



Men's Bible Fellowship

ONE MAN. ONE MISSION. NO ONE LEFT BEHIND.

Colton, CA

ACTS

“SAUL’S CONVERSION”

LESSON 8

If you are reading this you are likely participating in a small Bible Study group. In addition to the blessings that come from studying God’s Word together, one of the hidden benefits of small group studies is being able to watch God at work in the lives of fellow believers. God’s remodeling of believer’s lives is never more impressive than when testimonies are shared. My own personal conversion and testimony isn’t particularly dramatic or sensational, so when I hear the powerful way God has radically changed the lives of others I listen in awe of all our Lord has done. Often as others share what they were before conversion, it is almost impossible to reconcile who they were with what they’ve become as God continues to transform their lives. The story set before us this week is just such a conversion experience.

William Barclay calls it, “the most famous conversion story of all time.”¹ Because we will focus in detail upon Saul’s transformation in our study, we’ll look briefly at another equally inspiring conversion which largely parallels Paul’s experience.

John Newton, best known as the author of “Amazing Grace,” was instructed in the Gospel by his mother at an early age. After the death of his mother, Newton at age 11 became a seaman on his father’s ship. Newton lived a rancorous and rebellious life, eventually becoming the captain of his own slave ship. In an incident which he called “the great deliverance” off the coast of Africa while in the midst of a storm, when all seemed to be lost, Newton cried out “Lord have mercy on us.” Later while safe in his cabin, he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm, and that grace had begun to work for him. He left the ship for the clergy, studying under the famous evangelist George Whitefield. He was a close friend of John and Charles Wesley, and disciplesd William Wilberforce as a member of his congregation. It was Wilberforce whose work led to the abolition of slavery in Great Britain. Newton had the following written on his tombstone, “By the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the Gospel which he had long laboured to destroy.”²

In three consecutive chapters, Acts 8, 9, and 10, we witness three conversions that truly illustrate God’s desire for all to come to salvation regardless of origin. You may recall from Genesis 9 that Noah had three sons from which all peoples of the world originated. The Ethiopian converted in Acts 8 was of the line of Ham. Saul in Acts 9 was an offspring of the line of Shem. And Cornelius, converted in Acts 10, was from the line of Japheth. This shows the true heart of God towards the unsaved. He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b).

The common thread in all conversions is God's Amazing Grace:
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear. And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.³

¹William Barclay The Daily Study Bible Series Acts Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1955 page 71
²http://www.anointedlinks.com/amazing_grace.html ³http://www.constitution.org/col/amazing_grace-p.html

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Memory Verse

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

Day 1 – Persecution Breaks Out The Gospel Spreads Out – Acts 8:1-8

You may recall that Jesus gave his disciples marching orders in Acts 1:8 to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the Earth. Well to this point the church had grown to over 20,000 but the believers hadn't left Jerusalem. Stephen's martyrdom would quickly change all of that.

1. What do we know about Saul? See Acts 22:3, 23:6, 22:28, Philippians 3:4-5

2. What was one positive that came out of Stephen's martyrdom?

3. Despite the persecution and the dispersion caused by it, what did the fearless followers of Jesus proclaim as they went out into Samaria?

4. What signs validated the gospel message preached to the Samaritans and what evidence can you uncover that shows their acceptance of God's truth?

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“_____, if anyone is in _____, he is a new creation; old _____ have passed away; _____, all things have _____ new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

Day 2 – A Mixed Up Magician – Acts 8:9-25

The Samaritans were the remnant of the 10 tribes that formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the nation divided following Solomon's reign. They left the worship of God to follow idol worship and as a result of this God's judgment occurred in 722 B.C. when they were conquered by Assyria. During this period of captivity the Israelites freely intermarried with other ethnic groups and adopted their culture. By contrast the nation of Judea remained relatively faithful in their worship of God until conquered by Babylon around 586 B.C. While in captivity these Jews maintained their separate identity. For an idea of the cultural tension between the groups read the account of Jesus and the Samaritan women at the well (John 4).

