

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 8:9-9:31

Today is **Halloween**, or on the Christian calendar, "**All Hallows' Eve**." It was believed that on this night the veil between the physical and spiritual becomes very thin, allowing for entities like ghosts, goblins, and evil spirits to cross from the supernatural into the natural world.

And "**sorcery**" is the attempt to tap into or manipulate these spirit beings in ways apart from God and His will.

For most Americans, tonight is an occasion to wear costumes, eat candy, throw a party - but in the dark world of the occult, Halloween is prime time for sorcery and seances. It's the center stage for evil practices.

And in Acts 8, we have a story that mentions a man who would've been right at home on Halloween. This man was a sorcerer, a wizard. He lived in Samaria and had consorted with demons and demonic powers. His name was "**Simon Magus**" or "**Simon the magician**."

With the stoning of Stephen, Jerusalem was no longer a safe city for Christians. Rabbi Saul, instigator of Stephen's execution, was waging war against the Church. Yet as believers fled the city, they took the Gospel with them. God used Saul's persecution to spark evangelism and push the spread of Christianity.

And among those who moved out was Stephen's fellow deacon, **Philip**. He went north into the hills of Samaria and preached Jesus. The lame were healed and demons were

exorcised. Miracles happened. And this caught the attention of Simon, a local witch doctor.

We start this morning 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...”

This Simon obviously had an ego, claiming to be “*someone great.*” But apparently, he had 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 *sleight of hand*, Simon was able to dazzle a crowd.

The locals were ignorant of spiritual matters, so by default, they attributed his 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.”

We’re not sure whether Simon’s faith was sincere or bogus. But he was impressed with Philip's miracles.

Again, “*sorcery*” is the practice of tapping into spiritual power other than from God. And Simon had been a practitioner. In a former life, he’d relied on black magic, demons, paganism, astrology, psychic powers.

Call this man, “the Harry Potter of Samaria.” Simon had coveted spiritual power regardless of its source.

I’d imagine much of Simon’s so-called “power” was nothing but illusion and deception. He had a few magic tricks. *How do I know?* Because he was amazed at Philip’s miracles. He could tell *they were the real deal!*

Simon knew how to play a crowd. That’s why he could see that Philip was legit. Simon Magus knew Philip’s wonders had no other explanation than God.

“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 and apostles of the Church. They came to validate the legitimacy of the revival sweeping through Samaria.

Of course, if we stopped reading here, we’d end up confused. *For doesn’t verse 12 say 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 lacking...*

“For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Recall earlier in Acts we outlined three experiences a person can have with the Spirit. He’s *with us* before we’re

saved. He dwells *in us* when we're converted. But He also wants to *fall upon us* with spiritual power.

And 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 believer is baptized or immersed in water; a person baptized in God's Spirit is engulfed in the Spirit's power. You've heard the hymn, "**mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.**"

The **[VIDEO CLIP]** baptism of the Holy Spirit is like sitting in a dunk tank at the Hallelujah Fest; when faith hits the lever, you're suddenly in over your head in Holy Spirit power.

Here's what happens in Samaria... Folks are saved and water baptized as Christians. This is what's meant by the phrase "*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*"

But they had no knowledge of *the baptism of the Spirit*. He had yet to fall "*upon*" 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 to the Samaritans that God had more for them. There was more to the Spirit's work in their life. **They were entitled not just to a *transformed life*, but an *empowered life*.**

And Peter's presence in Samaria was important. In **Matthew 16:19**, Jesus had promised 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 - here, the Samaritans - and later, the Gentiles in Caesarea.*

The apostles and Peter were 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.*” This means there were discernible signs that accompanied the baptism of the Holy Spirit. *Was it speaking in tongues? Or prophecy?*

In Acts, speaking in an unknown tongue often occurred when believers were filled with the Spirit (*not always, but often*). Tongues is a type of praise to God. And tongues could've been what Simon witnessed.

But whatever the sign, he wanted the power.

Now, I'm not a magician, but I've heard 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 sinfully sold by the Pope and the Roman Catholic hierarchy for a monetary amount.

And the sin of simony is still around... In some churches, positions and influence are doled out to the largest donors. Folks still try to purchase spiritual clout. But such authority is not for sale. God gives it as a gift.

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 as a spiritual sin. Like coveting a neighbor’s new car, or 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 tradition says he became a leading heretic and an opponent of the early church.

Some say it was Simon who founded *Gnosticism*, the first-century heresy refuted by Paul in Colossians.

There were also reports Simon went mad and died by burying himself alive. Jealousy can become a deep pit from which there’s no escape. Let’s guard against it.

“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.” Through their visit, the 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 a revival. 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 between Macon and Savannah. It was a barren, boring stretch of highway.

