

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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ACTS 8:9-9:31

The only gate in Jerusalem that opens eastward is St. Stephen's Gate. The ancient gate was redesigned in the 1900s to allow cars traveling in and out. It gets its name from a tradition that Stephen was stoned nearby. *And how appropriate*, to name a gate opening out of the city after Stephen. It was his martyrdom that tossed the early Christians out of their nest. Jesus ordered His disciples to go into all the world and teach the Gospel. Yet as late as the end of Acts 7, they were content to hang out at home. But with the stoning of Stephen, Jerusalem was no longer a safe place. Rabbi Saul, instigator of Stephen's stoning, began to wage a one-man war against the Church. In Acts 8 God uses persecution to deploy His troops.

Among those who first launched out was another deacon named Philip. Philip moved up the road into the hills of Samaria, and preached Jesus to the locals. He healed the lame and cast out demons. Miracles happened. And this attracted the attention of a Samaritan who was no stranger to demons. He'd consorted with them. He was a sorcerer named “Simon.”

We start tonight in Acts 8:9, “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city...” Simon dabbled in the occult. He practiced witchcraft. This Simon was the local witchdoctor of Samaria. “And (he had tapped into *someone's* power source... for he) “astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great...” This Simon also had an ego. He claimed to be “*someone great,*” and evidently he backed it up with some fanfare. Luke notes, “To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” Either through *demonic power* or *sleight of hand* Simon was able to dazzle the crowd. The Samaritans were ignorant of spiritual matters so by default they attributed Simon's amazing powers to God. “And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.”

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” It was amazing... the town witchdoctor had converted to Christ. Whether Simon's faith was sincere or bogus we're not sure. But he was certainly impressed by Philip's miracles...

“*Sorcery*” is the practice of tapping into spiritual power apart from God. Simon was a pagan who relied on nature, demons, the stars. He claimed psychic powers – that he was in touch with primal forces. He was into power regardless of its source. I'm sure much of his so-called “*power*” was nothing more than illusion and deception. He had a few magic tricks up his sleeve. *And how do we know this?* Because he was amazed at Philip's miracles. They were real! They had no other explanation than God. Simon knew how to manipulate and deceive a crowd. That's why he could see Philip was legit.

“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.” If we stopped reading here we would become confused. Isn't every believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Without the Spirit the Samaritans could've never been saved? Verse 16 explains their deficiency... “For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” In Acts 1-2 we discussed three experiences we can have with the Holy Spirit. He's *with us* before conversion - *in us* at conversion - but He also wants to *fall upon us* with spiritual power. This often occurs after a person comes to Christ. Some Pentecostals call it the “**Second Blessing.**” The Bible calls it the “**baptism**” or “**filling**” of the Spirit. Just as a person who's baptized in water is immersed in the liquid, likewise the person baptized in the Holy Spirit is engulfed in the Spirit's power. You've probably heard the hymn, “**mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.**” Well, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a thunderstorm of living water. It's like sitting in a dunking tank at the county fair. The Spirit hits the lever and you're suddenly over your head in Holy Spirit power.

Here's what happened in Samaria... People were saved and baptized as Christians. This is what's meant by the phrase “*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” But before Peter and John arrived, they had no knowledge of the second blessing – *the baptism of the Spirit.* He had yet to fall “*upon*” them. But in verse 17 Peter and John fix the problem, “**Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.**” Peter explained more fully the work of the Spirit and they received. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus promised Peter, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom...**” Peter was the doorman who unlocked the Gospel to each new racial group – the Jews at Pentecost, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles in Caesarea. Peter was the continuity God used to show we're all one Church.