1. We meet a very interesting character named Simon. What do we learn about him and his reputation and status in Samaria?

2. What might have been the source of Simon's power? (Hint see 2 Corinthians 11:14) And what was Simon's response when he encountered the true power of God?

3. In Acts 2 we saw the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the believers on the Day of Pentecost. Ephesians 1:13-14 describes the indwelling or sealing of the Holy Spirit for all believers. Why do you think it was only through the laying on of hands that the new Samaritan believers received the Spirit?

4. Simon offers to buy the authority to lay hands on believers so they may receive the Spirit and suffers a severe rebuke from Peter. Do you think Simon was a true believer? Do you think Peter's remarks to Simon were appropriate? Why or why not?

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“_____, if _____ is in _____, he is a new _____; old _____ have _____ away; _____, all _____ have _____ new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

NKJV

Day 3 – Ethiopian Comes To Faith – Acts 8:26-39

J. Vernon McGee points out that Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth from which all peoples of the world ultimately trace their lineage. Evidence that the gospel is truly intended for all mankind is found in the conversion of a representative from each of these lines in Acts 8, 9 and 10. We are about to witness the conversion of an Ethiopian, a son of Ham. In Acts 9 we will see the conversion of Saul, a son of Shem, followed in Acts 10 by the conversion of Cornelius the Centurion, a son of Japheth.

1. If in fact the Ethiopian official was a eunuch (the preferred but not necessary translation), he would have been excluded by Mosaic Law from becoming a true proselyte. What do we know about this individual? _____

2. Have you ever had a divine appointment like Phillip? If so, describe yours as well as his as recorded in scripture. _____

3. We are told the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53. It is not surprising that he was confused as Jewish scholars of the day could not agree if the suffering servant described in this passage was Isaiah himself, the symbolic nation Israel, or the Messiah. Read Isaiah 53:3-12 and list all of the Messianic prophecies which Jesus fulfilled.

4. What key elements of conversion do we see in the story of the Ethiopian?

It is very interesting to note that upon his return to Ethiopia this official did not let his faith remain silent. Today the Ethiopian Coptic Christian Church boasts over fifty million members and they trace its start back to this official Phillip baptized on the road to Gaza.

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“_____, if _____ in _____, he _____ new _____; old _____ have _____ away; _____, all _____ have _____ new.” 2
Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

Day 4 – Saul’s Conversion – Acts 9:1-19

Saul was as unlikely a candidate for conversion as any imaginable. Yet in the hands of God this former Pharisee became one of the greatest evangelist of all time and the most prolific author of the New Testament.

1. Describe in detail Saul’s encounter on the Damascus Road.

2. A goad was a pointed or sharpened stick used to urge or direct the path of an animal. What goads do you think Jesus referred to in verse 5?

3. Ananias may be one of the all time unsung heroes of scripture. What role did he play in Saul’s conversion? Why was both his reluctance and obedience understandable?

4. Saul later describes his conversion and subsequent preparation for ministry in Galatians 1:13-17. What additional details do we learn from this passage?

Memory Verse – Fill in the Blanks

“_____, _____ in _____, he _____; old _____ have _____; _____, all _____ new.”
2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

Day 5 – Saul’s Early Ministry And Peter’s – Acts 9:20-41

1. Saul, after a three-year hiatus (many commentators feel this occurred between verses 19 and 20), returns to Damascus. What does he do and how are his efforts received?

2. What was the understandable response of the disciples in Jerusalem to Saul’s attempt to join their fellowship? Who helped disciple and advocate for Saul? What do we know about him?

