

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6d: Acts 8-9:31 – Persecution and Conversion

Introduction

Under normal circumstances, we would think that persecution would kill a cause and exterminate a people. However, when the Lord is involved, there is no such thing as “normal circumstances”. We see the church go and grow in these next two chapters, watered by the blood of the saints.

Acts 8:1-4 – The Persecution

What was the result of the localized persecution in Jerusalem?

The disciples started fleeing Jerusalem and going to the outlying areas of Judea and Samaria.

How does this fit into God's plan as revealed in Acts 1:8

This was part of the spread of the gospel out of Jerusalem into all the world.

How did the disciples go forth out of Jerusalem? Were they afraid to speak the name of Christ?

Not at all, they went out preaching the gospel.

Acts 8:5-25 – The Gospel Preached in Samaria

What was Simon's position among the Samaritans?

He was a sorcerer that had bewitched the Samaritans for a long time. They supposed that he was from God and was held in great esteem among them.

Why do you suppose that it was necessary for Peter and John to come before the gifts of the Holy Spirit were imparted upon the Samaritans.

God was using this as a sign that accompanied the spread of His gospel and the mark of His authority and blessing upon it. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were necessary for the Samaritans to accomplish God's purposes for them.

What was this event that we are seeing transpire?

We are seeing the first church organized outside of Jerusalem. They had the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon them because they were an independent body that needed Divine empowerment to carry out the Great Commission.

What was Simon's root problem?

He still desired to be highly considered and regarded among the Samaritans and wanted the power to use it for his own gain.

Did Simon appear to have a repentant heart about his sin? Why or why not?

No, he was concerned about the judgment directed at him, but did not seem to be concerned about his root problem – the sin of pride. Church tradition (not Scripture) indicates that he led a heretical movement, mingling Oriental or Grecian philosophy with some elements of Christianity.

Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

What do we learn about this man that Philip went to speak to?

He was eunuch under the charge of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was a slave. He was also well educated, being able to read and was obviously fairly bright, reading through the difficult book of Isaiah. This man was also searching for the truth – the place a soul needs to be to find the Lord!

What does the eunuch acknowledge about his understanding? How does this apply to us?

He needed help to understand. This is why our job is so important. We have to help people understand the truth about the Word of God. They are not able to understand on their own.

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When they reached the water's edge, the eunuch asked about being baptized. What does this imply about what Philip included when he preached the gospel? (See also Acts 8:12)

Philip preached the gospel of Christ, but also that people are saved to serve. He preached about God's Kingdom – His sovereign rule of His subjects through His church. We shouldn't be guilty of limiting our preaching to the lost.

What was the condition that Philip gave for being baptized?

The eunuch had to have faith with his entire heart

What did the eunuch's profession mean?

He affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah by calling Him Christ (The Anointed). He also affirmed His Divinity by calling Him the Son of God.

What about the eunuch's baptism indicates that he was immersed rather than sprinkled?

It mentions that they came to a body of water and they both went down into the water. This was obviously more than sprinkling!

Acts 9:1-9 – Saul's Conversion

What was Saul's intention in going to Damascus?

He was on his way to arrest Christians that were worshipping the Lord there.

Who does the Lord accuse Saul of persecuting? What does this teach us about persecution? (See also Matthew 24:9)

Saul was persecuting Christ. Their persecutions were directed at Christian people, but Christ was the reason they were being persecuted. Whenever you endure persecution for being a Christian, you are enduring reproach for Christ.

What were the pricks to which Saul referred? (See also Acts 7:54)

It was the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon His heart as a result of hearing the gospel.

If Saul had been under conviction yet was still persecuting the church, what does this teach us about the way people respond to the gospel?

Some get immediately humbled and seek the Lord. Others rebel even harder and struggle against God. Their staunch opposition is a sign of deep conviction

At what point did Saul get saved? How do we know?

He was saved right before he said, "Lord what will thou have me to do?" We see a converted heart witnessed by calling Jesus Lord and a willingness to serve.

How and why did Saul lose his sight? (See Acts 9:4, 9:8, 22:11, Rev. 1:12-16) What does this teach us about Jesus' glorification?

Saul lost his sight because he glimpsed the glory of the Lord before shutting his eyes and falling to the ground. It never said he saw the Lord at this time, but His preceding glory blinded Saul before he could close his eyes. Tying this passage together with others, we see that Jesus was outwardly glorified upon His ascension, not upon His resurrection.

Acts 9:10-31 – The Early Ministry of Saul

What was Ananias' hesitation when the Lord instructed him to go to Saul?

Saul was a persecutor of the early church and Ananias had a natural hesitation about going to him. However, knowing it was the Lord that directed him there, he willingly went out and healed Saul.

What is ironic about Ananias going to help Saul? (See Acts 9:1-2, 9:10 and 22:11-13)

Ananias was a devout Christian man in Damascus, probably even a leader of some sort. He would have been one of Saul's main targets when he went to Damascus. God ironically uses one of his targets to go and heal him.

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What does the Lord tell Ananias that His purpose is for Saul and how does that fit into the big picture of the Book of Acts? (See Acts 1:8)

God's purpose for Saul was to use him as a "chosen vessel" to be an apostle unto the Gentiles. God had a purpose for Saul from the moment of his salvation. The same is true for you!

How was Saul so quickly able to go and preach Jesus in the synagogue? Don't most converts take more time to learn and grow? Do we see this type of thing happening today?

Saul knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well from his study as a youth. That enabled him to take this knowledge and quickly apply it in ministry. This is one reason that it is good to raise our kids in church! They learn the truth and the gospel which gives them a great advantage after they are saved. The foundation has already been laid. They are able to jump in and work more quickly.

What was initially more exciting about Saul, his message or his testimony (vs 21)? What about later (vs 22)?

People were initially more excited about his testimony because he had changed so much. Eventually though, he began to understand and apply Scriptures with greater accuracy and power, enhancing his ability to defeat their arguments.

What was the Jews reaction to Saul's conversion and his zeal in converting them?

They decided to have him killed.

How was Saul treated by the disciples?

They didn't believe he had really converted and were afraid that it was some big scheme to catch them all and have them imprisoned or killed.

Looking back at the last two questions, what lesson did Saul learn early on as a Christian? How would this help him later in his ministry?

Saul had to learn to depend on the Lord and put all of his hope and love in Him. The unbelievers hated him and the believers were suspicious of him. This happened to him several times in his ministry. He had to learn to seek approval from God alone.

Who was it that stood up for Saul and helped him to gain acceptance by the other Christians?

Barnabas, his future traveling partner intervened and helped him gain acceptance.

Assignment:

Read Acts 9:32 – 12:25 in preparation for the next lesson