

Acts 8:1 – 12:25

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Witness in Judea and Samaria and the Beginnings of the Gentile Evangelism (8:1-11:18)

The Church Scattered (8:1-4)

With Stephen's death the anti Christians have now gained force in opposing the church that has been established.

Many have asked the question in reading both the death of Stephen and the scattering of the church...What has happened to the victorious Christ and the power of his resurrection? Why does God remain inactive, even dormant, while they suffer?

Acts keeps unfolding its deep theology on the subtheme of suffering as the book proceeds. God is not dormant; he actually feels the pain that Saul inflicts (9:4).

Luke gives us a glimpse of the victory God is going to win out in this seeming tragedy in verse four of chapter eight.

**THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SCATTERED PREACHED THE WORD
WHEREVER THEY WENT. - ACTS 8:4**

The people went as missionaries more than refugees. Luke used the term for scatter that means “to scatter like a seed is scattered on the ground.” This is no mistake as that is exactly the intention of the scattering. – Everett Harrison

The Means to the Ends - There is great significance in the event of scattering Christians. Without it we would be left with “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...”. It is the necessary result of to be able to spread the gospel to the Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

This suffering for the sake of the gospel causes several things to happen in lives of the Christian Church.

1. **Suffering produces fullness.** – Stephen’s experience of the fullness of the Spirit gives a clear and fresh insight into the nature of what it means to be filled. Paul gives emphasis to this later in Romans 8 as he describes the Spirit filled life.

2. **Sharing in Christ’s sufferings produces perseverance.** – We pointed out last week the similarities of Stephen’s death and Jesus death. They were both accused of “offenses against the temple.” Christ as our suffering savior bids that we to must suffer. Again, Paul in his later books makes clear that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance hope. Becoming more like Jesus will often times require suffering for the sake of the gospel.

3. **Suffering produces evangelism.** – We mentioned earlier that as the church scattered those going out preached the word wherever they went. This implies that preaching was done everywhere the church was scattered. The zeal for the gospel was increased as the suffering was increased.

The truth is that what we suffer increases our credibility in ministry. Such credibility opens the door for us to exhort people with some authority.

Phillips Ministry (8:5-40)

Samaritans Receive the Spirit (8:5-17)

Phillip was one of the many who had scattered from Jerusalem and he found his way to Samaria.

If you remember the story in John 4 of the Samaritan women at the well then you will know the preaching of the gospel to this city is one of many obstacles the disciples would face.



Samaritans and Jews didn't speak to each other often Jews would avoid the city all together due to the animosity that existed between the two. For Phillip to be able to go into the city and preach and people to listen just another proof of the Holy Spirit going before him preparing the way for the harvest to be ripe.

The word *semeion* appears for the first time verse 6 (1 of 13 times in Acts), which translates to "miraculous signs." It is used here and elsewhere in the book of Acts to signify just how special these moments of conversion really are among those who are hearing the gospel for the first time.

We also see this section giving significance to the receiving of the Holy Spirit separate from the baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus.

HOW, WHY, WHAT?

- **PRAYED FOR IT! IT DIDN'T REQUIRE SOMETHING SO SPECTACULAR TO MAKE IT HAPPEN. IT SIMPLY WAS AN ASKING! A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD TO EXPERIENCE IT THE WAY THEY (THE DISCIPLES) HAD EXPERIENCED IT.**
- **RECEIVED IT! THEY DIDN'T QUESTION WHETHER THEY SHOULD HAVE IT, IT WAS A MERE OPENNESS TO THE FULL MANIFESTATION OF THE GOSPEL IN THEIR LIVES.**
- **MANIFESTED IT! IT WAS OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING THAT WAS CLEAR ONCE THEY HAD IT. PETER AND JOHN NEVER QUESTIONED WHETHER IT HAPPENED SO THERE MAY HAVE BEEN A OUTWARD SIGN THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS PRESENT IN THEIR LIVES. I.E. SPEAKING IN TONGUES, PROPHECYING, TEACHING, PREACHING, ETC.**

One thing to notice is that the leaders of the Jerusalem church, Peter and John, came to instate the power of the Holy Spirit and in essence charge the Samaritans with the same mission. It is a unifying moment for the early church because of the deep historical roots of animosity.

Simon the Sorcerer (8:17-25)

Simon is attracted by the power of the Holy Spirit. What the disciples have he wants but it is clear he doesn't fully understand what it entails.

A major piece of significance in this section is contained in the following verses.

Acts 8:18-22 ¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

Simon does have a change of heart and asked the disciples to pray that this would not be the case. We can assume that because the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit that they oblige the request, however we are not told that specifically.

Phillip's Personal Ministry (8:26-40)

The Lord calls Phillip to continue his ministry in a very personal way. He meets an Ethiopian eunuch (high ranking official), who had come to Jerusalem to worship.

This is significant because in the ancient literature Ethiopia was considered to be at "the end of the earth."³⁸ Phillip is with the eunuch who's heart is convicted by reading Isaiah and takes the opportunity to proclaim to him the gospel of Jesus (the fulfillment of the prophecy he is reading). This is the beginning of the Great Commission as the Ethiopian is the one who suggest baptism into the Lord Jesus.

Phillip's calling shows how not only each of us are called to be evangelist for the sake of the gospel but how some are chosen to be set apart as doing this as a profession.

There is no doubt about the value of lay personal witness as a means of church growth today. Laypeople come in contact with non-Christians in a way that paid church workers do not. They can identify with their fellow students or fellow workers in a more natural way than professional Christian workers.

