

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 6: Gospel Advances to Judea & Samaria (chs. 8-9)

(No. 1119 – - NLC)

I. SAUL RAVAGES THE CHURCH

Acts 8:1-3: ¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

A. “And **Saul was there, giving approval to his [Stephen’s] death.** (v.1)

1. Saul was there – Luke keeps mentioning this name *Saul* because he is about to take center stage in God’s story.
2. **Giving approval** [Gk. *suneudokeo* = “to think well of; feel gratified with, be pleased, assent to”] – Saul’s approval was not a disinterested or mere mental assent to Stephen’s death—he took great delight in watching this Jesus fanatic being crushed beneath the stones of the Jewish zealots.

B. “On that day a **great persecution broke out** against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were **scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.**” (v.1)

1. On that day – Stephen’s death seemed to trigger a widespread attack on the church.
2. Great persecution broke out – all the believers were scattered, presumably because of fear, while the apostles remained in Jerusalem, apparently to brave the fury of their persecutors.
3. Historians estimate that by this time, 8-10 years had elapsed since the day of Pentecost, and the church had still not ventured out from Jerusalem with the gospel; although Jesus had clearly laid out the strategy in Acts 1:8:
1) Jerusalem, 2) Judea & Samaria, 3) Uttermost parts of the

earth, they had apparently become quite comfortable having a Jewish church in Jerusalem.

4. God has His ways of stirring the nest and moving us out of our comfort zone—persecution *forced* them to move out from Jerusalem to—that’s right, *Judea* and *Samaria*!
- C. “Godly men **buried Stephen and mourned deeply** for him.” (v.2)
1. What brought glee and joy to Saul and his Jewish cohorts, pierced the hearts of the believers with sadness and deep lamentation.
 2. Jesus had warned His disciples about this before His own death:
John 16:20: *I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.*
- D. “But **Saul began to destroy the church**. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” (v.3)
1. NKJV: “Saul **made havoc** of the church.”
 2. “Destroy” or “made havoc” – the Greek word used literally refers to ferocious wild animals seeking and devouring their prey.
 3. Something like a demonic obsession seemed to have overtaken Saul—we can only speculate, but Stephen’s death must have had a profound effect on him—seeing Stephen’s angelic face, his peaceful composure, and praying for his murderers to be forgiven.
 4. MSG: “And Saul just went wild, devastating the church, entering house after house after house, dragging men and women off to jail.”

II. PHILIP TAKES THE GOSPEL TO SAMARIA

Acts 8:4-8: *⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and*

many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

- A. “Those who had been scattered **preached** the word wherever they went.” (v.4)
1. What Satan had devised to *exterminate* the church was used by the Sovereign God to *expand* the church! How this must infuriate the enemy!
 2. MSG: “Forced to leave home base, the Christians all became missionaries. Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Message about Jesus.”
 3. This is the first instance in the book of Acts where people other than the apostles were specifically said to be *preaching*—now *all* of the believers were evangelizing.
- B. The gospel breaks through racial divides (v.5)
1. There was a 1,000-year racial wall between the Jews and the Samaritans, which could be understood in the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman:
John 4:9: *The Samaritan woman said to Him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*
 2. Samaritans claimed descent from Jacob, and looked on themselves as true Israelites. Actually, they were of mixed Jewish and heathen descent. Mount Gerizim had been adopted as their official place of worship, a mountain in Samaria that was clearly visible to Jesus and the woman as they talked together at the well. The Jews had a deep dislike for the Samaritans. They considered them half-breeds—mongrel dogs.
 3. But the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were coming to understand that the gospel is for all nations, tribes, races and colors—God so loved **the world** that He gave His only Son...
- C. **Philip’s ministry in Samaria** (vv.5-8)
1. One of the Seven, Philip is later called an evangelist:
Acts 21:8-9: ⁸*Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of **Philip the evangelist**, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*

