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VIII. THE CHURCH SPREADS NORTH TO SAMARIA, SOUTH TO ETHIOPIA - THE STORY OF PHILLIP AND THE BAPTISM OF THE ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL - 8:1

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. {2} And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. {3} As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. {4} Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. {5} Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. {6} And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. {7} For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. {8} So there was much joy in that city. {9} But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. {10} They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is that power of God which is called Great." {11} And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. {12} But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. {13} Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. {14} Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, {15} who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; {16} for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. {17} Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. {18} Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, {19} saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." {20} But Peter said to him, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! {21} You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. {22} Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. {23} For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." {24} And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." {25} Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. {26} But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. {27} And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship {28} and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. {29} And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." {30} So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" {31} And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. {32} Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep led to the

slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. {33} In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth." {34} And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" {35} Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. {36} And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" {37} {38} And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. {39} And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. {40} But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea.

A. Outline of Chapter 8

1. Propagation: vv. 1-8 The persecution causes the Church to spread
 - a. Hardship: vv. 1-3
 - b. Heralding: vv. 4-5
 - c. Heeding: v. 6
 - d. Healing: v. 7
 - e. Hallelujah: v. 8
2. Purification: vv. 9-25 - The example of Simon and the Samaritans
 - a. Conversion: vv. 9-13
 - b. Confirmation: vv. 14-17
 - c. Confusion: vv. 18-23
 - d. Confession: v. 24
 - e. Conclusion: v. 25
3. Proclamation: vv. 26-40 - The Baptism of the Ethiopian Official
 - a. Redirection: vv. 26-29
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 - (1) Dialogue: v. 30
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 - (3) Discussion: vv. 32-25
 - (4) Decision: vv. 36-38
 - c. Rejoicing: v. 39
 - d. Redirection: v. 40

- B. Now the Church has been dispersed. But the Christians who go forth carry the Gospel with them. Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. *Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.*¹ Luke turns to the example of Philip, one of the seven men made Deacons in Chapt. 6, and shine the spotlight on him as a paradigm.²
- C. ***Philip went down to a city of Samaria*** - the city is not named. Since Luke tends to situate his descriptions in a city environment perhaps it is not a particular city that is meant but rather, is used to underscore the present cosmopolitan quality of the present out reach. That he went "down" to Samaria seems odd to us because Samaria is to the North of Jerusalem. "Down" refers to a lower altitude. As we in Washington might say, "I'm going up to Charlottesville" even though it is to the south.
- D. ***Samaria*** - That Philip should find himself in Samaria is significant. Jews hated Samaritans and vice versa. Yet we know how our Lord in many ways chipped away at this hatred by going through Samaria, by speaking to a Samaritan Woman, by not infrequently having a Samaritan as the hero of his parables, etc. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans was centuries old. Back in the 8th Century B.C. the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel (this included the region that came to be called Samaria). As conquerors did in those days, they deported many of the inhabitants of the region and settled strangers in the Land. The Jews who did remain however, intermarried with the Gentiles races who came in to settle. This was an unthinkable thing for a Jew to do but war can sometimes break down even the strongest resolve. The Jews to the South in unconquered Judah regarded this as a great betrayal and a terrible sin to mix with other races. Thus, the Jews of Samaria (who came to be called Samaritans) were despised as worse than Gentiles. A further matter complicating things was that the Samaritans departed from many of the received traditions of the Jews. Some of the Jewish traditions they retained but others, even as significant an issue as the place for the temple, were set aside. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was invaded and destroyed in the 6th Century B.C. and the people sent into exile. They however did not mix with the Gentiles there and this was a source of pride for them especially in contrast with what the Samaritans had done. The bitterness against the Samaritans was so strong that, when the Jews finally returned to a destroyed Jerusalem, the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild. The help was contemptuously refused because they were no longer "pure" Jews. This rebuke was never forgotten by the Samaritans who remained bitter over it. The fact that Philip finds himself preaching in Samaria and finding it fruitful is seen for its significance given this background. It is also an important sign too of the oneness and universality of the Church. It is clear that the Spirit is moving the Church according to the will of Christ who prayed at the Last Supper that all might be one (Jn 17:20).
- E. ***And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did*** - Again we see the fruitfulness of the Church. Now the seeds which were sown in sorrow are already bringing the

¹Psalm 126:5-6. NAB

²a word meaning example or pattern, an outstandingly clear or typical example.

joy of a harvest. See too how once again, signs (i.e. miracles) accompany the preaching task. These miracles, as we have seen are not worked to merely amaze but to evoke faith. By the grace of God that faith is coming alive. Note too however that miracle working seems to presume so faith or at least good will as a type of prevenient faith. When we ask today why there are fewer miracles we might consider the possibility that there are less because there is less openness to faith. In his own hometown area Jesus would work few miracles since their lack of faith disturbed him. Perhaps then we ask the wrong question when we say, "Why do there seem to be fewer miracles today than in the past?"

