

# *Judea & Samaria*

## [PREPARATION]

### ✦ GETTING READY

How does Jesus's call to love our enemies differ from other religions and philosophies?

Read Acts 8–9.

Ask God to use these Scriptures to help you understand the way the early believers passionately shared the gospel with everyone they encountered, even their enemies. Ask Him to give you that same kind of passion for sharing the gospel.

## [THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE]

### ✦ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Holy Spirit calls us to share the gospel to everyone, including our enemies.

### ✦ THEOLOGY APPLIED

The Great Commission that was given to the first disciples was meant for all of us, the church in every generation. Every disciple is called to make disciples—to bring more people into the kingdom (baptizing) and help them grow in spiritual maturity (teaching). Or as Jesus said here in Acts, to “be my witnesses” everywhere we go. Many of us get overwhelmed by the idea of sharing the gospel or making disciples or by that big, scary word—evangelism. We picture standing on street corners, preaching to big crowds, or making viral TikTok videos. We might think we should have a theology degree, have studied the Bible for a certain number of years, or be able to answer all the hard questions. But Jesus describing it as being His witnesses helps us see that any believer can do it. When you are a witness in court, you only have to tell what you have seen and heard. You don't have to know every detail about the situation, just what you witnessed yourself. When we are Christ's witnesses, we just share our story, our testimony of what Christ has done in our lives, how He has changed us, what we know from our own personal experience with Him. We don't have to have all the answers. We just have to tell our story.

## ✚ MEDITATE

“So there was much joy in that city. ... The eunuch ... went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:8, 39b).

## [GETTING STARTED]

+This section will introduce the lesson by identifying the main point of the passage and offering a preliminary application of it.

**QUESTION** *Think about people you may consider your enemies. Why do you feel that way about them?*

**QUESTION** *Do you want them to be saved and come to know Jesus?*

In Acts 8–9, the church was scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution happening there. The deacon Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel to the Samaritans, the greatest enemies of the Jews, and many of them believed. Then Jesus Himself appeared to Saul, the greatest enemy of the church, and he believed and was completely changed. These stories show us that no one is ever so far from God that they cannot repent and come to Him. Even the people we may consider our greatest enemies. Even people we think are cruel or evil. No one is irredeemable.

That’s why we should share the gospel with everyone. Even people who seem to hate Jesus, the church, and everything about it. God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus died for us when we were still His enemies. We were once His enemies too! He wants to save His enemies, your enemies, my enemies. Instead of hating them, shunning them, or trash talking them, we should be praying for them, sharing the gospel with them, telling them about Jesus. Because we could have a Saul-to-Paul moment with them. Jesus’s greatest enemy could become His greatest advocate. Your greatest enemy could do a one-eighty and completely change if the Holy Spirit got a hold of him.

## ✚ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Acts 8 tells the story of Philip preaching the gospel in Samaria after Stephen’s stoning, when a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem, and the church scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip preached to many people, including a magician and an Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 9:1–31 tells us the story of the conversion of Saul, who had been the leader of the great persecution of the church in Jerusalem. Jesus appeared to Saul on his way to Damascus and called him to be His instrument to the Gentiles. Acts 9:32–42 tells us the story of Peter raising the disciple Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead.

## 1. Philip in Samaria

## 2. The Conversion of Saul

## 3. Peter in Judea

### [GOING DEEPER]

+ This section will follow the points given above and look deeper into Acts 8–9.

## 1. Philip in Samaria

### ✚ READ ACTS 8.

**QUESTION** *Why did Peter rebuke Simon the magician?*

**QUESTION** *How do we see Philip following the leading of the Holy Spirit?*

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The story of Acts follows this geographical outline:

- Acts 1–7: in Jerusalem
- Acts 8–9: in Judea and Samaria
- Acts 10 and beyond: to the ends of the earth

At the end of chapter 7, we saw the first martyr for the faith, Stephen, one of the seven Hellenistic Jewish Christians who were appointed as the first deacons in the church in Jerusalem. Stephen's stoning started a major persecution against the church, led by a young Pharisee named Saul. But instead of destroying the church or stopping their mission, it pushed them to fulfill the next phase of Christ's mission—to be His witnesses in Judea and Samaria.

The Philip in Acts 8 is not the apostle Philip from the Gospels. We know this because Acts 8:1 says when the believers were scattered to Judea and Samaria, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Also, when the Samaritan believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit, the apostles Peter and John had to come from Jerusalem to lay hands on them. If this Philip were the apostle Philip, he would have had the apostolic authority to lay hands on them. This was the deacon Philip, one of the seven Hellenized Jews (like Stephen)

who had been ordained by the apostles for ministry.

