

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 8:9-9:31

Of the eight gates in the walls of modern Jerusalem only St. Stephen's Gate opens eastward. The gate opens to the Mount of Olives. The ancient gate was recently redesigned to allow cars to travel in and out.

The gate 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. For it was his martyrdom that caused early Christianity to spread.

Jesus ordered His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Yet as late as the end of Acts 7, the Christians 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 war against the Church. In Acts 8 God uses persecution to jumpstart evangelism.

And among those who launched out was another deacon named **Philip**. He moved up the road into the hills of Samaria, and preached Jesus to the locals.

Philip healed the lame and exorcised demons.

Miracles were happening in Samaria. And this attracted the attention of a Samaritan who was no stranger to demons. History refers to him as **Simon Magus - Simon the magician**. He had consorted with demons. He was a sorcerer, a wizard, a witchdoctor.

We start tonight in Acts 8:9, “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great...” Simon obviously had an ego, claiming to be “*someone great.*”

But apparently he’d backed it up. 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 through *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 the hand of 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.”

Whether Simon’s faith was sincere or bogus we’re not sure. But he was impressed by Philip’s miracles...

Realize, “*sorcery*” is the practice of tapping into a spiritual power apart from God. And Simon had been a sorcerer. He’d been a pagan who relied on nature, and demons, and the stars. He claimed psychic powers.

You could say he was the Harry Potter of Samaria.

According to Simon, he was in touch with primal forces. He had envied power regardless of its source.

I'd imagine much of his so-called "power" was nothing but illusion and deception and sleight-of-hand. He had a few magic tricks up his sleeve. *And how do we know this?* He was amazed at Philip's miracles.

They were real! They had no other explanation than God. Simon knew how to create illusions and deceive a crowd. That's why he could see that 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." Peter and John were representatives of the Church. These apostles were sent to validate the legitimacy of the revival sweeping through Samaria.

Of course, if we stopped reading here we'd end up confused. *Doesn't verse 12 say that the Samaritans were already saved? And isn't every believer in Jesus in-dwelted by the Holy Spirit? What of the Spirit did they receive from Peter and John?... Verse 16 explains what these Samaritan believers were missing...*

"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 a person can have with the Holy Spirit. He's **with us** before our conversion

- He's *in us* at the point of our 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 a person baptized in God's Spirit is engulfed or soaked in the Spirit's power.

You've probably heard the hymn, "**mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.**"

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a thunderstorm of living water. It's like sitting in a dunking tank at the Hallelujah Fest, when faith hits the lever and you're suddenly in over your head in Holy Spirit power.

Here's what had 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 this second blessing - *the baptism of the Spirit*. He had yet to fall "**upon**" any of them. The Spirit was **in them**, but not **upon them**.

Thus, verse 17, "**Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.**" Apparently, Peter and John explained that God had more for these new Christians. There was more to the Spirit's work in their life - not just a *transformed life*, but an *empowered life*.

And it was important that Peter came to Samaria.

Remember Matthew 16:19, Jesus made a promise to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom..."

Peter was the doorman that 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 something discernible that accompanied the baptism of the Spirit... *Was it speaking in tongues? Or prophecy?*

1 Corinthians 14 explains that speaking in an unknown tongue, often occurs when believers are filled with the Spirit (*often, but not always*). Tongues is a means of praise. And tongues could've been the outward demonstration that Simon witnessed here.

Whatever the sign, Simon wanted the power...

I'm not a magician, but I've been told that magicians will sell their tricks to one another. Perhaps, that's why Simon thought he could purchase the Spirit's power.

This is where we get the sin of "**simony.**" **It's the attempt of purchasing the gifts and favor of God.**

In the Middle Ages ecclesiastical offices - and even forgiveness for sin - was sold by the Pope and the Roman Catholic hierarchy 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. Folks are able to buy spiritual authority.

This should never be! God's gifts are just that - gifts!

If we could buy His gifts, *with money or good works*, we would cheapen them. God's favor is not for sale.

The Greek word for spiritual gifts is "**charismata**" - or "**grace gifts**." The Holy Spirit's empowerment is prompted by *grace* - not sold for *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 God's Spirit are **not for sale!**

Peter says, "**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 new car, or nice house, or boat.

But it's also possible to be envious of another person's ministry - even their spiritual gifts. "**Why does she get to teach Bible studies, while all I'm asked to do is cook meals for sick people?**" or "**What qualifies him to be an elder in the church, and not me?**" *It's jealousy!*

We need to guard against spiritual envy - this was the sin of Simon of Samaria. 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.”* The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Simon, but according to tradition he soured. He became a leading heretic, and an opponent of the early church. It was this Simon who founded a belief called *Gnosticism* - the heresy Paul would refute in the book of Colossians. There are also reports Simon went mad, and died by burying himself alive.

Bitterness and jealousy can become a deep pit from which there's no escape. Let's guard against envy.

“So when they (that is, 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 Jerusalem church - the first church - the twelve apostles -* had put their stamp of approval on the spiritual awakening in Samaria.

