

Do You Understand What You Are Reading or Do You Need a Guide?

Acts 8:26-40

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So, Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. - Acts 8:31-32, ESV

Many Christians believe that all they need is their Bible and a personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to be a strong Christian. Does God expect His people to be able to understand the Bible on their own, with no guidance or instruction from others? Today's passage in Acts seems to show us otherwise.

Philip had been powerfully sharing the Gospel in Samaria when God called him to go south, to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. This road still runs today through the Negev, a dry desert area. Here, Philip found an Ethiopian eunuch, an official from the royal court of Queen Candace. This educated court official was reading a scroll of the prophet Isaiah, but he did not understand what he was reading. He needed a guide. Thankfully, God had sent Philip to be that guide.

Philip began with that section of Isaiah that we now identify as Isaiah 53, and from there he explained the Gospel to the Ethiopian. As soon as the Ethiopian understood the good news about Jesus, he believed. He wanted to be identified with Jesus, so when he saw water, he asked if he could be baptized. [*By the way, the language of vv. 38-39 does not indicate that the Ethiopian was baptized by immersion, since both he and Philip went down into the water and they both came up out of the water. We cannot read this as immersion in water unless we want to believe that Philip was immersed, too.*]

On his own, the Ethiopian eunuch might have never made the connection from Isaiah 53 to Jesus, even if he had heard about the death of Jesus on the cross and rumors of His resurrection. But it's not just unbelievers who need a guide to understand the Gospel. God appoints teachers in His church for a reason, so that His people will be built up and equipped in the truth of His word.

So, don't be ashamed of needing good guides to understanding the Bible. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you don't understand, just like the Ethiopian eunuch did. God will feed you and teach you and grow you, as you seek Him in His word, with good help from reliable guides.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the precious gift of Your word, which holds for us such rich treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Thank You also for gifted teachers who help us understand Your word and come to know Jesus even better. In His name, Amen.