In the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were the greatest enemies of the Jews. The Jews considered them half-bloods, worse than Gentiles. They were the descendants of the northern tribes (Israel or Israelites) who had intermarried with Gentiles after being taken over by Assyria (722 BC) and so were “lost” forever. The southern kingdom (Judah or Jews) remained ethnically pure, even through their exile to Babylon. Yet Jesus intentionally went to Samaria, met a woman of bad reputation, and had with her the longest, most theologically rich conversation recorded in the Gospels. She became one of the first evangelists, spreading the gospel to her entire village (John 4). Not only did Jesus tell His disciples to love their enemies, He lived it out!

The text doesn’t tell us why Philip was the one to go to Samaria, but as a Hellenized Jew, he may have been more open to preaching to the Samaritans than the more purist Hebraic Jews. As a deacon with Stephen, he may have felt personally inspired by Stephen’s death to go out and preach. When Philip went to Samaria, he preached, did many miracles, and cast out many demons, and the crowds listened “with one accord.” All of this, including the unity and joy they experienced, are signs of the power of the Holy Spirit.

A magician named Simon believed, was baptized, and began to follow Philip. Magic was forbidden by Old Testament law because those who practiced magic were either using trickery, which was deceitful, or they were practicing magic by the power of demons. This was an abomination to the Lord. Those who practiced witchcraft were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:27). But in this story, a magician came to faith in Jesus, showing us that no one is ever too far from God to repent and come to Him.

The believers of Samaria had believed and been baptized, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, so Peter and John went down from Jerusalem, laid hands on them and prayed, and they received the Spirit. When Simon saw that, he offered to pay Peter and John for the power to give people the Holy Spirit too. Peter rebuked him to repent and pray for forgiveness for thinking he could buy the gift of God.

We must understand that the different ways new believers received the Holy Spirit in Acts reflect a unique and transitional period in redemptive history and are meant to describe what happened then—not prescribe how it must happen for all believers today. While some received the Spirit at the moment of belief (Acts 10:44–48), others did so after baptism and the laying on of apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14–17), or even after receiving fuller instruction in the gospel (Acts 19:1–7). Pentecost itself (Acts 2) is seen as a one-time, foundational event, the inauguration of the new covenant era. These differences served to confirm apostolic authority, unify Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles into one church, and affirm the gospel’s expansion to all people. Ultimately, the normative pattern, as seen later in Scripture (e.g., Romans 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13), is that all who believe in Christ receive the Holy Spirit at conversion.

Then an angel told Philip to go to the road to Gaza where he met an Ethiopian eunuch. In this story we see that God's invitation to be saved is open to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, social status, or anything else. As an Ethiopian, he was a Gentile, from the southernmost part of Egypt. This was again witnessing to their enemies. The original enemies of the Jews were the Egyptians, who had enslaved them back in Exodus. As a eunuch, this man was a slave, of no value in the eyes of the world, considered just property. Yet he had value in the eyes of God. Also, as a eunuch, he was castrated, which made him permanently ritually impure. No one with damaged sexual organs could be in God's presence (Deuteronomy 23:1), not because He didn't love them, but because of His holiness. The tabernacle was an earthly representation of God's heavenly kingdom where there will be no suffering, sickness, or pain. Yet He welcomed him to receive the gospel and be baptized into His family! God intentionally sent Philip to this man to show us that the invitation to join His kingdom is open to all people.

**QUESTION** *Why did Simon want to have the power of the Holy Spirit? What is the real purpose of the power of the Spirit?*

**QUESTION** *What can we learn about witnessing from the story of how Philip shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch?*

**APPLICATION POINT** / We can learn several things from the story of Philip in Samaria:

- Philip followed the Spirit's instructions exactly. The Spirit spoke and he followed. The Holy Spirit still speaks to us and guides us; we must listen for His voice and follow His leading.
- The Holy Spirit empowered Philip and spoke through him. The Spirit will give us the words to say and equip us with everything we need to do what He calls us to do.
- The eunuch was reading the Scripture, but he didn't understand what he was reading. He needed someone to explain it to him. This is why we have leaders, pastors, and teachers who study and teach. This is why it's important to be sure we are learning from someone who really knows Scripture.
- Philip explained the gospel to the eunuch, starting with a prophecy from Isaiah. The whole Bible points to Jesus; it's all one story that leads us to the gospel. Every story, every passage is important to read and study.
- The people of Samaria and the eunuch responded with joy when they received the gospel. Christians should be filled with joy at the hope of our salvation.