Verse 18, “**And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.**” Notice “*Simon saw that... the Holy Spirit was given.*” That means there had to be some discernible sign... *Was it speaking in tongues? Or prophecy?* 1 Corinthians 14 explains not everyone will speak in an unknown tongue, but often it occurs when you're filled with the Spirit. It's a blessing of praise. Tongues could've been the outward demonstration that Simon saw. *Whatever the sign, Simon wanted the power...* I'm not a magician, but I've been told that magicians will often sell their tricks to each other. Perhaps, that's why Simon thought he could purchase the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is where we get the sin of “**simony**” – an attempt at purchasing the authority or power of God. In the Middle Ages ecclesiastical offices and even forgiveness was sold by the Pope and the Church for a monetary price. And the sin of simony is still around. In some churches positions and influence are doled out to the largest donors. People buy spiritual authority. Of course, this should never be. God's gifts are just that - gifts! If we could buy them – *with money or good works* - we'd cheapen them. His favor is not for sale. The Greek word for spiritual gifts is “*charismata*” - or “*grace gifts.*” The Spirit's empowerment is prompted by *grace* - not *gold or good works.*

Verse 20, “**But Peter said to him, Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!**” Peter is clear, the ministries and power of the Spirit are not for sale! “**You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.**” Usually we think of *envy* as materialism, rather than a spiritual sin. Like coveting a neighbor's car, or house, or boat. But it's also possible to be envious of another person's ministry. “*Why does she get to teach Bible studies, while all I'm asked to do is cook meals for sick people?*” “*What qualifies him to be an elder, and not me?*” *We're jealous!*

We need to guard against spiritual envy – this was the sin of Simon. As Peter said, he was “**poisoned by bitterness.**” Don't let that happen to

you! Verse 24, “Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.” We're never told what happened to Simon, but there's a tradition that he became a leading heretic and opponent of the early church. He founded a belief called *Gnosticism* - the heresy Paul refutes in the book of Colossians. There're also reports he went mad and died by burying himself alive. Bitterness and jealousy can form a maximum security prison from which it's difficult to escape. By all accounts Simon never regained his freedom.

“So when they (Peter and John) had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” The church in Jerusalem – the first church – the big 12 apostles had now put their stamp of approval on the spiritual awakening in Samaria. Imagine how exciting it was for Philip to be on the cutting edge of the great commission. He's riding a spiritual wave, when he receives strange orders...

Verse 26, “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” And notice the next words, “This is desert.” The road to Gaza was like Interstate 16 that runs south from Macon to Savannah. There's not a more *barren, boring* stretch of road in the country.

Philip was being asked by God to leave behind a spiritual revival – *souls were getting saved, miracles were happening, a church was blossoming of which Philip was the leader. Samaria was where the action was...* yet now Philip is told to go to an undisclosed location on a lonely highway to nowhere! *This move just didn't make sense*, yet Philip obeyed. What do you do when God gives you instructions that don't make sense? Philip obeyed God. Verse 27, “So he arose and went.” Apparently, celebrity or a large ministry wasn't Philip's goal. His ambition was to please His Lord. He was a servant – a deacon at heart.

“And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” We're told several facts about this fellow from Ethiopia. First, he was a “*eunuch*.” In oriental courts a queen's male servants and cabinet members were often castrated to protect against sexual advances. Second, this fellow was a man with clout. He was the queen's treasurer. Third, he had a hunger for righteousness. This Ethiopian traveled over 200 miles across Egypt and the hot sands of the Sinai - to Jerusalem, the Holy City, looking for spiritual answers. *But now he's headed home disappointed!* All he has to show for his pilgrimage is the Gideon scroll he took from his hotel room... That's what he's reading when Philip approaches him...

“So Philip ran to him...” Notice, Philip's enthusiasm. Our English word “*enthusiasm*” comes from a Greek phrase, “*En Theos*” or “*full of God*.” Real enthusiasm is being full of God. *Philip is filled up* with the Holy Spirit! And as Philip approached the Ethiopian, he “*heard him reading the prophet Isaiah...*” Understand what's involved when the Holy Spirit leads you to share your faith with another person. If God is prompting you, He's also working on the other guy. You can trust the Spirit is on both ends of the connection. The Angel told Philip to go to Gaza, now the Spirit is priming the heart of the Ethiopian. He's reading a Bible, and Philip recognizes he's reading from Isaiah. In fact, he's reading a Scripture that spoke prophetically of Jesus. And Philip asked, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*” And he said, “*How can I, unless someone guides me?*” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.” By this point, Philip realizes he's in on a “*God thing*.” His encounter with the Ethiopian is being orchestrated by God!