Philip is being asked to leave a spiritual revival: *souls are getting saved, miracles are happening, a church is blossoming of which Philip is the leader.* **Samaria is where the action is...** yet now God tells Philip to go to an undisclosed location on a lonely road to nowhere!

And though this didn’t make sense, Philip obeyed.

Verse 27, “So he arose and went.” Apparently, celebrity status or a large ministry wasn’t his goal. Philip’s ambition was obedience. He was a deacon (or servant) at heart. All he wanted was to please His Lord.

“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 the oriental courts of antiquity, a queen's male servants were often castrated to protect the queen against sexual advances.

Second, he had “*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, he hungered for righteousness. He’d traveled over 200 miles across Egypt, the hot sands of the Sinai, to Jerusalem, the Holy City, looking for answers.

But he’s now headed home disappointed! All he got from his pilgrimage was the Gideon Bible he took from his hotel room drawer... And that’s what he’s reading when Philip approaches... “So Philip ran to him...”

And as he encountered the Ethiopian, he “*heard him reading the prophet Isaiah...*” Realize what’s going on, when the Holy Spirit leads you to share your faith with a person, *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 this 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, I’m sure he realizes this encounter is being orchestrated by the hand of 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’s 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.”

It’s 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.*

We say we’ve found God, but actually God 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?*” Apparently, they see a brook, and the guy wants to be baptized.

And we assume from this episode that baptism in the early church was full immersion. If Philip sprinkled the Ethiopian, a canteen would've done the job. But they stopped at a body of water, since he was immersed.

The Ethiopian had asked, *“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 CC baptism, at a local swimming pool.

A woman and her daughter had gotten saved and were being baptized that day. She'd warned me her husband might be there. He was a rough guy - hadn't been to church in decades... Well, after I baptized the daughter and was about to dunk her, I heard a splash!

The husband had jumped into the pool in his street clothes. He didn't even take off his shoes and socks.

Tears were streaming down his face as he waded to us. I'll never forget it, he said, *“What do I need to do to be baptized?”* I quoted him Philip, *“If you believe in Jesus with all your heart, you may.”* **It was right out of Acts!** He replied, *“I believe...”* And I baptized him and his wife together. *There wasn't a dry eye in the house!*

And I love Philip's response to the man's question, *“If you believe... with all your heart.”* Salvation is by faith, but that belief has to come from your heart.

In James 2:19, the apostle writes, *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and*

tremble! Demons agree with the facts about God. They believe intellectually, with their heads.

But to believe with your heart is to pledge allegiance, and embrace God's way of living. **Saving faith is heart faith, not head faith.** Philip is careful not to *water down* the requirements for *baptism*. Faith has to be sincere!

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.”** Of course, this wasn't the end of the story for Philip or the Ethiopian. The African official went home and shared his faith with his people. He was one of the first to bring Christianity to Africa.

Even today a vibrant Christian community exists in Ethiopia that traces its roots to this eunuch. A black African was one of Christianity's first missionaries.

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.

“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 - a miracle!

Verse 40, **“And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.”** Philip and his four daughters end up living in the beautiful, sea-side town of Caesarea. In Acts

21, Paul and his buddies will hang out in Caesarea at Philip's house... Philip's life became an adventure because he dared to follow Jesus!

Chapter 9, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord..." He's still at it! Rabbi Saul was waging a war to silence Christians.

Yet his venom had only fanned the flame of their witness. They took the Gospel to the hills of Samaria, up the coast to Caesarea, and now to Damascus - 140 miles northeast. And in turn, Saul took 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 in Jesus were Jews under Jewish authority, so Saul seeks priestly permission to round up the Christians and imprison them back in Jerusalem.

But notice how Christianity gets labeled - it's called "*the Way*." Christianity isn't a moral code, or just a set of beliefs, or religious observances - it's *a way of life*.

Today, Saul's vicious attack on Christianity would qualify as a hate crime... 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 hate. These are the most violent and lethal haters. *And this was Saul.*

Blaise 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 knocks 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. He's headed 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 this voice was Jesus... But notice what Jesus doesn't say, "why are you persecuting My Church?" No, He says, "*why are you persecuting Me?*" Implied is that any attack on the Church is in reality an assault against our Lord.

Hey, you can't pick on my wife without involving me. And in the same way, you can't hurt the Bride of Christ without upsetting the Groom. Jesus takes it personally.

