



Making disciples for Christ
and helping them grow

Acts 8-11

Into Samaria

Term 3, 2014 Bible Studies

Merrylands Anglican Church

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

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INTRODUCTION

In term 3, 2013, we looked at the first 7 chapters of Acts and saw the birth of the Christian church in Jerusalem. This began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to the apostles in a powerful way. They suddenly spoke in tongues and the Jews from other nations understood what the disciples were saying in their own language. Peter stood up and proclaimed that the resurrection of Jesus proved that he was the Christ and 3000 people were converted and baptised on that day. This event was the beginning of the Christian church.

While this was a significant event, it also put the fledgling Christian church and the Jewish leadership on a collision course. For, it was the Jewish leadership (which met at the temple) who had Jesus killed believing that the Jesus movement would be destroyed with the death of its leader. However, with the resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, the believers would meet in Solomon's Colonnade in the Temple and proclaim that Jesus was the Christ. This was done with acts of power seen in the miraculous signs and wonders performed by the apostles and many people became Christians and the early church grew in number. However, this was the domain of the Jewish leadership and they saw these gatherings as a threat to the temple and to their roles as priests and leaders of the Jewish community.

Peter was arrested twice and some of the apostles were flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore. Peter could not agree to these terms as he stated...

Acts 5:29b-31 "We must obey God rather than men!"³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead-- whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Finally, Stephen, an elected leader in the church who helped to oversee the distribution of food to the widows, was arrested and brought before the Jewish leadership for trial. Stephen's speech is recorded in chapter 7 though you get the feeling that he never really got to finish what he wanted to say. The Jewish leadership were furious at his description of the vision he saw of the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56) and they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him to death. This is where Saul was first introduced into the story as he was there giving approval to Stephen's death.

With the stoning of Stephen, a wave of persecution spread and the early church scattered with only the apostles remaining in Jerusalem. In this way, the persecution had the desired effect as the Jewish Leadership wanted the followers of Jesus to scatter expecting that as they scattered the church would simply disappear. However, this persecution ushered in the next stage of church growth, for as the believers scattered they spoke the gospel to those that they met and the believers increased in number and the universal church grew. This brings to mind what Jesus said at the beginning of Acts - what many believe to be the purpose statement to Luke's second book.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This set of Sermons and Bible Studies will follow the spread of the gospel into Samaria and also see the first gentile converts to Christianity - something that was very controversial at the time.

COMMENTARIES

Bock, Darrell L.

BECNT: Acts. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007.



Though a technical commentary focusing on the Greek, it is one of my favourite commentaries. Bock is seen as an expert in Luke's writing and this commentary doesn't disappoint.

★★★★★★★☆☆

Bock, Darrell L.

A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for all Nations. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012.



This book is more like an extended Introduction to a commentary as it looks at the structure and themes of Luke and Acts.

★★★★★★★☆☆

Bruce, F. F.

NICNT: The Book of Acts: Revised Edition. Grand Rapids , Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988.



Bruce's commentary has long been the standard. It is a helpful commentary but a little stodgy at times.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Cook, David.

Teaching Acts. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2007.



A really good resource but is more of a big picture or outline commentary rather than verse by verse analysis.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Marshall, I. Howard.

TNTC: Acts. Leicester, England: IVP, 1980.



The oldest out of all of these commentaries but still very helpful. Relatively concise verse by verse commentary and probably the one for most Bible Study leaders to use.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Peterson, David G.

PNTC: The Acts of the Apostles. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009.



This is a very detailed verse by verse commentary and is one of the better commentaries. It is a high end commentary but you don't need to know any Greek to read it. A good reference by an Australian author.

★★★★★★★☆☆

Stott, John.

BST: The Message of Acts. Leicester, England: IVP, 1990.



This commentary is not technical and Stott is always easy to read. This is also more of an overview rather than a verse by verse commentary.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Of course there are other good commentaries but these are commentaries I have on my bookshelf and have used.

ACTS 8:1B-25 “MAY YOUR MONEY PERISH WITH YOU”

Acts 8:1b-3 works as a bridge between two sections of Luke’s narrative. The stoning of Stephen brought about persecution led by Saul and believers were scattered. Suddenly, the gospel was opened up to new locations and people.

- Who and what were the Christians afraid of?

