



# A CRY FOR REVIVAL

**Lord Set Us in the Way of Your Steps  
Psalms 85**

**Engaged Conversation Bible Study  
January 15- March 26**

Psalms 85:1

<<To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.>> LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. {for the sons: or, of the sons} {favourable: or, well pleased}

Psalms 85:2

Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

Psalms 85:3

Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. {thyself...: or, thine anger from waxing hot}

Psalms 85:4

Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

Psalms 85:5

Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

Psalms 85:6

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

Psalms 85:7

Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.

Psalms 85:8

I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

Psalms 85:9

Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land.

Psalms 85:10

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Psalms 85:11

Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Psalms 85:12

Yea, the LORD **shall give that which is good**; and our land shall yield her increase.

Psalms 85:13

Righteousness shall go before him; and shall **set us in the way of his steps.**

## Psalms 85:1-6 Message Bible

- 1 God, you smiled on your good earth! You brought good times back to Jacob!
- 2 You lifted the cloud of guilt from your people, you put their sins far out of sight.
- 3 You took back your sin-provoked threats, you cooled your hot, righteous anger.
- 4 Help us again, God of our help; don't hold a grudge against us forever.
- 5 You aren't going to keep this up, are you? scowling and angry, year after year?
- 6 Why not help us make a fresh start - a resurrection life? Then your people will laugh and sing!
- 7 Show us how much you love us, God! Give us the salvation we need!
- 8 I can't wait to hear what he'll say. God's about to pronounce his people well, The holy people he loves so much, so they'll never again live like fools.
- 9 See how close his salvation is to those who fear him? Our country is home base for Glory!
- 10 Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss! 11 Truth sprouts green from the ground, Right Living pours down from the skies! 12 Oh yes! God gives Goodness and Beauty; our land responds with Bounty and Blessing. 13 Right Living strides out before him, and clears a path for his passage.

## Keepers of the Flame-Stay Lit | January-March

Pick 1 Designated Hour and 1 Day Per Week to Pray for Prayer Points.

### Prayer Points:

**Positioned in Unity:** To be unified in prayer, that we not feed on emotional attack or negative thoughts; that we pray on one accord. That we be charitable towards each other in our church body and generous in supporting the work of the ministry. That we be bold in asking God for Miracles. That we rely on God's spirit to be a dominating force amongst us. Acts 2:42-27

**Perpetually Offer:** To remove ourselves from pity by daily tapping into his presence with praise, prophetic declaration/affirmations, thanksgiving, gratitude and determining to dwell in the Lord's delight. That we boast about him to him as often as we can daily. That we be an inspiration and glow in glory. Psalms 22

**Purpose Life:** To discover what we are Anointed For to Fulfill our Divine Purpose. Collectively and Individually. For every gift be stirred; that we do not neglect to make full proof of our ministries. Luke 4:18

**Propel the Work Properly:** To develop Teams who are raised up to do the Work for which God has called them. That we advance strategically. To be propelled into what God has established for us and needs us to establish. Acts 13:1-3

**Purge our Spirit and Flesh:** To give undivided attention to corporate consecration, sanctifying and setting ourselves aside to receive (Virtue) a Fresh Anointing. To Detox spiritually and naturally.....dumping the old refilling with the new. Luke 5:15-16

**Pray Before Connecting and Imparting:** To stay focused and to make major decisions after prayer, especially as it relates to imparting authority to others. To Connect with other Carriers of the Move of God whom he has Foreordained. Luke 6:12-13; Acts 13:1-3

**Pour Into Others:** To Flow in the Realm of the Supernatural. Intentionally and consistently schedule times of Refreshing we can be Reignited; we will hear from the Lord; our discernment will be keen and our virtue will be replenished. To be filled with the Power of His Might to work exploits to manifest miracles and unusual blessings . Luke 6:19

Leviticus 6  
Psalms 22  
Hebrews 10  
Luke 4:18

Acts 13: 1-3  
Luke 5:15-16  
Luke 6:12-13  
Luke 6:19

**Prayer Trilogy :**  
To learn and use These Types of Prayers  
Warfare (Assault). Intercessory( Assist) and  
Travail(Advance or Birth)

# Tuesdays @ 7pm

# Syllabus

Date	Lesson #		Group 1	Group 2
January 15	<b>1</b>	<b>HOW TO BRING JOY TO A CITY</b> (Study verses: Acts 8:1-8)	# 1-3	# 4-5
January 22	<b>2</b>	<b>THE CASE OF SIMON THE SORCERER</b> (Study verses: Acts 8:9-24)	# 1-3	# 4-5
January 29	<b>3</b>	<b>SERVING THE LORD BEFORE THE RAPTURE</b> (Study verses: Acts 8:26-40)	# 1-3	# 4-5
February 5	<b>4</b>	<b>WHAT HAPPENED IN STRAIGHT STREET</b> (Study verses: Acts 9:1-22)	# 1-4	# 5-7
February 12	<b>5</b>	<b>HOW THE LORD USED ANANIAS</b> (Study verses: Acts 9:1-17)	# 1-4	# 5-7
February 19	<b>6</b>	<b>FIRST STEPS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE</b> (Study verse: Acts 9:18-30)	# 1-4	# 5-7
February 26	<b>7</b>	<b>REVIVAL SCENES AT LYDDA</b> (Study verses: Acts 9:32-35)	# 1-4	# 5-7
March 5	<b>8</b>	<b>DORCAS: A LADY FULL OF GOOD WORKS</b> (Study verses: Acts 9:36-43)	# 1-3	# 4-5
March 12	<b>9</b>	<b>HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT DORCAS!</b> (Study verses: Acts 9:36-43)	#1-2	#3-4
March 19	<b>10</b>	<b>HOW TO GET NEW TESTAMENT RESULTS</b> (Study verses: Acts 10:1-48)	#1-2	#3-5
March 26	<b>11</b>	<b>MANY BELIEVERS SPREADING THE WORD</b> (Study verses: Acts 11:19-21)	#1--5	
March 26	<b>12</b>	<b>THE KIND OF MEMBERS THE CHURCH NEEDS</b> (Study verses: Acts 11:19-30)		#1--5



## **HOW TO BRING JOY TO A CITY**

(Study verses: Acts 8:1-8)

The geographical area referred to in this portion of scripture was the region of Samaria; the city of Samaria had been destroyed many years previously. Now Luke records (in verse 8), “there was great joy in that city”. What had happened that had led to this great joy in the hearts and lives of so many people? What must happen for this to come to any area today – any town, city, village, or to any individual? What had happened in the preceding verses to bring this about?

### **1. Fierce persecution entered the Church**

The Christians in Jerusalem had been cosily enjoying fellowship in the city for several years. Thus it was that the Lord permitted persecution to come in order to scatter the believers, so that they might spread the good news of the message of Christ crucified and risen, and of the salvation which is available for all in Him. In Acts 7 we have the account of Stephen’s martyrdom, and we learn from verse 58 of this chapter that Saul of Tarsus was watching this awful scene. We then learn from Acts 8:1-4 that Saul became a bitter opponent of the Church. The persecution which arose is described as “a great persecution”, and Saul “began to destroy the church”; he raged against the Church like a wild beast – and what was the result? Acts 8:4 tells us. All this was in the plan and purpose of God because He had said to His first followers – Matthew 28:19-20; look up Acts 1:8. These Christians had seen great victories in Jerusalem, but success carries with it the danger of complacency, so the Lord permitted the Christians to be scattered. As we study church history we find the record of this happening over and over again – look up Philippians 1:12. As Alexander Maclaren says about this passage, ‘A volcanic explosion flings burning matter over a wide area’.