2. Certainly what Paul later wrote to Timothy concerning deacons is applicable to Philip (and likewise to Stephen):

1 Tim. 3:13 (NKJV): *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

3. He *proclaimed* (preached) Christ (v.5)
 - a) **Proclaimed** [Gk. *kerusso* = “to herald (as a public crier)”]
 - b) As a king’s herald would go before him, proclaiming his edicts or announcing his coming, so Philip, as an ambassador to King Jesus, went to Samaria proclaiming Him.
4. As with Stephen, God confirmed Philip’s ministry with many miraculous signs, healings, and deliverance from demonic oppression (vv.6-7)

III. SIMON THE SORCERER

Acts 8:9-25: *⁹Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.”¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money¹⁹ and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

²⁴Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” ²⁵When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

A. **Simon the sorcerer** and his great influence on Samaria (vv.9-11)

1. Simon had practiced sorcery (magic). (v.9)
2. He had **amazed** [“bewitched” – KJV] all the people of Samaria, boasting that he was someone great. (v.10)
3. All the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.” They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. (vv.10-11)
4. It comes as no surprise that Samaria was filled with evil spirits, sicknesses and crippling diseases (v.7) due to the impact of Simon’s witchcraft and sorcery.

B. When the **Samaritans believed** the good news and **were baptized**. (v.12)

1. “When they believed... they were baptized” – baptism is the first logical response to the gospel of the kingdom (see Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).
2. As did Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, it is obvious that Philip also taught on the importance of water baptism as he preached the kingdom of God to the Samaritans—they were all baptized.

C. The apostles **Peter and John sent to Samaria** (vv.14-17)

1. “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.” (v.14)
 - a) Why was it necessary to send the apostles to Samaria? Philip obviously had a powerful ministry, gaining many converts, baptizing them, etc. What was he lacking?

- b) As pointed out in *Section I.B.* on p.5 of Part 2, God gave a very special ministry to the apostles—it was their job to ensure that churches had the proper foundation; every church mentioned in Acts was founded by apostles (see Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:10).
 - c) Philip was an evangelist; it is apparent that in the early church, there was a clear understanding within the so-called 5-fold ministry (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – Eph. 4:11) of the “division of labor” as well as the boundaries or limitations for each ministerial office.
2. They prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the **Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them**; they **had simply been baptized** into the name of the Lord Jesus. (vv.15-16)
 3. The Samaritans had believed in Christ, received healing and deliverance, taken water baptism, and the whole city was full of great joy...
 4. **BUT THEY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT!!!** This clearly refutes the popular teaching that as soon as a person puts their faith in Christ, they get the whole package—they are automatically filled with the Holy Spirit. These Samaritans still lacked an important experience in their journey of faith—they needed to *receive the Holy Spirit*.
 5. It was only when “Peter and John placed their hands on them, [and] they received the Holy Spirit. (v.17)

D. Simon the sorcerer rebuked by Peter

1. Simon had also believed and taken baptism, astonished by the miracles he saw God performing through Philip (v.13); but there is no mention of him receiving the Holy Spirit.
2. After seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the believers through the laying on of hands by the apostles, Simon wanted to buy the gift that the apostles had. (vv.18-19)
3. Peter rebuked Simon for thinking he “could buy the gift of God,” telling him he had “no part or share in this ministry, because **your heart is not right** before God.” (vv.20-21)

4. Peter then exhorted Simon: “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. **Perhaps He will forgive you** for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” (vv.22-23)
5. It is not clear whether Simon’s faith had been sincere or if he had been truly born again. One commentator writes, “Simon was a *professor* but not a *possessor* of salvation.” It seems he had just gone through the motions.
6. What was particularly wicked about Simon’s sin was that he wanted to use the gift of God to advance his own agenda and draw more attention to himself, as we can see from his request: “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” (v.19)
7. In any event, Peter told Simon to repent and pray.
8. Then Simon answered, “**Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.**” (v.24)
 - a) Like Pharaoh or King Saul, Simon seemed more concerned with being relieved of God’s heavy hand of judgment that was upon him than with changing his character and evil ways.
 - b) Nothing more is said about Simon in Scripture, so we can only speculate as to his sincerity and the final outcome in his life.