- How does this paragraph fulfil what Jesus said in Acts 1:8?

PHILIP IN SAMARIA

Read Acts 8:4-8

- What did the scattered followers of Jesus do?

- Where did Philip go and what did he do there?

- Is there anything significant in the way that Luke says that Philip went **down** to Samaria (you might have to check out a map)?

SIMON THE SORCERER

Read Acts 8:9-13

- What was Simon famous for?

- What reactions did the people have to Simon the Sorcerer and then to Philip?

- How did Simon the Sorcerer react to Philip?

THE APOSTLES AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Read Acts 8:14-17

- Why do you think the apostles decided to go to Samaria?

- What did Peter and John do/not do once they got there?

- This passage has lead people to a doctrine of “Spirit Baptism” or a “Second Blessing”, why do you think it might be significant that the Holy Spirit didn’t come upon them when they believed and were baptized?

SIMON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Read Acts 8:18-25

- What did Simon the Sorcerer want?

- What did Peter have to say to Simon the Sorcerer?

- Peter called Simon the Sorcerer to repent. Did he do that?

- What did the apostles do at the end?

CONCLUSION

- There is another aspect to this story that people often overlook. Read John 1:40-42 and possibly Luke 6:14. How do the names of the main characters give us insight into what might be happening in this story?

- How can we tell the difference between a genuine leader of Christianity and a false one?

The gospel was now starting to go beyond the Jews. The Samaritans had some Jewish heritage and they knew about the Messiah and so we can see the gospel spreading out from Jerusalem to those who had been part of God’s people in the past. Next week we will see how the gospel will begin to go to those beyond Israel’s borders.

ACTS 8:26-40 “DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?”

With the stoning of Stephen there came a great persecution against Christians. This led to many Christians leaving Jerusalem and going elsewhere. Philip was one such Christian who not only left Jerusalem but also took with him the gospel and so the word of God began to spread beyond Jerusalem into other parts of the known world. Last week we saw the impact that the gospel had when Philip brought it to a Samaritan city, this week we will see how Philip explained the gospel to change the life of one man.

- › Who was Philip? (Acts 6:5-6)

A CHANCE MEETING???

Read Acts 8:26-29

- › Where was Philip when the angel told him to go?

- › What did the angel tell Philip to do?

- › Who did Philip meet and what does the passage say about him?

- › Given the Ethiopian’s status and heritage, what surprises you about what the Ethiopian had been doing?

- › Who told Philip to go to the chariot?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Read Acts 8:30-35

- › What did Philip do in verse 30?

- What was the Ethiopian's quandary and how did Philip help?

- What was the passage and how does it point to Jesus?

- How would you explain the good news of Jesus from this passage?

- What's so scary about Philip's method of evangelism?

LET'S GET BAPTISED

Read Acts 8:36-40

- What response did the Ethiopian make to this good news?

- What did this mean?

- What happened to Philip? (also check out Acts 21:8)

FOLLOWING THE GOSPEL

- There are a number of implications that arise out of this passage if we are following the trajectory of the gospel. How has Acts 1:8 been fulfilled?

Acts 1:8 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- The ends of the earth have come to Merrylands, how can we be witnesses to them?

ACTS 9:1-19A “SAUL, SAUL WHY DO YOU PERSECUTE ME?”

The good news of Jesus had been going out! Philip brought the word of God to the people in Samaria and to the Ethiopian Eunuch travelling in his chariot. The message was spreading but the first word in chapter nine tells us that God was also doing other things. The good news of Jesus wasn't only going out to the people, Jesus was also making a personal appearance to one person in particular.

THE DANGEROUS SAUL

Read Acts 9:1-2.

- What do you notice about the language that Luke used in his first sentence of chapter 9?

- What did Saul do?

THE CONFRONTATION

Read Acts 9:3-9

- Describe the confrontation between Jesus and Saul in your own words.

- What do you think Saul was thinking or feeling at this point?

- Why would God choose Saul?

- How were his travelling companions affected? Were they converted by this experience?

A VISION OF WHAT IS TO COME

Read Acts 9:10-16

- Visions abound! Who was having visions in this passage?

- What did God tell Ananias to do?

- What did Ananias think of this idea?

- What did God say to Ananias about Saul's future?

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Read Acts 9:17-19a

- Ananias did what God told him to do and went to Saul. What was so special about his greeting?

