

Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 5

Session 5

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Session 5 - Further preaching and problems

Acts 8 and 9

Introduction

We saw in Session 4 how opposition to the early church was coming from the leaders of the Jews. In this session we see that this opposition grew. Because of this the believers who were persecuted left Jerusalem and moved into the surrounding areas, taking their message with them. We then read of the conversion of Saul, who was destined to be the means of spreading God's message outside Israel as far as Europe. Finally, we see the early church increase in numbers as a result of Peter's preaching and the witness of the miracles.

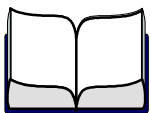
You will find it helpful to read Acts 8 and 9 before you continue.

Summary

The church in Samaria and Judea

Saul's persecution	8 v 1 to 3
Preaching in Samaria	8 v 4 to 8
Simon the sorcerer	8 v 9 to 25
The Ethiopian eunuch	8 v 26 to 40
The conversion of Saul	9 v 1 to 19
Initial preaching by Saul	9 v 20 to 31
Aeneas healed and Dorcas raised to life	9 v 32 to 43

Acts 8 v 1 to 3 - Saul's persecution



Read Acts 8 v 1 to 3

Saul seems to have been the leader of the persecution. It appears that he was a person who always did everything thoroughly. Verse 3 paints a picture of a very systematic and brutal persecution.

Acts 8 v 1 ... they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria ...

This was the result of Saul's persecution. But, as we shall see in the next section, Saul was unwittingly helping to spread the message he was trying to suppress.

Acts 8 v 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church ...

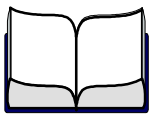
This verse identifies for us what the "church" is. The "church" Saul was persecuting was the believers.



Have a look at the *Young's Concordance* entry for "church" on page 15:

- "Church" is used in the Bible to refer to a group of people who have been "called out"
- It is referring to the people rather than to a building

Acts 8 v 4 to 8 - Preaching in Samaria



Read Acts 8 v 4 to 8

Acts 8 v 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

The result of Saul's persecution was that the believers scattered, taking the message with them. The cross-references show that opposition was one of the driving forces in spreading the message:

X-Refs-
Acts 8 v 4

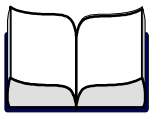
Acts 11 v 19 to 21; 14 v 2 to 7.

Acts 8 v 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

Many Bibles put a note in this verse to the effect that “the city of Samaria” should read “a city of Samaria”. The city of Samaria that we meet in the Old Testament had been destroyed, rebuilt and renamed by this time. Map 3 on page 2 of the Additional Notes shows the area known as Samaria. We can see that the message was now spreading in the area to the north of Jerusalem. Like Stephen, Philip was one of those chosen in Acts 6 v 5 to help solve the problem of the Grecian widows.

Verses 6 to 8 show that Philip, like Peter, performed miracles to support the preaching work.

Acts 8 v 9 to 25 - Simon the sorcerer



Read Acts 8 v 9 to 25

This section gives an important warning about using God’s message and power for wrong motives.

Acts 8 v 9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

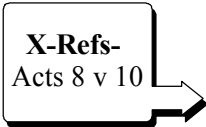
Look at the cross-references from this verse and see what you can learn.
Compare your findings with the notes on page 14.

X-Refs-
Acts 8 v 9

Exodus 7 v 11 and 22; 8 v 18 and 19; Leviticus 20 v 6; 2 Timothy 3 v 2 and 5.

Acts 8 v 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."

The references spell out clearly the warning similar to that which we looked at from v 9:



Ephesians 4 v 14; 2 Peter 2 v 1 and 2.



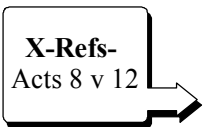
We have to be constantly on our guard to resist ideas that were not taught or believed by the apostles in the first century.

Verse 11 tells us that Simon had been influencing the people for a long time.

Acts 8 v 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

This verse contrasts the teaching of Philip with that of Simon. Philip's teaching is summed up in the phrase "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ".

The cross-references show that this phrase is a summary of the whole gospel message:



Acts 1 v 3; 11 v 20; 20 v 21 and 25; 28 v 31.

"The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" is a summary of the whole message that Philip and the apostles were preaching. It shows that there are two aspects of that message.

The things concerning the kingdom of God ...