### **2. Believers witnessed wherever they went**

If we compare verse 1 with verse 4 we see that it was not the apostles who were scattered, but the rank and file members of the Church. Wherever they went they proclaimed the gospel. This does not necessarily mean that they held meetings; it means that they ‘gossiped the gospel’; they talked about the Lord Jesus to everyone they met. God’s plan is every-member-evangelism and this is how the early Church grew. The Church grows slowly today because we are not working to this pattern. We all have a congregation every day, and it is to this congregation that we are to witness joyfully and confidently to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **3. One Spirit-filled layman was obedient to the Lord**

In verse 5 we read that “Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there”. This was not Philip the apostle, but Philip the deacon, the

layman of whom we read in Acts 6:5, where it is specifically stated that he was “a man full...of the Holy Spirit”. What did this Spirit-filled layman do? We are told that he preached Christ – see 8:5. He was not a minister, an evangelist or an apostle; he was a layman who was sensitive to the leading of the Lord, and he went to the principal city of Samaria. Notice that what we read about in verse 4 is of Christians witnessing to individuals, whereas in verse 5 we read of Philip proclaiming the gospel to great crowds of people. Later, according to Acts 21:8, Philip is described as “the evangelist”, but here in Acts 8 he was for the first time embarking on his public ministry – a very bold step indeed. The lesson for us is that Philip was available to the Lord, ready to receive orders and to act on them. This is borne out by what we read in verses 26-27, as well as in verse 5. Who knows how God will lead us and use us if we are ready to do His will!

### **4. The message proclaimed was full of Christ and of His saving work**

In Acts 8:4 we read that the Christians preached “the word”. We are reminded of John Wesley who constantly cried, ‘Give them Christ!’, and of Paul who declared – look up Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 9:16.

We need to proclaim the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ – His virgin birth (Matthew 1:20); His sinless life (Hebrews 7:26); His authoritative teaching (Matthew 7:29); His atoning death (2 Corinthians 5:21); His bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:4); His glorious ascension (Acts 1:9-10); His present session (Hebrews 1:3); and His personal return (Acts 1:11); and to make it clear that He is able to save all who come to God by Him (Hebrews 7:25); that He is the only Saviour (Acts 4:12). This is the message this poor old world so desperately needs; there is evil on every hand; there are organised efforts to lower and reject Christian standards; there is much unrest and international relationships can be strained. What is the solution? It is the gospel of Christ – Christ Himself is the answer.

### **5. The Holy Spirit was at work and many lives were blessed**

We learn this from Acts 8:6-8. As a result of the powerful witnessing of ordinary members of the Church, and of the Spirit-anointed preaching of Philip, there was a three-fold blessing:

1. *The demon-possessed were delivered.* Men and women who were gripped by evil were set free (verses 9-13).
2. *Many people were healed.* In verse 7 we read that “many” were healed; it was not “all” who were healed. God heals today when it is His sovereign will to do so. If revival came, however, God might well perform “extraordinary miracles” (Acts 19:11).
3. *A great many souls were saved.* The greatest miracle of all is not the healing of the body but the salvation of the soul.

No wonder there was great joy throughout the whole area! Read through this section of scripture again and pray the prayer – ‘Lord, do it again!’



### **THE CASE OF SIMON THE SORCERER**

(Study verses: Acts 8:9-24)

The fact that so many verses have been given to the 'conversion' of Simon the magician means that they must contain some very important lessons. The first few verses in this chapter are of triumph, progress and joy, because a great missionary movement was afoot (see verse 4); there was revival in Samaria; people were being converted, some were being healed, and others were being delivered from evil spirits. Our first reference to Simon is in verses 9-11, where we read of his powerful personality as a sorcerer and of his influence on the people. He heard the preaching of Philip and was greatly impressed by it, and when he saw people converted and confessing the Lord by baptism, he made a profession of faith and was baptised. Then Philip sent news to Jerusalem of what was happening, with the result that Peter and John arrived on the scene. This was a new situation among a new group of people, and in verses 14-17 we read that in order to attest the reality of what God was doing, Peter and John prayed for the new converts and laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (The Holy Spirit is received upon believing – look up and compare John 14:16-17; Acts 2:38-39). There was obviously evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and power, and when Simon saw this he asked to buy the power of the Holy Spirit! This led to all that followed...up to verse 24. What are the lessons we should learn from this solemn incident?

#### **1. We must be prepared for disappointments in God's work**

It must have thrilled Philip when this well-known and outstanding personality, Simon, professed conversion, and when afterwards he was baptised – but what a setback it was when Peter and John came on the scene and challenged the reality of Simon's conversion (verses 18-24)! Why do we get disappointments like this in the Lord's work? There are three reasons:

1. *Satan is very active.* Wherever God is at work, so is the Devil, and one of his strategies is to counterfeit the work of God. Moreover, he does not let sorcerers go easily! We must always remember that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare – look up 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:12.
2. *We often make mistakes.* Philip had to face this fact that presumably he had not discerned the lack of reality in Simon when he professed faith in Christ and asked to be baptised. But notice that Philip's motive was right, and this is what God sees.
3. *There are some lessons we can only learn through experience.* It is so often through our failures and mistakes that we are warned and prepared, so that on future occasions we do not make the same mistakes.

What should we do at such times? See Philippians 3:13. We must not be beaten down by disappointment and discouragement from the Enemy.

#### **2. Satan invariably shows himself after times of blessing**

In verse 8 we read the positive words "there was great joy in that city", but in verse 9 we move to the negative work of Simon. After a man has been converted, after a time of fresh dedication, after giving a testimony, then is the time to look out for the Enemy! The Lord Jesus was baptised (Matthew 3:13-17); now see how Matthew 4:1 reads! It was after the disciples had been on the Mount of Transfiguration that they came down into the valley and faced a situation where the Devil was at work (Luke 9:28-42). What is our safeguard? Look at James 4:6-10 – in this way we may be "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37).

#### **3. True conversion has to do with the heart, not only with the head**

In Acts 8:13 we read that Simon "believed", but look at verse 21! It would seem that he believed with his head but not with his heart (Romans 10:9-10). The devils believe (James 2:19); this means that they believe *about* the things of God and of Christ, but they do not trust *in* Him, which is to "believe" in the New Testament sense of the word. How do you stand regarding this matter?

#### **4. There is need for catechising as well as for evangelising**

Dr Alexander Whyte says that Philip was 'a good evangelist but a poor catechist' – that is, he knew how to preach the gospel but was not so skilled at speaking to people and 'vetting' them for baptism and church membership! Later, however, we see that he was indeed a good catechist (Acts 8:36-37). Before receiving people for baptism or for membership of our churches we must make sure they are truly saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2), with a desire to live a separated, dedicated life – look up Romans 12:1-2.

#### **5. God's servants must be uncompromisingly faithful with each other and with their fellow-men**

Notice how faithful Peter was in his dealings with Simon and how that he acted on conviction. He asked, 'What is right in this situation...?' It is not always easy to be faithful with those we are trying to help. One man said, 'I like my pastor: he does not spare me!' We should like friends of this calibre, for really they are our best friends (Proverbs 27:6). All this applies in our dealings with the unsaved. Let us always remember, however, that we are not the final judges of other people's position in the sight of God – look what a hopeful verse Acts 8:24 is! Thank God, there is mercy with the Lord! Look up Psalm 103:8-12.

