

Chapter 29: The Number of the Disciples Was Multiplied

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1. The Book of Acts Continues

In these chapters, we see the work of the church, under the direction of the Apostles going forward. Peter, along with James and John, function as the presiding leadership of the church. As the growth and the responsibilities of the Apostles increases, there is a need for others to be called to assist in this work. This results in calling seven to oversee the temporal work of the church. Two of the seven, are given special attention in this section as Stephen is called upon to be the first martyr and Philip serves a mission to Samaria. He will receive assistance from Peter and John.

The latter sections of this lesson are devoted to an individual who will fulfill a major role in the remaining chapters of the New Testament. His Hebrew name is Saul (Acts 26:14), but he will become known in the scriptures by his Roman/Latin name, Paul (Acts 13:9), as he goes on his first mission with Barnabas. His transformation from persecutor to ardent defender is miraculous. As we will later learn, his missionary work to the Gentiles will bring him special recognition and open the doors of the Gospel to include all individuals on the earth.

2. Seven Supervisors of Temporal Work

Acts 6:1-2

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

We learn that with the increase in numbers of the congregation of saints [members], the number increase who were sick and needy. While the Apostles do not do the work individually, they held by reason of their Apostolic calling, the ultimate responsibility to see that the sick and poor were cared for in the church. It was,

therefore, necessary for the twelve to delegate this responsibility to others who had their support and confidence. The qualifications of these individuals included, “men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

Acts 6:5

**5...they [the apostles] chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.
6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.**

The process of selection is the same as it is today. Names are submitted; the presiding authorities [the Apostles] make it a matter of prayer in order to learn whom the Lord had chosen; the names of the individuals are submitted to the congregation for a sustaining vote, and then they are set apart and given the authority to act in their calling.

3. Stephen Testifies and is Arrested

Acts 6:8-10

**8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.
9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them Cilicia and of Asis, disputing with Stephen.
10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.**

Being full of the Holy Ghost, as Stephen taught the truths of the Gospel to the people. He was successful in convincing them of the truths revealed by Jesus Christ, through the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. He was then able to ignite their faith to the degree that he was able to perform “great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8).

There were, however, in the audience critics who, despite their ardent efforts, were not able to refute the truths he was teaching. Unable to silence him with their logic, they determined to silence him with their lies.

Acts 6:11-12

**11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him spake blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.
12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council {Sanhedrin}.
13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:
14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.**

By the use of false witnesses, who are willing to testify before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the critics seek to have Stephen put to death. It is of interest to note that one of their charges is a misinterpretation of Jesus regarding His destruction of the temple combined with bringing about a change in the customs Moses delivered to us. In this manner they sought to present Stephen as speaking against both God and Moses.

Acts 6:15

15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Adam Clarke states,

“It appears that the light and power of God which dwelt in his soul shone through his face, and God gave them this proof of the falsity of the testimony which was now before them; for as the face of Stephen now shone as the face of Moses did when he came down from the mount [Exodus 34:29-35], it was the fullest proof that he had not spoken blasphemous words either against Moses or God, else this splendor of heaven had not rested upon him.”¹

The manifestation of the spirit of God upon Stephen’s face may have been the impetus for the High Priest to give Stephen an opportunity to speak in response to the serious allegations brought against Stephen.

Stephen’s defense is to give a history of Israel over the past centuries including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Having done so, he shares with them Moses witness of the coming of Jesus Christ. It was He who had spoken to him out of the burning bush, introducing Himself to Moses.

Acts 7:32

32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...

Stephen continues.

Acts 7:37-38

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who receive the lively oracles [Ten Commandments] to give unto us.

Despite God’s intervention with His chosen people, instead of the people expressing gratitude for God’s direction, they rebelled.

Acts 7:39-41

39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again to Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us,...

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

The penalty they received for their idolatry was:

1. To lose the higher law the Lord had originally given that had been written upon the tablets that Moses destroyed

2. To receive a lesser law that was based upon the law of sacrifices which was designed to direct their thoughts and actions to the coming of Jesus Christ
3. To wander in the wilderness for forty years thereby being denied the opportunity to enter into the land God had promised them

Their forefather could have enjoyed wonderful blessings, but instead they rebelled.

