this guy's history. He doesn't know of his conversion necessarily. And Peter's offended because for obvious reasons. You don't get the Holy Spirit by paying for it or anything like that. And he says your heart's not right before God. He rebukes him really harshly. And what does Simon say? Does he say, well, enough of you guys. I'm just going to go off and do my wizard act again. No, he says 'pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you said may come upon me.'

He's serious. He says, ok, I'm wrong. I did wrong. So I don't have any doubt in Simon's genuineness. Let's go back, though, to verse 10. There's something really kind of interesting here in this phrasing of what was said about Simon prior to his conversion. 'People all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest saying', now here's the line, 'this man is the power of God that is called great.' Now that is significant because in Samaritan targums, again, targums, that's just a word for a translation. The targums that we in biblical studies talk about them, like the targum of the Old Testament is the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Aramaic. Targum of the New Testament is the New Testament, Greek New Testament, translated into Aramaic. Well the Samaritans had targums. Samaria has its own script. Even today, if you have access to a Samaritan text, it's not going to look anything like Hebrew. It's still going to be Semitic but it's their own form of a Semitic language. So they have their own targums, their own translations, and in ancient Samaritan targums, the Hebrew word El, which means God and is often used as a proper name for God, is often represented or often rendered by the Aramaic word *Keilah*, which means power.

So what's being said here, this man is the power of God that is called great/ The claim apparently is that some people, either, we're not really told if it's by Simon's encouragement or if they just drew this conclusion, but some people were associating his magical powers with God himself, and were referring to him as great or the great one. Now in Samaritan texts, we have *Keilah* as a word for God, but you also have the phrase *Keilah Rabba*, which is the great power. And so that term in Samaritan targums is also a divine name, a name for God. God is the great power. So when Simon is called great, it moves him into the same category as God in the minds of those referring to him as this is the one who is great. We can take it even further. *Keilen* in Samaritan texts is a word that is often used for angels. And if you're the *Keilah*, the power among the *Keilen*, among the angels, that links you to, not only the great power abstractly, but actually the principal angel, the angel of the Lord, who is, if you're familiar with my stuff on the Divine Council or other sources that go this trajectory, the Angel of the Lord is Yahweh embodied as a man in the Old Testament.

And he's linked, by virtue of what the New Testament does with some of those angel of the Lord passages, he's linked to Jesus. So this portrayal of Simon is like, there were people, now they weren't thinking about Jesus when they were calling him the great one, the great power, but what's going on here, sort of under the current, is that this was a guy who some people associated with or as the Angel of the Lord. He was that close to God. He was this great power. Maybe the Angel Lord now come here in our midst because look at the amazing magical stuff he does. The Angel of the Lord has come to us and just look at the power that he exhibits. They're associating Simon with the second Yahweh figure of the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord. But who does Simon submit to? Who does Simon look at and essentially turn his back on his old life and believe in? It is Jesus. So it's a victory of the true second power, the true second Yahweh over one who had been falsely claimed as having that status. It's a really interesting, and I think fairly significant, theological message here, especially to people reading this in the first century

or second century. They're going to have known because there's a considerable body of I guess we could call it the folklore about Simon well into the Middle Ages. And you'll still see about Simon in esoteric texts and whatnot.

This is a very well-known person and here in the book of Acts, you have this person saying, no, I'm not the embodiment of God. I'm not the embodiment of divine power. I am not the great power. Jesus is, and I'm going to follow him. That's pretty dramatic when it comes right down to it, that he would just turn away from that and choose to follow Christ, even though he does something stupid and naïve. Because now that he knows what the real power is, and it's not him, he wants to be part of that like the apostles are. And so he doesn't, again, in his naïveté, he doesn't know any better way to do it than say, hey, can you show me how to do this? Can you give me this power because I want to transmit this to other people as well, and Peter, of course, goes off on him. But in the context, the fact that he believes and he repents when Peter rebukes him is really significant because of what people were saying about him, and his conversion is basically a denial of all of that. Now, let's keep going here. We have a Philip in verse 26 is where we stopped. So let's pick it up with Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. So Philip has been doing his thing in Samaria and in a verse 26, we read,

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.