- F. ***So there was much joy in that city*** - There was joy not only because of miracles but essentially because the Gospel of Peace was being proclaimed and accepted. As Jesus himself declared, *All of this I have told you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete* (John 15:11).
- G. ***there was a man named Simon*** - The story of Simon is somewhat of a mixed report. Clearly his coming to faith is admirable. This is especially so because it meant a diminishment of his own influence. Philip clearly supplants him in prestige. Simon had been a magician of quite a profound reputation among the people. We might tend to immediately consider him a fraud but this might well be wrong. Many magicians and people sincerely believed in the power of their magic and even benefited from it sometimes. Hence, it is not necessarily a bad thing that he was a magician. As Luke records it however, when Philip came on the scene, Simon did not apparently rebel or seek to remove him or even compete with him for the people's patronage. Rather, he along with the rest was baptized and stayed in Philip's company and delighted in the power of God worked through Philip. This however, may have been his shortcoming. Fascinated as he was by the power of God worked through Philip and the Apostles Peter and John he wanted that power for himself. Rather than to seek this power through holiness and to receive it as a gift from God he sought to purchase it. Peter rather severely rebukes him for this folly, going so far as to question his motive for conversion (though at least he does not fall dead as did Ananias and Sapphira)! Peter underscores the seriousness of this sin and exhorts Simon to repent. From his reaction, we every reason to hope that he did repent and received the mercy of God. We can further hope that he grew in holiness.³ However, to this day his name has become associated with the sin of Simony. This sin involves the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices and services. Church Law is very clear in condemning such trafficking and provides serious penalties for violations (Canon 1380). No item can be sold for a higher price because it has been blessed. Likewise, no office in the Church can be received in exchange for money. Further, promises of prayers cannot be sold. How does this apply to the Catholic practice of mass intentions. People usually offer the priest a nominal amount (most often it is \$5) for saying a mass for their intentions. Is this not simony? No, if the following situations apply
1. the priest is receiving the money merely as a freewill offering from the requestor of the mass not because he demands it as a fee.

³Sadly there is an ancient tradition that he repudiated the faith and became a fierce antagonist of the Church.

2. the priest would be willing to say the mass even if no money were offered.
 3. the needy are not deprived of prayers (C. 848)
- H. The essential teaching of this whole story is that God is in control. Magicians seek to manipulate and control reality through human effort. Thus man is in control. The essence of grace however is that healing, holiness and salvation are entirely in God's grasp. They are his initiative, his work, his gift. Man can do nothing to force God's hand or bring forth his power. It is total gift, all man can do is receive. Recall that the word Grace comes from the Latin *Gratia* which means "gift." Gifts are received. If they could be forced or required they would no longer be gifts. So it is with grace. As for today, we may not invoke magic etc. (at least in the industrial west). However, we must ask, "Do we invest superstitious or excessive power in science or politics?" Certainly the chief characteristic of our modern age is that man and his efforts are at the center and God is off (far off) to the side. Not infrequently we think we will be saved by economics, politics or technology. Where is God in this *modus vivendi*?
- I. ***Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, {15} who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; {16} for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. {17} Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*** - It is worth recalling here what we discussed back in Acts 2. Some non-Catholics object to the Church's sacrament of Confirmation. Most of them do not regard Confirmation to be a sacrament. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church holds to the age-old doctrine that it is a sacrament which makes the Pentecost event described in Acts 2 a part of our lives. The teaching of the Church is backed up by the fact that the Apostles did in fact see it necessary to confer the Holy Spirit upon believers after baptism. They considered the conferring of the Holy Spirit to be part of their office. It will be seen that this text shows especially the roots of the Catholic practice of conferring and celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon each believer. Philip did not confer the sacrament. The Apostles saw this as part of their office and thus Peter and John went to confer it. This corresponds to the present Catholic practice of reserving the ordinary conferral of the sacrament to bishops. While a priest may at times confer it, it is most often reserved to the Bishop. While there is an anointing with holy oil, the essential form involves the laying on of hands and the prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the individual believer, just as it was done here. Thus again we see the biblical root of the Catholic teaching and practice of the Sacrament of Confirmation. There is another example of Paul confirming at the same time he baptizes. He can do this because, unlike Philip who was but a deacon, Paul is a Bishop.
1. *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing*

*this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.*⁴

- J. The Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40) The baptism of the Ethiopian official marks another important step in the spread of Christianity. Symbolically the baptism of the Ethiopian represents all Africa and the going forth of the Gospel to that whole continent
- K. ***But an angel of the Lord said to Philip*** - this phrase underscores God's initiative. The growth and direction of the Church is under God's control not man's. It is well to heed this reminder and to recall the words of Gamaliel, *...if this plan or this work is of men it will come to nothing, but if it is of God you cannot overthrow it.* (Acts 5:38-39) Hence we must learn to discern the will of God and seek to follow it.⁵
- L. ***This is a desert road*** - the command of God through the angel is odd, even strange. Why go down a road to a desert? Up until now the Christian faith has been spread in the cities. Who will be found in the desert? It is unlikely that a rich harvest will be found there and it might even be dangerous.
- M. ***And he rose and went-*** Nevertheless, Philip, like Abraham of old, sets out in faith into a land he knows not. Here is another example of the obedience of faith which responds affirmatively to every positive command of God even without a clear road map. *For, we walk by faith not by sight* (2 Cor 5:7).
- N. ***And behold, an Ethiopian,*** - "Ethiopia" described the land to the south of Egypt. It might also be called the land of Nubia and would include modern day Sudan. Its capital was Meroe below the modern Aswan Dam, the first cataract on the Nile. In the Bible it is known as the ancient Land of Cush (Gen 2:13). In the Greco-Roman world the word "Ethiopian" was often applied to black people in general. There was a great fascination with the exotic lands to the far south. The Odyssey by Homer speaks of "Far-off Ethiopians...the further-most of men"⁶ All of this fascination must be evoked by the entrance of this Ethiopian on to the stage of Acts. Here is a man from an exotic land at the end of the known world, someone whose dark skin made him an object of wonder and fascination among the Romans, Greeks and Semites. Not only all this but as we shall see, he is no mere man, his a royal official. There are several prophecies being fulfilled by this encounter and the results to follow:
1. Psalms 68:31-32 *Let bronze be brought from Egypt; let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God. Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord.*
 2. Isaiah 11:11 *In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.*
 3. Zephaniah 3:9-10 *"Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the*

4Acts 19:1-7.

5For other interventions of Angels in Acts see 5:19; 10:3,7,22; 12:7-15,23; 27:23. 61:22-23.

peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.

