

## BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

### 24. PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL

Bible Base: Acts 8: 25-40

Key Christian Belief: The Holy Spirit teaches us.

Aim: To discover that Christians believe the Holy Spirit helps us to understand what God says.

You will need

- the PowerPoint presentation attached

*NB: Instead of using the PowerPoint, you could get two volunteers to act out the story as you tell it. Have two chairs seated in the middle of the stage and have the official sitting on one of them. He could be reading and puzzling over a scroll. Have Philip run up to him and then climb on to the other chair. Have him point to the words on the scroll as if explaining them to the official. The official could then point to an imaginary pool and Philip could pretend to baptise him - dipping him under the water and then bringing him back up again. Have Philip wave goodbye and go off in the direction from which he came. Have the official climb on to the 'chariot' again and then (at the end of his journey) climb down and hurry off excitedly in the opposite direction.*

#### Introduction

Ask if anyone has been on a long journey - by plane, by boat or by car. Talk about how you fill in the time on a long journey. Play a game of 'I Spy' or similar.

Today's story is about someone going on a long journey by chariot. He had brought a copy of the book of Isaiah with him. (Isaiah is one of the books in the Old Testament part of our Bibles.) On his journey, he had four opportunities to do something with this. Listen out for what these were.

But listen out also for how the Holy Spirit helps the man in today's story. We have seen how the Holy Spirit helps us to live for Jesus and strengthens us when things are tough. Today we are going to hear about another way in which the Holy Spirit is able to help us.

#### 1. An Opportunity To Read It

His Excellency the Treasurer of Ethiopia was a very busy man. He had been to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem and was now on his way back home to Ethiopia. He had been very busy in Jerusalem and when he got back to Ethiopia he would be very busy there too. But for three whole days he would be travelling through the desert with nothing much to see or do. So he had decided that he would bring a copy of the book of Isaiah with him. He had been wanting to read it for some time but he had been so busy! But here, at last was the perfect opportunity.

Christians believe that the words written in the Bible are God's words. It is important to read (or listen to) them for ourselves. Do you have a Bible - or could you get one? If you have, when might be the best time for you to read it or get someone to read it to you?

#### 2. An Opportunity To Understand It

The Ethiopian official opened the scroll and began to read - but unfortunately he could not understand what he was reading. He tried to figure it out but it didn't seem to make any sense. He had no idea what it meant.

Meanwhile, Philip, one of Jesus' followers, was busy telling lots of people about Jesus in a place called Samaria. Hundreds of people came flocking to hear what he had to say. But one morning Philip sensed the Holy Spirit telling him to go into the desert.

'That's odd' thought Philip. 'There aren't usually too many people in the desert!'

Even so, Philip set off into the desert where the sun was blazing hot. After a while, out in the distance, he saw something moving. As he got closer he saw that it was a chariot with a very important-looking man sitting on it. He seemed to be reading something and Philip heard him mumble the words to himself out loud.

'Led like a lamb to the slaughter...God has laid on him the punishment we deserve...'

'He's reading about Jesus!' Philip thought. 'I wonder if he knows that.'

'Excuse me Your Excellency' Philip called out, running up to the chariot and walking beside it. 'Do you understand what you are reading?'

'No' said His Excellency sadly. 'How can I if no one explains it to me?'

'Well I think I can help you there' said Philip, grinning from ear to ear. Now he knew why God had wanted him to be in the desert.

'Jump on board' said His Excellency. 'Come up here, sit beside me and tell me what this means.'

So Philip climbed on to the chariot, sat down beside His Excellency and began to explain what he had been reading about to him.

'It's all about Jesus' said Philip. 'Hundreds of years ago Isaiah wrote that a rescuer would be born one day and that when he grew up he would be punished for the wrong things all of us have done, so that we can be forgiven.'

'And that's exactly what Jesus has done!' said Philip. 'It happened just as Isaiah said it would. And now God has raised Him back to life again to show everyone that He is the one we must listen to and follow.'

Now at last the man understood what he had been reading. God sent Philip to help him understand it. Who do you know who could help you to understand the Bible better?

### **3. An Opportunity To Obey It**

'Is this true?' asked His Excellency. 'Did Jesus really die and come back to life again?'

'Yes, He did' answered Philip. 'Lots of people saw Him after He came back from the dead and can tell you all about it. And thousands have now started to follow Jesus.'

'Then I want to follow Him too' said His Excellency. 'Is there any reason why I couldn't be a follower of Jesus?'

'None at all' said Philip and when the chariot came to a little pool of water, he baptised him as a sign that he had now started to live a new life.

As soon as the official knew what God wanted him to do, he was ready to do it. There and then, in the middle of the desert, he started to follow Jesus.

You may have heard about Jesus many times. But have you started to follow Him yet? And if you have, are you looking for opportunities to show His love to others as He has asked us to do? Once you know what God wants you to do it is important to do it!

#### **4. An Opportunity To Share It**

It is likely that this Ethiopian official was the first person from his country to hear the Good News about Jesus and follow Him. So when he got home he had a wonderful opportunity to tell others about Jesus too. And it seems that he did - because not long after that we read about a church that had been started in Ethiopia.

If you are a Christian, in what ways could you share the Good News about Jesus with others? Could you explain it to them yourself? Or could you invite them to come with you wherever you go to learn about Jesus so that they can learn about Him too?

#### **Conclusion**

Remind the children of the four opportunities this man had and encourage them to look out for and make use of any similar opportunities they may have - to read, understand, obey and share what the Bible says.

Then ask if they noticed what part the Holy Spirit played in the story and point out that it was the Holy Spirit who sent Philip to help this man understand God's message to Him. God wants us to read or listen to what the Bible says. But sometimes it can be a hard book to understand! The good news is that God has not left us on our own to try to figure out what it means. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us.

Christians believe that it was the Holy Spirit who helped those who wrote down the words that are in the Bible to know what to write - so that the words we find there are really God's words to us. It is important that we take time to read or listen to them.

Christians also believe that God provides us with teachers - like Philip - who are gifted in helping us to understand what the Bible says. It is important that we talk and listen to them too if we want to really understand what the Bible says.

And Christians believe that as we read or listen to what the Bible says, the Holy Spirit is with us and that He will help us in one way or another to understand what it means, and what God wants to say to us through it, if we ask Him to. And then we can look out for opportunities to obey it and perhaps even share it with others as this man did!

Jesus promised His disciples before He went back to heaven that He would send them a helper who would remind them of everything He had told them and teach them God's ways just as He had done. If we want to understand more about God and how to live as His friends, Christians believe we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us - and He will!

#### **Song**

All About Jesus by John Althoff

#### **Prayer**