



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

VOLUME TWO, PART ONE
ACTS 6:1 - 9:31

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

A small ember faintly glowed in Jerusalem. A carpenter, seeming to be a common man, collected a few faithful followers showing them what life was meant to look like. But as soon as these followers caught His brilliant vision, their joy and hope would seem crushed upon a Roman cross, because the powers and principalities would stop at nothing to snuff out His beauty and goodness. This is not how most stories begin . . .

But just when it seemed as if the shadows had grown to replace the light, a tomb is robbed of it's death and a risen Savior illuminates hope. Now these followers of Jesus are called to pick up and carry the vision and movement forward into the darkness of this world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they carry the spark of Jesus' vision outward, proclaiming this Good News of a King on a Cross to their city, their people, their enemies, and to the ends of the earth. And what began as a glowing ember in an upper room would gather into a blazing and consuming firestorm of witness across time and space, telling the tale of this carpenter, this risen Savior, the very Son of God.

These are the Acts of the Apostles.



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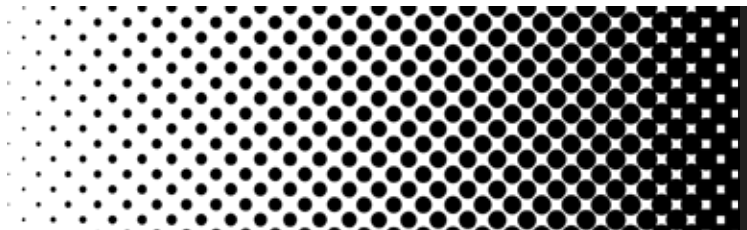
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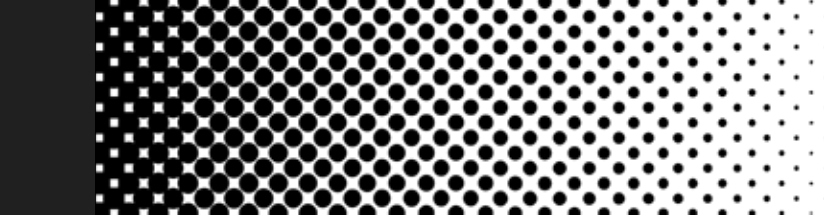
Acts 9:19b-31

NAME

SESSION 1

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”





⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

INTRODUCTION

After experiencing the wrath of the religious elite in Jerusalem, we come across another internal difficulty for the growing movement of Jesus followers. Taking care of practical needs is critical, but can't interfere with the ministry of the Word. Some see this text as the earliest description of the role of deacons, but either way, it is an example of wise delegation in action.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think a Hellenist is?
2. What is the point of Acts 6:2-4? Give an example of how this type of delegation happens today.
3. What are the prerequisites for this role that the apostles have established? Why would these prerequisites be important for this task?
4. What causes the need for extra help in the text for today? Be specific and consider the implications. What does this communicate about the role and purpose of these seven men? Explain.
5. If you have responsibilities in your household, who decides what they are and how they are assigned?
6. Compare Acts 6:4 with Acts 2:42. Devotion continues to be a theme of the disciples. How would you describe this kind of devotion? How does the object of that desire affect the strength of devotion?

7. Read Romans 12:3-8. What is Paul's point? Do you think our culture agrees with his sentiment? Explain.
8. Compare Acts 6:6 with Deuteronomy 34:9. What is the purpose for the laying on of hands by the apostles on these seven?
9. Is there something about your faith that you have not been very "devoted" to lately? Explain and discuss a strategy that will help you to improve.
10. How does this section begin and end? What might this imply about the ongoing actions of the apostles?
11. Consider what happened with the religious leaders of Jerusalem in the section preceding this text (Acts 5:17-42, especially v. 42) and read Acts 6:7. What is happening? How is this movement answering Gamaliel's point in Acts 5?