Acts 7:51-52

51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One [Jesus Christ]; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Rather than being the accused based upon the false accusations of blaspheme against God and Moses, Stephen instead defended God and His prophets, including Moses, as he taught Israel divine truths to which they had rebelled. Had they embraced the teaching of God and His prophets, they would have recognized Jesus as their Messiah and not put Him to death.

The response of the council to Stephen was complete rejection. Though they had received a witness of the truth, they were determined to silence him.

4. Stephen: First Martyr

Stephen is given a rare vision into heaven. He shares his witness with those in the council before they could take direct action against him.

Acts 7:55-56

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

56 And he [Stephen] said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Those in attendance were not affected by his witness or his innocence. They wanted him dead.

Acts 7:57-60

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him:...

59 And they stoned Stephen calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when had said this, he fell asleep [died].

Stephen becomes the first martyr of the Early Church after the death of Jesus Christ. His witness and testimony of Christ and His teaching brought healing to the people of faith and anger to those who resisted the truths he taught. Like his Savior before him, Stephen sought only to teach those truths that would free Israel

from the bondage of sin, and based upon their repentance and adherents to the principles of the Gospel, bring them the divine blessings they sought. For teaching this message, he gave his life.

There was one who was in attendance at the stoning of Stephen. He did not participate in his stoning, but “the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58). We will learn more about Saul as the lesson unfolds.

D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner state,

“Among the covenant people of ancient times, clothing appears to have been used to witness or to attest to something, as a token of sign of one’s testimony, or as a symbol of one’s formal association with an idea or an action.

“Paul seems to have represented the Sanhedrin in overseeing the official stoning of Stephen—an action the Jews believed was supported by the Old Covenant, or Mosaic law.”²

5. Philip Preaches and Performs Miracles in Samaria

Saul, now operating with the full support and direction of the Sanhedrin, is zealous in his persecution of the members of the Church in Jerusalem.

Acts 8:1, 3

1 And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen] death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

As a result of Saul’s persecutory efforts in Jerusalem, those who were able, left the area in order to go to other parts of the land where they were free from persecution. One valuable aspect of their journey is spreading the gospel.

Acts 8:4

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

One who left Jerusalem was a member of the seven who had been called as one of the supervisors of the temporal work (see Acts 6:5). It is clear from the scriptures that like Stephen, Philip’s authority and responsibility, along with the care of the poor and needy, also included teaching the principles of the gospel, performing baptisms, and where faith was manifest, performing miracles. He did not, however, hold the higher authority the Apostles held as will be seen.

Acts 8:5-8

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

Philip, acting within the authority he held, was able when sufficient faith had been manifested by his teachings, to perform many of the miracles that Jesus had previously performed. This was truly a wonderful day for those of Samaria for they had waited patiently for the day when they could also be taught the gospel principles. During the days of Jesus, you will recall, only a few Samaritans were able to receive the principles of the gospel, for their day had not yet come (see Matthew 15:24—daughter had devil; John 4:39—woman at the well).

LDS Bible Dictionary states,

“**Samaritans.** The title is used to describe the people who inhabited Samaria after the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were the descendants of (1) Foreign colonists placed there by the Kings of Assyria and Babylonia (2 Kgs. 17:24; Ezra 4:2, 10); (2) Israelites who escaped at the time of the captivity. The population was, therefore, partly Jewish and partly gentile...[however] the people of Samaria were included among those to whom the apostles were [now] directed to preach the gospel (Acts 1:8).”³

Acts 8:12, 14

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

14 Now when the apostles which were in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.

We may ask why did the Apostles Peter and John make the journey to Samaria? It is because Philip held the authority to preach the gospel, perform miracles, and to baptize, but he did not hold the higher authority of the Apostles. He, therefore, could not bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the new members.

Acts 8:15-17

15 Who, when they [Peter and John] were come down, prayed for them [the new disciples], that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

17 Then laid they [Peter and John] laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Joseph Smith states,

“Peter was clothed with the power of Elias. When he went to Samaria, he could baptize for the remission of sins but could not lay on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. But [he] sent for Peter and John, who had the power of Elijah.

In the case of Philip, when he went down to Samaria [he] was under the spirit of Elias. He baptized both men and women. When Peter and John heard of it they went down and laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. This shows the distinction between the two powers.”⁴

How does one obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost? One must have faith in Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, be baptized by immersion by one who holds the authority, and then receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by one holding the higher authority. Without receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, one is born of water, but not of the spirit.