- Who had sent Ananias and what had he been sent to do?

- What do you notice about the order of things in verses 18-19?

APPLICATION

- Not everyone gets to have a Damascus Road experience, but does that make our stories any less a miracle?

- Ananias had to meet up with a person he was frightened of. What kind of person does God expect us to meet up with?

SAUL'S IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Saul had made good his escape and now wanted to meet up with other Christians. So, Saul went to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 9:26-31

- Why would Saul want to join the disciples?

- How did the disciples initially react? Why would they have reacted this way?

- Who and what convinced the apostles that Saul had genuinely converted?

- What kind of relationship did Saul then have with the apostles (9:28)?

- Who did Saul debate with? What is so significant about this? (9:29. Also Acts 6:8ff)

- How did they respond to Saul's debates with them? What did Saul have to do as a result?

- With Saul gone, what happened for the church?

APPLICATION

- Can you think of someone (a person or an organisation, etc.) who currently opposes Christianity but would have great influence for Christ if they became a Christian?

- What would you do if an enemy of Christ who had persecuted you came to real faith?

- What should we do about these enemies?

ACTS 9:32-43 “TABITHA, GET UP!”

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke presented us with small glimpses into the life of the community of believers in the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:41; 42-47; 4:32-37). The very last verse of last week’s passage gave us a similar glimpse into the life of the very early church but now it had moved beyond Jerusalem (Acts 9:31). Some say that Luke has used this “glimpse” as a natural marker in the narrative and that a new section has begun with this passage.

PETER AND AENEAS

Read Acts 9:32-35

- What was Peter doing in Lydda?
- Who did Peter meet while he was there?
- What did Peter do for Aeneas and how did people respond?

PETER AND TABITHA

Read Acts 9:36-43

- While Peter was in Lydda, two men urged him to go to Joppa. What had happened and what do you think they expected Peter to do?
- What are we told about the kind of person Tabitha was?
- What did Peter do (and didn’t do) when he arrived at the scene?
- Once Peter had finished praying, what happened next?
- What was the result of this miracle?

THE PURPOSE OF THE STORIES

Both these miracles are quite extraordinary and it makes you wonder if there were other stories like these. However, while the stories of Aenaes and Tabitha are extraordinary it is hard to know what purpose they have in the story line of Acts. Chapter 8 had mainly been about Philip though, of course, Peter also made an appearance. Chapter 9 had mainly been about Saul. Chapter 10 is going to be about a Gentile called Cornelius who converted to Christianity. So, why has Luke included these two stories at this point in the narrative? To help us think about this we are going to look at some other stories and make comparisons to these ones to see if there are any clues as to why Luke included the stories of Aenaes and Tabitha in Acts.

- Before we read any other passages, can you think of any other Biblical stories that remind you of these two stories? How might those stories help inform you about the stories of Aenaes and Tabitha?

- Read the passages below and do a comparison with Aenaes' and Tabitha's stories. What are the main points of these stories and see if there might be allusions or reasons for Luke to have included Aenaes' and Tabitha's stories in Acts.

↳ Luke 5:17-26

↳ Acts 3:1-10

↳ Acts 4:12

↳ Luke 8:50-56

↳ Mark 5:41

↳ Acts 8:9-10

- Having now read these passages, have they helped you come up with a reason why Luke might have included the miracles of Aenaes and Tabitha here?

ACTS 10:1-23 “DO NOT CALL ANYTHING IMPURE THAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAN”

Visions are something that not many people have and even less so in liberal western cultures. Yet there are parts of the world where God still speaks in visions. In this study we will see how God spoke to Cornelius and Peter through visions and angels in order to bring them together so that Cornelius and his family would become followers of Jesus.

CORNELIUS' VISION

Read Acts 10:1-8

- How does Luke describe Cornelius? What kind of person was he? (Acts 10:1-2 & 22)

- What similarities can you find between the description of Cornelius and Tabitha (Acts 9:36-39)?

- What did Cornelius see and what was Cornelius told to do?

- How did Cornelius respond to what he had seen and heard?

PETER'S VISION

Read Acts 10:9-16

- This seems like a strange vision. Try and recount the vision in your own words to see if you can understand what Peter saw.