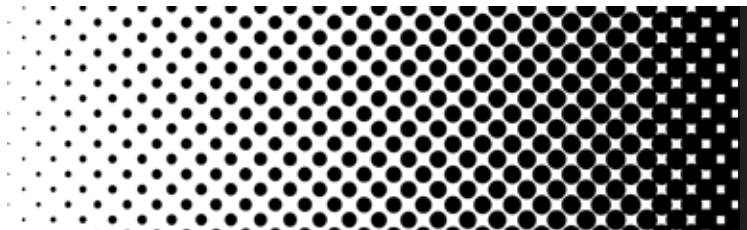
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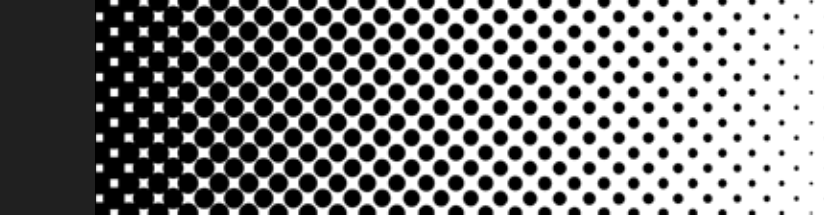


These seven men were chosen because they had good reputations and were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” Note that it doesn’t say anything about particular skills or expertise. Their faithfulness was noticeable. These seven were simply “fit” for the job. This doesn’t mean they were more loved by God, but it does mean they were chosen instead of others. Even in the world today there is a division of labor. Those in authority are called to delegate wisely and those they invite into the work are simply to respond faithfully. The question you should consider is “what would have happened if no one stepped up to help the Hellenists widows get food?” Better yet, “what would have happened to the ministry of the Word if the apostles had to do all of that work?” Are you living up to the faithfulness you have been called to by our King? Are you looking at someone else, envious of their position or wondering why they were chosen? The local church requires faithful help in many things. This week consider what’s getting in your way and find a way to start?

SESSION 2

⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”





¹² And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵ And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

INTRODUCTION

One of the seven who was singled out for his reputation and wisdom comes onto the scene. Luke wants us to see an immediate snapshot of one of the “selected” faithful fellows. What does this faithful life look like in action? What is the earthly reward for one who would be singled out for the special role of helping the apostles to administrate the rest of the body of believers?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the phrase “full of grace and power” is intended to communicate?
2. Who has been doing signs and wonders to this point in Acts? Give examples. Who was doing these signs and wonders before Acts? What is Luke telling us about delegated authority? Does it mean everyone can do the same? Do we see the same from the six from Acts 6:5?
3. Where were the people of this synagogue from? Are these locals? What do you think “Freedmen” might indicate?
4. Have you ever presented an argument so well that people were angry with you? Or maybe you were the angry one. Explain the situation

5. Read Exodus 20:16, 23:1-3, and Deuteronomy 19:18-19. How does the Law of Moses treat false witnesses?
6. Who was the last to come before the Jerusalem council? How did it go?
7. List all of the charges against Stephen here. It will be important for next week.
8. Find all the comparisons between the accusation of Stephen here and the treatment of Jesus in Mark 14:55-64.
9. Why do you think Luke includes the detail that all who gazed at Stephen's face saw that it "was like the face of an angel"? What would it communicate to look like a divine being?