In fact, “The place in the Scripture which he read was this: *“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.”* Philip couldn’t have asked for a better launching pad for the Gospel - [Isaiah 53](#). The Ethiopian was pouring over the famous passage about the Suffering Servant - the clearest description of the sacrifice of Jesus in the whole OT.

“So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*” Apparently, they came to a brook, and the guy wanted to be baptized. We assume from this that baptism in the early church was by full immersion. If Philip had sprinkled the Ethiopian, a canteen would’ve done the job. But for him to be fully immersed they needed a body of water.

Notice again the Ethiopian’s question in verse 36, *“What hinders me from being baptized?”* “Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” I’ll never forget one of our CC baptisms. It was held at a local swimming pool. A woman and her daughter had gotten saved and were being baptized. She warned me in advance her husband might be there. He was a tough guy – lived a rough life. He hadn’t been to church in over a decade. I’d just baptized the daughter and was about to baptize the woman when all of a sudden I heard a splash! It was the husband. He’d jumped in the pool fully clothed. If I remember correctly he didn’t even take off his shoes. Tears streamed down his face as he waded his way over to us. And I’ll never forget his question, *“What do I need to do to be baptized?”* I told him, *“If you believe in Jesus with all your heart, you may.”* It was all right out of the book of Acts! He replied, *“I believe...”* And I ended up baptizing him and his wife together. There wasn’t a dry eye in the house!

I like Philip’s response to the Ethiopian, *“If you believe... with all your heart.”* Salvation is by faith, but that belief has to come from the heart. Remember James 2:19 tells us, *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!”* The demons acknowledge the facts about God. They believe with their heads. But to believe with your heart is to pledge allegiance. It’s faith that embraces a new way of life. *And heart faith is saving faith.* Philip is careful not to *water down* the prerequisites for *baptism*. The Ethiopian needs to check his sincerity.

Verse 38, *“So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”* But this wasn’t the end of the story for either Philip or the Ethiopian. This African dignitary returned home, and shared his faith with other Ethiopians. Even today a vibrant Christian community exists in Ethiopia that traces its roots to the eunuch. A black African was one of Christianity’s first converts.

And what happened to Philip? *“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus...”* God did a little rapture practice - *“the Lord caught Philip away.”* The Greek word is *“harpazo”* or to *“snatch up”* - the same word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the rapture of the Church. Philip wound up in the coastal town of Azotus – some 35 miles north of the road to Gaza. It was obviously a miracle of transportation. *God beams up Philip!*

Verse 40, *“And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.”* Philip ends up settling in Caesarea – he and four daughters. Later in Acts 21, Paul and his buddies will hang out in Caesarea at Philip’s house. What an adventure this was for Philip!... A boring

life turns into a thrill ride when we love people, follow God regardless, and dare to share our faith.

Chapter 9, “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...” He’s still at it! Rabbi Saul had overseen the stoning of Stephen, yet rather than silence the Christians, he’d only fanned the flame. The Christians in Jerusalem were moving out and spreading the Gospel. Believers moved up the coast to Caesarea - to the hills of Samaria – now churches were springing up in Damascus - 140 miles to the northeast...

And Saul takes his rage on the road. He “went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus (The city had a big Jewish population - the first believers were Jews), so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Notice how Saul refers to Christianity – as “the Way.” Christianity isn’t just a moral code, or system of beliefs, or religious observance - it’s *a way of life*.

Stephen’s testimony had gotten under Saul’s skin. All he could think about was stamping out the message that so infuriated him. He hated everything Christian. His attack on Christianity would qualify today as a hate crime. Several years ago, two Northeastern University professors did a study on hate crimes in America. They concluded 60% of the perpetrators are thrill-seekers. Insecure people trying to be macho. 35% are turf defenders. They throw rocks at a house when a family of a different race moves onto the block. But 5% of perpetrators have deliberately built a false theology to rationalize their prejudice. These people think they’re doing God a favor by persecuting the group they hate. These are the most violent and lethal. *And this was Saul*. Pascal once observed, “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.” Saul was zealous for God, but his zeal was without knowledge. Its easy to hate what you don't understand, but that's about to change for Saul - he's about to make a new acquaintance...