E. Peter and John return to Jerusalem (v.25)

1. “When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.”
2. The apostles now realized they were in Phase 2 of the Acts 1:8 commission—they were witnesses in Samaria.

IV. PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:26-40: ²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot

reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³²The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. ³³In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For is life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

³⁷[Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

A. “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “**Go south to the road—the desert road**—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (v.26)

1. How many preachers would be willing to leave a place that is in full-blown, red hot revival, to go out into the desert—for one man!
2. Philip had in Samaria what every pastor dreams of—“crowds” coming to hear him preach, numerous conversions, miracles, and baptisms.
3. And the Lord said, “Go.”

- B. “So he started out, and on his way he met an **Ethiopian eunuch**, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” (v.27)
1. *So he started out* – with unquestioning obedience, Philip did as he was instructed.
 2. He met an Ethiopian... this one man was the entire reason for what, at least on the surface, appeared to be a detour for Philip’s ministry;
 3. God loves people—crowds, small groups of people—He seems to have the same love for one solitary person.
 4. And this was no ordinary person—the Ethiopian man was a top-ranking official for the queen in his country—hand-picked by God to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole nation of Ethiopia! The gospel net continues to widen, now including Judea, Samaria, and Ethiopia!
 5. We are about to witness what can be called a “Divine Appointment”—Philip’s meeting with this man had been supernaturally arranged by the Sovereign God.
- C. “This man had **gone to Jerusalem to worship**, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot **reading the book of Isaiah** the prophet.” (vv.27-28)
1. Apparently a convert to Judaism, for he had gone to Jerusalem to worship.
 2. Perfect timing by the Holy Spirit—just as Philip arrived, the eunuch was reading Isaiah—coincidence? Not a chance!
- D. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” (vv.29-31)
1. How wonderfully God opens doors and hearts when His Spirit is at work; with one friendly question, Philip suddenly found himself riding in the chariot of the Treasurer of Ethiopia!
 2. And what a beautiful setup: “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?”

- E. The eunuch *just happened* to be reading **Isaiah 53**, which gives a graphic description of the suffering Messiah: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open his mouth. In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.” (vv.32-33)
- F. “The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, **who is the prophet talking about**, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. (vv.34-35)
- G. **Ethiopian believed and was baptized** (vv.36-39)
1. We’re not given the details of what Philip spoke, but in the course of his preaching, it is apparent once again that Philip spoke clearly about the importance of water baptism.
 2. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?” (v.36)
 3. “[Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ The eunuch answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’]” (v.37)
 4. “And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch **went down into the water** and Philip **baptized** him. When they **came up out of the water**...” (vv.38-39)
 - a) Note the simplicity of the ceremony—they were not in a temple, the church was not present—they were out in the desert!
 - b) That the baptism was by **immersion** is evident by the expressions, *went down into the water* and *came up out of the water*. [See *Section II.H.2* on p.32, Part 3 for more on baptism.)
- H. “The **Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away**, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at **Azotus** and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.” (vv.39-40)
1. Philip was miraculously and supernaturally translated through the air, snatched up in full view of the Ethiopian:

2. NAS: “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **snatched Philip away.**”
3. “Snatched away” or “taken suddenly” is the same Greek word *harpazo* which Paul uses in 1 Thess. 4:17 (translated “caught up”) to refer to the Rapture of the church:
4. **1 Thess. 4:16-17:** ¹⁶*For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*
5. Azotus was 30 miles away from Gaza!
6. The Ethiopian went on his way **rejoicing** (v.39)

V. SAUL’S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-19: ¹*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”*

⁵*“Who are You, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

⁷*The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

¹⁰*In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered.*

¹¹*The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*

¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

A. Chapter 9 marks a distinct turning point in Acts. Up until now, the apostle Peter had been the prominent leader of the church in Jerusalem. But from this point on, the apostle Paul gradually becomes the foremost figure and the gospel goes increasingly out to the Gentiles.

1. Saul of Tarsus was perhaps in his early thirties at this time.
2. He was generally regarded by the rabbis as one of the most promising young men in Judaism.
3. As to zeal, he outstripped all of his fellows.