In the *Additional Notes* on "The significance of the Kingdom of Israel" we saw that the disciples expected that Jesus during his lifetime would re-establish the old kingdom of Israel as the kingdom of God which he had preached about. "The things concerning the kingdom of God" are the facts about it in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, and in the New Testament. We look at these several times in this course, e.g. Session 1, page 16 and Session 2, pages 8 and 9.

... and the name of Jesus Christ

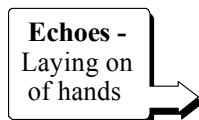
“The things concerning the name of Jesus Christ” is the complementary part of the message of the apostles to the “things concerning the kingdom of God”. It is the other half of the message that we shall see as we go through the Acts. This part of the message tells us how, through the work of Jesus, we can be part of the kingdom that Jesus will establish. Again we look at several aspects of this part of the message in this course, e.g. Session 1, pages 18 and 20 and Session 2, page 7.

Verse 13 tells us that Simon was convinced by Philip’s teaching and became a believer himself. The fact that he “was amazed” at the miracles and signs means that he could not do similar things himself.

Verses 14 to 17 tell us that the apostles Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to the believers in Samaria to “lay their hands on them”.

The purpose of this “laying on of hands” was to give the believers the Holy Spirit.

Have a look at the echoes to “laying on of hands” in the Acts and see what conclusions you can draw.
Compare them with the notes on page 14.



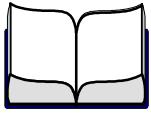
Acts 8 v 18 and 19; 9 v 17; 19 v 6.

It is interesting to note that it was only the apostles and those specially commissioned by God who are recorded as giving the Holy Spirit by laying on of hands. So it would seem that when all the apostles had died and all the people to whom they gave the Holy Spirit had died, there would be no one left with the Holy Spirit or the power to give it.

Verses 18 and 19 give us Simon’s reaction to seeing the Holy Spirit given. He saw how this power could be used to regain his lost esteem among the people.

Verses 20 to 23 tell us that Peter appealed to Simon to change his attitude before it was too late. Verse 24 would seem to indicate that Simon saw the error of his ways.

Acts 8 v 26 to 40 - The Ethiopian eunuch



Read Acts 8 v 26 to 40

This section is the story of the conversion of an Ethiopian convert to Judaism who was returning to Ethiopia having worshipped recently at Jerusalem.

Look at Map 3 on page 2 of the *Additional Notes* to identify the places mentioned in this chapter.



A Roman carriage of the type possibly used by the Ethiopian eunuch

It is interesting to note the similarities between the conversion of the eunuch and the conversions that we saw in Acts 2.

Similarities

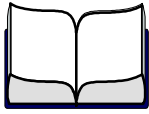
	<u>Acts 2</u>	<u>Acts 8</u>
Some knowledge of the Old Testament	v 16 to 21, 25 to 28, 34 and 35	v 28, 32 and 33
Desire to understand and obey God's Word	v 37	v 30, 31 and 34
The significance of Jesus in relation to the Old Testament explained	v 22 to 24, 31 to 33 and 36	v 35
The need for baptism following belief	v 38 and 41	v 36 to 38

Conclusions:

- We need some knowledge of the Old Testament
- We need to wish to understand and obey God's commands
- We must understand how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament predictions
- Baptism should follow belief in God's plan in Jesus

In verse 40, we see that after Philip left the eunuch, he carried on preaching in various cities till he came to Caesarea. The story of the preaching work in Caesarea continues in chapter 10.

Acts 9 v 1 to 19 - The conversion of Saul



Read Acts 9 v 1 to 19

Acts 9 v 1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

The references from verse 1 are to Saul's later comments about this period of his life. They emphasise the horror of this persecution and have a lesson for us:

X-Refs-
Acts 9 v 1

Acts 26 v 9 to 11; 1 Timothy 1 v 13 to 15.

- Saul had believers put to death
- He tortured them and made them blaspheme
- His persecution extended throughout the nation of Israel and beyond
- Despite the terrible things he had done to the believers God forgave him because he did it in unbelief
- Whatever our sins we can be forgiven if we confess and repent

We can learn some lessons for ourselves by looking at the cross-references and echoes from "the Way" in verse 2:

**X-Refs
and echoes-**
The Way

Acts 16 v 17; 18 v 25 and 26; Acts 19 v 9 and 23.

- The "way" the believers were going was to salvation (or escape from death)
- "The Way" was God's way, which some people opposed



The *Young's Concordance* entry on page 15 tells us that "way" means "road", "journey" or "custom".