Do you feel you are beyond God's mercy, that you have sinned so much that there is no hope for you? The Bible does not teach this – look up Isaiah 1:18.



## **SERVING THE LORD BEFORE THE RAPTURE**

(Study verses: Acts 8:26-40)

The key to this study is verse 39, where we notice the words “the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away”. Was this a literal, physical transportation? Was he caught away like Enoch (Genesis 5:22-24), or like Elijah (2 Kings 2:11)? It may have been so, but not necessarily, and probably not! Luke is telling us here in a graphic way that Philip’s job was done and that now the Holy Spirit wanted to move him on and thrust him out to other service. But notice that “the Spirit of the Lord *suddenly* took Philip away”; this is very suggestive, that we who belong to the Lord are going to be taken away suddenly – to be caught up, raptured literally into the air and into His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). It would, however, be quite wrong to teach the doctrine of the Second Coming and the rapture of the saints from Acts 8:39; but this verse, within the context of verses 26-40, shows us how the Lord’s servant should be living and what he should be doing, if he is waiting and watching for the Lord’s return. How does this affect our behaviour if we believe Jesus will come at any moment for us? Look at Philip and see the answer to this question.

### **1. He was living in close fellowship with the Lord**

We see this in verses 26 and 29, where we read that God spoke to Philip, and Philip heard Him. He must have been living in close touch with the Lord because God does not shout His orders. Sometimes he speaks very quietly (1 Kings 19:11-12). Are you living in such close touch with Him that you can hear His voice and be ready to obey Him? If the One we love is coming soon, and if we are to be raptured suddenly into His presence, surely we shall want to keep very near to His side (1 John 2:28). If a loved one is coming to visit us, all the time we are waiting and expectant for the knock on the door which announces his or her arrival.

### **2. He was available to the Lord**

It is quite clear from the narrative that Philip was ready to be moved around in accordance with God’s will and wish – compare verses 5-8 and verse 26. Although a revival was taking place in Samaria he could have had many reasons for doubting God’s call to leave that fruitful work and to go off to some unknown destination, yet we are told that he was so completely at the Lord’s disposal; his main concern was just to find out and to do His will. How different it was in Jonah’s case (Jonah 1:1-3)! He was not available to the Lord – in fact he was disobedient. How sad to be out of God’s will when Jesus comes, to be in Tarshish instead of Nineveh, to be in Samaria instead of Gaza!

### **3. Philip was ready to obey God**

It is very beautiful to notice, when we compare verses 26-27 and verses 29-30, that as soon as God spoke to His servant he obeyed. Notice in verses 26-27, “Go....so he started out”; and notice in verses 29-30, “Go to that chariot....then Philip ran.” ‘Why are you running, Philip?’ ‘I am running to do what God wants me to do!’ ‘What does He want you to do, Philip?’ ‘I don’t know yet, but my only concern at this point is to obey Him.’ This is how we should live and work in the light of the Lord’s coming.

### **4. He was living to win others**

His concern was to bring others to know the Lord as their Saviour, as we see in verses 4-8, and now in verses 26-39. Look at Philip’s activity in verse 40!

1. *He was on the look-out for souls* (verse 27).
2. *He was no respecter of persons* (verse 27). When Philip saw the man he learned he was an Ethiopian and a high-ranking official. Did he hesitate about speaking to him of the Lord? Certainly not! – look up Romans 10:11-13.
3. *He was tactful and respectful* (verses 28-30). See how gracious and wise Philip was in his approach.
4. *He was armed with God’s word* (Ephesians 6:17); and verses 30-35 tell us that Philip believed the scriptures, was conversant with Isaiah’s prophecy relating to the Messiah, and he knew how to use the scriptures to lead someone to Christ.
5. *He pointed the needy soul to Jesus*, not to himself. Philip did not speak about denominationalism or joining a movement. When he was speaking to the crowd he “proclaimed the Christ” (verse 5); and when he was speaking to this man he “told him the good news about Jesus” (verse 35).
6. *He wanted the new convert to be established*. Evidently he had spoken about baptism and open confession of Christ, and verses 36-38 tell us about this; so we learn that Philip not only evangelised but he catechised and gave instruction to the new convert.
7. *Philip got out of the picture*. Having done his job and having been faithful to the Lord he had fulfilled his work (John 3:30).

### **5. He was a Spirit-led, Spirit-filled man**

We learn this from verses 29 and 39. How important it is for those of us who are living in anticipation of the imminent return of the Lord and the rapture of the Church that we should know what it is, day by day, to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Look up Acts 13:52.

This is the way to live and work before Jesus comes. If it is His will that we die before that great event, this is still the way to live and work for Him before we die; and then when He comes - read it for yourself in 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18!



### **WHAT HAPPENED IN STRAIGHT STREET**

(Study verses: Acts 9:1-22)

For this study we shall lift out from Acts 9:11 the words “Straight Street”, and we shall make this the focal point of our consideration of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the notorious enemy of Christ and His Church who was bent on exterminating the Christians – sincere, misguided, blind – and then wonderfully saved! Saul thought Christ was an impostor and that Christians were deceived, but dramatically the Lord Jesus met him (verses 3-5). Immediately this proud man was humbled – convicted, converted and commissioned. It was, of course, a miracle, as every conversion is. Then the Lord spoke to Ananias and sent him to encourage Saul (verse 11). Ananias could not believe that this man was actually praying! – but in obedience he sought out Saul and helped him (verses 10-18). We shall consider the things which happened in Straight Street.

#### **1. It was the street where a man was gloriously converted**

No-one becomes a Christian apart from conversion (Matthew 18:3). Saul had a revelation of the risen Lord in all His glory, and when he saw Him he was at once convinced that Jesus was no impostor; He was alive, He was the Son of God, His death was unique, He had risen from the dead, He was the true Messiah, He was the Saviour of the world and He was worthy of Saul’s devotion. This was the heavenly vision which Saul had, and to which he was not disobedient (Acts 26:19). It was in the home of Judas in Straight Street that he began to come into the assurance of the Saviour’s love and grace.

#### **2. It was the street where a man really began to pray**

We are told about this in verse 11. Of course, Saul had said many prayers as a very religious man but his praying had been a formal matter. Like the Pharisee (Luke 18:11), he had prayed “about himself”. What a difference now, however, as humbled before the Lord he lifted up his heart in true worship and petition! This raises the question, ‘I often say my prayers, but do I ever pray?’

#### **3. It was the street where a man discovered God’s will for his life**

God leads His people one step at a time (Psalm 37:23-24), and we learn here that God had a plan for Saul’s life, as He has for yours; read Acts 9:6,15-16. How amazing it is to discover God’s plan for your life! We should be constantly praying the prayer in Acts 9:6, and taking note of John 2:5!

