

LESSON 5: ACTS 8:1 - 9:30
APRIL 6, 2016

OVERVIEW

- . Expansion through Philip – Acts 8
- . Expansion through the preparation of Paul – Acts 9:1 - 9:30

EXPANSION THROUGH PHILIP – ACTS 8

- . Expansion to Samaria – Acts 8:1-25
 - . Seed sown in Samaria following persecution – Acts: 8:1-4
 - . Stephen's martyrdom inaugurated a tremendous change
 - . Smoldering fires of persecution erupted into furious flames
 - . Hundreds of believers were killed or arrested
 - . Persecution forces many believers out of Jerusalem
 - . Many went to Samaria where Jewish orthodoxy was more liberal
 - . Samaria's mixed population and historical background
 - . Many of the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom, after its fall, had been deported in 722 BC by the Assyrian kings
 - . These people were replaced by pagan settlers from other lands
 - . Over time, the Jews still living in Samaria began to incorporate pagan idolatry in to their religious beliefs and practices
 - . In opposition to Jewish doctrine and tradition, the Samaritans built their own temple of worship on Mt. Gerizim
 - . Tension between the Jews of Judea and the Samaritan Jews became so intense that Jews traveling north from Jerusalem would bypass Samaria
 - . Jesus' ministry to the Samaritans – John 4
 - . Jesus deliberately takes the Disciples through Samaria – John 4:4
 - . Jesus deliberately encounters a Samaritan woman at the well
 - . Jesus ministers to the woman who comes to believe in Him as the Christ – John 4:7-38
 - . As the result of this one encounter, many Samaritans come to believe
 - . Samaria remains a hotbed of believers after the resurrection
- . Samaria's response to the gospel preached by Philip
 - . Philip's background
 - . Philip was not one of the original disciples
 - . His name first appears in Acts 6 with the appointing of the first deacons – Acts 6:5

- . He becomes known as Philip the Evangelist
- . Philip was sent by the disciples, to Samaria to evangelize
 - . The disciples stayed in Jerusalem to run the ministry
 - . Five years has now elapsed from the day of Pentecost
- . A great revival breaks out in Samaria
 - . Because of such a large outpouring of support, Peter and John were eventually sent to Samaria to pray for and bless the church
Acts 8:14
 - . In the early days of the church, the apostles at Jerusalem still exercised a general supervision over the progress of the Gospel
 - . Philip was able to baptize these Christian converts with water, but

not

the Holy Spirit – Acts 8:14-17

- . Peter prayed for these believers who then received the Holy Spirit
- . There are four recorded times in Acts when we see a mass conversion of believers – Pentecost – Acts 2, Samaria – Acts 8, the gentiles in the house of Cornelius – Acts 10:44, and John the Baptist disciples at Ephesus – Acts 19
- . Simon the Sorcerer - Acts 8:9-25
 - . Simon, lived in the region, and had great sorcery powers
 - . He was able to amass a great following because people believed his powers came from God
 - . When Philip came and preached the good news of Christ, Simon believed and was baptized
 - . He followed Philip everywhere and was astonished by Philip's power
 - . When Simon witnessed the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by Peter, he was greatly impressed and wanted to acquire that power
 - . He approached Peter and offered to pay a great price to acquire that power
Acts 8:18-25
 - . Peter calls out Simon saying his heart is not in the right place
 - . Simon asks Peter to pray for him and his condition
- . Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:26-39
 - . This Ethiopian was an official of the Queen of Ethiopia
 - . All the officials of the Queen were castrated
 - . Under Jewish law the Eunuch would have been excluded from membership in any Jewish synagogue
 - . This Eunuch would have been considered an outcast of Jewish society
 - . God expressly guided Philip away from his mass conversion ministry in Samaria, in the opposite direction down to the road to Gaza for this encounter with one man
 - . This Eunuch was hungry for God and was by the side of the road reading from Isaiah
 - . Philip encounters the Eunuch, proceeds to teach him the meaning of the cross and the Eunuch immediately professes his belief

- . This is the one and only mention of this Eunuch in Acts
- . Ethiopia today, has one of the largest Christian populations in all of Africa
- . Ethiopia has maintained its Christian identity for over two thousand years

