

The Ethiopian Eunuch...Jew or Gentile?

by Roger W. Walkwitz

Recently I was in a service preparatory to a baptism when the speaker used as his text Acts 8 about the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a gentile, and he emphasized repeatedly that the Ethiopian Eunuch was also a gentile, seeking Truth in the Scriptures. That was a very noble attempt at an application, but my gut feeling was that the Ethiopian Eunuch was a Jew. Years ago I probably would have agreed with him, but for some years now I have been learning to THINK JEWISH when I read and study my Bible, and to study it much more carefully.

After the baptism and during the luncheon I talked with the speaker about it. He was sure the Ethiopian eunuch was a gentile. Time was short, so I let it go at that, but did my mental research as we drove on...and wrote him later with the following evidence:

1) Operation Moses, the first airlift to Israel of Ethiopian Jews, so named because Moses' first wife (Numbers 12:1) was Tharbis, daughter of the king of the Ethiopians. Check Josephus for details.

2) Operation Solomon, the second airlift to Israel of Ethiopian Jews (1991), so named because Solomon and the Queen of Sheba produced a son that Solomon raised in Jerusalem and who brought back to Ethiopia an exact copy of the Ark of the Covenant. The marriage is only alluded to in the Bible. However, Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia claimed direct descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and titled himself the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

3) Why would a gentile Ethiopian eunuch go to Jerusalem to worship and have a copy of the scroll of Isaiah?

None of the above prove that the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jew, but give historical

background for the following, which does prove that the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jew.

4) The Book of Acts is chronological. Why would God send Philip to Gaza (Acts 8) to speak to a gentile Ethiopian eunuch and baptize him when gentiles were not yet accepted directly into the *ekklesia* until Acts 10, when it was necessary for God to bring Peter from Joppa to Caesarea to witness to Cornelius, when Philip already lived in Caesarea? Cornelius obviously was the first gentile to be accepted directly into the

ekklesia, without first becoming a Jewish convert (Acts 10-11). Philip would never have violated God's Standard Operating Procedure regarding gentiles, nor would God have caused Philip to do so before Cornelius.

So, the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jew, a born Jew. Many Jews had prominent positions in gentile governments. It is highly unlikely the Ethiopian eunuch was a convert, since he was a eunuch.

Whenever I teach, I try to emphasize "When you read your Bible, THINK JEWISH, think like THEY thought!" because every book of the Bible is written by the Holy Spirit through a Jewish person, in his culture and situation. Further, every word (in the original Hebrew and Greek) was breathed by the Holy Spirit into the writer's mind so that what was written is exactly what God wanted written. It is important to rightly divide (lit. cutting straight) the word of the truth, and Acts 10 is a very important dividing line!

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Editor's comment: The Gospel is "to the Jew first." Therefore, it even had to go to the Black Jews (commonly called the "Falashas") before going to the Gentiles as mentioned in Acts 10.

