

>>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 16 <<<<<<<<

- 1) When we left last time, we were talking about Philip's adventure.
- 2) Continuing, it looks like it is not over ...

**Acts 8:39–40 (NIV)**

- 3) As we said, Philip is on quite the adventure.
  - a) Heads for home from Jerusalem and winds up in a ministry in Samaria.
  - b) Leaves a successful ministry in Samaria at the behest of an angel.
  - c) Heads back to Jerusalem and a road south of there with no real knowledge of why in sight.
  - d) Converts and baptizes a total stranger.
  - e) Then without any warning his is suddenly and miraculously placed in Azotus
    - i) Azotus would be about 4 to 20 miles away from the desert road depending on where they had stopped to baptize the eunuch .
    - ii) Azotus is about 30 mi. north of the Gaza border.
- 4) Given these happenings in my life personally, I would be absolutely flabbergasted!
  - a) I might even be frozen in place afraid to move not knowing what to expect next.
- 5) However, not Philip – his mission doesn't change no matter what his circumstances.
- 6) He simply strikes out walking and preaching the gospel wherever he goes.
- 7) Turns out, he heads from Azotus (current name of the Philistine capital Ashdod) and winds up in Caesarea his home.
- 8) We don't hear of him again until Acts chapter 21.
- 9) Luke and some others meet Paul and travel to Meletus who are on their way to Jerusalem. After sending for the elders from Ephesus and saying goodbye to them they continue their voyage.

**Acts 21:7–9 (NIV)**

- 10) Philp is still well known and loved as an evangelist and has likely not ceased working for the Lord from that early adventure beginning in Samaria until now.
- 11) Philip is truly a dedicated and submissive disciple of our Lord. When one considers what he is enduring, it is nothing short of amazing (and somewhat intimidating).

***Paul, the Beginning Years Explained***

- 1) Now, enters our next famous character in the narrative of Acts – Saul the persecutor soon to become Paul the Apostle.

**Acts 9:1–9 (NIV)**

- 2) Lets' look at the facts to get a perspective here.
- a) First, when Saul first sees the light, closes his eyes, and hears the voice, he does not know who it is.
    - i) There is no indication that Christ appears bodily at this point. The men heard the sound but did not see anyone.
  - b) Then, Jesus tells him plainly – **I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!**
  - c) At that moment, we must consider what would be going through Saul's mind.
  - d) He knew many facts about Jesus but he also had an obviously strong opinion about who He was:
    - i) He knew that Jesus was a preacher, perhaps a prophet and miracle worker, popular with many of his fellow Jews (obviously since he was pursuing them to put them in prison).
    - ii) He knew in detail what those he was pursuing believed about Jesus and, to say the least, he did not accept it or agree with it.
    - iii) Most importantly, he knew the claim of Jesus' followers was that he was the long awaited Messiah – indeed the very one Saul himself was waiting on.
      - (1) Of course, he had a completely different take on what that meant! AND JESUS WAS NOT IT!
    - iv) I think it is important to remember that Saul also knew that Jesus and His followers were absolutely claiming that He was the Son of God!
    - v) Though he did not believe the conclusions being drawn by his soon to be brothers and sisters, he absolutely knew the prophecies and law on which they were based.
    - vi) As with most other Jews, the thing that kept him from even considering it was expectations – what he expected and what he saw did not match up in his heart and mind.
  - e) And YET, HERE WE ARE!!
  - f) The transformation of Saul of Tarsus to Paul the apostle begins over the next three days as he sits in that room in Damascus, blind and so shook to his foundation that he cannot even eat or drink.
  - g) The transformation likely continues for many months and perhaps even years.
  - h) He must come to grips with how this all fits together.
    - i) It is the same God he has been serving his entire life.
    - ii) It is the same foundational beliefs that he has always had in the Law and the Prophets.
    - iii) It is the same country and people that he has always known.
    - iv) BUT – the point in history he was waiting for has arrived and it is absolutely NOT what he was expecting.

- v) In fact, as stated earlier, he saw this entire situation as not only a contradiction but as a threat to his very core beliefs – his fundamentals.
- 3) All of this is what leads me to say that from my perspective, Saul, and for that matter, any Jew who came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God **is not “converted”**.
  - a) Instead, I think they simply come to a different understanding and knowledge of their God’s plan and accept it.
  - b) Saul as well as any other Jew believes in the same one true God of the universe – the transformation that takes place is an acceptance of Jesus as the fulfillment of that one true God’s plan AND promise.
- 4) While, on the other hand, pagans, Gentiles, Romans, any and all polytheists and non believers must:
  - a) FIRST come to a belief in the one true God which also demands them giving up what they had worshiped in the past.
  - b) and THEN accept His son and all that comes with that new found belief system – the Law, the Prophets, the design of a new way of life.
  - c) THAT’s a CONVERSION!
  - d) Perhaps this is a ***Difference without Distinction?***
  - e) Just my opinion on this subject and perhaps some FUN food for thought.
- 5) Continuing, let’s look at Jesus’ answer. I find it interesting in two ways:
  - a) First, He indicates that He personally is being persecuted – not His followers.
  - b) Second another subtle but important Greek reference – Jesus uses the term εγω ειμι.
    - i) When translated literally, the phrase means “I I am” – It is used other places in the Bible by God stating that He is God – the Great I am!
  - c) Saul would have recognized this phrase without doubt and with that phrase Jesus claims truth to the very last impossible thing Saul must come to believe – Jesus is the Son of God.

### **Acts 9:10–19a (NIV)**

- 1) This is a typical discourse framework we see between the Lord and a prophet or someone He is giving instructions to go on a mission.
  - a) The Lord give the instruction, the person gives a reason or excuse not to go and then the Lord reassures the person and things move on.
- 2) Ananias was very dubious of Saul and with good reason.
- 3) However, Jesus assures him that it is the thing that is needed.
- 4) We need to note here a couple of things:

- a) Many times we get the impression that Paul was “the apostle to the Gentiles”. However, Jesus states clearly here that he is also to go to the people of Israel.
  - b) We must not forget that.
  - c) It is obvious that much of Paul’s ministry was to areas where Gentiles were predominant but, as we will see, in most cases, he begins with the Jewish part of the communities first and then the Gentiles.
  - d) Along with this comes a major point in much of his ministry – **reconciliation** – getting Jews and Gentiles to come to the same point in their new faith.
  - e) Of course, as we will also see, he gives his message before kings and the elite at every opportunity.
  - f) Another thing that we need to note here is Jesus’ concluding remark. **“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**
  - g) To me, there is an indication in this that Jesus is going to spend time with Saul to bring him fully into a knowledge of what it is he is to be doing.
- 5) In this next passage, we are going to enter another of those areas where we really do not have the total picture of the timeline.
  - 6) I am going to spend some time attempting to bring all the pieces together.
  - 7) Mainly, because what we see in this is the fledgling efforts of Saul the new believer in the Messiah dealing with the inevitable trials one would expect.
  - 8) We also see where he ends up after this period and his disappearance from the main stream for a number of years.
  - 9) All of this is important in gaining an understanding for Saul as he becomes Paul the apostle.
  - 1) We will start in Damascus with, what one must assume are the first enthusiastic efforts of this new Christian / former Christian hater and persecutor.