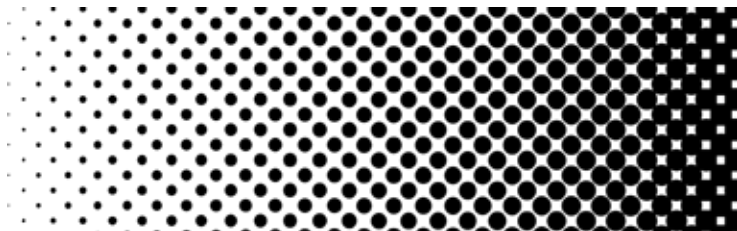
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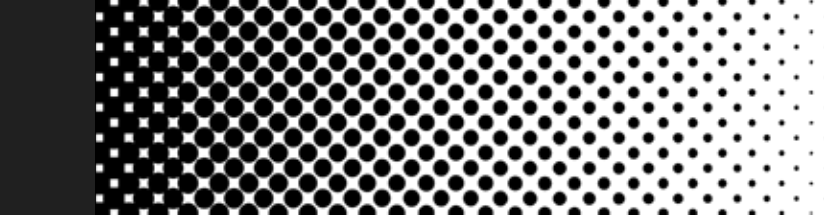


Stephen, full of the Spirit, is now doing what the apostles were doing. Not only that, but Luke wants us to see how Stephen walks a known path. Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Stephen was full of grace and power. Stephen is following in the footsteps of His King, literally. He is empowered by the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom so he can stand up and be irrefutable in a synagogue filled with other Jews who likely come from throughout the Roman world and had been freed. Actually, the story contrasts two versions of Hellenists—a man of good repute who had been given the responsibility to care for his people, versus men who had once been slaves now turned false witnesses. Stephen is just getting started, but all of the allegations against him, and all of the false rhetoric is met with the face of a divine messenger. Was he looking like the angel of the LORD who delivered important rebuke and instructions? Was his face shining like Moses' when he beheld the glory of the LORD? This would be ironic since they are claiming he is blaspheming both Moses and God. Was this some lesser version of Jesus' transfiguration? We really don't know. But it makes us think . . . How are we perceived when faced with direct challenge to our faith? How should we speak the truth of the Bible into the places we inhabit? And, what do people see when they gaze at us in these moments?

SESSION 3

¹ And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ² And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. ⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ ⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. ⁹ “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. ¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. ¹³ And





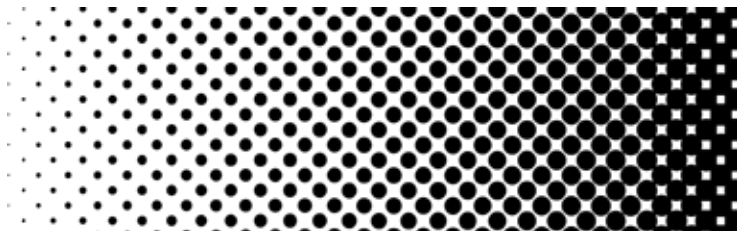
on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵ And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, ¹⁶ and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. ¹⁷ "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, ²¹ and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. ²³ "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?'

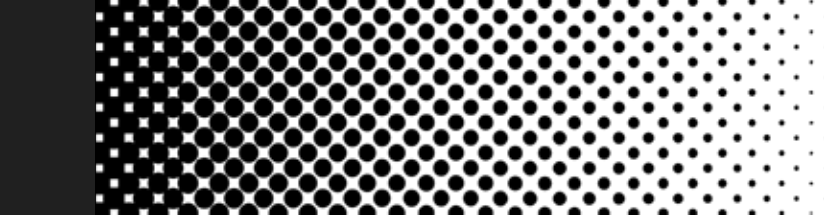
ACTS 7:1-53

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SESSION 3 CONT.

²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. ³⁰ “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. ³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’ ³⁵ “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this





Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: “ ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David,⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,⁴⁹ “ ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?’⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

INTRODUCTION

Stephen has been charged and now, before the council, he responds. I think it is fair to call Stephen's response a divinely-inspired history lesson. He is recounting the story of Israel to the High Priest and the council. For what purpose? To inform the temple's elite that they are just like their "fathers" who killed the prophets. His point is simple. THEY are the law-breakers, not him. You can feel the indignant rage of the council kindling.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Walk through the books of the Bible that Stephen lays out here and discuss why you think he chose these characters and stories. In Acts, Peter is the one who proclaimed these type of messages. What stands out about Stephen's proclamation?
2. Describe what Joseph and Moses had in common and how this plays into Stephen's logic.
3. Read Luke 11:11-12. Are these words from Jesus' meant to be an encouragement? Explain. Now, reading carefully, were these same words intended to be a promise of safety? Why does this matter?
4. Acts 7:44-53 makes an account of the "tent of witness" and the building of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. What is the purpose of these structures in Israel's worship? Why is Stephen bringing them up here?

