

## Isaiah 55:11-56:8

**Isaiah 55:11** - “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

This would reflect the faith of Joseph in his prison cell, apparently lost into a bottomless hole with no way out, but sure of God’s faithfulness, and hoping he would “go out with joy, and be led forth with peace” (vs. 12).

The next chapter highlights the Lord’s willingness to embrace the dispossessed, particularly eunuchs.

**Isaiah 56:4-5** - “For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.”

The word for “eunuch here is *s’ris*, which is commonly translated as “courtier” but which more commonly means “eunuch.” The same word was used to describe Potipher, as well as the “officers” - the baker and the butler or cupbearer in Genesis 40.

The promise here about the eunuch is fulfilled in **Acts 8:26-40** when Phillip converts the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading **Isaiah 53:7-8**.

The eunuch is returning to the Ethiopian Kingdom of Meroe after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the feasts, and he is sitting in his chariot reading Scripture. The chariot is probably a four-wheeled covered vehicle, like an oxcart, large enough to accommodate the eunuch, his driver, Philip and possibly another servant (who would be reading the manuscript aloud if the official is not doing so himself). The carriage is moving slowly enough to allow for reading and for Philip to approach it on foot. Reading aloud was the common practice in ancient times, and was especially necessary when words were strung together on a manuscript without spacing or punctuation.

- See <http://buff.ly/2uWtwuw>

## Binding and loosing and the keys to the kingdom

**Acts 1:8** - “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Some scholars see this verse as fulfilled through Peter using his “keys to the kingdom” to open new doors into God’s kingdom for different people groups. First was the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. Then, after Philip had preached in Samaria and many believed and were baptized, Peter and John arrived they “prayed for them, that they

might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.(Acts 8:15-17)

The third open door was with the Ethiopian Eunuch. Ethiopia was considered “the ends of the earth” by classical writers, including Herodotus.

A variant reading of this chapter reads in English: “The Holy Spirit fell on the eunuch, and an angel of the Lord caught up Philip.” Bruce Metzger, the dean of textual criticism, believes this reading is genuine, and was changed by a later scribe who believed the Spirit could only be given by laying on of hands of the apostles.

An alternative view is that the Spirit would have been given only after Peter opened the Kingdom to Gentiles through Cornelius in Acts 10, which would also include “to the ends of the earth.”

After these doors were opened, the theory goes, the Spirit was received simultaneously when one believes.

At any rate, the faith of the Ethiopian Eunuch fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 56:4-5 that eunuchs would be included in God’s kingdom.

Eunuchs were not allowed to become Jewish proselytes, according to the Torah.

**Deuteronomy 23:1** - “He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD.”

Later, foreign eunuchs were employed in the Judean king’s palace:

**Jeremiah 38:7** - “Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin”

This earlier Ethiopian eunuch pulled Jeremiah out of the pit where the king had imprisoned him.

**Was Daniel a eunuch?** It’s not stated specifically. If he and his companions were made eunuchs in Babylon, it would reflect a shift in the way eunuchs were seen, since Daniel was definitely included in the “congregation of Israel.”

According to rabbinical tradition Daniel was of royal descent; and his fate, together with that of his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, was foretold by the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah in these words, "and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. xxxix. 7; compare Sanh. 93b; Pirke R. El. lii.; Origen, commentary to Matt. xv. 5; Jerome, commentary to Isaiah, l.c.). According to this view, Daniel and his friends were eunuchs, and were consequently able to prove the groundlessness of

charges of immorality brought against them, which had almost caused their death at the hands of the king. But the evidence is not conclusive.

Josephus shows that eunuchs were important members of a regal household, especially under Herod the Great, the care of whose drink was entrusted to one, the bringing of his supper to another, and the putting of him to bed to a third, "who also managed the principal affairs of the government" ("Ant." xvi. 8, §, 1). Herod's favorite wife, Mariamne, was attended by a eunuch ("Ant." x v. 7, §, 4).

Of course, Jesus had something to say about being a eunuch spiritually, referring to disciples determined to remain single:

**Matthew 19:12** - "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

The Ethiopian Eunuch was probably not a proselyte but a "God-fearer" who was interested in Jewish ethics and law, like many in the Roman world.