²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him [**MSH: I like that phrase, he ran. He didn't just sort of meander over there.**] and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord

carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

MSH: I'm going to stop there with one verse to go for a particular reason. But this is the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Why Ethiopia? What's going on with Ethiopia? This is the ancient name used for a number of countries. There's actually a good bit of geographical confusion or overlap with the use of this term and some of the terms in Greek and Latin and Hebrew and all I sort of thing. It's kind of messy but very generally, this is a term that's used for countries in Africa or the south of Egypt, like the Sudan or a place like that, that far south. Nubia would've been in an ancient term and just regions in that area, since *Aithops* meant people with burnt face. In other words, if you were really dark skinned, this is a term that was associated with you. And since a lot of the people who were of dark skin came from these regions, the term stuck. Now in the Old Testament, Ethiopia is called Kush and in the Septuagint it's either going to be Cush, like a transliteration of Kush or *Aithopia*. It's not necessarily really done with consistency.

There's some confusion here. Now it's not really surprising that you'd get an Ethiopian, now think about what the scene is. You have a guy from Africa or some place in southern Egypt, and he's in a chariot, and he's able to read Isaiah 53. He has this text. It's not really that unusual that this guy would either be a Jew or a Jewish proselyte. Remember in Acts chapter 6, we had reference to people who had converted to Judaism and then had to be converted again to follow Jesus. So it's not unusual any Ethiopian would be a Jew or a proselyte. Ethiopic is a Semitic language related Hebrew and Aramaic. He certainly could have had access to this text. He certainly could have read it, had the ability to read Hebrew and whatnot. So that in and of itself is not a terrible surprise. What's significant, though, more than the speculation of why this place, this is part of, if you go back into Acts 2, Isaiah 66, it's as though the writer here, Luke, wants us to, again, be certain that people from regions either covered by language and Acts 2 or not covered in language from Acts 2, because there's some variability with Cush and Ethiopia, but the messaging is, this place is not forgotten.

There is a Jewish presence here, and it's the old thing with Paul, the Gospel to the Jew first, and then to the barbarian, to the Greek. This is the last, sort of, either Jewish convert or Jewish proselyte converted to follow Jesus before you get to the conversion of Paul, conversion of Saul. He becomes Paul and then that begins sort of a ministry to the Gentiles. Because after Acts 9, you get the conversion of Saul. You get the incident with Peter having a vision about rise Peter, kill and eat, about all these things that were unclean and you couldn't eat as a Jew. Now you can eat them. Again, telling, prepping Peter for the notion that, hey, the Gospel is going to go directly to the Gentiles now, not just Jews and people who'd been converted to Judaism who now know enough about Messiah that they're going to embrace the message of the Gospel. Now we're going directly to the Gentiles. So the Ethiopian unit is the last person who sort of isn't this full-blown Gentile converted to follow Jesus before you get to incidents like Paul's conversion, Peter's vision, the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 right after Peter has his visions. We're going to see a shift at this point to direct interaction with the Gospel with Gentiles. And, again, the messaging is consistent.

God has people for his family in all these places but the message is first for the Jew and as we expand out, we're not going to stop. We're not stopping with people who are in the lineage or the heritage of Abraham. It's going way beyond this. And that was the whole intent to Acts 2,

to send those people back and start winning people who are Gentiles to the faith, to the family of God. But the apostles have to learn this. They have to sort of get the message and Luke is recording how they learn this, how they did it, how it happened. And Ethiopia is specifically part of that equation. Now, there are a couple of rabbit trails here that are kind of interesting. I don't want to spend too much time. Candace, for instance, is not a proper name, It's not the name of the Queen. Candace is actually a transliteration or transcription of a Nubian word so that would sort of situate us in down south, southern Egypt for where this guy comes from. It's a transcription of a Nubian word for queen, so the Nubian word is KNTKY, and that's very similar to the Greek letters used to spell what is translated in the ESV is Candace.

It's probably why Luke follows Candace with the phrase queen of the Ethiopians. He's more or less defining this term that he's transliterating here in the text. It's not a proper name but it just means queen. If all that's consistent, there's no real connection here to Sheba, the Queen of Sheba, even though you get later material, later folklore, that associates the Queen of Sheba with this passage in Acts chapter 8. Now I'm going to try to keep this as brief as possible. But if any of you have read anything about the Ark of the Covenant, you can probably already detect where this is going to go. Because Graham Hancock in his book, *The Sign and the Seal*, I wrote a review of that book when it appeared years ago. I referred to as a mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. He did some really good stuff and some other stuff, he just goes way off the deep end. It's just not good stuff. But he has a reasonably good discussion of the Ethiopian connection to the Ark of the Covenant, and it goes something like this. There is according to Ethiopian folklore or legend or whatever you want to call it, in their national history, and it is not purely a historical work.