Simon, one who had previously practiced sorcery or magic amongst the people, had become a new convert of the church. Upon seeing the Apostles bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost and its accompanying blessing, thought the authority to perform this ordinance could be purchased with money. He received this rebuke from Peter.

Acts 8:20, 22

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

James E. Faust states,

“Priesthood power is the greatest power on earth...For us, priesthood power is the power and authority delegated by God to act in His name for the salvation of his children. Caring for others is the very essence of priesthood responsibility...this greatest of all powers, the priesthood power, is not accessed the way power is used in the world. It cannot be bought or sold...worldly power often is employed ruthlessly. However, priesthood power is involved only through those principles of righteousness by which the priesthood is governed.”⁵

The Lord gave the following direction regarding the use of the priesthood.

Doctrine and Covenants 121:36-37

**36 ...the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and...the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.
37 ...they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, or vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or authority of that man.**

On this day, through the words of the Apostle Peter, Simon learned an important lesson regarding the sacred trust one is given by the Lord when they receive the power and authority of the priesthood.

Philip then received a new missionary assignment.

Acts 8:26-28

**26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.
27 And he arose and went: and behold a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,
28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet.**

Philip is directed to go to the desert near Gaza. While there, he finds a man who is in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. He is alone, and had stopped to rest as he was traveling from Jerusalem where he had been to worship, before proceeding on his way to his home in Ethiopia.

Acts 8: 29-31

**29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.
30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias [Isaiah], and said, Understandst thou what thou readest?
31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.**

Once Philip feels the promptings of the spirit, he does not hesitate, but “runs thither to him” (Acts 8:30). Phillip is an example to each of us in his desire to bring people unto Christ.

Acts 8:32-33

**32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth.
33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.**

This scripture found in Isaiah 53:7-8 is a prophecy given regarding the suffering that Jesus Christ would experience as He was brought before His persecutors. (See Mark 14:61; 15:2-15; B/M, Mosiah 14:7-8).

Acts 8:35

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

As they travelled together, Philip continued to teach him the First Principles of the Gospel, including the importance of baptism. The spirit bore witness to both his mind and his heart regarding the truthfulness of the principles that Philip was teaching him.

Acts 8:36-39

**36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?
37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.
39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.**

We may be certain that Philip had also instructed his new convert regarding the importance of receiving the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost by one who held the proper authority following baptism. Having been taught and baptized, arrangements would then be made for him to receive this special ordinance when possible.

Acts 8:40

40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Philip's sudden departure was due to the importance of his missionary labors. He will continue to teach the gospel principles as directed by the Spirit of God to all who would listen to his message. His teachings began with the First Principle, Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Adam Clarke states,

“The Azotus of the New Testament is the Ashdod of the Old. It was given by Joshua to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:47). It was one of the five lordships which belonged to the Philistines, and is a seaport town on the Mediterranean Sea, between Gaza on the south, and Joppa or Jaffa on the north...[This Caesarea on the coast with an excellent harbor, not Caesarea Philippi which is an inland town nears the springs of Jordan]...As Philip preached in all the cities of Palestine till he came to Caesarea, he must have preached in the different cities of the Philistine country, Ashdod, Akkaron, and Jamnia. It appears from Acts 21:8, that Philip settled at Caesarea, where he had a house and family, four of his unmarried daughters being prophetesses.”⁶

6. Saul: Persecutor of the Saints

We were first introduced to Saul at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). He was there in an official capacity on behalf of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was to confirm that the punishment of Stephen's death was carried out.

Next, we learn that Saul's zealous persecution did not end with the stoning of Stephen, but extended to include all members of the Jerusalem Church. Those members who had not departed from the city or gone into hiding, at Saul's direction were arrested by the soldiers at his disposal and placed in prison (Acts 8:1-3).

Saul's fury and ardent belief was that he was engaged in the work of his God as he arrested these converts to Christ. His efforts were not confined to only the converts in Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1-2

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

How is it that Saul could go to Damascus and upon the written word of the high priest in Jerusalem have an individual brought to stand trial before the Sanhedrin?

