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A Ring of Truth

For some sixty years my bookshelf has included a copy of The New Testament in Modern English by J B Phillips.

It was published at a time when not much else other than the King James version of the bible was available and, although it was in some respects a paraphrase rather than a translation, it was one of those books that it was sometimes almost impossible to put down. Particularly for the gospels and the book of Acts, you just needed to keep reading to find out what happened next.

J B Phillips was a Greek scholar and linguist and in 1967 he wrote a book entitled Ring of Truth. He said at the time that, following his studies, he felt compelled to write a testimony to the historicity and reliability of the New Testament. The title referring to the ring that a fine piece of glass or china, or indeed a bell, gives when it is tapped, indicating the lack of cracks or manufacturing flaws.

Earlier this year, our Sunday New Testament reading included the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip had been elected by the church leadership in Jerusalem as one of the seven people to supervise the distribution of aid to the poor, but the persecution of the church after the stoning of Stephen had caused him to go north into Samaria until directed by an angel down to the Gaza road where he encounters the Ethiopian. The story then ends when, after the latter's baptism, Philip disappears and reappears on the coast road to Caesarea.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, who also wrote the gospel, as an examination of the opening verses of the two books will show. Luke was not one of the apostles, but was a travelling companion of Saint Paul. He therefore had to base his gospel and the early part of the book of Acts on what he was told by others.



Being in Rome with Paul would have brought him into contact with the apostle Peter, Mark and others, and he also accompanies Paul on his journey to Jerusalem where they meet senior members of the church including James, our Lord's brother. But it was a single verse in Luke's description of that journey to Jerusalem that recently caught my eye and brought J B Philips "Ring of Truth" into mind.

In Acts chapter 21 and verse 8, Luke writes; "Leaving (Ptolemais) the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven."

More than twenty years have passed since Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian, but he is still in Caesarea, and you can just imagine that little group exchanging stories of how God has used them, and Luke taking notes. It has a ring of truth.

As we enter the holiday season, many of us will be travelling, going to new places, meeting new people. How will people remember you? What impression will you give? I pray that each one of us through our actions and our conversations may demonstrate lives that have a real ring of truth to them.

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