- O. ***a eunuch*** - it was not uncommon for castrated males to hold positions of importance in oriental courts. Indeed, the term was sometimes applied to men who were officials but not necessarily castrated. Yet, Luke does seem to want to emphasize that he had been sexually mutilated since he both terms: eunuch and official. The likely reason for this is that such a condition would have precluded this man's full participation in the assembly of Israel.⁷ Hence, those previously excluded by various technical problems will be included in the new and catholic Church.
- P. ***a minister of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure...seated in his chariot, he was reading*** - All of these descriptions help us to see the importance of this man. He is a high ranking minister (an official) of Candace.⁸ In fact, he was the treasurer general for all Ethiopia. He has a chariot, a further sign of nobility, and he can read. Therefore, here is a royal official, learned and open to the truth. His learnedness is a wisdom as well since, as we shall see, he is open to instruction and seeks for truth. All too frequently the learned can become fools because they are closed to instruction and do not seek for the truth. (cf Romans 1). Such is not the case here. Here is a man who is truly wise for the wise man knows that he does not know all.
- Q. ***And the Spirit said to Philip*** Now it is not an Angel but it is the Holy Spirit who speaks. Nevertheless, angels are God's messengers and work hand in hand with him. Hence, for angels to speak and God as well is not a cacophony it is a harmony.
- R. ***Philip...heard him reading*** - It was customary in the ancient world to read aloud. Thus libraries were hardly the quiet places they usually are today. People read aloud even when alone. St. Augustine in Confessions 6:3 puzzles over St. Ambrose peculiar habit of silent reading. It seemed quite odd to Augustine. Even today it is recommended to priests that if they pray it alone they at least move their lips while praying the Liturgy of the Hours.
- S. ***Do you understand what you are reading?"*** Philip's question does not presume stupidity or even ignorance. However, every text is capable of different levels of meaning: the literal, the extended or allegorical and the mystical meaning. Philip's question presumes the Christian conviction that the words of the prophet contain deeper meanings for the future and that they point to Christ.
- T. ***And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?"*** This is a very important and wise response on the part of the Ethiopian. To be docile is not to be spineless as many presume today. Rather the word comes from the Latin "docere" (to teach). Hence to be docile is to be teachable. Those who are docile then are learned in the ways of God. Likewise, this response is important since it calls to

⁷Deuteronomy 23:1 "He whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the LORD.

⁸This is probably a dynastic rather than a personal name. Hence, the definite article preceding the word.

mind the fact that scripture alone is not necessarily sufficient as a guide for God's will. The protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura does not hold under scrutiny. In the first place we see a massive division among protestants all claiming to be biblical and to be interpreting the Bible properly but with no authoritative way to sort out all the disagreements. This alone tells us that the Bible alone is not sufficient to preserve a unity in the truth. Sola Scriptura fails the reality test. The Bible itself is not the problem, interpretation is. Hence, in addition to the Bible an authoritative interpreter is needed. Further, nowhere does scripture itself attest that it alone is sufficient. Rather it suggests the contrary: viz. there are other binding sources, and an interpreter is needed. Besides the texts that is before us other passages in the Bible also declare that the Bible alone is not the complete rule of faith. Consider the following texts:

1. John 21:25 *But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*
2. 2 Peters 3:15-17 *And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability.*
3. 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15 *To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.*
4. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
5. Acts 2:42 *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

U. ***As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. {33} In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth.*** - The passage here is a direct quote from the Prophet Isaiah 53:7-8. It is worthy of our reflection however to see other excerpts from that passage (known as the suffering servant song) to appreciate the fuller discussion that Philip and the Ethiopian must have had. Thus, here is the full text of Is 53: *Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? {2} For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. {3} He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. {4} Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. {5} But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the*

chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. {6} All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. {7} He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. {8} By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? {9} And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. {10} Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand; {11} he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities. {12} Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- V. ***About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" {35} Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus*** The question of the Ethiopian is clear and direct. So is the answer of Philip. The passage refers to Jesus. Starting with this passage Philip relates the whole story of Jesus. All this recalls another scene another road: *That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them...And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad...Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,...And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"* (Luke 24:13,15,17-19,25-27,32) It is thus an essential insight and a teaching of the Catholic Church that the Old Testament is read and understood in the Light of the New Testament. The O.T. is a prophetic book pointing to Christ. Within the New Testament itself and the tradition of the Church there is no hesitation to see and apply freely many passages to Christ and his teaching and ministry. This is done by the application of literal prophecies about the messiah and by allegorical recognition.
- W. ***See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" {37} {38} And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip***

and the eunuch, and he baptized him. The response to faith is baptism. The Ethiopian received the gift of faith and thereby in obedience to that faith requests baptism for our Lord says, Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Although some Protestants hold that baptism is merely a ceremony that celebrates faith, the Catholic Church considers it a sacrament necessary for salvation. This is so because faith is not merely an abstract acceptance of Jesus as savior, it is a concrete acceptance of Him as Lord wherein he takes authority over my life. Hence, how can an individual claim to have faith and then neglect to do the very first thing Christ demands of his followers: viz. to be baptized? Faith is a life of obedience to the commandments of Christ hence, baptism, by Christ's own words is necessary for salvation.