#### **4. It was the street where a man was filled with the Holy Spirit**

At the very beginning of his new life Saul not only came to know the Lord as his Saviour (Acts 4:12); he was not only born into the family of God (John 1:12-14); but he was filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 17). This is God’s provision for every

one of His children – look up Ephesians 5:18. It was necessary for Saul to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that he might live for the Lord and serve Him effectively, and this gracious infilling of God’s Spirit is necessary and available for you and for me every day down here (Acts 2:4; Acts 2:39). It is great when a new convert is led at once to understand something of the ministry and to experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **5. It was the street where a man openly identified himself with the Lord and His people**

Think what a great thing this was for Saul to do. He had been an enemy of the Lord and of Christians; but look at verse 18! At once, on coming to know Christ, “he got up and was baptised”. This was in accordance with Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16. Think what this meant for Saul, the enemy, persecutor, the infidel, to take this step! Some may have said, ‘I wonder if it’s real...if he’s really converted...whether it will last?’ We know the answer to these questions, but have we really identified ourselves with the Lord and with His people in accordance with His own command and desire? – look up Mark 16:16.

#### **6. It was the street where a man was introduced into a new and wonderful fellowship**

Now that he was a Christian Saul came into fellowship with the saints – look up Ephesians 2:19; he was in the family of the redeemed (Galatians 3:13); he belonged to the royal family of heaven (Ephesians 3:15). To see this from our study verses, notice that as soon as he was converted he came into fellowship:

1. *With the Lord Jesus Himself* (verses 5-6).
2. *With Judas*, presumably a believer (verse 11).
3. *With Ananias* (verse 17).
4. *With those who baptised him* (verse 18).
5. *With those who fed him* (verse 19).
6. *With the disciples* (verse 19).
7. *With others at Damascus* (verse 22).

#### **7. It was the street where a man became a living witness for the Lord**

Look again at verses 20-22: Saul not only became a Christian, but from the start he became a Spirit-filled, witnessing Christian.

Straight Street was famous because of what happened in it. Is there a street, a place somewhere on this earth where all this has happened to you? If so, thank God! If not, why should this not happen now? – because the Lord is waiting to do all this for you. If you will say to Him, “Who are you Lord?” (Acts 9:5), then He will reply, “I am Jesus...” (which means Saviour – Matthew 1:21). Then you can say to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).



### **HOW THE LORD USED ANANIAS**

(Study verses: Acts 9:1-17)

One of the most humbling truths revealed in the Bible is that God uses men and women to accomplish His purposes. In this study we shall consider one man who was wonderfully used by the Lord – Ananias – who was privileged to seek out and lead Saul of Tarsus into fullness of blessing. We read of him only twice in the New Testament (Acts 9:10-17; 22:12-16), and he is presented as the type of Christian whom God can use. Consider the following points:

#### **1. The man God uses must be a member of the Body of Christ**

God works through Christians, through those who, by the miracle of the new birth and by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, have been made members of His Church, which is His body (John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). In Acts 9:4 the Lord clearly told Saul of Tarsus that in persecuting Christians he had been persecuting the Lord Himself, because believers are members of the body of Christ. He is the Head, and they are members of the body – and so the disciples of the Lord and the Lord Himself are one. During His earthly ministry Jesus had an earthly body, and He lived and worked through that; but now His body is the Church, and from heaven He, the Head, works through the individual members of that body. Ananias was a member of that body, and if you and I are to be used by the Lord the same must be true of us.

#### **2. The man God uses may be a very unlikely person**

God reached Naaman through “a little maid” (2 Kings 5:2 KJV). When God wanted to lead Saul of Tarsus into the assurance of salvation He used Ananias. But who was Ananias? He is described in Acts 9:10, not as an apostle, not as an outstanding man, but as “a disciple”. God delights to use ordinary people and this should be a great encouragement to many – look up 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. You may be a very ordinary member of your church, but the Lord wants to use you as He used Ananias.

#### **3. The man God uses must be living a devout life**

In Acts 22:12 we read that Ananias was devout and highly respected. This means that his conduct was blameless and there was no unreality or insincerity about his testimony. Ananias was one who showed forth the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in his actions and in his words (Titus 2:10). God will use only those people whose lives are consistent and glorifying to Him. Is yours?

#### **4. The man God uses must be utterly at His disposal**

Some Christians are not available to the Lord. If God should tell them to go to their neighbour and invite them to attend church they would not be willing to do so. If He should tell them to leave their secular job and go to another place as a missionary they would be unwilling to obey. If He should tell them to give a certain amount of ‘their’ money to His work, they would not be prepared to do this. Ananias, however, was completely at God’s disposal. How do we know this? Verse 10 tells us that he was living in such close touch with His Lord that he could hear Him speaking to him. Read through verses 10-14 and notice the note of intimacy in this conversation between Ananias and the Lord. Ananias was on speaking terms with God. Are you? Then again, Ananias was willing to obey the Lord. It is true he asked the Lord some questions, but immediately the Lord emphasised that his job was simply to “go” (verse 15), Ananias “went” (verse 17). There was instant obedience. Sometimes to obey God means to incur the disapproval of men. Many young people today experience the disapproval and the misunderstanding of their parents when they obey a missionary call. How completely Ananias trusted and obeyed God!

#### **5. The man God uses must be full of Christ-like affection**

When Ananias went to Saul he did not say, ‘You scoundrel! You persecutor of the Church! You have done much evil!’ – compare verses 13 and 17. Notice he put his arm round Saul and said, “Brother Saul...” – no doubt there were tears in his voice and compassion in his heart when he said these words! Here is a great test: when another Christian has harmed and hurt you, are you able to go to him and say, “Brother...”? Your answer to this question will determine whether God can or cannot use you.

#### **6. The man God uses must be well-informed**

We infer this from verses 13 and 14 (compare 1 Chronicles 12:32; Esther 1:13; Daniel 11:32). However, in 2 Timothy 2:15 we learn that we must know how to take our Bible and use it in pointing people to Christ. Do you know your way about your Bible? Can you turn to the verses which show why we need a Saviour?...why Jesus Christ is the Saviour we need?...why He is the only Saviour?...how and when and on what conditions He saves, keeps and satisfies....? – look up 1 Peter 3:15.

#### **7. The man God uses must be able to lead others into blessing**

On the very threshold of his new life Ananias led Saul into the fullness of spiritual blessing, because he showed him how to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (verse 17). Ananias was obviously in the enjoyment of this himself and knew how imperative it is for any Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit if he is to serve God effectively (Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). We can never lead others into blessings which we have not experienced ourselves.



### **FIRST STEPS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

(Study verse: Acts 9:18-30)

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was sudden; it was also a striking conversion; we learn from 1 Timothy 1:16 that there is a sense in which it was a sample conversion – the kind of thing that God can and does do. How did this man, Saul of Tarsus, progress after his initial encounter with the Lord on the Damascus road? Because, important as it is to start the Christian life, it is equally important to go on, to grow (2 Peter 3:18), and to enter into the full purpose for which God has saved us. What happened to Saul after this event?

#### **1. He made an open confession of allegiance to Christ (verse 18)**

It is impossible to read the book of Acts and not to be impressed with the fact that those who believed then confessed their belief and their trust in Christ by baptism. This then is the scriptural, Christ-appointed way (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-41). So when Ananias came to Saul he helped him to understand the purpose of the Lord, and Saul immediately identified himself publicly with the Lord in whom he now trusted as his Saviour, and to whom he had surrendered himself as his Lord and Master. Recognising baptism to be a command of the Lord, we should carefully consider John 14:15!