Sidney B. Sperry states,

“If it be a puzzle to the modern reader how Saul could legally bring back prisoners from a city beyond the borders of Palestine, we may explain that by Roman sufferance every Jewish colony in her Empire was considered subject in religious matters to the local synagogue, which in turn was under the control of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. That a Jew belonged to the Church of Christ, or to some other strange group, would make no difference to the Jerusalem authorities: he would be looked upon merely as a member of a Jewish sect like any Pharisee or Sadducee.”⁷

Having obtained the official documents, Saul now departs from Damascus.

Sidney B. Sperry continues,

“Having received the necessary papers giving him the authorization he desired, Saul went on his cruel—yes, murderous—mission to Damascus. He was doubtless attended by the needed servants and officers of the

Sanhedrin. We need not pause to speculate on the route he took; the fact is that he was only too willing to walk the one hundred and forty miles separating him from the ancient Syrian capital. The Greek words used in the narration suggest that he walked, not to mention the fact that on coming into the city his companions ‘led him by the hand.’ (Acts 9:8). When the author once traversed the distance between Jerusalem and Damascus in a modern car (which was bad enough), he couldn’t help but think of Saul’s zeal and determination in doing a job he thought was right. The fact that the future Apostle walked is perhaps of little importance in itself, but it does tend to reveal certain aspects of his character and state of mind.”⁸

Before we precede further with our discussion, maybe we should reflect upon Saul’s culpability for his actions.

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

“Paul informs us that he was brought up in strict compliance with Israelitish law. It is well for us to remember as we know that Paul took no part in making the decision that condemned Stephen and fortunately took no part in the stoning which cost Stephen his life. That he was in full sympathy with what was done we may well believe and, therefore, was willing to protect the clothes of those who engaged in the awful tragedy. It is likely true that he sanctioned the action. It is also true that in his misplaced zeal he was determined to bring all believers in Jesus to trial and have them punished perhaps to lose their lives by the violation of what he truly believed to be in full accord with the commandment of the Lord which had been given to Moses in relation to those who forsook the truth and turned to the worship of other gods. (See Leviticus 24:13-14, 16; Deuteronomy 13:6-9).

“Fortunately, Paul took no part in [Stephen being stoned], only to take charge of the clothes of the guilty murderers. That he was sympathetic with them is true.

“Considering all the elements in connection with his life, we must say of Paul, what he did he did honestly in this work of destruction, feeling that he was doing the will of the Eternal Father. It was wrong, and it took a drastic measure to stop him in his mad course and turn him to the defense of the truth. Whatever evil was at his door, he fully paid the price through his greater zeal and perseverance to undo all that he had formerly done and bring souls unto Christ. Eventually it was required of him that he too lay down his life in martyrdom in defense of the Son of God whom previously he had persecuted.

“Surely Paul is worthy of our sympathy for the things he did which were wrong, and our love for his life of zeal which intensified without question because of his evil labors ignorantly performed.”⁹

Whatever our feelings regarding Saul/Paul, we should remember that He who knows the mind and hearts of all men and, for whose sins He suffered, extended the call to serve to him. I believe he exemplified the same zeal, though misplaced, in persecuting the members of the Church, that he exemplified in his missionary service and in defending the Church. Like each of us, it is extremely important who we eventually become during our mortal journey. I believe Saul/Paul deserves our gratitude for becoming one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

7. Saul: His Conversion

Acts 9:3-6

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?...

Adam Clarke clarifies meaning, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,"

"It is a proverbial expression [that]...signifies an ox goad, a piece of pointed iron stuck in the end of a stick, with which the ox is urged on when drawing the plough. The origin of the proverb seems to have been this: Sometimes it happens that a restive stubborn ox kicks back against the goad and thus wounds himself more deeply; hence, it has become a proverb to signify the fruitlessness and absurdity of rebelling against lawful authority, and getting into greater difficulty by endeavoring to avoid trifling sufferings."¹⁰

I am sure that no one was more surprised than Saul by hearing the voice of the Lord. In one brief moment, he came to the realization that amongst those whom he had been persecuting was the Lord Himself! In his zeal to persecute the humble disciples of Christ's Church, he had, in fact, been furthering the work of Satan upon the earth. Furthermore, he had gravely hindered the work of Jesus Christ, His Lord, from going forth! To Saul's credit, his simple, and yet humble reply is, "Lord, what would thou have me do?" His response signifies a complete surrender to do whatever the Lord would ask him to do.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"A man can ask no more important question in his life than that which Paul asked: '...Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' A man can take no greater action than to pursue a course that will bring to him the answer to that question and then to carry out that answer. 'What would the Lord Jesus Christ have us to do?' He has answered that question by saying, 'Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt.5:48), and, 'Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am' (B/M, 3 Ne. 27:27). Christ, then, has set us the example of what we should be like and what we should do."¹¹

We might ask ourselves if the question asked by Paul of the Lord, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) is still important to us today? and if so, why?