Imagine how exciting this was for Philip. He was 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, backwoods* stretch of highway in the country.

Understand, 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.

Verse 27, **“So he arose and went.”** Apparently, celebrity status, or a large ministry wasn’t Philip’s goal.

His ambition was obedience. He wanted to please His Lord. Philip 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.” Several facts emerge about this Ethiopian...

First, he was a **“eunuch.”** In oriental courts a queen's male servants and male cabinet members were often castrated to protect her against sexual advances.

Second, he had clout or **“great authority.”** The word **“Candace”** or **“Kandake”** may’ve been a title. It literally means,

“royal woman.” This man reported to Candace. Apparently, he was Ethiopia’s Secretary of Commerce.

Third, this man had a hunger for righteousness. He had 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 Bible he took from his hotel room drawer... *That’s what he’s reading when Philip approaches...*

“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 going on when the Holy Spirit leads you to share your faith with another person... *If God is prompting you, you can be sure He’s also working on the other guy.*

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 out-loud, and Philip recognizes it’s Isaiah. In fact, the Scripture he’s reading speaks 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 his encounter with this 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. It was [Isaiah 53](#).

The Ethiopian was pouring over the famous prophecy predicting 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.”

What a divine set-up! Obviously God wanted this man to be saved. In fact, it’s a *set-up* when anyone gets saved! We come to God, *because He draws us*.

[Often we say we found God, but actually He finds us.](#)

“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?*” The road to Gaza is desert. Water is scarce. Apparently, they passed a brook, and the guy wanted to be baptized.

And we assume from this episode that baptism in the early church was by full immersion. If Philip sprinkled the Ethiopian,

a canteen would've done the job. But for him to be fully immersed they needed a body of water.

Yet notice again the Ethiopian's question in verse 36. He asks, *"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 at a local swimming pool.

A woman and her daughter had gotten saved and were baptized that day. 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 dunk the woman when suddenly I heard a splash! It was the husband. He had jumped into the pool fully clothed. If I remember correctly he didn't even take off his shoes.

Tears were streaming down his face as he waded over to us. And I'll never forget his question, *"What do I need to do to be baptized?"* I quoted Philip to him, *"If you believe in Jesus with all your heart, you may."*

It was right out of the book of Acts!

He replied, *"I believe..."* And I baptized him and his wife together. *There wasn't a dry eye in the house!*

I like Philip's response to the Ethiopian's question, *"If you believe... with all your heart."* Salvation is by faith, but that belief has to come from your heart.

Remember James 2:19. The apostle writes, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" The demons mentally 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 saving faith is **heart faith**, not **head 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 Philip or the Ethiopian. This African official went home, and shared his faith with his people. This Ethiopian brought Christianity to the African continent.

Even today a vibrant Christian community still exists in Ethiopia that can trace its roots to this 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..." Apparently, God had a little rapture practice.

We're told, "*The Lord caught Philip away.*" The Greek word is "harpazo" or "to snatch" - the same word is 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.

Verse 40, “**And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.**” Philip and his four daughters ended up settling in the beautiful, sea-side town of Caesarea. Later in Acts 21, Paul and his buddies will hang out in Caesarea at Philip’s house.

What an adventure for Philip! Life is a thrill ride when we love others, follow God, 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, and waged war to silence Christians. Yet his venom had only fanned the flame of their witness.

As Christians fled the persecution they took the Gospel with them, and spread it wherever they went.

Believers had moved from Jerusalem up the coast to Caesarea - into the hills of Samaria - now churches were springing up in Damascus - 140 miles 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, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.**”

The first believers were Jews, under Jewish authority, so Saul seeks priestly permission to round up the believers and imprison them in Jerusalem.

And notice how Saul refers to Christianity - he calls it *“the Way.”* Christianity isn’t a moral code, or a system of beliefs, or a 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 infuriated him so. He hated everything Christian.

Today, Saul’s attack on Christianity would qualify 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 - just 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 of hate crimes have deliberately constructed a false theology to rationalize their prejudice. These people think they’re doing God a favor by persecuting the group they hated. These are the most violent and lethal haters. *And this was Saul.*

Pascal once said, *“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. It’s easy to hate someone that 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 horseback. The light from heaven knocked him out of the saddle. Whether Saul was *on horseback* or *on foot* he was definitely riding his **“high horse.”** It was a long fall to the ground for a proud rabbi like Saul.

The pompous Saul 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?”** Implied is that an attack on the Church, is really an attack against Jesus.

You can't pick on Kathy Adams without involving me. And likewise, you can't hurt the Bride of Christ without upsetting the Groom. He takes it personally.

Verse 5, **“And (Saul) said, “Who are You, Lord?”**

One of my favorite John Wayne movies is **“Big Jake.”**

In the final scene the villain, Richard Boone, gets shot. Boone looks up at John Wayne, and says, **“Who are you?”** Wayne answers, **“Jacob McCandles.”** He's surprised, **“I thought you'ze was dead!”** Wayne replies, **“Not hardly!”** clip *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 cattle prodders. They were sharp pokers. When cattle went astray they were used to get them back in line... And this is a good illustration of the Holy Spirit's conviction. Stray from God and His Spirit pokes at you... you can't escape His prodding.