#### **2. He linked up with the Lord's people (verse 19)**

The great word of fellowship is the word “with”, and here we are told that Saul linked up in fellowship with the Christians at Damascus, and according to verse 26, with those in Jerusalem; and it is evident that wherever he was, from now on he sought the fellowship of the Lord's people. He was not a ‘freelance’ Christian! Every true believer should link up with a company of the Lord's people. Some Christians say, ‘I don't believe in joining a church!’ – but what would happen if every Christian said that? We must get together, pray together, work together, stay together and unite together for worship and for the spread of the gospel. We need a spiritual home; we need fellowship with other Christians and they need fellowship with us.

#### **3. He preached Christ wherever he went (verse 20)**

The words “at once” are very significant; they mean ‘without delay’. This is just how it should be, of course. When we put our trust in the Lord we should waste no time in telling others of our Saviour and of all He has done and is able to do for them. Saul became an outstanding preacher; but all of us are to be preachers in the sense that we are to tell others about the Lord, to make Him known *by life* (Acts 4:14 and 22); and *by lip* (Acts 4:20). Saul's life was completely changed, so much so that those who heard him were “astonished” (verse 21)! What a change takes place – look up 2 Corinthians 5:17.

#### **4. He grew in grace and in his knowledge of the Lord (verse 22)**

Where and how did he grow? At some point in these early stages of his new life Saul went into Arabia for approximately three years (Galatians 1:15-18). Probably it was fairly soon after his conversion, because it was necessary for him to get alone with the Lord and to be prepared for his future life-work. So Paul went to King's College for three years! Moses had a similar experience (Exodus 3:1); so did Elijah (1 Kings 17:3); so did John the Baptist (Luke 3:2); and even the Lord Jesus did not begin His public ministry until he was thirty years old (Luke 3:23). A good decision, especially for young people anticipating a lifetime of service for the Lord, is indicated in Acts 6:4.

#### **5. He encountered terrific opposition and persecution (verses 23-25, 29)**

What a rough time Saul had right at the start of his Christian life, and how natural it was that others should be cautious and wary about accepting him as a real convert! In contrast, how easy it is for some of us to be a Christian! How much more costly it would be if we were as determined to live and witness for Christ and to defend the gospel like Saul of Tarsus, and like many today in our world! Take a good long look at Matthew 5:10-12.

#### **6. He had to face and overcome internal misunderstanding (verse 26)**

It was natural that he should receive opposition from outside, but the most difficult thing of all was to discover that even God's people were suspicious and afraid of him, doubting the reality of his conversion. However, thank God for Barnabas (see verse 27)! As the result of the commendation of Barnabas, Saul was accepted by the Church in Jerusalem and, as verse 28 tells us, he “moved about freely” – praying with them (John 14:14); remembering the Lord in His death with them (1 Corinthians 11:23-26); and entering into all the joys of worship and of service for the Lord.

#### **7. He went back to Tarsus: the hardest place of all (verses 29-30)!**

So fierce had been the opposition that verses 25 and 29 tell us that Paul's life was in danger. The Lord permitted all this for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12); and so it was that Saul went back to Tarsus, to his own home, family and friends. Whether or not they welcomed him there we do not know, but what we do know is that it was an extremely good thing for him to go back to his own people and let them see and hear the great things which the Lord had done for him – look up and compare Psalm 126:2-3 and Mark 5:19.

These are some early post-conversion experiences through which Saul of Tarsus was led by the Lord. Are you following on to know the Lord (Hosea 6:3)?



### **REVIVAL SCENES AT LYDDA**

(Study verses: Acts 9:32-35)

The book of Acts is full of movement and action, and it is inevitable that in our studies we should come up against some important truths over and over again. In this small section there are several important lessons for us to consider.

#### **1. A real Christian will always desire the fellowship of other Christians**

In verse 32 we are told that Peter was on a journey, that he visited many places and that he eventually reached Lydda. When he arrived there he sought out “the saints” – that is, the Christians. He wanted to get into his proper environment (compare Acts 4:23). He did not go to the Baptist, the Methodist or the Presbyterian assemblies because in these early days there were no denominations. The important thing for us to emphasise is this: when we are away from home, do we seek out a company of God’s people with whom we can have fellowship, especially on the Lord’s Day? If we really are Christians we shall feel like ‘fish out of water’ among non-believers, because we belong to a different family (Ephesians 3:15); we have a different nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). How was it that there were any Christians in Lydda anyway? Notice:-

#### **2. Just one man in the hands of the Holy Spirit can be a great blessing to any community**

There is little doubt that Philip had been to Lydda on his way to Caesarea. In Acts 8:5 we learn that he preached throughout Samaria; then verses 26-39 tell us that he was preaching in the desert of Gaza; but verse 40 tells us that he passed through Azotus and was “preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea”. So, *en route* to Caesarea he would pass through Lydda, and Philip “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8) evangelised! That is, he preached the gospel there. People heard the Word, believed, were converted, and a church was formed (Matthew 18:20). As the result of the preaching of the gospel by one man, a church was established. It is amazing what God can and will do with one person who is wholly surrendered to Him!

#### **3. In the Bible Christians are called “saints”**

Everyone who has been born again (John 3:3), who has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and who trusts Him as his Saviour (1 Peter 1:18-19), who is united to Christ (John 15:4-5), is a saint. The word describes our standing; that means we are “in Christ”. God looks upon us as saints. Look up 1 Corinthians 1:2.

#### **4. In every company of God’s people there are those in great need**

In verse 33 we read about a man called Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years because he was paralysed. What a sad situation for him! But there are many such people today who endure physical suffering and weakness. In Acts 9:36-43 we have the sad case of Dorcas who died, and who was then raised to life by God through Peter’s ministry. The Church has a special ministry towards the suffering members of the fellowship. It is not only the privilege of the Pastor but of the whole company of God’s people to minister to those needing help; and there are many practical ways in which we can give encouragement and comfort to those who are in need (1 Corinthians 12:26).

#### **5. The message of the gospel is adequate for spirit, soul and body**

It is interesting to note that in verse 34 (KJV) Peter told Aeneas that Jesus Christ could make him “whole”. This word “whole”, which is derived from the word from which we also get the word ‘holy’, reminds us that in the Lord Jesus is everything that we need for time and for eternity. He does not always heal our bodies – there is a ministry of suffering (1 Peter 3:17). But He is sovereign in the matter of His dealings with His children, and it is not always His will to grant physical healing. So how can we say that the gospel message is adequate for the *whole* man?

1. *If it is God’s will to heal, He will lead us to wait before Him and trust Him for His healing grace.* Many scriptures encourage us to do this (James 5:14-15).
2. *If he does not heal us He will give us sufficient grace so that we can glorify Him in a ministry of suffering.* This will be just as great a miracle as any physical healing. Look up 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

If anyone reading this is tempted to say, ‘But it is always God’s will to heal’, the answer is that the scriptures do not teach this. However, notice the following:-

#### **6. It could well be that if we had greater faith, and more holiness of life, we would see more evidences of the miracle-working power of God**

Read verse 34 again and notice that, although Peter had great faith, Aeneas had great faith as well. Very often we are filled with unbelief and ask the question, ‘Can God...?’ (Psalm 78:19). Of course He can! – (Genesis 18:14); but we also need to ask the question, ‘Will God...?’ – Is it His will to do this?

#### **7. Finally, the putting forth of the Lord’s power always results in the spread of the gospel**

We learn this from verse 35. Aeneas became a channel for God’s wonder-working power. Many people came to witness what God had done in the life of this one man, and when they saw it they “turned to the Lord”!