Neal A. Maxwell states,

"The submission of one's will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar. The many other things...He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God's will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give."¹²

In other words, everything else we have to offer to our Heavenly Father, He already has and more. Our complete submission to the Father's will is the one thing He will never force upon us. When we offer our total and complete obedience to the will of the Father, we come as close as we can as mortals to emulating the supernal attitude of His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Master.

Acts 9:6

6 ...And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

| Acts 9:7 | JST, Acts 9:7 |
|--|---|
| <p>7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.</p> | <p>7 And they who were journeying with him <u>saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him who spake to him.</u></p> |

Acts 9:8-9

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was there three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

As part of Saul's experience on the road to Damascus, he both saw a light and heard a voice which spoke directly to him and gave him directions. Following his experience, he became blind and needed someone else to lead him. He then did not eat or drink for three days. Those who were part of his company also saw a light, but as he will confirm himself (Acts 22:9), they did not hear the voice that spoke directly to him.

We might ask what was it like for Saul during the first three days he spent in Damascus unable to see, totally dependent upon others for physical care? While the record is incomplete regarding the details, there was another who as a youth had a similar experience on a road in ancient America. His name was Alma, the younger. His father, Alma, was the head of the church and his companions were the four sons of the King named Mosiah. They had each been actively involved in persecuting the members of the church, contrary to the desires of their father. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and spoke directly to Alma:

B/M, Mosiah 27:16

16 ...Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.

This experience had been preceded by an earthquake that shook the ground. Alma was left completely helpless and needed to be carried by his companions back to his home. He was also struck dumb, being unable to speak.

After the third day in which Alma lay in a coma-like condition, he arose and spoke of his experience. He will later share a fuller account with his son, Heleman.

B/M, Alma 36:12-13, 15-21

12 ...I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

15 Oh, thought I that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

18 Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy n me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

19 And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

20 And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

21 Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

While Saul's experience is not recorded, we may gleam some insight from Alma, the younger's first-hand experience. We can assume that due to the prior activities of Paul and Alma the younger, necessitated heavenly intervention. Each likely underwent an acute appraisal of their past sins as part of their conversion experience. It is my belief that like Saul and Alma, each of us will also be required to suffer for the unrepentant sins we have committed. The contrast between our lives of sin and the sinless life of God will combine to bring us great sorrow and pain. As it was for them, it will also be true for us, that only as we turn to our Savior will we then receive relief.

8. Ananias: Meeting with Saul

There was living in Damascus a member of the church, who was a humble servant of the Lord. The Lord appeared to him in a vision and instructed him to go to the home where Saul was staying. He was to lay his hands upon his head and restore his vision. Ananias being fully informed regarding Saul's purpose for coming to Damascus and his imprisonment of the members was reluctant to make himself known to Saul.

Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

In spite of Saul's past, the Lord is calling him as a messenger to the Gentiles, as opposed to the Jews, to their leaders and to all members of the tribes of Israel. He is to serve as the Lord's representative to all the nations of the earth. His purpose is to bring to them the truths of the Gospel.

Acts 9:17-18 [underline added]

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized.

Ananias adds his witness that not only did Saul hear the Lord's voice, He also appeared to him.

It is understood that before Ananias departed that day, and certainly before he entered the waters of baptism, he would have begun teaching Saul the principles of the Gospel.

9. Saul/Paul: Defender of the Church

Acts 9:19

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

There is no doubt as Saul continued to regain his physical strength, he was also involved in being taught. His instructions would have included the principles of faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and following his baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. Saul would have also received the lesser priesthood by one who held the authority.

Finally, he was prepared to teach in the synagogue at Damascus. This was the very synagogue to which he would have come to continue his persecution. Based upon his spiritual conversion, he has a different message for those who were gathered.

Acts 9:20-22

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for the intent that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Not all who learned of Saul's conversion were pleased. Once the high priest who had sent him to Damascus to continue his persecution of the members of Christ's Church heard of his change, Saul was no longer of use to him.