- Most of all, we see that God's invitation is open to everyone, and we should share the gospel to everyone we can, including our enemies.

**QUESTION** *How have you seen people treat God like a genie or focus on getting power (or wealth or something else) from Him rather than the focus on the gospel?*

**QUESTION** *What have you experienced in sharing the gospel with people in your life? What was difficult about it? What went well? How can you better prepare yourself for witnessing?*

## 2. *The Conversion of Saul*

### ✚ READ ACTS 9:1-31

**QUESTION** *Why did Jesus say what He did to Saul on the road to Damascus (vv. 5-6)?*

**QUESTION** *Why were the apostles afraid of Saul when he came to Jerusalem?*

Acts 9 brings us back to the young Pharisee Saul, who had been leading the great persecution against the church, even going into people's homes and dragging them off to prison. Now he was on the way to Damascus, very far north, past Samaria, to search for Christians and bring them back to prison in Jerusalem. Saul's zealous anger was palpable; he was "breathing threats and murder" against the apostles.

Later we will learn that Saul was the ultimate Jewish man, "a Hebrew of Hebrews," a Pharisee who knew the Law backward and forward and followed it flawlessly (Philippians 3:4-6). He studied under the very famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and was very zealous for the purity of the people of God. He thought this movement of Jesus was blasphemy, so he felt compelled to destroy it. In Saul's mind, he was cleansing the synagogues of a dangerous heresy. He thought he was doing the work of the Lord.

But along the road, a light from heaven shone around him, and he fell to the ground. A voice spoke to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul asked who the voice was, and He responded, "I

am Jesus, who you are persecuting.” In every other story in Acts, it seems like the Holy Spirit is the main character. But here the story is very specific and very clear—Jesus spoke to Paul. It could have said the Spirit led him or the Father spoke to him, but it was very specifically a personal encounter with Jesus. This is because Jesus is what sets our faith apart from every other religion. It’s not a religion; it’s a relationship with a person.

We see this in Paul’s writings. He talked about his faith not as a religion, a set of rules, theological concepts, or a belief system but as “knowing Jesus.” Paul was completely Jesus-centric:

*“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).*

*“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).*

*“Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:7–8).*

Everything he said and wrote was focused on Jesus. Not the religion of Christianity, but the person of Jesus. Because he had encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was the person of Jesus who spoke to him, who transformed his life.

When Saul rose, he was blind, and they led him by the hand to Damascus. He fasted for three days, until a disciple named Ananias came to him because God had appeared to him too. Ananias laid hands on Paul, and he regained his sight and was filled with the Spirit. This is the first time we see the Spirit be given by the laying on of hands from a non-apostle, but it was directly commanded by God.

Ananias initially told God he had heard that Saul had been persecuting His people, but God assured him that He had chosen Saul to be His instrument to the Gentiles. God also told him Saul would suffer much for His name. When Saul began preaching the gospel in Damascus, the people were surprised because they knew he had been persecuting the Christians. Then the Jews of Damascus plotted to kill him, so he escaped by night through an opening in the city wall. He went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there, but they were afraid of him; they didn’t believe he was really a disciple. Until Barnabas defended him and told them the story of his conversion. Then, when the Hellenistic Jews (not the Christian ones) tried to kill Saul, the apostles sent him to Tarsus, his hometown.

This section ends with a conclusionary statement that the church now had peace and was being built up. Because Saul was no longer persecuting the church, they had peace, at least for a little while. Eventually, persecution started again, and Saul himself would be persecuted as he had persecuted others.

**QUESTION** *How was Saul's life different after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus?*

**QUESTION** *What does the conversion of Saul teach us about who God can change?*

**APPLICATION POINT** / The conversion of Saul shows us that anyone can be converted by the gospel, even the greatest enemy of the church. This should give us hope for those we've been trying to reach who still seem far away from Jesus no matter what we do. Keep trying, keep reaching out. You never know. They are never too far gone to turn around and come to Jesus. Paul's conversion was a complete turnaround. He went from persecuting the church to being persecuted, from trying to destroy the church to building it.

This story also shows us in a very tangible way that our faith isn't about a religion; it's a relationship with the person of Jesus. Are you following Christianity as a religion or are you following the person of Jesus? What is the difference?