### **DORCAS: A LADY FULL OF GOOD WORKS**

(Study verses: Acts 9:36-43)

The story of Dorcas has been an inspiration to thousands; it is packed full of valuable lessons, all of which are important, and some of which need particular emphasis in these days. Dorcas lived at Joppa, a town situated on the shores of the Mediterranean, and was at that time the main seaport of Palestine (look up and compare Jonah 1:3; Acts 10:5-8). There was a Christian church at Joppa, and it is even possible that the believers met for worship and prayer in the home of Dorcas, because this was the custom in those days (Acts 12:12; Romans 16:5). We know very little about her, her age, her position in life, whether she was married, whether she lived alone, or whether she was rich or poor. But we do know that we have met many people like Dorcas, who “was always doing good and helping the poor”. She had a wonderful name, meaning ‘gazelle’ or ‘antelope’, or ‘full of grace’ (Acts 4:33). What can we learn from this passage of scripture?

#### **1. Being a disciple is more than being a Christian**

In verse 36 Dorcas is described as “a disciple”; of course ‘disciple’ here means ‘Christian’. This was (and is) applied to all who follow the Lord Jesus, but it is important to notice the significance of the word. A Christian is someone who comes to God as a lost sinner and accepts, or trusts, Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour (John 1:12; 3:16; 6:37; 7:37; 10:9). Being a disciple involves more than the initial act of trusting Christ; a disciple is someone who follows Christ, but who accepts His discipline, acknowledges His authority and lordship and submits to His rule. Just think about this: if a disciple follows the example of Christ (1 Peter 2:21), accepts the teaching and authority of Christ (Luke 10:39), submits to the lordship of Christ (John 20:28), are we, in fact, true disciples? Look up Matthew 11:28-30, and be sure that you do not stop at verse 28.

#### **2. Faith without works is dead**

In verse 36 we are told that Dorcas was not just a talker but was “always doing” and in verse 39 we are told about the particular ministry which occupied much of her time; she made “robes and other clothing...” A needle is a very small thing, and the ability to use it is fairly common, but here is a ministry which is most acceptable to the Lord and which has brought much comfort and relief to His children. The Amplified Bible says of Dorcas that she was “abounding in good deeds and acts of charity”. Notice that her faith in Christ was seen by the works that she did. No-one can ever be saved by works (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5); but the obligation of every saved person is to be like Dorcas – “full of good works” (Ephesians 2:10 KJV). If you compare the two following ‘trustworthy sayings’ you will notice that, whereas the first stresses that

salvation is given to us *apart* from works, the second emphasises the fact that the result, the evidence and the outflow of being saved is *doing* good works (1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 3:8). James has much to say about good works (James 2:14-26), and especially notice the last verse.

#### **3. Sudden death can fall upon any of us**

We say this, not to make anyone fearful, but simply because it’s true (verse 37)! Dorcas was ill and grew worse – and she died; her friends and loved ones said, ‘She’s gone!’ It was a bitter blow for that little community. Why did she die?

1. *Had she sinned, and was this a chastening that came upon her from the Lord?* It could have been but there is no indication of this – look up 1 Corinthians 11:26-32 and compare 1 Corinthians 4:5.
2. *The Lord permitted it for some wise and loving purpose.* Romans 8:28 was in operation! We cannot explain why suffering, sickness, accident and death afflicts us, but God knows what He is doing and one day we shall understand (John 13:7).
3. *While we are in our physical bodies we must walk by faith, meaning that we are to trust God in His gracious dealings with us.* He is altogether wise and is working out His plan in the lives of His children (Psalm 138:8).

Sickness, suffering, trials – these are meant to be channels of grace and power for God’s glory (Philippians 1:12). When John Calvin was dying he said, ‘The Lord is bruising me, but I am abundantly satisfied since it is from His hand!’

#### **4. There is room for all in the service of God**

We are all different, but there is work for each one of us to do for the Lord.

Notice the variety of ministries at work in the Church:

1. *Dorcas used her needle for the glory of God* (verse 39) – it was small but acceptable. No work is too small for Him (Zechariah 4:10).
2. *Some women attended to her* (verse 37). We do not know who they were.
3. *Two men went to Lydda to fetch Peter* (verse 38) – God’s errand boys!
4. *Some disciples sent the two men to Joppa* (verse 38) – who were they?
5. *Then Peter came*, as we learn from verse 39.
6. *Then, there were the widows* (verse 39).

There are plenty of opportunities for Christian service, and the sphere of service is just as much in the home as in the church (Ephesians 4:4-7). In a sense there is no such thing as a ‘one-man ministry’!

#### **5. The power of God is still operating today**

How does His power operate? Look at verses 40-43 and see:

1. *The power of prayer* – verse 40.
2. *The power of faith* – verses 40-41.
3. *The power of salvation* – verse 42.



### **HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT DORCAS!**

(Study verses: Acts 9:36-43)

In this study we shall notice that in the story of Dorcas there are four pictures of the ministry of the Church to those who are dead – not physically dead but dead in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Dorcas died physically and she was raised from the dead; there is no doubt about that. But in her experience of death and resurrection, in the physical realm, we have some valuable lessons about God's power, in the spiritual realm, to raise the dead souls of men and women.

#### **1. We must remind ourselves of the real, deep need of those around us who are not Christians**

It is important that we are convinced about the fact that all who are not Christians are in desperate spiritual need. This may include our loved ones, friends and neighbours, many of whom are good living, decent, honest and upright, and perhaps religious. On the other hand, some are immoral and have very low standards of living – but what is their real spiritual condition, whether moral or immoral? The answer is that they are dead, just as Dorcas was dead (verse 37). This is what the Bible teaches; this is what God says about everyone who is outside of Christ (Colossians 2:13). Apart from Christ we are dead and need to be born again (John 3:7); and we need to be raised to new life (Romans 6:4). When the Prodigal Son was away from his father, in the far country, he was 'dead'; that is to say, he was out of fellowship, cut off from his father by his own wilfulness and by his going away from home into the far country. When he came back, however, the father rejoiced and said, "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again" (Luke 15:24). The boy had never been physically dead but his condition in the far country is a picture of those who are spiritually dead, out of fellowship with God. See what the Lord Jesus said in John 5:40, and compare 1 John 5:11-12.

#### **2. We must remind ourselves of the concern we should feel because of the deep need of those who are not Christians**

What should be our attitude towards those who are spiritually dead? We should ask ourselves, What happens when a loved one, a friend or a neighbour is desperately ill and in danger of dying? We are filled with a deep concern and if, like Dorcas, they die, we are sad because we have 'lost' them. When Dorcas died there was deep concern on the part of all the Christians who knew her; and that is exactly how we should feel towards those around us who are not believers. The Church of God should feel a deep concern for the millions who are spiritually dead, who are without God and without hope in the world, and in the world to come (Ephesians 2:12). Do you feel any concern? How does it

show itself? *Firstly* we shall be moved emotionally (as the loved ones of Dorcas were – verse 39); *secondly* we shall be moved practically – we shall go into action, as the friends did when they sent for Peter (verse 38). Have you any tears because some of those who are near and dear to you are lost (Luke 19:10)? – facing death and judgment (Hebrews 9:27)?