- X. ***See, here is water!*** Finding water in the desert is not unheard of but it is wonderful to behold and a great reassurance to all who travel there. There is something of a spiritual picture painted here as well. The desert surrounding is the world, the water is the life of grace. The desert surrounding is largely dead, the water is life-giving. The desert surrounding is a symbol of the man's former lack of knowledge, the water is the sign of his enlightenment by the word of God. The anxiousness of the Ethiopian to be baptized recalls the psalm, "As the deer yearns for running water, so my thirsts for you, Lord my God...or again, O God, you are my God for you I long. My body pines for you like a dry weary land with out water.
- Y. ***and the eunuch...went on his way rejoicing.*** This reaction recalls the reaction in Samaria earlier in this Chapter (And there was much joy in that city). Gospel, the good news, of peace brings joy. Jesus himself declared, *All of this [my teachings] I have told you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete* (John 15:11).
- Z. ***the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more*** - we are reminded that this whole event has been a work of the Holy Spirit, not of Philip alone, or the eunuch. It is not a coincidental meeting, it is a work of God from start to finish. This sudden rapture of Philip is not an uncommon event in the lives of God's prophets:
1. Ez 11:24 *And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me.*
 2. 1 kings 18:12 *[And Elijah said], "And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you whither I know not; and so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have revered the LORD from my youth.*
 3. 2 kings 2:16 *And they said to [Elisha], "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men; pray, let them go, and seek your master; it may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send."*
- AA. ***Azotus*** - is north of Gaza along the coast. Philip is working his way toward Ceasarea where we will see him again when Paul visits there in Acts 21:8

IX. Chapter 19 - The Conversion of Paul - *But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest {2} and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. {3} Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. {4} And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" {5} And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; {6} but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." {7} The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. {8} Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. {9} And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. {10} Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." {11} And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, {12} and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." {13} But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; {14} and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name." {15} But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; {16} for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." {17} So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." {18} And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, {19} and took food and was strengthened. For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. {20} And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God." {21} And all who heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests." {22} But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. {23} When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, {24} but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; {25} but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. {26} And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. {27} But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. {28} So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, {29} preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. {30} And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus. {31} So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.*

{32} Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. {33} There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. {34} And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. {35} And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. {36} Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. {37} In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. {38} Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, "Please come to us without delay." {39} So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. {40} But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, rise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. {41} And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. {42} And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. {43} And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

- A. Outline of the Chapter
1. Paul - vv. 1-31
 - a. Resolve - vv. 1-2
 - b. Reproach - vv. 3-9
 - (1) Indictment vv. 3-5
 - (2) Instruction - v. 6
 - (3) Implementation - vv. 7-9
 - c. Rescue - vv. 10-19
 - (1) Minister - vv. 10-12
 - (2) Misgivings - vv. 13-14
 - (3) Mission - v. 15-16
 - (4) Ministry - vv. 17-18a
 - (5) Miracle - vv. 18b-19
 - d. Resolve reprise - vv. 20-25
 - (1) Proclamation - v. 20
 - (2) Puzzlement - v. 21
 - (3) Power-filled preaching - v. 22
 - (4) Persecution - vv. 23-25
 - e. Report - v. 31
 2. Peter - vv. 32-43
 - a. Meanderings - v. 32
 - b. Miracles
 - (1) Revitalization - vv. 33-34
 - (2) Response - v. 35
 - (3) Resurrection - vv. 36-41
 - (4) Response - v. 42
 - c. Map markings - v. 43

- B. The story we have just heard must not be overly sentimentalized. Pure and simple, Saul was an enemy of the Church - enemy number one. Luke has described him as one who breathes threats and murder. He was on his way to see to the imprisonment and death of Christians. In strong contrast to the story of the Ethiopian there is no joy or openness to the truth here. Saul is not a pleasant fellow; he is an enemy and a serious threat. This is an important background to this story of conversion.
- C. **went to the high priest** - it is not merely Saul who acts. He has authority from the high priest. As we have seen all along, Luke presents the persecution against the church as from the very leadership of the Jewish people. This was the way it was with the Lord Jesus and so it is with his mystical Body, the Church. Thus Luke shows the Jewish leadership at the head or at least intimately involved with efforts to eliminate the Christian Church.
- D. **and asked him for letters** - letters of recommendation that would extend the authority of the high priest to actions of Saul.
- E. **Damascus** - was a large city to the northeast of Jerusalem. It is located at the site of a very large oasis in the desert where the waters of the Barada river exhaust themselves. It is a gateway and an outpost in the desert. It was the ancient capital of the Assyrian kingdom and at the times of Acts was the capital of the Roman province of Syria. It was one of the cities of the Decapolis. It was a thriving center of commerce and manufacture and had a large Jewish colony. It is clear that the Christian community made enough inroads there that Saul requested taking action.
- F. **the Way** - this is a very early designation for Christianity. It harkens back to the Old Testament. It is worth seeing some of those texts (we limit our search to the psalms) in order to appreciate the tradition that is tapped
1. Psalms 1:1,6 *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the **Way** of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; for the LORD knows the **Way** of the righteous, but the **Way** of the wicked will perish.*
 2. Psalms 25:8-9 *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the **way**. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his **way**. Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the **Way** that he should choose.*
 3. Psalms 27:11 *Teach me thy way, O LORD; and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.*
 4. Psalms 37:5,34 *Commit your **Way** to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. Wait for the LORD, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to possess the land; you will look on the destruction of the wicked.*
 5. Psalms 67:1-2 *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that thy **Way** may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations.*
 6. Psalms 77:13 *Thy **way**, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?*
 7. Psalms 86:11 *Teach me thy **way**, O LORD, that I may walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name.*
 8. Psalms 101:2,6 *I will give heed to the **Way** that is blameless. Oh when wilt*

*thou come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in the **Way** that is blameless shall minister to me.*

9. Psalms 119:14, 27, 32 *In the **Way** of thy testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. Make me understand the **Way** of thy precepts, and I will meditate on thy wondrous works. I will run in the **Way** of thy commandments when thou enlargest my understanding!*
10. Psalms 146:9 (RSV) *The LORD watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the **Way** of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

G. ***a light from heaven flashed about him*** - Light is especially associated with the presence of God. Here too we have a precious theme very much in resonance with many Old and New Testament texts.