Saul's Conversion and Call (9:1-31)

A true testimony that literally, God can use anyone he chooses to further his Kingdom.

9:1-2 – Luke describes Saul's vehemence is very strong language. This most likely to give the great picture of just how extravagant the conversion is and that it is not of anything Saul has done that makes him deserving of such.

³⁸ Tannehill. Narrative Unity, p108-109

Paul is seen going to the Sadducean high priest for letters of support. This would not have been a common practice as the Sadducees were more heartless in their judgments than the Pharisees. This is an indication of the extremes he was willing to go in attempting to stamp out this menace.

9:3-9 – Saul’s Incredible Conversion

**THE FINAL POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCE OF JESUS
THE CHANGE OF MAN THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD!**

Jesus spoke to Saul in a language that could not be mistaken. He knew the Old Testament and wanted to make clear that God, Yahweh, is one calling and that Jesus was the incarnate God in flesh.

“Saul, Saul” is a double vocative is reminiscent of the way God’s voice was heard often in the Old Testament.

The light he witnessed would have been a reminder of Shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament.

Paul has no doubt seen the risen Christ as he uses it as his qualification for apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1)

9:10-19 - Ananias’s Ministry to Paul

Paul was instructed to go to Tarsus and find “straight street.” Ironically this would be where he would begin to straighten out his theology and prepare for the ministry ahead of him. Today it would be the southern part of Turkey.

Tarsus is the city both where Saul was born and the city where he would be reborn into his new life in

Ananias was not a fan of the request to go find Saul as he was most likely part of one of the groups that Saul was so vehemently against because of their zeal for the faith. God was bringing the Saul’s story to full circle as he would begin his powerful ministry of gospel proclamation.

Following Saul's conversion to Paul he launches into his preaching ministry in synagogues of Damascus. His zeal for the persecution of the church has now been transformed into a zeal for the work of the gospel. He would need such zeal as he is told upfront that he "suffer much for the sake of the gospel."

Finally to Jerusalem (9:25-30)

Paul makes clear in Galatians that it was 3 years before he returned to Jerusalem. This is understandable as he would have most likely seen great opposition from those he shared company with during his persecution of the church.

The disciples were "all afraid of him" (v26) as they most likely feared their lives but also questioned Paul authenticity. It would have been easy for one to "fake" a conversion to infiltrate the efforts of the church as so having their guard up is very much warranted at this time.

In verse 27, Barnabas takes Paul to disciples and the apostles, Peter and James (Galatians 1:17-18). This was Paul's crash course in the teachings of Jesus as he only had fifteen days with Peter.

WE FIND THIS SECTION ENDING WITH A REPORT OF HEALTHY CHURCH! A RELATIVE CALM COMES OVER THE CHURCH WHICH IS COMMON AFTER AN INTENSE TIME OF PERSECUTION.

Personal Implications of Paul's Story

- *Personal Encounters with Christ*
- *Importance of Surrender*
- *Encouragement for New Believers – Everyone needs a Barnabas*

Miracles of Peter (9:32-45)

Peter has now become the representative of Church abroad. He is the equivalent of a Bishop as he travels, speaks, lays hands on others, and appoints new leaders. In these moments we are seeing Peter in a role as healer.

The healings have a twofold result.

1. Glorify Jesus (v.34 and v.40)

- (a) Acts 9:34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.
- (b) Acts 9:40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

2. Conversion power (v. 35 and v.42)

- (a) Acts 9:35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.
- (b) Acts 9:42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

The Story of Cornelius (10:1 – 11:18)

Scene one: Cornelius' vision (10:1-8)

- A centurion in Roman, meaning he would have been over about a hundred soldiers.
- Devout and God Fearing (v.2)
 - Generous to the needy
 - Regular prayer
- Had a vision – around 3PM (traditional time of prayer)
- Angel scared him but gives specific directions
 - Call for Peter from Joppa

He has no idea what the reason for the calling of Peter is at this time, but obeys the command of the angel.

Scene two: Peter's vision (10:9-16)

- Animals – clean and unclean
- Kill and eat – Jews didn't eat unclean animals
- He makes a rebuttal to the one he calls "LORD"
- God declares all things clean that he wants to be clean

Peter, who has been the instrument of God at Pentecost and in Samaria is now about to open the door for the Gentile world to respond to the gospel.

Scene Three: Peter meets the messenger (10:17-23)

- Messenger comes from Cornelius' house
- Peter is “thinking” about the vision
 - The word for thinking in this verse is only used one time in the Bible (v19)
 - He is confused – that unclean and clean would mix

Scene Four: Peter and Cornelius Meet (10:23-33)

- Peter goes with some of the other brothers
- Large gathering is waiting for him
- Cornelius shows humility
- Peter explains his vision

Peter had to realize his need for repentance as he had judged the Gentile nations as unworthy to receive the gospel. In doing so he has set the stage for the presentation of the gospel and the audience is more than willing to hear – they are eager to receive.

Scene Five: Peter's Speech (10:34-43)

- Peter opens his mouth and begins to proclaim
- He summarizes Jesus' ministry
- Apostles witnessed this ministry
- Proclamation given by Christ

Scene Six: Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:44-48)

- Spirit comes before baptism
- Jewish leaders are astonished that Gentiles receive
- Peter stays with Cornelius to keep teaching

Scene Seven: The Jewish Christians Approve (11:1-18)

- News Spreads
- Critique from the Jews
- Explanation of what happened
- Evidence was overwhelming – Jews accept the Gentile conversion