#### **3. We must remind ourselves what to do when seeking the restoration of dead souls**

Notice from this passage that we should do something practical about seeking the salvation of others. It is not enough to think about it; it is certainly important to pray about it; but where it is at all possible, action is required. The method we use should be the outcome of the love and sympathy of the whole church. Winning a soul is never the work of one person; there are many links in the chain, many people who are used by the Holy Spirit to bring someone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This means that not one of us can ever be proud and say, 'I won that soul!' Here in this story our attention is focused on Peter. How did he act? The answer is given to us in verses 40-41:

1. *He "sent them all out"*. Here was the recognition that only God could raise Dorcas. There must be concentration and freedom from distraction. God must do the work, otherwise nothing would be done.
2. *He "got down on his knees and prayed"*. Here is humility and reverence. Peter on earth was kneeling before God in heaven and asking Him to perform a miracle. Others outside the door doubtless were praying as well (Matthew 18:19).
3. *"Turning towards the dead woman, he said..."* It is not enough just to pray; it is important to "say" (Mark 11:23-25).
4. *"He took her by the hand"*. Here is an indication of loving sympathy and practical help; what scope there is for ministering to others by showing love and kindness to them!
5. *He "presented her...alive"*. What a scene this was! What rejoicing at Joppa when Peter opened the door and "called the believers and the widows", and Dorcas walked out of the room with a radiant face and a healthy body!

How much our hearts should burn with a longing to see others come to Christ!

#### **4. We must remind ourselves of the blessing which always follows our obedience and God's gracious working**

Look at verse 42. The raising to life of Dorcas made headline news in next morning's issue of the Joppa Journal! Whenever a Dorcas is raised to life there are others who are challenged by the Lord and brought to see His power and grace. Indeed, when we lead one soul to Christ we never know what widespread blessing may result from the salvation of that one person.



### **HOW TO GET NEW TESTAMENT RESULTS**

(Study verses: Acts 10:1-48)

Acts 10 is full of detail, of movement and of spiritual lessons that the chapter needs to be read several times to gain the full significance of its teaching. It records the conversion of a devout but unsaved soldier; the 'conversion' of Peter from inborn religious prejudice to an understanding of the fact that in God's sight all men are equal; the chapter concludes with the account of the salvation of Cornelius and his household. It has been suggested that in order to produce the amazing results recorded at the end of Acts 10, God had a problem thirty miles long; that is, if you can measure a problem geographically. You see, Cornelius was in Caesarea and Peter was in Joppa, thirty miles away – not only thirty miles' walking distance but a distance of deep-down prejudices which had to be broken and dealt with. However, God can overcome problems, since we find that the chapter works up to a grand climax. Let's see what led to so many being so suddenly and gloriously saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. What should we do to secure such results in our work for God and from our preaching?

#### **1. The Audience must be gathered**

In verses 24 and 27 we are told that in obedience to the Lord's direction, Cornelius and his family and friends were met together to await the arrival of Peter. Here, then, was a ready-made congregation, and all Peter had to do was to preach the gospel. If we would see New Testament results from the proclamation of the Word we must go to where the people are. We can certainly witness to them individually, but we must also gather them together so that they may "listen to everything the Lord has commanded" them of God (verse 33).

#### **2. The Gospel must be preached**

When Cornelius told Peter that all the people had met together and were waiting to hear what God had to say to them, he at once began to preach the gospel, and the outline of his sermon is in verses 34-43. Notice that in verse 44 it was while Peter spoke "these words" that God poured out His blessing on all who listened. What were "these words"? – what is the gospel that we must proclaim? It is clearly stated in verses 34-43:

1. *God loves everybody (verse 34);* see Isaiah 45:22; Luke 2:8-10; John 3:16; Acts 10:28; Romans 10:11-13.
2. *God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour (verse 38);* see Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; John 10:9; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 4:8-10.
3. *The Lord Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins (verse 39);* see Isaiah 53:5-6; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.
4. *He rose again (verse 40);* see Luke 24:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-20.

5. *Salvation is by faith alone; it is by 'believing' (verse 43);* see Acts 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; Romans 3:26; Romans 4:5; 2 Timothy 1:12.

This is the gospel, the good news, and if men and women are to be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, this is the message they must hear.

#### **3. The Holy Spirit must be honoured**

Look at verse 44! While Peter (on earth) was preaching the gospel, the Lord (in heaven) was doing His gracious work – look up Mark 16:19-20. There are no true conversions unless the Holy Spirit produces them, and He only does this when we preach "these words", the gospel. If we are to see results we must secure the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, and this can only be done as we honour Him. Notice the following fundamental requirements:-

1. *There must be a clean channel.* The Church must be separated (2 Corinthians 6:14-18), and the preacher must be dedicated (Romans 12:1-2).
2. *There must be an emphasis on prayer.* This is the divinely-ordained method for securing blessing; private prayer (Matthew 6:6); united prayer (Matthew 18:19); and the prayer of the church (Acts 4:23-31).
3. *There must be a proclamation of the whole counsel of God.* We must believe the Bible and preach it, thus honouring the Holy Spirit who inspires the Word (Acts 20:26-27).

Only as the channel is clean, as we look to God alone to work, and as we proclaim the whole message, will our dependence really be upon the Holy Spirit. With such complete dependence upon Him He will do His work of reproof (John 16:7-11); or warning (Hebrews 12:25); and of conversion (Acts 2:37-41).

#### **4. The Word must be received**

Peter preached the gospel: "they heard the Word" (10:44), "received the Word" (11:1), and "received the Holy Spirit" (10:47), so a man is converted by hearing and receiving the Word, believing it, and by receiving the Lord Jesus as his Saviour (John 1:12; John 3:16; John 5:24). Verse 43 states that we are saved by believing, and to believe is to receive (John 1:12).

#### **5. The Converts must be established**

The gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit does His work, the listeners are receptive and trust Christ, are born of the Spirit (John 3:3); baptised into the body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13); filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Anything more? – yes, verses 47-48 include two important things, which assure us that the converts were immediately instructed in the faith:

1. *Their conversion was accepted.* Cornelius and his friends had lost their prejudice, and so had Peter, and they all rejoiced in what God had done.
2. *Their confession was witnessed.* The new believers were baptised. This was not optional, but a question of obedience. Why? Because of Matthew 28:18-20.



### **MANY BELIEVERS SPREADING THE WORD**

(Study verses: Acts 11:19-21)

In these verses, which constitute a simple historic note given to us by Luke, there are five important truths to consider. The section of scripture between Acts 8:4 and 11:18 is in parenthesis, because in Acts 8:4 we read that the disciples “had been scattered”, and in Acts 11:19 we read what happened when they “had been scattered”. What lessons should we learn from these verses?

#### **1. The seeming tragedies of life are often seen to be triumphs for the gospel when viewed in retrospect**

It must certainly have seemed a tragedy, and it was a great trial and upset, when as the result of Stephen’s persecution and martyrdom the Church at Jerusalem was stirred up so much that the believers were scattered. But now we learn from Acts 11:21 that all this had turned out to advance the gospel (Philippians 1:12). The tragedy led to a great outreach for God’s message of grace and love. When Stephen died the believers must have felt that there could not be any possible purpose in God allowing such an awful thing to happen; but God is sovereign, and nothing happens by chance. We know tragedies can happen in our lives; we experience sorrows, trials and disappointments. At the time we cannot see how there can be any good purpose resulting from them. If a loved one is taken, we are involved in an accident, our business suddenly fails, or we experience a crushing disappointment – can we see at the time any purpose in all these things? No – we cannot! But God is on the throne, and Romans 8:28 has not changed; like Joseph, we may be fruitful day after day even in the land of our affliction (Genesis 41:52). The one thing that the Lord wants is that we should trust Him. He knows what He is doing; we are His children and He wants us to leave all our worries, doubts and fears with Him, and He assures us that if we do that, all will be well – look up Job 23:10.