Our journey through life should follow God's "way" if we wish to escape from death.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us what happened to Saul on the way to Damascus.

Acts 9 v 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

If we understand what "goads" are, it will help us to understand this verse. The Authorised Version uses the word "pricks".

"Goads" or "pricks" were instruments for persuading beasts to go where the owner wanted.

Saul was kicking against the message from God and was wanting to destroy the message rather than submit to it. By submitting he would have had to give up his current way of life. Saul was steeped in Jewish thought, as the echoes show:

**Echoes -
Saul's
credentials** →

Acts 22 v 3; 2 Corinthians 11 v 22; Philippians 3 v 4 to 6.

- Saul knew the Old Testament very well having been educated by Gamaliel, the important Jewish leader whom we met in Acts 5 v 34 (Session 3, page 15)
- He was an enthusiastic Pharisee, opposing anything which appeared to threaten the Law of Moses

Saul would be well aware that Peter and the apostles were saying that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. He would also be aware of Gamaliel's comments that they could not overthrow the message of Peter and the apostles if it was from God (Acts 5 v 39). This could have been one of the "goads" that he was fighting against.

Acts 9 v 6 ... "Lord, what do You want me to do?" ...

As soon as he heard the message from Jesus, he realised that he must do something about his current situation.

Acts 9 v 6 ... Then the Lord said to him ...

Jesus knew that Saul was enthusiastic in whatever he did, so he was here pointing him in the right direction.

Verses 7 to 9 tell us that Saul did just as he was asked. This would have required considerable courage. He was in effect joining the opposition. We are not told what effect this had on the men who were with him, but they were willing to help him in his blindness by leading him by the hand to Damascus.

Verses 10 to 19 tell us how Saul received his sight again and was baptised.

Ananias showed considerable faith in going to Saul, who was known to be a vicious persecutor of believers such as himself. He accepted God's reassurance and did what he was asked.

Acts 9 v 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."

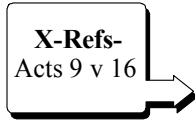
The echoes from "Gentiles" show that the Old Testament prophets predicted that Gentiles, or "non-Jews", would be included in God's purpose:

**Echoes -
Gentiles in
God's plan** → Genesis 12 v 3; Isaiah 11 v 10; 42 v 1 and 6; 49 v 6.

Saul was to be involved in the fulfilment of these prophecies by taking the gospel message to the Gentiles in the Roman Empire.

Acts 9 v 16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Look at the cross-references and you will see how much he was to suffer:



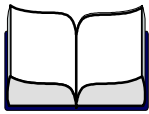
2 Corinthians 11 v 23 to 27; 2 Timothy 2 v 9 and 10; 3 v 11.

Jesus was making it clear that this would be no easy task that Saul was being given.

Acts 9 v 18 ... and he arose and was baptised.

We see that Saul believed that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and was baptised when he realised his situation. We can see similarities to Acts 2, when several thousand were baptised, and to Acts 8, when the Ethiopian was baptised.

Acts 9 v 20 to 31 - Initial preaching by Saul

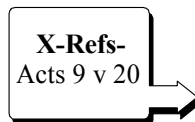


Read Acts 9 v 20 to 31

Verses 20 to 22 tell us about Saul's initial preaching.

Acts 9 v 20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

Look at the references and you will see that Jesus is often referred to as "Son of God":



Matthew 26 v 63 and 64; 27 v 43 and 54; John 1 v 49; Acts 8 v 37;
Romans 1 v 4; 1 John 4 v 14 and 15.



Look at the implications of Jesus being the Son of God in the "Jesus as the Son of God" section of the *Additional Notes*. The summary, on the next page, of the conclusions shows how it affects our hope of life:

- Jesus had God as his Father and Mary as his mother
- This enabled him to overcome sin in the same human flesh that we all have
- Because he overcame sin, God raised him from the dead and gave him immortality
- We too can be counted as being right with God, and have eternal life through faith in the work of Jesus Christ

Verse 22 of Acts 9 tells us that Saul preached in Damascus proving that Jesus was “the Christ” - the special descendant of Abraham and David promised in the Old Testament. We saw that this was also part of Peter’s message in Acts 2 v 36.

Acts 9 v 23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

Saul was experiencing opposition in the same way that Jesus did to his preaching and that we also saw in Acts 4 and 5.

