

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
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Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

Acts 8:27, 36, 38

I have heard that it would be improper to view the Ethiopian whom Philip encountered in Acts 8 as a “eunuch,” and instead that we should think of him as a “believer” from the Aramaic Peshitta. The Torah prohibits a eunuch from approaching the appointed place. Can you assist me with this?

The scene of Acts 8:25-40 should surely be well known to Bible readers, as Philip had been declaring the good news to Samaritans, and was then commanded to go down to Gaza, to speak the message to a court official of Ethiopia, who had come to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:26-27). Philip ran alongside this Ethiopian’s chariot, speaking to him as he was contemplating his personal reading of Isaiah 53:7-8 (Acts 8:32-33), clarifying how these passages spoke of Yeshua of Nazareth. The Ethiopian official eagerly received the message, and as a result was immersed with water (Acts 8:34-38). Following this, Philip was supernaturally transported to Azotus (Acts 8:40), with the Ethiopian continuing his journey home in a spirit of rejoicing, as a new follower of the Messiah (Acts 8:39).

Most Bible readers see the Ethiopian’s status as a *eunuchos*, and think nothing of it. As is recorded in Acts 8:27, 36, 38,

“So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship...As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’...And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:27, 36, 38, NASU).

The hesitancy to recognize the Ethiopian as some sort of “eunuch,” is often made from how the Torah prohibited a eunuch from entering into the assembly: “No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 23:1, NASU). Proponents of an original Aramaic New Testament might argue that the Ethiopian official was a “believer” of some sort.¹ The HRV Scriptures renders Acts 8:27, 36, 38 with “believer” instead of “eunuch”:

“And he arose, went and he met a believer who had come from Ethiopia, an official of Kandake, queen of the Ethiopians. And he was in authority concerning all of her treasure and had come to worship in Yerushalayim...And as they went on the way, they arrived at a certain place in which there was water, and that believer said, Behold, water. What is the obstacle so that I may be immersed?...And he commanded that the chariot stop, and the two of them descended into the water and Philip immersed that believer” (Acts 8:27, 36, 38, HRV Scriptures).²

Notwithstanding some of the Ancient Near Eastern factors involved with the Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibition, perhaps in that God did not want members of Canaanite sexual cults to enter into the *qahal YHWH*³—without any

¹ James Scott Trimm, trans., *The Hebraic-Roots Version Scriptures* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2006), 1388 fn#1229.

² “believer” also appears in Andrew Gabriel Roth, ed. and trans., *Aramaic English New Testament* (Netzari Press, 2008), pp 326, 328; the traditional “eunuch” is used in the Lamsa version.

³ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996, pp 210-211).

consideration for other factors, the Ethiopian being some kind of a “believer” might on the surface appear to make sense. However, many interpreters of Acts—particularly those who read the text in an historically conscious manner—have had to weigh in more thoroughly both the background of the Ethiopian, as well as the relationship of Isaiah 53:7-8 to other passages within the immediate text of Isaiah.

The Greek noun *eunouchos* has a variety of meanings, including: “**a castrated male person, eunuch,**” “**a human male who, without a physical operation, is by nature incapable of begetting children, impotent male,**” “**a human male who abstains fr. marriage, without being impotent, a celibate**” (BDAG).⁴ In all probability, the first definition is what is intended for Acts 8:27, 36, 38, but this is not entirely required. Noting how Candace or *Kandakē* was not a proper name, but rather the “title of the queen of Ethiopia” (BDAG)⁵—the NEB having “This man was a eunuch, a high official of the Kandake, or Queen, of Ethiopia, in charge of all her treasure”⁶—it has been suggested how the Ethiopian being a “eunuch,” similarly could have only been in a titular sense.⁷

It is certainly not inappropriate, with “Candace” being a title like “Pharaoh” or “Caesar,” to suggest how “eunuch” might have also been a title to represent a high office in Ethiopia.⁸ However, most Acts examiners consider the Ethiopian official to have been a physical eunuch of some sort—having either a natural deformity or an unnatural operation—who likely went to Jerusalem to seek after Israel’s God, and was seemingly turned away from the Temple complex per the Torah’s prohibition. Ben Witherington III thinks that “at the most he might have been permitted in the Court of the Gentiles, or in some of the local synagogues.”⁹ Some First Century Jewish thought on the status of eunuchs, as seen in the works of Philo and Josephus, was hardly positive:

“But the law, being most especially an interpreter of equal communion, and of courteous humanity among men, has preserved the honor and dignity of each virtue; not permitting any one who is incurably sunk in vice to flee to them, but rejecting all such persons and repelling them to a distance. Therefore, as it was aware that no inconsiderable number of wicked men are often mingled in these assemblies, and escape notice by reason of the crowds collected there, in order to prevent that from being the case in this instance, he previously excludes all who are unworthy from the sacred assembly, beginning in the first instance with those who are afflicted with the disease of effeminacy, men-women, who, having adulterated the coinage of nature, are willingly driven into the appearance and treatment of licentious women. He also banishes all those who have suffered any injury or mutilation in their most important members, and those who, seeking to preserve the flower of their beauty so that it may not speedily wither away, have altered the impression of their natural manly appearance into the resemblance of a woman” (Philo *Special Laws* 1.324-325).¹⁰

“Let those who have made themselves eunuchs be had in detestation; and do avoid any conversation with them who have deprived themselves of their manhood, and of that fruit of generation which God has given to men for the increase of their kind: let such be driven away, as if they had killed their children, since they beforehand have lost what should procure them; for evident it is, that while their soul is become effeminate, they have withal transfused that effeminacy to their body also. In like manner do treat all that is of a monstrous

⁴ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 409.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 507.