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

One of my favorite movies is “**Big Jake.**” And I love the end when the villain, Richard Boone, gets shot. He looks up at John Wayne, and says, “*Who are you?*”

Wayne answers, “**Jacob McCandles.**” He’s surprised, “*I thought you’ze was dead!*” The Ole Duke replies, “**Not hardly!**”

VIDEO CLIP *That’s how I hear this conversation...*

Saul thought Jesus was dead. But *Big Jesus* knocks the little rabbi 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 - sharp pokers. When a cow went astray you poked them back in line. And this illustrates the Spirit’s conviction. Stray from God - you get poked! 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 he radiated was all that Saul wanted, yet Stephen obtained it apart from Judaism. His Savior was the Man, Israel had labeled a blasphemer. Saul couldn’t shake the Spirit’s prodding.*

Usually, we think of Christianity's most *vocal critics* and *violent opponents* as the hardest nuts to crack. Yet they’re the ones who may be closest to salvation.

If they didn't sense the Holy 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 a proof of the genuineness of Christian conversion. It's the cry, “*Lord, what do you want me to do?*” Not “*Lord, here's what I want done.*” If you're saved, you'll want to serve.

Note too, Saul trembles. He's been fighting God. He finally surrenders. *Have you been fighting God?* An unconditional surrender is all that will bring you peace!

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 acted like a camera. When the light hit, the shutter closed. It didn't reopen until the image had time to develop. God blinded Saul; then kept him in the dark room for three days, 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 a meeting. “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 east to west corridor through the city center.

The instructions continue, “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!

“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 feel Ananias’ reluctance. Saul had a reputation. This was like God calling you to witness to the man who murdered your family. This is how the Church saw Saul - *as 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 chose Saul, not vice versa. From the outset, God had a mission for Saul. He would preach to Gentiles, kings, and Jews. And everything in Saul’s life had prepared him for his mission. He was born a Jew, yet was raised in a Gentile city, Tarsus. He spoke Hebrew *and* Greek.

He was a Roman citizen *and* a Jewish rabbi. He knew Greek culture, Roman law, *and* Hebrew theology. Paul moved easily among Gentiles and Jews, pious and pagan, prince and pauper, scholar and servant.

And he was bound to suffer. Ironically, *the biggest persecutor of Christians was to be the most persecuted of Christians.* 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 grace! Ananias calling Saul “*brother*” affirmed God’s pardon and acceptance.

And this is what fellowship does. When we treat another as a brother, it solidifies their 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.*” Saul is a brother, but he’s not yet filled with the Spirit. Again, a Christian can be in-dwelled, but not filled. As in Samaria, here, the baptism of the Spirit occurred subsequent to Saul’s conversion.

Verse 18, And “*Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.*” The blinding light Saul saw on the Road to Damascus may’ve caused a scabbing of his eyes. This was likely a reoccurring infection that plagued him his whole life.

It may've flared up on his first missionary journey to Galatia. In Galatians 4:15, he said of the Church, they loved him so much they would've given him their eyes.

Some folks believe this was his "thorn in the flesh" he mentions in 2 Corinthians 12. A victim of trachoma develops puss over the eye that makes the eyelashes brittle. They can dig into the eyeball like little thorns.

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." Amazingly, he's now using his knowledge of Scripture to prove Jesus is Messiah. The *chief antagonist* of the faith is now its main *proponent*.

Most NT scholars place Galatians 1:16-17 between Acts 9:21 and 22 to get the chronology of Paul's early ministry. In Galatians, Paul says 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 his conversion, Paul left Damascus and retreated to the Arabian desert, possibly

Mount Sinai, to rethink his theology. He reconciled what the OT taught of the Messiah with the work of Jesus.

On the Damascus Road, Jesus revealed Himself *to Saul*. In solitude, Jesus revealed Himself *in Saul*.

Paul later wrote of the Gospel he preached, "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 human teacher, or a podcast, but from God Himself.

At the end of verse 22, Saul is winning arguments, but not souls. He has the right message, but the wrong audience. God wanted him to target Gentiles, not Jews. For the Jews send a hit squad to ambush him.

"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." Then 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 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... at night... over a wall...*

This also meant that Saul was not a big man. He fit into a basket! There's a 3rd century novel, "*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*" that gives the following 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 Acts 6:15, he had "the face of an angel." Saul now radiates the same glory 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." *And who can blame them?* Rabbi Saul had been Public Enemy #1.

"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." And Barnabas went to bat for Saul. He encouraged the Jerusalem church to welcome him.

"So he 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 Hellenist, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren (the apostles) found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus." It was another letdown.

We know from elsewhere in the NT, Saul spent the next seven years in his hometown of Tarsus, perhaps feeling like a failure. He'd been unsuccessful in reaching Jews in either **Damascus** or **Jerusalem**.

And here's a vital lesson, **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 before that would happen God wanted to *minister to Saul*. Soon he'll find success, but not *with Jews - with Gentiles*.

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

Their chief antagonist had been converted, and for a moment the Jerusalem church experiences a peace and growth. **"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 to the exploits of Peter...