It's got theological spin to it. It's called the *Kebra Nagast*, but in that story of their history, the queen of Sheba, they situate Sheba with Ethiopia. The Queen goes and visits Solomon, just like in the biblical story, and she converts. She becomes a follower of Yahweh under the influence of Solomon. OF course, Solomon does with her like he did with so many other women, either an arranged marriage or just a sexual liaison or something, because she's going to go back to her country but she goes back pregnant. And there are those who, if you remember the Queen of Sheba story, there's this line about Solomon gave her her desire or something like that. Well, that's interpreted rather loosely as a child. So she goes back to Ethiopia pregnant. She has a son and his name is Menelik, and he, therefore, in Ethiopian tradition, is a descendent of Solomon and therefore descendent of David. That's going to become important because when he grows up, when Menelik grows up, he goes to Israel to visit Solomon, his father according the story. And when he comes back, he brings the Ark of the Covenant with him, thereby transferring the divine presence from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. Why in the world would Solomon let him do that?

Well, we get different versions, different folkloric explanations for this. There are stories that would suggest, well, he did it and Solomon didn't know it. He hoodwinked him, or Solomon could sort of anticipate, hey, after my reign, things are just going to become really awful. We're going to have a lot of apostasy here. And what Graham Hancock does with this is he situates the transition of the Ark out of Jerusalem into Ethiopia as a later time at the hands of loyal priests, priests who are loyal to Yahweh. Get the Ark out of there and they say, where are we going to put it? Well, yeah, remember that Menelik guy down there in Ethiopia. Let's get him up here and we'll send it back with him because he'll keep the Davidic line alive and they're following Yahweh down there. So let's give it to him and he'll hide it away, and when things get better here

and get rid of all this apostasy, we'll bring it back. Because, again, the apostates in Jerusalem when Jerusalem goes south, pun intended I guess. They do things like under Manasseh like Institute cultic figurines, and some would say, even phallic symbols, into the holy of holies where the Ark would've been. And so the supposition is that there are priests who wouldn't tolerate that and they get the Ark out of there. This is why you get a whole bunch of legends about the Ark being absent prior to Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Temple, which lends fuel to this idea that the ark of the covenant is still out there waiting to be brought back into Jerusalem.

You get some stories say they buried it under the dome of the rock. There's this passage in the Apocrypha with Jeremiah burying it in some mountain adjacent to Jerusalem. You get a whole bunch of explanations for what happened to the Ark and why isn't the Ark listed by Nebuchadnezzar in what he took. Why when they bring the holy vessels back under Ezra and Nehemiah isn't the Ark mentioned. It must still be out there and all this kind of stuff. I've been in the Ark of the Covenant a lot. I find it interesting and fascinating and I find a lot of it persuasive because of Jeremiah 3:16. But I don't want to extend the rabbit trail anymore. But anyway, you have this connection, or at least a seeming connection, back to Ethiopia. What I'm suggesting to you here is there's really not a good link between the Menelik story and the Ethiopian Eunuch story in Acts Chapter 8. Now if there was, it would be interesting because this is the last Jew to get the Gospel before it's taken to the Gentiles, and that would indicate this Jewish presence, that God is interested in Ethiopia for some reason. We could play the spooky music right about now here in the podcast. That would make it more persuasive to people. But this is how it's presented, this connection, and there isn't really a solid connection here. It's circumstantial at best. But, again, you'll read stuff like that. Before we end up, I do want to get the last verse here of Acts Chapter 8, because it looks like a throwaway line but there's messaging here. So we get the Ethiopian Eunuch, he's baptized, The Spirit of the Lord carries Philip away in verse 39. The Eunuch sees him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing. Now here is verse 40.