Verse 3, “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground...” Some artists depict Saul on the back of a horse. The light knocked him out of the saddle. Whether Saul was *on horseback* or *on foot* he was definitely on his “high horse.” It was a long fall to the ground for a proud rabbi like Saul. He was headed to Damascus to *knock off* Christians, instead he gets *knocked off*.

“And (he) heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” We learn later the voice from heaven was Jesus. But notice what He doesn’t say, “why are you persecuting My Church?” He says, “why are you persecuting Me?” To attack His Church is to attack Jesus Himself. You cannot pick on Kathy Adams without involving me. And likewise, you can’t hurt the Bride of Christ without upsetting Jesus. He takes it personally.

Verse 5, “And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” One of my favorite John Wayne movies is “Big Jake.” In the final scene Wayne kills the bad guy. Before he dies, he looks up, “Who are you?” Wayne answers, “Jacob McCandles.” The guy is surprised, “I thought youze was dead!” Big Jake replies, “Not hardly!” Well, that’s how I hear this conversation. Saul thought Jesus was dead. But *Big Jesus* now knocks Saul off his high horse, and says, “Not hardly!”

“Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Goads were sharp metal pokers used to maneuver cows. Cattle prodders are a good analogy of the Spirit’s conviction. Stray from God and His Spirit will keep poking... you

can't get away. Saul was trying to stamp out publically the very thing that haunted him privately. Stephen's joy - his peace in the throes of death – the glory of God he radiated - was everything in life Saul wanted. Yet Stephen obtained it apart from Judaism. Stephen's Savior was a man the Jews called a blasphemer. But Saul couldn't shake his testimony. The Holy Spirit kept prodding... Usually we think of Christianity's most *vocal critics* and *violent opponents* as the hardest nuts to crack. Yet in reality they may be closest to salvation. If they didn't sense God's conviction they'd be ambivalent and apathetic, but like Saul their resistance is actually their way of kicking against the goads.

Verse 6, “So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Here's the first proof of the genuineness of a man's conversion - the cry, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” Too many people start out their Christian experience with the demand, “Lord, here's what I want You to do.” We know a person is saved, because they desire to serve.

Saul melts, he breaks. He's trembling! He's seen the light! Jesus is alive - he's met Him. And if Jesus rose from the dead it means He's Lord of life. Are you fighting against God? You can't win! It's best to surrender.

And when Saul does, Jesus gives him orders. “Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Notice, Jesus instructs us one step at a time. Before I get step two I first need to obey step one. Once Saul gets into the city, he'll be told the next step.

“And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

God's revelation to Saul worked like a camera. As soon as the light hit the film the shutter closed, and didn't reopen until the image had time to develop. God blinded his new servant Saul. He gave him 3 days in the dark room so the memory of the light of Christ would be forever etched into his mind. “Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight...” The “*Street called Straight*” still exists in the modern city of Damascus. Its the main thoroughfare that cuts east to west through the city center. “And (on the street) inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.” Here's another proof of a genuine conversion. When you've meet Jesus you'll want to talk. You'll desire to pray.

The Lord continues His instructions to Ananias. Verse 12, And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” Ananias is a bit reluctant – and you can understand. This was like God calling an American to pray for Osama Bin Laden. That's exactly how the Church saw Saul. He was terrorist enemy #1.

“But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.” God chose Saul, not vice versa. He chose him by grace. And from the beginning God had a mission in mind. He'd preach to Gentiles, kings, and Jews. And in that order... Everything about Saul's life prepared him for his mission... He was born a Jew, yet was raised in the Gentile city of Tarsus. He spoke Greek *and* Hebrew. He was a Roman citizen *and* a

Jewish rabbi. He was familiar with Greek culture, and Roman law, and Hebrew theology. Paul knew how to work with his hands and make tents, but he was also academically schooled under the greatest of Jewish rabbis - Gamaliel. He moved easily among both Gentiles and Jews - pagans and religious - princes and paupers - scholars and scrubbers. Saul was chosen and prepared...