1. Psalms 4:6 *There are many who say, "O that we might see some good! Lift up the **light** of thy countenance upon us, O LORD!"*
2. Psalms 56:13 *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the **light** of life.*
3. Psalms 36:9 *For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy **light** do we see **light**.*
4. Psalms 89:15 *Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the **light** of thy countenance,*
5. Psalms 97:11 ***light** dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.*
6. Psalms 104:1-2 *Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest thyself with **light** as with a garment, who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent,*
7. Isaiah 2:5 *O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the **light** of the LORD.*
8. Isaiah 60:19 *The sun shall be no more your **light** by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give **light** to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting **light**, and your God will be your glory.*
9. 1 John 1:5-7 *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is **light** and in him is no darkness at all. {6} If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; {7} but if we walk in the **light**, as he is in the **light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*
10. 1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous **light**.*
11. James 1:17 *Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of **lights** with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

H. ***"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"***- The voice of God harkens back to the call of Moses from the burning bush (Moses, Moses!) in Exodus 3:4⁹ and There

⁹*When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I."*

was also a repetition of the name in the call of Jacob (Gen 46:2)¹⁰ and Samuel (1 Sam 3:4, 10)¹¹. This entire action of the Lord show him not to be far away in some heaven but closely and intimately concerned for his Church. This again is born out by the promise of the Lord in several ways in the Gospels

1. Matthew 25:40 *And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'*
2. Luke 10:16 *"He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*
3. John 14:18-20 *"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."*

- I. **"Who are you, Lord?"**- The use of the title Lord is significant. Recall that the word Kyrios (Lord) was the Greek word chosen in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the Divine Name, Yahweh. This does not mean that every time it the word Kyrios is used it is meant in that context. Nevertheless, Saul sees to be quite aware that he is involved in some sort of Theophany (a divine manifestation) and so his use of the title "Lord" is understood in its divine sense. Recall how, when Peter was called by our Lord, he (Peter) changed his vocabulary when he realized the to who he was speaking in Luke 5:4-8: *And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* Note how Peter at first, rather cynically refers to Jesus as Master. After the miracle he calls him Lord. So too has Paul treated the Lord badly but now changes his tune and calls him Lord. Even as Peter had to grow to understand the full implications of the title, so too does Paul, but the vision is being given.
- J. **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting;** - The proclamation of Jesus is simple and straightforward in its authority and clarity. As for the identification with his followers persecution see note above.
- K. **rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.** - Here Jesus is calling Saul to the obedience of faith. He is not about to tell Saul what will happen, he simply tells him what to do and to walk by faith, not by sight (literally!). We discussed the obedience of faith earlier in our Chapter 8 discussion of Philip and his immediate obedience to the command to go out into the desert. We also recalled the Obedience of Abraham. Now Saul is called to the same obedience. This all harkens back to the dialogue with Thomas at the Last Supper

¹⁰*And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I."*

¹¹*Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" And the LORD came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for thy servant hears."*

in John 14:5-6: *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.* In effect Thomas wants details and a road map. The Lord responds by saying, in effect, "I am the way...follow me...no details...have faith in me and do what I say...tomorrow is not for you to know...follow me."

- L. ***The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.*** - the text here is problematic since later accounts in Acts differ. In Acts 22:9¹² the companions see light but hear nothing. In 26:13¹³ all seem to see light but only Paul hears. Further, in that version all fall to the ground but here and in 22, only Paul falls. A possible explanation for the discrepancies is that in the citations later in Acts Paul is recounting the event in a preaching setting. There is some liberty with the story as there is frequently in preaching. The story gets embellished and the details a bit jumbled but the basic point remains: I was a sinner whom Christ Jesus summoned in a most dramatic way. The details that are changed are not particularly important to this basic point. Lastly, there is an interesting parallel to this story in the book of Daniel worth recalling here: Daniel 10:7 *And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves.*
- M. ***Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.*** - Who can see God and live? (Ex 33:20) Saul has been permitted to live but has been blinded by the glory he has seen. He must be healed by God who will stretch forth his hand to heal through his mystical body, the Church.
- N. ***three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*** - There are at least two traditions of fasting and the period of three days that may be at work here.
1. Fasting can be associated with a period of preparation before receiving revelation.
 - a. Ex 34:28
 - b. Deut 9:9,¹⁴
 - c. Dan 9:3; 10:2-3¹⁵

¹²Acts 22:7,9 *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.*

¹³Acts 26:12-14 *"Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.'*

¹⁴When I went up the mountain to receive the tables of stone, the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.

¹⁵Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 10:2-4 *In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I*

- d. et al.
- 2. Fasting can be associated with Penance.
 - a. Jer 14:12
 - b. Neh 1:4¹⁶
 - c. Joel 1:14
 - d. Jonah 3:8
- 3. The practice in the early of Church of fasting before baptism may have had its roots here.
- 4. The mention of the three days seems also rich in meaning since Luke seems interested to compare Paul to Christ. This is only a theory however.
- O. **Ananias** - Ananias seems to be an ordinary disciple on whom the Lord calls and gives a healing ministry. As has been the case many times in Acts, the Lord speaks to him in a vision. The Response of Ananias, **Here I am Lord** is a biblical response to the call of God (cf. Gen 22:1¹⁷; 1 Sam 3:6¹⁸). Ananias raises reasonable objections when he is told what to do but is obedient when the Lord, without a lengthy response, simply tells him to go. Human hesitancy is legitimate but must be overturned by God's command. It is said that Paul is praying. Prayer and fasting is a standard combination (Jer. 14:12; Neh 1:4; Mark 9:29).
- P. **my chosen instrument** (literally the Greek says, a vessel of election for me). The choices of God are often inscrutable. But Saul joins a long list of reprobates (eg. Jacob) and murderers (eg Moses) and odd characters (eg many of the Apostles) whom God has chosen.
- Q. There is another thing said by the Lord that is very important: **he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles** This phrase lays the whole foundation for the Gentile mission that is to take up the remainder of Acts from Chapter 10 to the end. It is noteworthy because, once again the initiative is God's. The Lord himself indicates that the Gospel is to go unto the Gentiles. Thus Luke, gives an indication of the divine authorship of the mission to the Gentiles. Like everything else in Acts, it is not mere cultural accident or event. The mission to the Gentiles that begins with the Baptism of Cornelius is of the very plan of God.
- R. **I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.** Just as Saul has caused suffering due to the Name of the Lord, now he will suffer the same. It is not so much that the Lord is getting back at him, but there is a reparation that is to be made for all sin. Beyond reparation Paul will learn to glory in the cross of Christ and he will gain an understanding of the glory of the martyrdom of Stephen

ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with gold of Uphaz.

16When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

17After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

18And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

- and see it from a new perspective.
- S. Ananias goes to Saul on ***street called Straight***. Straight Street was a grand avenue in Damascus running east-west and flanked with beautiful columnaded buildings in the Greco-Roman tradition. The owner of the house was a man named Judas. There is no connection to Judas Iscariot who lived in Galilee. Of this Judas of Damascus we no little or nothing.
- T. Ananias enters the house and ***laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul***. The gesture of laying on hands is a frequent gesture in the Church. It has already been seen here in acts as a way to invoke the Holy Spirit and it is used in the confirmation rite (Acts 8:17¹⁹) We also see how it is related to the commissioning of certain men to offices in the Church (Acts 6:6²⁰). Now too we see that the gesture is used as part of the rite of healing (see also James 5:14²¹). All these examples of the laying on of hands in the tradition of the Church in the following sacraments: Confirmation, Anointing of the sick, and Holy Orders. The salutation, Brother Saul is astonishing but accurate. The two are brothers not by their own choice but by God's. *You did not choose me, I chose you* (John 15:16). Through baptism Saul will enter adoptive sonship and thereby become a brother to Ananias. His salutation anticipates this fact just as does the Church today when she calls catechumens her own.
- U. By the healing prayer of Ananias and the power of God ***something like scales fell from his [Saul's] eyes and he regained his sight***. Some commentators consider this remark figurative and not necessarily literal. This need not be so especially since Luke is a physician. Nevertheless, the main point is that Saul regains his sight by the power of God through his mystical body, the Church. As Ananias stretches forth his hand, it is actually Christ who does so. Just as in any human body the head commands the hand and it obeys, so too here: Christ the head commands and the hand is stretched forth obediently and effectively.
- V. ***Then he [Saul] rose and was baptized, {19} and took food and was strengthened***. Again Luke disappoints us regarding details. We may ask, was there any instruction before the baptism? How and where did the baptism take place? What was Saul's state of mind: joy, fear, etc. None of this is given. What is important again is the obedience of faith. Saul has seen the Lord, heard his command and obeyed. So did Ananias. Two men obedient to the Lord now become brothers.
- W. Saul at Damascus (9:19b-22) ***{19} For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. {20} And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God." {21} And all who heard him were amazed, and***

19Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

20These [seven men] they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.

21Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests." {22} But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

1. *immediately he proclaimed Jesus* - there is a suddenness brought forth by the Holy Spirit. This is just as it was back in Acts Chapter Two when the Holy Spirit descended and all began to speak making bold proclamations.
2. *He is the Son of God* This designation occurs only here in Acts although it was not at all uncommon in the Gospel of Luke (1:32, 35; 3:22; 4:3, 9, 41; 22:70). Although the phrase here is obviously meant in its form as a full expression of the divinity of Christ, the title "Son of God" is not as lofty to ancient ears as to modern for in the Jewish milieu the title "son of God" could refer to angels or human beings in general. Here it is clearly meant however as an affirmation of the divinity of Christ.
3. The use of the title "Son of Man" and Son of God are an interesting study in this context. Why is the title "Son of God" in reference to Christ somewhat rare? We might expect, a more direct statement of Jesus saying, "I am the Son of God." Why does he not use this title in reference to himself? Is this a blow to the teaching of the divinity of Christ? No. As will be set forth here, the title "Son of God" depending on the context can be a very ambiguous term that would have had little impact on the people of the Lord's day. Thus, Jesus makes no use of it and the bible as a whole contains only a few references to this effect. Jesus does use the more provocative and meaningful title "Son of Man" in reference to himself. Why this title is more useful to the Lord is set forth below as each title is examined.
 - a. **Son of God:** in the scriptures, the title "son of God" is used of Israel itself (Ex. 4:22; Hos 11:1), of the Davidic King (Ps 2:7) and of the angels (Gen 6:2) Likewise, all humankind is called this since we are all created in God's image and likeness. And again, all the just and peacemakers are called sons of God since by divine adoption they have been called to be like unto him showing forth his Justice and Mercy and by knowing and loving him in a special way. Perhaps in view of the ambiguity of the term it is best understood why it is never explicitly recorded in the scriptures that Jesus said, "I am the Son of God." But He did better than this, by revealing explicitly the intimacy between his Father and himself. *The Father and I are one. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* (Matt 11:27) Indeed, the anger and charges of blasphemy by many of the Jews at Jesus' claim show that Jesus was not merely speaking in a figurative or ambiguous way as might be implied if he merely used the term Son of God in relation to himself.