**QUESTION** *Think about the people in your life who are far from God. Why are they resistant to the gospel? How can you be praying for them to have a "road to Damascus" kind of encounter with Jesus?*

**QUESTION** *Reflect on your own relationship with Jesus. Do you feel the way Paul did, that to live is Christ and to die is gain? That everything else in the world is nothing compared to knowing Jesus? Does the way you live your life reflect that?*

### 3. Peter in Judea

#### ✚ READ ACTS 9:32-42

**QUESTION** *Where do we see "rising" in both of these miracles? What does this language point to?*

**QUESTION** *What were the people's reactions to these miracles?*



The last bit of this chapter turns to Peter's activities in Judea as a bookend to Philip's activity in Samaria, being Christ's witnesses "in Judea and Samaria." Joppa was a city northwest of Jerusalem and southwest of Samaria, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Lydda was the town next to it, just a bit inland from Joppa. The text says that as the church was growing and spreading, Peter was going here and there among all the people who had come to believe, visiting all the churches.

When he came to Lydda, there was a man who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. Peter used his name—Aeneas. Then he simply said, "Jesus Christ heals you, rise and make your bed." And *immediately* he rose. No delay, no magic words or potions necessary. Just the power of Jesus. In nearby Joppa, a faithful disciple named Tabitha (Aramaic) or Dorcas (Greek) had died. Peter also used her name—Tabitha. And simply said, "arise." Though one was a healing from paralysis and the other was a resurrection from the dead, the language of "rise/arise" in both healings reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus. Though these healings brought physical life, the gospel is ultimately about the resurrection to eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

Both healings were done simply, without a lot of fanfare or elaborate words, rituals, or potions used by magicians. Both healings were personal; Peter used their names. One was a man, one was a woman, both were disciples of Jesus. Both healings happened immediately; Peter said rise and they rose. And both led to many people believing in Jesus. This is what Simon the magician had misunderstood about the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only is it not for sale, but it's not to be used for our own glory, power, or purposes. Peter never pointed to himself or his own power; he only pointed to Jesus. The power the Spirit gave to do miracles was only about bringing people to know Jesus, about building His kingdom. It was done for His glory, in His name, to show people He really is God and that His gospel message is true.

In Lydda, everyone who lived there saw the healed man and believed in Jesus. In Joppa, the resurrection of Dorcas became known throughout all of Joppa and many believed in Jesus because of it. The purpose of these healings, and all the miracles, was to bring people to know Jesus. The miracles show us what God's kingdom is like—a place with no sickness, pain, death, or evil. And they draw people to faith in Jesus. Because who else can raise the dead? Who else can bring life where there was only death? Like Peter said to Jesus, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

**QUESTION** *Imagine you saw someone suddenly healed who had been bedridden for eight years or someone alive again after having died. What would your reaction be?*

**QUESTION** *Imagine you were the one who was healed. How would your life be different from that moment on?*

**APPLICATION POINT** / We may not have the gift of healing, but every one of us has been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. Scripture tells us the gifts are given to build up the church, to grow us into spiritual maturity in the fullness of Christ. All the power, authority, and gifts we are given by the Lord are never about us. They are always about giving glory to Jesus, sharing the gospel, and building His kingdom.

**QUESTION** *What spiritual gifts have you been given? How can you use them to build the church, share the gospel, and glorify the name of Jesus?*

**QUESTION** *How have you experienced healing—physically, spiritually, or emotionally—from the Holy Spirit in your life?*

### [NEXT STEPS]

This week, step outside your comfort zone to share the gospel with someone who is different from you, maybe even someone you have considered an enemy—people who have been unkind to you, people who are difficult for you to love, people who have hurt you. How can you share the gospel with them, both with your words and actions? In small ways and big ways?

### [PRAY]

+*Make a list of people you know who are far from God. Be sure to include people who are difficult to love, people who have hurt you, those you have considered enemies. Pray for each person on this list every day this week, not just for them to change the way they treat you but for them to come to know Jesus. Pray for their hearts to be softened. Pray for supernatural healing in their lives. Pray for someone like Philip to come along and explain the gospel to them in a way that opens their eyes. Pray for them to have an encounter with Jesus that is so undeniable that they can't reject Him anymore. Pray that they will see the beauty and goodness of Jesus and fall in love with Him and run hard after Him the rest of their lives. Ask God to give you a passion for sharing the gospel and give you opportunities to share the gospel with people who are far from Him.*