- This might be a difficult vision to understand, especially if you have never dealt with the idea of something being considered unclean. In order to help us, let's have a look at some Old Testament passages. Read the following passages but don't get caught up in the detail of exactly what a person was or wasn't allowed to eat. Look for the reason why God decided to allow his people only to eat some foods and not others.
 - ↳ Leviticus 20:22-26

↳ Deuteronomy 14:1-21

- Peter was told to “kill and eat” (v13). The word that Luke used here was θύσον - thuson, it’s normal translation is “sacrifice, offer, slaughter in sacrifice” though it can also refer to “slay, kill (for food)” (Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon). Do you think there might be any ritual overtones used in this vision?
- The voice told Peter to not only kill and eat but to not call anything impure that God has made clean. Peter seemed to recognise that the vision and the voice were from God (v14), so why didn’t he eat given that it happened three times?
- What suddenly made the animals clean for eating? Why could Peter now eat things he never would have done in the past?

MORE THAN A CHANCE MEETING

Read Acts 10:17-23

- Peter was wondering about the vision when Cornelius’ people had found the house he was staying in. What did the Spirit tell Peter to do? (v19-20)
- Why would Peter have hesitated about going with them?
- How did Peter answer the door?
- What did Cornelius’ people say to Peter and how did he respond?
- Who was in control of this “meeting”?

APPLICATION

- We don’t have to worry so much about food laws, they are not what separates us from the world. What kind of things should we not participate in, distance ourselves from, etc. to demonstrate that we are not of this world but are God’s people? What makes us holy?

Pray that God would help you to be someone who can see the difference between what is holy (set apart for God) and what is not. Pray that God would help that distinction to be noticeable to friends and family so that they will see that there is a difference between God’s people and the world. Also pray that when people notice the difference that you may be able to tell them why there is a difference and that they should get to know about Jesus.

In the previous study we saw how Cornelius was visited by an angel and was instructed to find Peter. Peter also had a vision but this was of a large sheet which had unclean animals on it that Peter was supposed to kill and eat. Finally, Cornelius' people had found Peter and Peter invited these men in to be his guests.

TENSE INTRODUCTIONS

Read Acts 10:23b-33

- Having spent the night in Joppa, Cornelius' people and Peter made their way to Caesarea to meet up with Cornelius. What was so significant about Cornelius' greeting of Peter?

- Peter had now entered the house and though it is mostly remembered as a meeting between Peter and Cornelius, who was actually there at this meeting? (10:7; 23b; 24; 27; 11:12)

The more you read this passage the more you realise that there was a lot of tension in the air at the beginning of this meeting. Everything seemed to be a little on edge and out of the ordinary, even the way that Cornelius fell at Peter's feet was completely out of order and counter cultural. Now that Peter was inside Cornelius' home introductions needed to be made.

- What was so surprising about what Peter said by way of introduction?

- Cornelius responded to Peter's introduction. What did he have to say?

- What purpose did Peter's introduction and Cornelius' response serve?

THE SPEECH

Read Acts 10:34-43

- As Peter began his speech, he seemed to still be stuck in his introduction. Why was Peter able to speak to these Gentiles?

- Peter then spoke about what they already knew. What did they know and how would Peter have known this?

- The language of Peter's speech changed from verse 39. What has changed and why would Peter change it?

- What are the central points of the gospel from Peter's point of view?

THEY HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT

Read Acts 10:44-48

- Peter had not finished presenting the gospel when something seemed to happen. What was it and how did they recognise it?

- Why was the speaking in tongues and praising God so significant?

- The circumcised believers and Peter were astonished. Why were they astonished?

- Peter was keen for them to be baptised. Why?

CONCLUSION

- Who was in control of the Gentiles coming faith?

- What distinctions now made a person holy for the Kingdom of God as opposed to the past?

THE ACTUAL EVENT

Read Acts 11:15-17

- › Peter moved straight into what the Holy Spirit did. What significant part of the story did he leave out?

- › What happened while Peter spoke and why did he find that significant?

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Read Acts 11:18

- › The apostles and the brothers heard Peter's testimony. What were their conclusions?

CONCLUSION

- › How had the understanding of what made a person holy before God and part of the Kingdom changed?

- › Who was in control of the conversion of Cornelius and his household? How was this seen?

- › Did God do everything? How were the people involved in this story?

- › How can you play an active part in doing something counter-cultural for the Kingdom in Merrylands?