⁴⁰ But Philip found himself [**MSH: Again, the Spirit of the Lord carries him away.**] at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

MSH: Azotus is a coastal city. Caesarea is pretty close to the coast too. So the Spirit basically picks up Philip and drops him in Azotus and then he preaches his way up the coast to Caesarea. Big deal, who cares? What's Azotus? Azotus is the name for the Philistine city of Ashdod in the Apocrypha and in the New Testament here. Do you get the messaging, the Philistine city? You could say this is a transition now, right here in verse 40, to the Gospel taken to Gentiles. You can't really say that because we're just talking about the city. We're still talking about Jews living in these locations so we can't go that far. But it's a Philistine city. The Philistines, there's this association with Goliath and their association with the Anakim, and their association with the Nephilim. You could go all the way back through all this stuff, all this baggage in the Old Testament, and even this place, even this place is now under domain of Yahweh because the gospel is taken to this place.

The Spirit drops him right in the city and says, okay, you got your business to do here. I have people here, too. Preach the gospel to all the towns and make your way up to Caesarea. So

even this part of the country with all of its sinister history, all of its baggage, the messaging is really simple. I own this territory, too. I have people here, too. It will submit to me like every other place will. If you think about that and you go back to Acts 6, you get Jewish converts converted, brought into the fold. You get Samaria brought in the fold. You get Ethiopia brought into the fold. You got Azotus, the land of the Philistines, brought into the fold. We have gobbled up every square inch, I mean every square inch of the Promised Land, is now being permeated with the gospel.

And now is the time. Think about how Acts is written. It's at this point, chapter 9, where what do we get next? The conversion of Saul, because now it's time to go get the Gentiles directly. This is all deliberate. This is not only literary artistry, this is intelligent theological messaging. So I'm hoping that you're getting these points. I know it might sound repetitive but that's just the way it is. That's what's happening in Acts. Its theological messaging about reclaiming the nations and overturning what happened at Babel. Of course, there you get an association with Gibborim through Nimrod and all that stuff. It's a reversal of the situation created really by two events in the Old Testament, the incident in Genesis 6 and the incident in Genesis 11 with Babel. Those two things frame so much in the Old Testament and they're in view in a lot of sort of cryptic ways off the beaten path ways in the New Testament. So I want you to try to become alert to this kind of thing as we continue through Acts and just generally to Bible study.

TS: Mike, serious question. Do you know where the Ark of the Covenant is?

MSH: It's in the tunnel under my house. I kid because there's at least a half truth there. I own a house in Lyndon, Washington that once had a tunnel under it. We bought it from the US Marshal. It was a drug tunnel. And it's filled and all that good stuff, but I thought, man, I could go on coast-to-coast to talk about the tunnel under my house. I could put the Ark there. We got the Roswell remains there. We got aliens there. Yeah it's perfect. It just sort of fits but yeah, that's what I like to tell people. It's in the tunnel under my house.

TS: Well, all of the reading that you've done into the Ark, has it lead you to an opinion...?

MSH: I actually think, I do think that you can come up with a good circumstantial case for the Ark surviving the destruction in Jerusalem, but, and here is the big caveat. If you go to Jeremiah, since you asked the question, might as well read the passage, Jeremiah 3:16, I'll just read it here.

¹⁶ And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again.

MSH: Now the last line, it shall not be made again, suggests that it was destroyed because why would you need to remake it if it hadn't been destroyed. Again, it suggests it. Now people can say, well, that's just referring to what people are saying out there because they miss the Ark and they want the Ark back and they're just assuming it was destroyed. And so Jeremiah, God is

speaking through Jeremiah this way, sort of just parroting what people are saying, and God's point would be, hey, you're not going to hear this anymore. Because when I bring you back to the land, eschatologically, you don't need the Ark in the kingdom. Why? Because the glory of God directly is right there, the Earth is the throne, the new Eden is the house of God. And the Lord is there directly.

So you could argue it that way, but I think just the simplest and most normal reading of Jeremiah 3:16 suggests pretty strongly that Jeremiah either knew or suspected that it had been destroyed. Again, I'll admit, the door is open just a crack. You have subsequent tradition associated with Jeremiah that has Jeremiah removing the Ark. Again, that's in the Apocrypha, you have that. That doesn't really mean anything one way or the other, pro or con. But it's out there and whoever wrote that probably read the book of Jeremiah would read this verse, so who knows. But I think I'd lean toward not being around because of this verse, but I would never say that it is just beyond the pale to think that it might have survived the destruction