B. “Meanwhile, Saul was **still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.** (v.1)

1. KJV: “Breathing out threatenings and slaughter...”
2. AMP: “Still drawing his breath hard from threatening and murderous desire...”
3. Saul’s obsession with destroying the Christian church continues.

C. “He went to the high priest and **asked him for letters** to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who **belonged to the Way**, whether men or women, he might **take them as prisoners** to Jerusalem.” (vv.1-2)

1. **Asked for letters** (authorizing him)

2. MSG: “And got arrest warrants...”
 3. **The Way** – a name commonly used for the Christians in the early church (see also Acts 16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)
 4. **Damascus**, located in the Roman province of Syria, was about 150 miles from Jerusalem (4-6 days’ journey); it had a large Jewish population, and apparently many Christian converts as a result of the believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem and taken the gospel there. (Acts 8:4).
- D. “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a **light from heaven flashed** around him. **He fell to the ground** and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute Me?**’” (vv.3-4)
1. Paul would later fill in more details about the event in his own personal accounts:

Acts 22:3-11: [To the crowd in Jerusalem after being arrested]: ³*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. **4I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death**, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in **Damascus**, and went there to **bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.***

⁶*About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, “Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?” ⁸“Who are You, Lord?” I asked. “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,” He replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of Him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰“What shall I do, Lord? I asked. “Get up,” the Lord said, “and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.” ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the **brilliance of the light had blinded me.**”*

Acts 26:9-15: [Before Agrippa]: ⁹*I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of*

Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests **I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.** ¹¹Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and **I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.** ¹²On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³About noon, O king, as I was on the road, **I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun,** blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” ¹⁵Then I asked, “Who are You, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied.”

2. “Suddenly **a light** from heaven flashed around him.”
 - a) How *suddenly* God can appear and change everything!
 - b) Paul described this light as brighter than the sun.
 - c) The brilliance of the light blinded him for 3 days. (v.9)

3. “**He fell to the ground.**”
 - a) As King Nebuchadnezzar learned (the hard way!), “No one can hold back His hand... and **those who walk in pride He is able to humble.**” (Dan. 4:35-37)
 - b) Of King Saul, David lamented, “How the mighty have fallen!” (2 Sam. 1:19)
 - c) Now, Saul of Tarsus, who had taken such delight in seeing Stephen fallen to his knees about to die (Acts 7:60), found himself prostrate on the ground beneath the mighty hand of God!

4. “**Saul, Saul,** why do you persecute Me?”
 - a) “Saul, Saul” – only 1 of 7 instances in Scripture where God repeated an individual’s name twice (Gen. 22:11 (Abraham); 46:2 (Jacob); Ex. 3:4 (Moses); 1 Sam. 3:10 (Samuel); Luke 10:41 (Martha); 22:31 (Simon Peter);
 - b) Saul was about to learn a very important truth: To persecute the church (Christians) is to persecute Christ,

for the church is His body (see 1 Cor. 12:27;
Eph. 1:22-23)

- c) Pain inflicted on the members of His body on earth is felt by the Head in heaven!

E. **“Who are you, Lord?”** Saul asked. **“I am Jesus**, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (v.5)

1. Saul seemed to answer his own question: Who are you, **LORD?** [Gk. *kurios* = “supreme in authority; by implication, God, Lord, master”]
2. But the next words he heard removed any doubt: “I am Jesus.” How simple: “I am Jesus.” Saul met Jesus! That is the essence of Christianity—it’s not merely embracing a creed or agreeing with a system of thought—it’s an *encounter* with the Living Christ!
3. It is hard to imagine Saul’s thoughts and emotions here, but up until this point, he had been fully convinced that Jesus was dead—the leader of the hated “Way” sect—and he had been doing everything in his power exterminate all of its followers.
4. Now Saul was learning that this same Jesus was not dead—He was alive and speaking to him from heaven—and he had been persecuting Him. *Oops... I’m in real trouble!*

F. **“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”** (v.6)

1. From this point onward, Saul would be taking orders from the Lord Jesus!
2. Jesus could have informed Saul at once what was His will concerning him; but He chose to make him wait to receive further instructions from one of those very disciples whom he was going to drag off to prison in Jerusalem. That disciple would be the means of Saul’s salvation.
3. Although God’s intention was to raise Saul up to become the mighty apostle Paul, He wanted to teach him an invaluable lesson: there are no “lone rangers” in the kingdom of God, and every member of Christ’s body needs the other members (see 1 Cor. 12).