3. Peter appears to have the gift of healing. Whenever we see Peter use this gift how does he leverage it for the advancement of the gospel? What is the impact of miracles on observers and how do many respond? _____

Write This Week’s Memory Verse:

Day 6 – Take Away / Summary

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, “What did you learn?” We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible. *How would these phrases instruct or encourage us today?*

Persecution (Acts 8:1 and also Acts 9:4, 5)

Laying On Of Hands (Acts 9:17 and also Acts 8:17)

Tool Box

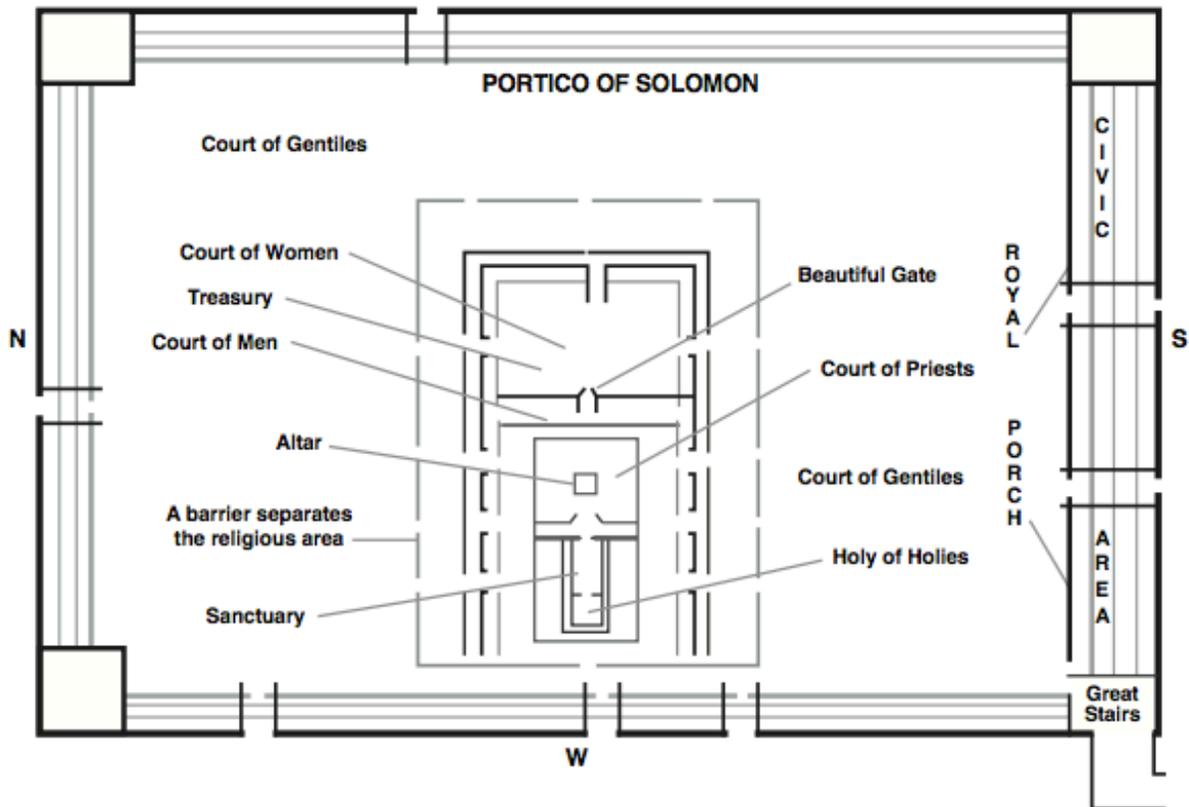
Step 1: The Bible. Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as *New Living Translation* or *The Message*). To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as *New American Standard Bible* or *New King James Version*.

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger’s Bible Dictionary 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and blueletterbible.com. Word Studies: 1) Zodhiates’ *The Complete Word Study New Testament* 2) Vine’s *Complete Expository Dictionary* 3) Strong’s *Dictionary of Bible Words*

Step 3: Commentaries. Commentaries should not be used in place of studying God’s Word directly, but they can give you additional insights. Some good commentaries include: John MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee, *The Expositors Commentary*, NIV Application Commentary, William Barclay (great for background and culture but be careful of his spiritual applications).

Herod's Temple During the Early Church

The crippled beggar mentioned in Acts 3 was sitting at the Beautiful Gate. The Apostles taught in the Portico of Solomon or in the Court of the Gentiles. The Sanhedrin met within a chamber in the Sanctuary of the temple itself.



OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