Ironically, the biggest persecutor of Christians will be the most persecuted of Christians. Before his life is over Saul will suffer much for Jesus' sake. Verse 17, "And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul..." What a token of God's grace - how encouraging it must've been for Saul to hear Ananias say, "Brother Saul." Ananias' acceptance affirmed the Lord's forgiveness. This is what fellowship does for us. When we treat each other as brothers and sisters, the acceptance and forgiveness solidifies our identity in Christ.

Ananias tells him, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Saul is a brother, but not yet filled with the Spirit. Again, a Christian can be indwelt by the Spirit and not yet filled with the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit often occurs subsequent to conversion.

Ananias prays and "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized." The light that blinded Saul may've caused an infection that scabbed over his eyes. This was likely a reoccurring condition that plagued him his whole life. Apparently, it flared up on him during his mission to Galatia. In Galatians 4:15, he says the Church loved him and would've given him their own eyes. Some people even believe this was Paul's thorn in the flesh. The Greek word translated "thorn" means "stake or dagger." A person with trachoma develops puss over the eye that causes the lashes to become brittle. At times they dig into the eyeball. It feels like a thorn in the eye.

Verse 19, "So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." How amazing, Christianity's *chief persecutor* will become it's most *powerful preacher*.

Most NT scholars slip Galatians 1:16-17 between verses 21 and 22 to get the right chronology of Paul's early ministry. In Galatians Paul tells us after his conversion, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem..." Paul spent some time in private sorting out his theology. He retreated to the desert, possibly Mount Sinai to reconcile the work of Christ with what had been written about the Messiah in the OT. On the road Jesus revealed Himself to Saul. Now in solitude He revealed Himself in Saul. It's good to take what you've learn and ask the Lord to affirm it personally to your heart. Paul later wrote of the Gospel, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."

At the end of verse 22 Saul was winning arguments, but not souls. He had the right message, but the wrong audience. He had yet to target Gentiles... "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him." The Jewish hit squad had staked out an ambush by the gate. That's when, "The disciples took him by night and

let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” What a *let down* for Saul – literally! He loved the Jews, but he’d failed to reach them with the Gospel. I guess you could say that at this point Saul was *a real basket case*. What a humiliating way for a once-proud Saul to have to leave – *in a basket, an escape, at night, over a wall*.

This also meant Saul was apparently not a big man. He fit into a basket. There’s a 3rd century novel, “*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*” that give a written description of Paul. “He was small in size with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel.” That’s what was said of Stephen in Acts 6:15, he had “the face of an angel.” Saul now radiates the same glory that he’d witnessed in Stephen.

“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” The name “*Barnabas*” means “son of encouragement.” He was filled with grace. Barnabas wanted to look past your failures and focus on your potential. It’s no accident Barnabas was the believer who opened the door to Saul.

“So (Saul) was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists...” Stephen was a Hellenist - a Jew who’d adopted Greek culture. It seems Saul tried to take up where Stephen left off. Perhaps he still felt guilty over Stephen's death and wanted to assume his mission. Saul had yet to embrace his own calling. “But they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” It was another let down. We know from other Scriptures, Saul spent the next seven years in Tarsus, probably feeling like a failure. He’d been unsuccessful in reaching the Jews in either city - Damascus or Jerusalem. Successful ministry takes the *right man* at the *right place* at the *right time*. Saul was God’s man, but it wasn’t God’s place or time. Saul was trying to *minister for God*, but this was a time when God wanted to *minister to Saul*. Soon Saul will find success, but not among Jews - among Gentiles.

Verse 31 “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.” Their chief antagonist had been converted. Now the Church experiences a period of peace and prosperity. “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied...” Saul is not quite ready... so the scene shifts back to Peter...