The rest of this section shows that Saul was eventually accepted by the believers after Barnabas assured them that he was no longer a threat. We also see that there was opposition from the Jews of Greek origin. God made the ideal choice in Saul, because there was a lot of opposition to be overcome, and God saw that a man of Saul’s enthusiasm was the right man for the work.

Acts 9 v 31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

The cross-references from “walking in the fear of the LORD” show us a little more of what this means:

X-Refs-
Walking in
the fear of
the Lord

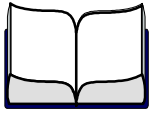
Job 28 v 28; Psalm 86 v 11; Proverbs 8 v 13.

- Wisely avoiding evil is part of fearing the Lord
- Those who fear God walk in His way
- The fear of the Lord should restrain pride and arrogance



We should follow the example of the first-century believers and respect God’s principles, attempting to avoid things that challenge those principles.

Acts 9 v 32 to 43 - Aeneas healed and Dorcas raised to life



Read Acts 9 v 32 to 43

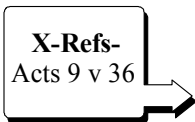
This section comes during a preaching journey by Peter along the coastal plain starting at Lydda and eventually reaching Caesarea in chapter 10. He covered similar ground to the later part of Philip's travels in Acts 9. (See Map 3 on page 2 of the *Additional Notes* booklet.)

We read in this section of two more miracles. Peter's healing of Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, gave support to the work of preaching. When they saw Aeneas healed, all the residents of Lydda and Sharon "turned to the Lord" (verse 35).

Peter raised Dorcas to life again when he saw the sorrow of the disciples. This miracle also supported the preaching work as "many believed on the Lord" in Joppa (verse 42).

Acts 9 v 36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

If you look at the references you will see the attitude of the first-century church to pastoral work:



Colossians 1 v 10; 1 Timothy 5 v 9 and 10; James 1 v 27.

We see that there was pastoral work going on in the first-century church. In addition to the preaching work there was also care for the spiritual and physical needs of the believers.

Verse 43 tells us that Peter then stayed in Joppa with Simon, a tanner, for a while.

In the next session we shall see that Peter was asked to go from Joppa to Caesarea to take the gospel message to non-Jews.

Summary of Session 5

In this session we have seen the gospel message spread to the region of Samaria. We have also learned more about the ways of the first-century church.

- Saul's persecution was terrible for those involved, but it helped spread the message
- Simon the sorcerer is an example of those we should not listen to
- Saul's conversion shows that whatever our sins are, we can be forgiven
- Confession of belief that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament was followed by baptism
- In addition to preaching, the first-century church looked after the spiritual and physical needs of the believers



We have also had some challenges:

- We must resist ideas that were not taught or believed by the apostles in the first century
- Our journey through life should follow God's "way" if we wish to escape from death
- We should avoid anything which challenges God's principles of Truth

Questions

1. What have you learned about the significance of the word “church”?
2. What sort of influences should we avoid?
3. What have you learned about the practices of the early church?

Self-study notes

Cross-references from Acts 8 v 9 (page 3)

- Signs that people are speaking on God’s behalf can sometimes be imitated by impostors (Exodus 7 v 11 and 22; 8 v 18 and 19)
- God disapproves of those who become involved in witchcraft and similar activities (Leviticus 20 v 6)
- A time would come when people would be ruled by money, be arrogant, despise God and yet have some semblance of religion. We are told to avoid mixing with such people (2 Timothy 3 v 2 and 5)

Laying on of hands (page 5)

- The apostles could give the Holy Spirit by “laying on of hands”. Simon did not have this ability (Acts 8 v 18 and 19)
- Ananias was specially commissioned by God to “lay hands on” Saul. As a result Saul was healed of his blindness as well as being given the Holy Spirit (Acts 9 v 17)
- Paul had the ability to give the Holy Spirit by “laying on of hands” (Acts 19 v 6)

Young's Concordance entries

CHURCH -

That which is called out, ekklesia.

- Matt. 16.18 upon this rock I will build my church; and
18.17 if he .. neglect .. tell (it) unto the church
18.17 but if he neglect to hear the church, let
Acts 2.47 the LORD added [to the church] daily such
5.11 And great fear came upon all the church

WAY -

10. *Way, road, journey, custom, hodos.*

- Matt. 2.12 departed into their ... country another w.
3. 3 Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his

Acts 16. 17 which show unto us the way of salvation
18. 25 This man was instructed in the way of

Notes