- b. **Son of Man:** With few exceptions (eg Acts 7:56) the title Son of Man is found only in the Gospels and only on Jesus' lips. There are actually three different uses of the phrase evident on the lips of the Lord:
- (1) In regard to the Last Judgement: *When the Son of man comes on the clouds of heaven escorted by the angels...* (Mk 14:62 and Matt 25:31ff) The Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory as judge of the world (Matt 17:22 and Mk 8:31)
 - (a) In regard to his future sufferings, death and resurrection as the Messiah (Mt. 17:22 and Mk 8:31)
 - (b) Or finally to Jesus simply as an individual speaking in his own name (Mt. 5:11; 10:32; Lk 6:22; 12:8)
- c. So, the title "Son of Man" is a clear profession of divine transcendence that can be traced to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13²² which Christ appropriated to himself at the dramatic moment when his fate was being decided by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Caiphas the high priest was vexed with the savior and puzzled by his silence: "I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." The Words are your own, answered Jesus. Moreover, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt 26:62-66)
- (1) Thus, of the two titles discussed, "Son of Man" is a far more clear and lofty title and it explains why our Lord took this title for himself.
 - (2) Nevertheless, Paul's use of the title "Son of God" from the context is clearly meant in a lofty sense; that is, "He is the eternal Son of God most high. He is divine.
4. Although the Christians are understandably concerned to have Saul among them, the power of God through his preaching makes his words an amazing proof of his conversion and they accept him.
 5. ***Saul...confounded the Jews*** - here is the first time that Luke uses the phrase "the Jews" in contradistinction to the Christian. For the first time the Jews are described as a group apart from the Christians. However, Luke does not use the word "Christians" here. It will wait until Antioch that the followers of "the Way" are called Christians for the first time.
 6. He ***confounded*** them - the Greek word is *synchuno* which literally means to confuse. Thus Saul confused and mixed up the Jews who heard him. Perhaps his words were altogether too much for them. We must not forget that Saul was a brilliant Rabbi. He was the greatest student of the greatest

22"...and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

teacher among the Jews: Gamaliel (yes, our old friend). Hence, Saul was a formidable opponent in any debate. Grace his brilliance by the power of the Holy Spirit and the result is obvious: his opponents are confused and confounded.

- X. Saul's first Jerusalem journey (9:23-30) *{23} When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, {24} but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; {25} but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. {26} And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. {27} But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. {28} So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, {29} preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. {30} And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.*

1. *the Jews plotted to kill him* - Here is the first fulfillment of the prophecy of our Lord that Saul would have much to suffer for the sake of the name.
2. *when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him* - this reaction is understandable based on all that has happened. Saul has been an arch-enemy who now seeks full admission. As we shall see the problem will be dealt with by recourse to the leadership of the Church: the Apostles.
3. *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles...So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly* - the fear in the community is resolved by bringing Paul before the Apostles. We have no details about this meeting but the upshot is that Saul was able to move freely about in Jerusalem preaching, after the meeting. This episode shows again, at least implicitly the hierarchical structure of the Church. Saul's authenticity and preaching authority come from the Lord but are ratified through the Church. His authenticity and authority are not recognized until after his meeting with the Apostles. There are two other issues that need to be addressed here as well
 - a. In the beginning of Chapter 8 we learned that the Church at Jerusalem was scattered and dispersed by a persecution that arose and that no one remained in Jerusalem except the Apostles. Now we are informed that there are disciples in Jerusalem. Did some return? Are these more recent converts? Luke does not say. However, persecutions in the early Church tended to be sporadic. Hence, it is likely that some of the disciples returned to Jerusalem once the persecution subsided.
 - b. This account of Paul's first days as a disciple is at some variance with what Paul himself wrote in Galatians 1:11-20: *For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was*

I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) How to resolve this conflict!? There are several issues to be resolved: the question of time, the Arabia side trip, and the number of the Apostles seen.

- (1) In regard to time, Luke uses the Greek phrase *hemerai hikanai* (literally, a goodly number of days). The Greek sense of the phrase implies more than just a few days. Although Luke does not mention years, his phrase does not totally exclude the possibility since it is such a vague time reference. Thus, although the time discrepancy is not entirely removed by this examination it is at least made less glaring and the disagreement is less pronounced. Additionally, we have discussed that Luke's historical account is not a history in the same way that we use the word History today. Luke tells what really happened but he does not tell everything that happened. He selects certain events for highlight in order to illustrate the fuller picture. Likewise, Luke does not give dates as modern histories are required to do. Thus the whole time scale in Luke is not certain. Are there days, weeks, or months separating these events? It is not clear. This allows us to take Luke's account here and clarify it by Paul's account. So, instead of conflict we have clarification. It is also a helpful bit of information that helps explain the "sudden" reappearance of the disciples. If the time period is three years the reappearance of disciples in Jerusalem is neither sudden nor all that surprising.
- (2) Luke makes no mention of Arabia and Paul does. Thus there is no conflict here but again, a clarification. What Paul was doing in Arabia is unknown. It might have been a kind of a desert experience for him where he studied the Gospel given him or at least prayed over what he had heard and seen and prepared for the preaching task ahead. Did

Paul have a teacher? We do not know.

- (3) Luke says Paul was brought before the Apostles but Paul seems to limit this to only Cephas (Peter) and James. But again, here we have no conflict; we have a clarification. Luke does not say "11 the Apostles" but only "Apostles" This could mean 2 or 12. What Luke gives ambiguously, Paul gives specifically: 2 not 12. In Galatians Paul seems eager to make this point since some dispute his apostolic authority. He wants to show himself equal to the Apostles. Thus, he is eager to clarify that he was not required to go before all 12 but only Peter who seems to have been the one to meet with him formally (for 15 days). He also happened to see James while he in Jerusalem but the implication it was only to see Peter that he went up to Jerusalem. This too furthers the Catholic position about the primacy of Peter. We have seen the authority of Peter all along here in Acts and Paul confirms this in Galatians. Paul denies that he is required to appear before the Apostles but does admit that he appeared before Cephas (Peter) and although it is not directly stated that this is required of him, both Luke and Paul imply that it is essential. This is the case today. No Bishop is required to appear before brother bishops to justify himself in any matter but he must appear before the Pope when required to do so.