Also W.A. Beardslee, “Candace,” in George Buttrick, ed., et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:498; “Candace,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:591; Ben Witherington III, “Candace,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:837.

⁶ “the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians” (RSV/NRSV); “the Kandake (which means ‘queen of the Ethiopians’)” (TNIV); “the Kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia” (CJSB).

⁷ Tim Meadowcroft, *The Message of the Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 209.

⁸ That there is some variance in what it means to be a “eunuch,” is clear enough from Yeshua’s own word, “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it” (Mathew 19:12, NASU). *Lattimore* offers a unique rendering of Matthew 19:12: “For there are sexless men who have been so from their mother’s womb, and there are sexless men who have been made sexless by other men, and there are sexless men who have made themselves sexless for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him who can accept, accept.”

⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 297.

¹⁰ Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 565.

Acts 8:27, 36, 38

nature when it is looked on; nor is it lawful to geld men or any other animals” (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.290-291).¹¹

The Ethiopian, still being wooed by the Lord, was searching for truth, as was demonstrated by his deep pondering over the scroll of Isaiah. Certainly, the good news of Yeshua as the sacrificed lamb of Isaiah 53:7-8, was powerful enough to save even this eunuch from Ethiopia, as one can see some fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 in view: “Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God” (NASU). More significant to the context of this Ethiopian eunuch recognizing Yeshua as Redeemer, is how Isaiah 53:7-8 and Yeshua’s Messianic fulfillment, was directly related to further Isaianic expectations. It has been noted how in the future eschaton, eunuchs will have a place in worship (Isaiah 56:3b-6), and that the author of Acts, Luke, in recording the scene of the Ethiopian eunuch, recognized this reality as beginning to take place.¹² Recognizing the Torah prohibition of Deuteronomy 23:1,¹³ examiners have focused readers’ attention on Isaiah 56:3-6¹⁴ and how eunuchs will be welcomed in during the Messianic Age:

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from His people.’ Nor let the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the LORD, ‘To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant” (Isaiah 56:3-6, NASU).

Here, the Hebrew term *saris*, while often involving some sort of removal of the male testicles, can also be closely involved with some sort of high role as an official: “The noun, meaning ‘(court) official,’ has its origin in the Akkadian title *ša rēši* (*šarri*) ‘the one of the (king’s) head.’ The meaning ‘eunuch’ arose with the practice of utilizing castrated men in key positions in the various nations of the ancient near east (e.g. in Persia, Esth 2:3ff; Esth 4:4ff)” (*TWOT*).¹⁵ So, it might not always be that a “eunuch” was one who had his testicles removed or made inoperative in some fashion, although they frequently were.

The importance of Isaiah 56:3-6, which is obviously located rather close in proximity to the Messianic prophecy fulfilled by Yeshua in Isaiah 53:7-8—and would have been quite easily to access in a Hebrew scroll of Isaiah—is something which many are agreed was an ancillary thought present in the composition of Luke.¹⁶ Recognizing the Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibition on eunuchs entering into the assembly, and also the negative views as stated by Philo and Josephus, examiners have drawn attention to Isaiah’s expectations of eunuchs indeed being later welcomed into the people of God.¹⁷ Those who were once excluded, were now decisively included,¹⁸ as realities of the future Messianic Age were steadily breaking in via the First Century activity of the gospel.

Those who think that the “eunuch” of Acts 8:27, 36, 38 was not a eunuch of some sort, have done so at the expense of severing the Ethiopian’s pondering over Isaiah 53:7-8 from Isaiah 56:3-6, in which the work of the Messiah would decisively welcome in eunuchs and foreigners to the Kingdom of God. Perhaps they did this,

¹¹ Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 123.

¹² Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp 341-342.

¹³ Also to be considered for the Second Temple era could be IQSa 2.6, 8 in the DSS:

“No man with a physical handicap—crippled in both legs or hands, lame, blind, deaf, dumb, or possessed of a visible blemish in his flesh...may en[ter] to take a place in the congregation of the m[e]n of reputation” (IQSa 2.6, 8; Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996], 146).

¹⁴ Witherington, *Acts*, 299.

¹⁵ R.D. Patterson, “*saris*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:634-635.

¹⁶ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 495.

¹⁷ F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), pp 103, 104.

¹⁸ Cf. Meadowcroft, 215.

without considering the relationship of Isaiah 53:7-8 and related prophecies to the scene. While nothing more is stated in the Biblical text regarding the Ethiopian eunuch, the Second Century Christian apologist Irenaeus acknowledged this Ethiopian as having returned to his country, and becoming a strong evangelist:

“Whom did Philip preach to the eunuch of the queen of the Ethiopians, returning from Jerusalem, and reading Esaias the prophet, when he and this man were alone together? Was it not He of whom the prophet spoke: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb dumb before the shearer, so He opened not the mouth?’ ‘But who shall declare His nativity? for His life shall be taken away from the earth’ [Acts 8:32; Isaiah 53:7, 8]. [Philip declared] that this was Jesus, and that the Scripture was fulfilled in Him; as did also the believing eunuch himself: and, immediately requesting to be baptized, he said, ‘I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God’ [Acts 8:37]. This man was also sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed, that there was one God preached by the prophets, but that the Son of this [God] had already made [His] appearance in human nature (*secundum hominem*), and had been led as a sheep to the slaughter; and all the other statements which the prophets made regarding Him” (*Against Heresies* 3.12).¹⁹

¹⁹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 433.