#### **2. The spread of the gospel is dependent upon the witness of the laity**

This truth is emphasised repeatedly throughout Acts; see verses 19-20:

1. *“THEY”* (verse 19 AV). In Acts 8:1-4 we notice that they were the rank and file members of the Church, not the apostles but the ordinary members. It is important for us to see this.
2. *“TRAVELLED”* (verse 19). This word tells us that they preached as they went, and wherever they went.
3. *“TELLING THE MESSAGE”* (verse 19). They had no pulpit, no prepared ‘sermon’; they told others about the Lord and what He had done for them.
4. *“SOME OF THEM”* (verse 20). These words are interesting, because it reminds us that there were many people who were on the job whose

names are not given, and this encourages us. The gospel is spread mostly by its unnamed heralds!

5. *“PREACHING”* (verse 20 AV). This means ‘proclaiming’ and is the only kind of thing done from a pulpit; it is important. Spreading the gospel is dependent not only on telling (verse 19) or gossiping the good news.

#### **3. The message entrusted to us is simple and sufficient**

Verse 19 refers to this, and we know that the message is “the Word”. In verse 20 it is described as “the good news about the Lord Jesus”. The written Word and the Incarnate Word must go together; the Bible and the Lord Jesus cannot be parted because they are inseparable (John 1:1; Acts 4:12). But what is it to preach the Word, the Lord Jesus? Notice that you cannot really preach Him in His full glory, dignity and power unless you accept and believe in the Bible as the Word of God, because it is the Bible which reveals Him in the perfection of His Person and Work. An imperfect Bible means an imperfect Christ, because the Bible is our only true and valid revelation of Him. What then is it to preach the Word? It is to preach the Lord Jesus (the Word), who is God’s thought fully expressed in the Person of His Son – John 1:14; 14:8-11; Hebrews 1:1-3. What a message – simple and sufficient!

#### **4. The preaching which honours God and exalts the Lord Jesus secures the co-operation and blessing of the Holy Spirit**

This is the only preaching which does secure God’s blessing – and what is God’s blessing which comes as a result of the preaching of the Word? It is contained in verse 21, in the word ‘believed’. What would happen if in every Christian church the preaching centred upon the Person and work of the Lord Jesus and proclaimed Him as He is revealed in “the Word”? – verse 21 would happen! There would be real results, because “the Lord’s hand” would be upon the preacher and the listeners, and multitudes would be converted. But what does real conversion mean? It means trusting Christ as our personal Saviour. Does it mean more than that?

#### **5. The evidence of real faith is seen in a genuine turning to the Lord**

When people really believe on the Lord Jesus Christ they turn to Him. This means turning away from sin and turning to Him (Isaiah 55:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:9); it means turning away from all that is unlike Him and contrary to His will; it means putting our whole trust in Him as our Lord and Saviour, and going on into a life of trust and obedience to Him.

What wonderful things would happen if we got back to the New Testament Acts of the Apostles pattern, as indicated in Acts 11:21! God grant that we may see the Lord working like this in the coming days, before He returns.



### **THE KIND OF MEMBERS THE CHURCH NEEDS**

(Study verses: Acts 11:19-30)

In approaching our study of Barnabas in Acts 11, we must begin by making reference to Acts 4:36-37 and Acts 9:26-28.

The first of these references tells of this man's great generosity and that his real name was Joses (or Joseph), that he was a native of Cyprus and that he was a Levite. Dr Paul Rees says of him that "he had a stewardship rather than an ownership view of property" - look up 1 Corinthians 4:2.

In the second reference to Barnabas (Acts 9) we learn of his magnanimous spirit. With the blood of the martyrs still on his hands, Saul found he was without friends, but when he sought fellowship with the Christians, they were afraid of him! How gracious Barnabas was to befriend and commend him to the Lord's people! But it is to Acts 11:19-30 that we turn to see *the kind of members the Church needs*. Notice in verse 24 Barnabas is referred to as "a good man". No greater thing can be said of any man than this; we may not be great, talented or prosperous, but we can all be good; and how the Church needs people of the Barnabas type. Notice some of his characteristics:-

#### **1. We know that Barnabas was a good man because of what he saw**

It is important to read Acts 11:19-22 and then, connecting it to verse 23, to notice what Barnabas saw – "When he...saw the evidence of the grace of God..." But how can we see the grace of God? It means that Barnabas saw souls who had been saved, lives that had been transformed and Christians who were rejoicing in the Lord. He saw the grace of God in action; and a good man will always see what God is doing in others. The first mark of goodness, then, is to see the best in others, not the worst.

#### **2. We know that Barnabas was a good man because of what he felt**

What were his innermost reactions when he saw the grace of God? – verse 23 tells us – "he was glad..." This surely means that he experienced Lamentations 3:51 and felt a thrill when he saw what God was doing. Some people get mad when God begins to work in revival power, when souls are saved and Christians are blessed; others are genuinely glad and they rejoice in what God is doing – look up Psalm 126:1-3. Notice that Barnabas rejoiced in the work of God although he had no part in that work. Do we rejoice when God is using others? Are we glad when someone else is the special instrument of His power?

**3. We know that Barnabas was a good man because of what he said**  
Speech is a good barometer of character, and our tongues certainly have a great power for good or evil (James 3:1-11). Verse 23 tells us that Barnabas "encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord". Notice what this means:

1. *He encouraged the new converts* (Acts 18:26; Hebrews 10:25).
2. *He urged them to be steadfast believers* (1 Corinthians 15:58).
3. *He helped them to fix their eyes on Jesus and to keep close to Him* – compare John 15:4-5 and Hebrews 12:2.

Barnabas had a glorious opportunity to start a new sect, denomination or movement, such as 'The Sons of Consolation'; but his great concern was that these new believers should make much of the Lord Jesus (see verse 26).

#### **4. We know that Barnabas was a good man because of what he did**

There is something wonderful indicated in verses 25-26. Barnabas sent for Paul, the more gifted man. This was a mark of true humility. He did not say, 'I will keep this work in my own hands!' It is a mark of grace to be willing to discover a more talented man than yourself and then to be willing to fade out of the picture. Obviously Barnabas had a humble spirit (John 3:30). He was 'content to fill a little space' so long as the Lord was glorified (Romans 12:10).

#### **5. We know that Barnabas was a good man because of what he was**

The real test is not what we see, feel, say or do, but what we are; and verse 26 tells us that Barnabas lived a whole year among the Christians at Antioch, which suggests that his life was consistent. He practised what he preached.

How greatly our churches need members of the calibre of Barnabas! But what was the secret of his life of goodness? Was he inherently good in himself? – look up Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Romans 7:18. The secret is in verse 24 – "He was...full of the Holy Spirit and faith". One writer says, 'Barnabas was an earthly reflection of the Holy Spirit'.

In closing this study let's notice that even a good man like Barnabas may fall short of the Lord's purpose of holy living and fruitful service! There are "surprises of sin in the holiest histories", and this is seen even in the life of this good man – look up Acts 15:36-39; Galatians 2:13.

Let us learn these lessons: Failure is not necessary; failure is always possible; failure need never be final.