Acts 9:23-25

23 And after than many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

It would appear from the writings of Acts, that Saul left Damascus and returned to Jerusalem. It appears that according to his own writings, there was a one to three-year interval between his departure and return to Jerusalem. Where did he go during this time?

Sidney B. Sperry states,

“Without consulting anyone, including those who were Apostles, he went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus (Gal.1:16-17).

“We are uncertain how long Saul remained in Arabia; neither are we told just where he sojourned in that land...but wherever it was he probably stayed from one to three years, judging from what he says in Gal. 1:18. But we can be sure that through prayer and meditation, Saul came to peace with himself and his God in the

desert place. Like Moses and Christ before him, in such solitary places was he prepared for his ministry; doubtless during this desert sojourn, he became the recipient of divine revelations instructing him in the truths of his new faith (2 Cor.12:1-7). Saul in later years emphasized the fact that the Gospel which he taught came not from man, neither did he receive it of ordinary mortal, but by revelation from the Lord (Gal.1:11-12).”¹³

Sidney B. Sperry continues,

“Three years have now passed since Saul’s conversion, and he felt it wise to go to Jerusalem (A.D. 39?), make himself known to the Church which he had so cruelly mistreated, and pay his respects to the Apostles, particularly to Peter (Gal.1:18). This first visit to the Palestinian metropolis after his conversion, was of great importance to him throughout his life.”¹⁴

As Saul returns to Jerusalem, he is a very different man than he was three years ago. He is anxious to meet with both the leaders and disciples and assure them of his conversion. He was now one of them, a humble servant of Jesus Christ.

Acts 9:26-29

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.
27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.
28 And he was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem.
29 And he spoke boldly in the name of Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

It is while Saul is in Jerusalem that he goes to the Temple to engage in prayer. Here is given a vision and receives instructions from the Lord that he is to depart from Jerusalem.

Acts 22:17-21

17 And it came to pass, that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance.
18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.
19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee.
20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.
21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Again, Saul departs Jerusalem. He is assisted by the brethren in Jerusalem, but now he leaves as a servant of Jesus Christ.

Acts 9:30

30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Caesarea is a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with a harbor. It is from here that Saul will sail to Tarsus, his former home.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“What miracles God, by his Spirit, works in the life of a convert! Indeed, what greater miracle is there than for a sin-laden soul to become clean, for an enemy of God to become his friend, for Satan’s ally to enlist in the cause of righteousness?”

“And so Saul, who once wrecked havoc with the Church, is now to become Paul, the son of Him whose cross he has chosen to bear. Hatred of Christ has turned to love. Rebellion is replaced with righteousness. Already the man from Tarsus is one with the saints and has commenced his ministry as a missionary, scripturarian, theologian, a preacher of righteousness, a student of the law. Soon he will become the apostle to the Gentiles, a special witness of Christ his adopted Lord, and an author of world renown.”¹⁵

10. Peter: Administers and Heals

We have addressed the activities of Stephen, Phillip, Saul, Ananias, and now conclude with Peter. Each, through the blessing of the divine authority they held, was able to perform mighty works and miracles. Luke concludes this section by addressing the visit of Peter to the churches and their members concluding with two miracles in Lydda.

Acts 9:31-32

**31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.
32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints [members of the church] which dwelt at Lydda.**

Peter, as the presiding member of Christ’s Church, along with an unnamed companion [possibly James], was fulfilling his responsibility to ensure that the members of the church were being taught the true doctrine and strengthened in their faith. He was responsible not only for the members in Jerusalem, but in all the areas where the members were gathered. This now included throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and Damascus. This responsibility is similar to the visits made by the Prophet and Apostles today as they visit the members living in the areas and stakes of the Church throughout the world.

It is while Peter is in Lydda that he visits, probably accompanied by the local authorizes, a man named Aeneas, who suffered from palsy. As a result of his illness he had been confined to his bed for eight years. We are not told if he is a member of the Church or not, but what is certain is that he had received sufficient knowledge regarding Jesus Christ as the Son of God and he had the prerequisite faith in the authority and power that Peter held.