5. Read Isaiah 66:1-4. Why might Stephen use this last section of Isaiah in Acts 7:49? Now finish reading Isaiah 66.
6. Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Deuteronomy 30:6-20 and Jeremiah 4:1-4. What is Stephen's point by using this "uncircumcision" language from the Law and Prophets?
7. Acts 6:11 from last week's session says "Then they secretly instigated men who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.'" Is the accusation true? What is the irony?
8. Acts 6:13 from last week's session says "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law." How is Stephen responding to this accusation?
9. After reading Stephen's whole proclamation, who do you think Luke sees as "on trial"? Explain.

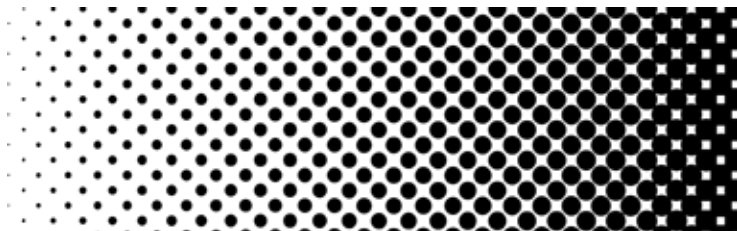
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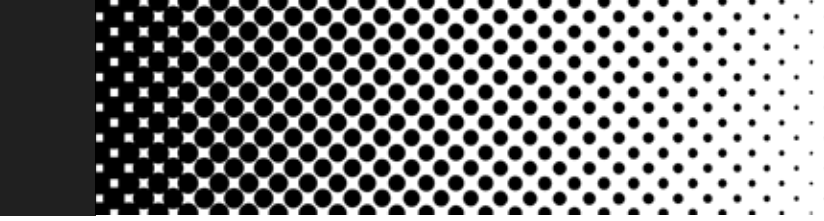


Stephen presents a much longer account including the essential history of the Israelites. He calls to mind the Promise to Abraham, Moses and the giving of the Law, and he reminds his hearers of the Holy places of worship where the LORD was in their midst. A darker thread is included as well. Stephen is revealing how deep within the tradition, there was a failure to accept God's representatives. Joseph, Moses, the Prophets. Stephen embodies the prophetic role of Israel's story, no longer the accused but the one bringing the righteous accusation against the religious leadership of the temple. His trial is actually their trial. Stephen knows the story. He knows how to identify parts of it that are important to the occasion at hand. Do we know the story that well? There are many different reading plans for the Bible and there are resources to help us understand the ancient environment. Make a commitment to know the story starting this week.

SESSION 4

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.





¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

INTRODUCTION

Here Luke bridges the story of Stephen and Saul. As one exits in a horrific scene of death by stoning, the other enters as a cold and calculated overseer of the event. This is a powerful moment. Stephen looks saintly in his death, and Saul looks zealous and bloodthirsty in his life, so we tuck away this picture of Saul and look to the final chapter in Stephen's faithful life.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Considering the session last week along with this week, who does Luke see as “on trial”? Explain.
2. Read Luke 13:22-30. Compare the use of gnashing or grinding of teeth in Luke and in Acts 7:54. What is the cause of the gnashing in each? How might Luke be connecting the the beginning and end of Stephen’s story? Explain.
3. Compare Acts 6:15 and 7:55. How might these be connected? What is common to both situations?
4. Read Mark 14:55-65. The words of Stephen are close to Jesus’ own words in the Gospel accounts. In Acts 7:56, what is different? What reaction do these words prompt in both situations?
5. Now read Isaiah 3:13-15, Psalm 109:30-31. Considering Stephen’s vision, what might the posture of “standing” mean in this context?