- G. “The **men traveling with Saul stood there speechless**; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.” (v.7)
1. AMP: “The men who were accompanying him were **unable to speak [for terror]**, hearing the voice but seeing no one.”
 2. God made sure there were witnesses to this dramatic event; we learn 3 important details by looking at both Luke’s and Paul’s accounts:
 - a) All of Saul’s traveling companions heard the sound but did not understand the voice speaking to Saul; (v.7)
 - b) All of Saul’s traveling companions saw the light; (Acts 22:9)
 - c) All of Saul’s traveling companions fell to the ground. (Acts 26:14)
 3. Saul’s companions were on the same mission he was on—to persecute and imprison the Christians in Damascus; but there is no indication that any of them got converted, though they were also struck down, saw the bright light, and heard the sound of Christ’s voice!
- H. “For three days he was **blind**, and **did not eat or drink** anything.” (v.9)
1. The “three days” may be a coincidence, but it reminds us of Jonah’s 3 days in the belly of the great fish (Mat. 12:40) which he describes as the “belly of hell” (Jonah 2:2), and which is a type of Christ spending 3 days and nights in the grave.
 2. We can only speculate, but likely Saul was in the darkness and torment of hell for those 3 days, suffering God’s terrors for all of his sins.
- I. “In Damascus there was a disciple named **Ananias**. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and **ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying**. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to **restore his sight**.’” (vv.10-12)
1. God had this one all planned out!

2. Ananias was an otherwise unknown, ordinary disciple—like you and me! That’s what’s so beautiful about this story—God chose to use a simple, regular guy like Ananias to pray for Saul’s (the future apostle Paul!) healing, baptize him in water, and help him receive the Holy Spirit!
 3. Thank God for simple disciples like Ananias who say “Yes” when the Lord calls!
- J. “Lord,” Ananias answered, “**I have heard many reports about this man** and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.” (vv.13-14)
1. Saul’s reputation was known far and wide—the poor saints in Damascus were trembling like defenseless lambs at the approach of a ravening wolf.
 2. But God has many ways of delivering His people out of trouble— sometimes He does it by a change wrought in their persecutors—Saul’s conversion was their salvation.
- K. “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘**Go! This man is My chosen instrument** to carry My name before the **Gentiles** and their **kings** and before the **people of Israel**. I will show him **how much he must suffer** for My name.’” (vv.15-16)
1. God revealed to *Ananias*, not Saul, the basic outline of Saul’s future life and ministry: he would primarily be the apostle to the Gentiles, his commission would bring him before kings, and he would also preach to his fellow Israelites, but from them he would suffer the keenest persecution.
 2. “My chosen instrument to **carry My name**”
 - a) How simple: each one of us is chosen by God to carry the name of Jesus wherever we go.
 - b) Whether we are a nurse, business owner, mechanic or teacher (we should be doing what we are *skilled at* and *passionate about*), the most important thing is to **carry the name of Jesus** with us!
 3. “How much he must suffer for My name.”
 - a) Instead of inflicting pain and suffering on Christ’s followers (as he done in the past), Saul would now be on the receiving end of that persecution.