Acts 9:34-35

**34 And Peter said unto him [palsy man], Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.
35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.**

Because the condition of this man was so well known, when he was healed, this knowledge became known by the people. The result was many were brought to investigate the truths of the Gospel and to learn of themselves

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is while Peter is in Lydda, he is invited to come to Joppa to visit a sister who had died.

Acts 9:36-38

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas:

this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

It appears, from the scriptures, Tabitha or Dorcas was a faithful member of the church and had lived a life of charitable service to others. Though she is deceased, those who care about her, family members and others, had the required faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as well as in Peter's authority. Each believed, if it is the Lord's will, she would be restored to life.

Acts 9:39-41

39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

The prerequisite faith had been exercised by those who know and loved this woman during her life. Peter held the power and authority necessary for her life to be restored. The remaining and most essential factor for an individual to be healed is the will of the Lord in granting the requested blessing. It is essential to understand that an individual can have the requisite faith; One who holds the power and authority to perform the healing be present; however, the final and determining factor necessary is the will of the Lord on behalf of the individual. Without the confirming authority of the Lord, the healing will not occur despite the prior prerequisites. We, with our limited understanding, may not fully understand why one is healed and another is not. Someday, when we are able to fully understand, I am confident that we will know that the resultant course of action was the best response. Until then, we must learn to walk in faith and to trust in the Lord's will for us and those we love.

Acts 9:42

42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

As in Lydda, those who came to know of the raising of the woman in Joppa from the dead, many came seeking further understanding regarding the principles of the gospel beginning with Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The healing of these two individuals proved to be the impetus that sparked interest in others investigating the Church.

11. Conclusions

We began this lesson with the need for those who would serve as supervisors of the temporal needs of the members. We conclude our discussion with Peter and his companion, administering to the members throughout the Church, especially in Lydda and Joppa. We may assume that just as there were those who were healed in Lydda and Joppa, that there were also others with faith who were healed in the other areas Peter and his companion visited.

We were introduced to Stephen, Philip, Ananias and Saul/Paul. Stephen and Philip were members of the seven who were called to care for the sick and the widows, but through the lesser authority they held, they also taught the gospel, performed miracles, and baptized. Ananias, probably the presiding authority in Damascus, was able to not only restore Saul's sight, but teach him the gospel, and see to his baptism. As one holding the higher authority, he was also able to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, just as Peter and James had done in Samaria.

A major portion of our focus has been upon the transformation of Saul who will become known as Paul. He began as ardent persecutor of the members in Jerusalem and was on the way to Damascus to continue his determined efforts. It must have been most astonishing to him when he learned that he was persecuting the work of his Lord! His reply to the Lord upon realizing his gross error was to say to the Lord, "What wilt thou have me do?" (Acts 9:6). He is an example to each of us as we come to realize that we are in error, it is imperative that we also seek to do all we can to make the necessary changes in our lives. It is essential, our lives and actions are aligned with the will of Our Lord and Savior for us. Because he made the necessary changes in his life and actions, Saul the Persecutor truly becomes Paul, the Defender of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, we saw the efforts of Peter as he visited the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and we assume also Damascus, teaching the true doctrine of Christ and strengthening the faith of the members. As he administered to the Church, he also healed those who had sufficient faith just as he had observed Jesus having done.

I am most grateful to Luke for his writing Acts and the insight he provides regarding the challenges and development of the Church of Jesus Christ in its beginning. It also strengthens me as I come to understand the efforts of others against difficult challenges, including the sacrifice of their lives, so the gospel could be established.

Footnotes

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- ¹ *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing March, 1991], 971.
- ² *New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ. A Guide for Acts through Revelation*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998, 47.
- ³ LDS Bible Dictionary in *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, 768.
- ⁴ *Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible*. Compiled and Edited by Kent P. Jackson. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994, 148-149.
- ⁵ "Power of the Priesthood" in *Ensign*, May 1997, 41, 43.
- ⁶ *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing March, 1991], 978.
- ⁷ *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, 15.
- ⁸ *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, 16.
- ⁹ *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Vol. 4. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1963, [Second Printing], 48, 51-52.
- ¹⁰ *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing March, 1991], 979.
- ¹¹ "Listen to a Prophet's Voice" in *Ensign*, January, 1973, 57.
- ¹² "Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father" in *Ensign*, November 1995, 24.
- ¹³ *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, 24.
- ¹⁴ *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, 27.
- ¹⁵ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, [9th Printing, 1976], 92.