6. Read Luke 6:47-49 and 10:16. How do these words from Jesus resonate in Acts 7:57?
7. When the text says “they rushed together” the Greek word for “together” is the same used for “one accord” that we have seen in Acts 1:14, Acts 2:46, and Acts 4:24. Being of the same mind cuts both ways. What are some areas in your life where you are of the “same mind” with others that is not in accord with God’s will?
8. Read Ezekiel 2:3-7 and 3:4-7. Is Ezekiel promised success in his prophetic mission? What is the outcome that he is promised?
9. Read the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. What is ironic about the council’s response in Acts 7:57, when we think about Stephen’s defense from last week?
10. Do you read the story of Stephen and feel unremarkable in your own faith? Explain. What would it mean to have a remarkable faith in your opinion?

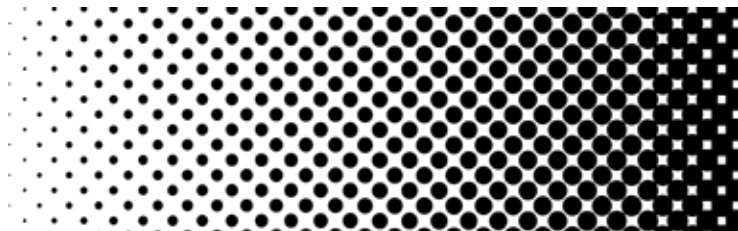
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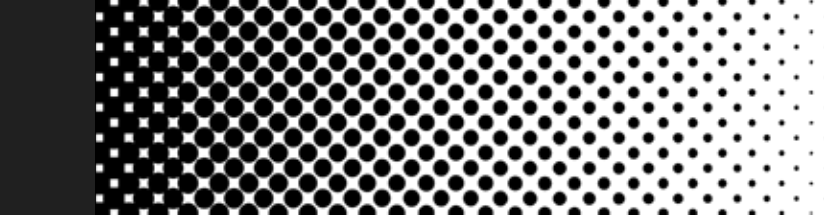


This is heavy. The faithfulness of Stephen has nothing to do with his success in convincing his hearers. He is simply called to speak the truth regardless of the outcome. Like the prophets of old, there was no promise that their hearers would respond positively. Quite the opposite. Just like his King, Stephen knows the possible outcome for his own life. The real promise comes from setting our gaze on Him who is at the right hand of the Father. He stands as the ultimate judge, witness, and our advocate before the Father. So, do you need to be a witness to Jesus unto death like Stephen in order to be saved? If we are being honest, you likely won't get the chance! But consider how you are witnessing to Jesus now. Why do we shy away from declaring the goodness and holiness of our King in the public square? This week, consider where your fears come from and what you can do differently to be more faithful in every situation, no matter what it costs.

SESSION 5

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city. ⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. ¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received





the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

INTRODUCTION

Remember Jesus' words in Acts 1. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria..."

While the circumstances of getting there may not be celebratory, we now see how the movement of faithful witnesses have been pushed outward so the kingdom message would kindle beyond the borders of Judea.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who caused the “scattering” in Acts 8:4?
2. What is a Samaritan? Discuss.
3. Compare Simon in Acts 8:9-11 with Philip in Acts 8:6, 13. Identify what characterizes both of them. What makes them different? It is not stated explicitly, but what seems to be the underlying motivation of each?
4. Read Deuteronomy 18:9-14. Why are these practices of “magic” wrong? How would you differentiate miracle from magic?

5. Read 1 Samuel 13:10-23. How did Saul lose his kingship? How would you explain Samuel's words from the LORD that say "rebellion is as the sin of divination"?
6. Can you remember something about your faith that you failed to understand for a long time? Explain.
7. Repentance is a word we know, but not one we practice in community very well. Is there something you could confess and repent of boldly with your group today?
8. Is Simon utterly rejected for his wickedness? Explain.