- b) Paul gave a partial list of some of his sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:23-33.
- L. “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and **be filled with the Holy Spirit.**’ Immediately, something like **scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.** He got up and **was baptized.**” (vv.17-18)
1. “Brother Saul” – how gracious was this Ananias, acknowledging not his Jewish brother, but his brother in Christ, for Saul had now joined the family of the redeemed!
 2. In Christ’s commission to Ananias, there was only mention of laying on his hands to restore Saul’s sight; but Ananias added two other integral parts of the gospel message (see Acts 2:38): be **baptized** and **receive the Holy Spirit** (Jesus didn’t have to tell him because those commands are implicit in the gospel commission).
 3. “Something like **scales** fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again.”
 - a) It seems that the brightness of the light that Saul had seen literally burned the cornea of his eyes.
 - b) In any event, amazing grace was now removing his Pharisaical blindness, enabling him to see—really see!
- M. In Paul’s testimony given later in Jerusalem, he would add a few details in his dramatic and amazing conversion story:

Acts 22:12-16: ¹²A man named **Ananias** came to see me. He was a **devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews** living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴Then he said: “The God of our fathers has chosen you to **know His will** and to **see the Righteous One** and to **hear words from His mouth.** ¹⁵You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? **Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.**”

VI. SAUL IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

Acts 9:19-31: *Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.* ²⁰*At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.* ²¹*All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”* ²²*Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.*

²³*After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,* ²⁴*but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.* ²⁵*But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

²⁶*When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.* ²⁷*But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.* ²⁸*So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.* ²⁹*He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.* ³⁰*When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

³¹*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.*

A. **“At once he began to preach in the synagogues** that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet **Saul grew more and more powerful** and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” (vv.20-22)

1. Saul wasted no time obeying Christ’s call—he began to preach Jesus!
2. His changed life was a compelling testimony to everyone.

- B. Persecution rapidly arose in Damascus, the Jews there conspiring to kill Saul, but he escaped safely to Jerusalem. (vv.23-25)
- C. “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but **they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple**. But **Barnabas** took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.” (vv.26-28)
1. So amazing was the miracle of Saul’s conversion that it was difficult for the other Christians to believe that it was true.
 2. Barnabas played a key role in getting the apostles in Jerusalem to accept Saul, and he would play a much bigger role later on in Paul’s ministry.
- D. “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” (v.31)

VII. AENEAS AND DORCAS

Acts 9:32-43: ³²As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

³⁹Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. ⁴⁰Peter 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. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

⁴²This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

- A. God used another healing miracle (Aeneas) in Peter’s ministry to expand the gospel message (vv.32-25)
 - 1. Aeneas, had been bedridden for 8 years, was instantly and miraculously healed.
 - 2. “All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him [Aeneas] and turned to the Lord.” (v.35)
- B. The first recorded instance in the early church of a dead person being raised to life results in many more being added to the church (vv.36-43)
 - 1. Dorcas was raised to life by Peter.
 - 2. “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.” (v.42)

VIII. SUMMARY

- A. In Acts 8 & 9, persecution of the early church continued to intensify, but the Sovereign God showed how He is always in control—sometimes He uses persecution to scatter His people to new places—at other times, He miraculously changes the *persecutor* (Saul) to become a champion for the faith.
- B. The gospel net continued to expand, now including Judeans, Samaritans, Ethiopians, and soon... all of the Gentile nations.
- C. Another important truth in these chapters is that **God uses ordinary people** like Philip and Ananias to accomplish awesome things—this should be a great encouragement to us all.
- D. Saul, aka Paul, is now center stage—in a few more chapters, Paul will be the predominant church leader until the conclusion of Acts.

- E. From Paul's conversion, we can identify **7 marks or evidences of a true Christian conversion**:
1. He met Jesus (Acts 9:4-6) and heard His voice—he had a personal encounter with the risen Christ;
 2. He humbled himself (fell to the ground) and longed to know the Lord's will and obey Him; (Acts 9:6)
 3. He began to pray; (Acts 9:11)
 4. He was baptized in water and received the Holy Spirit; (Acts 9:17-18)
 5. He united in fellowship with other believers; (Acts 9:19)
 6. He began to testify and preach Christ; (Acts 9:20)
 7. He grew in grace and strength; (Acts 9:22)
- F. In the next chapter, the camera is focused back on Peter and the next quantum leap for the gospel—the Gentiles!