Saul was trying to stamp out publicly, 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. His Savior was a Man Israel had labeled a blasphemer. But Saul couldn't shake his testimony. God's Spirit kept prodding his conscience.

Usually we think of Christianity's most *vocal critics* and *violent opponents* as the hardest nuts to crack.

Yet in reality they're the ones who may be closest to salvation. If they didn't sense the Spirit's conviction they would be ambivalent, 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 - it's 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*, when they desire to *serve*.

The angry 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, tonight?

If so, you can't win! It's best to surrender.

And when Saul does surrender, Jesus gives him his marching 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 Saul gets step two, he first has to obey step one. Once he gets into the city, he's 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 it didn't reopen until the image had time to develop.

God blinded his new servant Saul, and gave him three 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." Again, God is at work on both ends of an equation. He's not only whittled Saul down to size. He's also preparing a messenger to speak to Saul.

"And (Ananias) said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight..." This street

still exists in Damascus. It's the main east to west thoroughfare through the city center.

He continues, "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 the genuineness of Saul's conversion. When you truly meet Jesus you'll want to talk to Him, or pray!

The Lord continues His instructions to Ananias.

In verse 12, And in a vision (Saul) 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." You can understand Ananias' reluctance. Saul had a reputation. This would be like God calling you to witness to the very person who murdered your family.

That's how the Church saw Saul. He was a terrorist.

"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 had chosen Saul, not vice versa. And from the beginning God had a mission for Saul. He'd preach to Gentiles, and kings, and Jews. And in that order...

Everything in 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 the Jewish rabbis at the time - Gamaliel.

He moved easily among Gentiles and Jews, pagans and religious people, princes and paupers, scholars and servants. Saul was chosen and prepared by God!

Ironically, *the biggest persecutor of Christians will become the most persecuted of Christians.* Before his life is over Rabbi 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 was for Ananias to say, "*Brother Saul.*"

Ananias' acceptance of Saul as his "*brother*" affirmed the Lord's forgiveness. This is what fellowship does. When we treat each other as brothers and sisters - our recognition solidifies our identity in Christ.

Then 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.*" Realize, Saul is a brother, but not yet filled with the Spirit. Again, a Christian can be in-dwelted by the Spirit and not filled with the Spirit.

As with the case of the Samaritans, the baptism of the Spirit occurred subsequent to Saul's conversion.

Here 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 Paul his whole life.

Apparently, it flared up on him during his journey to Galatia. In Galatians 4:15, Paul says the Church loved him so much they would’ve given him their own eyes.

Some folks believe this was Paul's “*thorn in the flesh*” he speaks of in 2 Corinthians 12. The Greek word translated “*thorn*” means “*stake or dagger.*” A person with trachoma develops puss over the eye that causes the eyelashes 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.” He had been fasting for three days.

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, Rabbi Saul was now using his knowledge of the Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the

Messiah. Christianity's *chief antagonist* had suddenly become its *main proponent*.

Most NT scholars slip Galatians 1:16-17 between verses 21 and 22 to get the chronology of Paul's early ministry. In Galatians Paul tells us that 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..." After Saul's conversion he left Damascus and spent time in private rethinking his theology.

Some folks believe Saul retreated to the desert, possibly Mount Sinai, to reconcile the work of Christ with what was written in the OT about the Messiah.

On the Damascus Road Jesus revealed Himself to Saul. Now in solitude Jesus will reveal Himself in Saul.

It's good to take what we learn and ask the Lord to make it personal. 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." Paul got the crucial elements of his faith not from a school, or a podcast, or a teacher, but from the Lord Himself.

At the end of verse 22 Saul was winning arguments, but not souls. He had the right message, but he had 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 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 had 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 this once-proud rabbi to have to depart from Damascus - *in a basket... an escape... at night... over a wall...*

This also meant that 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 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."

Remember, the latter is what they said of Stephen in 6:15 - he had "the face of an angel." Saul now radiates the same glory that he had 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." And who can blame them. He had been archenemy of the church.

"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. He looked past your failures and focus on

your potential. It's no accident he was the believer who welcomed 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...”

Remember, Stephen was a Hellenist. He was a Jew who had adopted Greek culture. It seems Saul tried to take up where Stephen had 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 his hometown of Tarsus, perhaps feeling like a failure. He was unsuccessful in reaching the Jews in either city - in **Damascus** or in **Jerusalem**.

Understand, **fruitful ministry takes the *right man at the right place at the right time***. Saul was God's man, but it wasn't yet God's place or God's time.

Saul was trying to *minister for God*, but this was a time when God wanted to *minister to Saul*. Soon he'll find success, but not among Jews - among Gentiles.

Verse 31, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.”

The church's chief antagonist had been converted.

The Church now 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 for the ministry God has for him... so the scene shifts back in Chapter 10 to Peter...