EXPANSION THROUGH PREPARATION OF PAUL – ACTS 9:1-31

- . Saul's background
 - . Born at the turn of the century in the Roman city of Tarsus in southeastern Asia Minor
 - . Tarsus was an important Roman city at a major crossroads
 - . Located ten miles north of the Mediterranean Sea on a lake, which made for a great port
 - . To the north was a great Roman road connecting the east with the west, over a famous mountain pass called the Cilician Gate
 - . City also famous for Greek culture and intellectual life
 - . Had its own state supported university
 - . Tarsus probably had much to do with Saul's ability to sympathize and communicate with all types and classes of people and understand the origins of their way of thinking
 - . There were several instances in his life where he made use of his Roman citizenship
 - . Saul was born in to a Hebrew family and saturated in the Old Testament scriptures from his earliest years – Philippians 3:5
 - . He belonged to the strictest orthodox sect – the Pharisees
 - . He was trained to become a rabbi and sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, one of the most famous rabbi's of the day – Acts 22:3
- . Saul's personality
 - . Saul was as zealous, if not more so, for the religion of his fathers
 - . He earnestly strove to conform outwardly to every small detail of God's law
 - . He burned with zealous anger over this new sect
 - . The climax came with Stephen accused him, as a member of the Sanhedrin, of resisting God's Holy Spirit
 - . After Stephen, Saul's main goal was to wipe out these hated Nazarenes
- . The road to Damascus experience – Acts 9:1-18
 - . Saul was heading to Damascus, with authority from the Sanhedrin, to destroy all believers of the sect there
 - . On the road, without warning, a light as bright as an atomic explosion shone around him and he fell to the ground
 - . Christ then spoke directly to Saul – Acts 9:4-6
 - . Others were there to witness this
 - . Saul asks who this is – Acts 9:5

- . The Lord answers, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" – Acts 9:5
- . Saul immediately understood the authority speaking to him, submitted himself to that authority and surrendered his agenda over to that authority Acts 22:8
- . The Lord instructs him to go to Damascus and wait
- . When Saul gets up and opens his eyes, he is blind and needs to be guided to Damascus

- . The Lord calls Ananias to be his messenger – Acts 9:10
 - . Ananias was a disciple living in Damascus
 - . The Lord tells him to go to Paul to place his hands on him and restore his sight
 - . The Lord also tells Ananias that Paul will have seen Ananias in a vision and will be ready for him
 - . Ananias demonstrates his great belief and trust in the Lord
 - . Ananias does as instructed – after placing his hands on Saul's eyes and praying, the scales fall off and Saul can see again

- . Saul's (Paul's) preparation for his life's work after conversion – Acts 9:19-30
 - . About eleven years elapsed from Paul's conversion until his first missionary journey with Barnabas
 - . Nowhere in scripture is the period of eleven years actually stated
 - . Biblical scholars have come to this conclusion based on events described in Galatians 1:16-2:2 and dates known in secular history that corresponds to these events
 - . The following dates therefore are founded upon biblical statements compared with known dates in secular history
 - . In Damascus, Arabia and back to Damascus (three years)
 - . After a very short period of time in Damascus, preaching the very truth he had come to stamp out, non-believing Jews became furious and tried to kill him
 - . After being smuggled out of Damascus, in a basket, over the wall, he went to Arabia
 - . Very little is known about his time there but it is believed he spent great stretches of time alone, in prayer and meditation with the Lord
 - . After about three years he returns to Damascus briefly, before going to Jerusalem
 - . At Jerusalem (one – two years) – Acts 9:26-29, 22:17-21, Galatians 1:17-19
 - . The disciples were initially cold to Paul, not wanting to see him
 - . Peter, the undisputed leader of the church, lived at the home of John Mark, who is loved like a brother
 - . John Mark had a cousin, Barnabas, who was an earnest disciple from Cyprus

- . Barnabas was the one who introduced Paul to the other apostles in Jerusalem, telling them how boldly Paul had preached in Damascus and suffered for his faith
- . Following this Peter invites Paul to spend fifteen days with him at his lodging
 - . The only other disciple Paul met during this time was James
- . Paul then begins preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem – Acts 22:17-21
- . Paul's time in Jerusalem was difficult because he was considered a renegade by the Jews
- . On more than one occasion, they tried to kill him
- . God used this opposition for good in order to get Paul out of Jerusalem and prepare him for his ministry to the non-Jewish people
- . At Tarsus (six-seven years)
 - . During this time Paul preached to the Jews of Tarsus
 - . Also during this time God was helping the twelve apostles back in Jerusalem see that the Gospel was intended to be brought to all peoples, not just Jews
 - . Peter finally sees the light and opens the door to the gentile world – Acts 10:1-11:24
 - . During this time Paul was preaching and continuing to study the scriptures
 - . Paul was content to wait on God's timing, in humility, trust and patience that so distinguished him in later years

NEXT LESSON, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2016 – ACTS 9:31-12:25