Y. Summary (9:31) {31} *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.*

1. Here is another of Luke's summaries. It is a way of tying up loose ends and reminding us of the larger picture.
2. There are Five qualities of the Church mentioned here
 - a. **had peace** - There was peace not only due to the removal of Saul as an enemy but also due to the very presence of The Lord and the Gospel of peace within the community. See for example these texts from Luke's Gospel
 - (1) 1:78-79 *through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*
 - (2) 2:13-14 *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"*
 - (3) 2:27-30 *And inspired by the Spirit he [Simeon] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord,*

now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

(4) 8:48 *And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."*

(5) 19:38 *As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

(6) 19:41-44 *And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

b. **was built up** - We have seen how this key concept of growth is fundamental to Luke's presentation. It is a work of the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be stopped or hastened by any human agent. Growth is a work of God.

c. **walked in the fear of the Lord** - fear refers to a profound respect for the Holiness of God and a wish never to offend his greatness and majesty. The truest effect of Holy Fear is that we dread to ever offend God because he is so holy and loving.

d. **and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit** - the word comfort in the English language has become a bit lame. It merely means being cozy or at ease. But the older sense of the English word and certainly its Latin root (confirmare) is more vigorous. The Holy Spirit, the Holy Comforter - builds up, strengthens and encourages. These are the essential qualities of comfort. This comforting can lead to an ease since they make the person strong against the enemy and thus he rests more easily.

e. **was multiplied** - see # 2 just above.

Z. Peter's Mission in Palestine (9:32-43) *{32} Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. {33} There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. {34} And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. {35} And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. {36} Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas. She was full of good*

works and acts of charity. {37} In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. {38} Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, "Please come to us without delay." {39} So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. {40} But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, rise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. {41} And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. {42} And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. {43} And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

1. This transition into this story seems rather abrupt. This is because it is. We have been reading of the conversion of Saul. Now rather suddenly we are dropped into the middle of the Peter's ministry. We are told that Peter was going "here and there" but that's about it for introductions into this new and rather short section. There are a couple of explanations for the brevity and terseness of this section.
 - a. It is worth recalling that Luke's history is not like most modern histories. He does not give a blow by blow description of the historical event. Rather he opens windows for us to look through. The examples are paradigms (good examples especially suited to showing forth the whole). Thus, Luke is throwing open another window without a lot of background and simply says, "Behold."
 - b. The other explanation is that this short section is a bridge. It links the conversion of Paul narrative (at which Peter figures at the end) to the conversion of Cornelius (in which Peter figures prominently). This short story puts Peter in the proper place since in Chapter 10 Cornelius will be instructed to send to Joppa where Peter will be found. Luke thus prepares us to understand how Peter got to Joppa from Jerusalem.
2. ***Peter went here and there among them all*** - Peter is pictured as making a circuit of the Churches. This is especially clear in the Greek where there is a dia + genitive construction. Thus, more literally he moves through them all. The "all" here refers back to verse 31: *the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria*. Thus Peter is not aimlessly wandering about but is exercising his ministry of strengthening the brethren (Luke 22:32).
3. ***Lydda*** - A town in Judea between Jerusalem and Joppa. It is described by the Jewish historian Josephus as "in size not inferior to a city" and also names it as a place where the Governor of the region sat to settle disputes.
4. ***paralyzed*** - the healing of a paralytic obviously harkens back to the same sort of healing by our Lord. The fact that the man was paralyzed a long time (8 years) is always a significant detail. This was no mere palsy: it was a clear case of paralysis Just as the case earlier in Acts and the cases dealt with by our Lord.

5. ***make your bed*** - Literally the Greek has "spread (or strew) your bed" for yourself. The point of the command is to emphasize the cure not to make him work.
6. ***they...turned to the Lord*** - the intended result of any miracle is not merely to work a physical cure but to reach the soul and call people to faith. Hence, once again the Holy Spirit through the Church is at work healing on more than one level.
7. ***Joppa*** - (modern day Jaffa) a city on the seashore of Palestine to the West, Northwest of Jerusalem. It was the nearest port to Jerusalem but because it had no harbour it could not be used in rough weather. It was never a Jewish city however. Jews did live there but it was never under Israelite governance. By the time of this occurrence it was under Syrian control.
8. ***disciple*** - The Greek word here is *mathetria* which literally means, "woman disciple." This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament.
9. ***Tabitha***- The name is Aramaic and so Luke translates it for his Greek readers as *dorkas*. In both languages the words mean "gazelle."
10. ***full of good works and acts of charity*** - Tabitha was beloved of the community for her works of Charity. The specific works are described in verse the works were ***tunics and other garments which Dorcas made***. This does not mean that it was all that she did (for the Greek says she was full of good works). But even if it was, overcoats and tunics were very important and prized possessions in this part of the ancient world. People often slept in these coats during the cooler seasons.
11. ***Tabitha, rise*** - There is a considerable resemblance of this whole scene to the raising of the little girl by Jesus (Luke 8:49-56). The resemblance includes the use of messengers, the weeping bystanders, the putting out of everyone from the room, the call to rise, and the taking by the hand.
12. ***and many believed in the Lord*** - again, see how healing are a stimulus to conversion.

Here ends the Narrative of the Mission in Palestine. Next we turn to part two of Acts: **The Mission to the Ends of the Earth**. Peter has been placed by the Holy Spirit in Joppa and will be prepared there for the great opening to the Gentiles. The Gentile Cornelius will be directed there by the same Holy Spirit and thus will the Gentile Mission open. We have crossed a landmark.