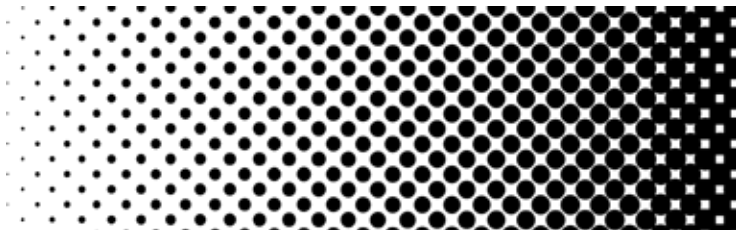
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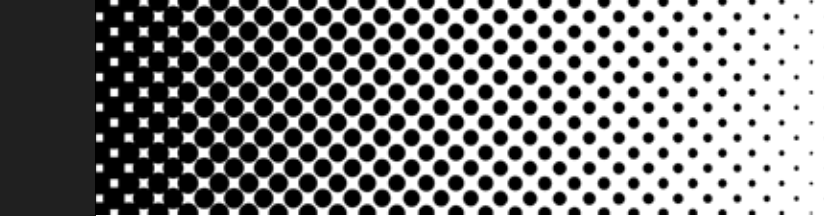


Magic and miracle are identical if you think they are ways of manipulating or proving you can manipulate the divine. Like purchasing a “spirit upgrade,” Simon the magician was looking to increase his ability to manifest a vision of the divine. He presupposes “what power is” based upon his cultural lens and his pride. It’s a power boost or a quick fix. King Saul showed the same thing when he dressed up his sacrifices as an excuse for disobedience. What does this have to do with you and me? Imagine offering a friend a birthday gift, but they absolutely insist on paying you for it. A bit offensive, right? Have you ever thought “Oh God, if I only do <fill in the blank>, would you give me <fill in the blank>.” God is not to be trifled with and salvation is not a negotiation. In a sense, Simon was thinking far too small. It costs much more than he was thinking or could even afford. Remember Stephen. We pledge our life’s allegiance in word and deed to the King, and He saves, protects and empowers. Are you still trying to negotiate with God? Confess and repent this week considering that the price you really should have paid, has been paid in full on a Roman cross.

SESSION 6

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe





his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” ³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

INTRODUCTION

Philip, like Stephen, is one of the seven from Acts 6. Coming out of a scene in Samaria where the signs and proclamation of Philip precedes the coming of the apostles and where at least one misunderstanding of the gospel is challenged, it is interesting that the next scene is about a foreigner who comes from even farther away. We can't lose sight of this Ethiopian's position and physical status. As spoken by Jesus in Acts 1:8, this scene echoes and heralds the far-reaching nature of the King and His message.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 11:31. How might Jesus' warning be connected to this episode about the Ethiopian?
2. What is the Ethiopian's role and how might it heighten the impact of this text?
3. It's important to understand what a Eunuch is, and how they were treated in the Ancient Near East, especially in Judaism. Read Deuteronomy 23:1. Why might this be the case for temple worship and the temple assembly? Discuss in light of other reasons people would not be able to worship in the assembly.
4. Read Matthew 19:3-12. Why does Jesus use the example of a eunuch here? Describe His logical steps as best you can.

5. Acts 8:32 is a passage from Isaiah 53:7 which describe a messianic figure as a “servant.” How might this resonate with the Ethiopian?
6. Read Isaiah 56:3-5. Consider how close this reference is to the passage that was read. We don’t really know what happens next, but if the Ethiopian continued reading, how long would it take for him to read this passage from Isaiah? How might you respond?
7. What do you observe about Philip and the Spirit in this text? If someone was writing down an episode from your life, what might they say about the interplay between you and the Spirit?
8. Read Luke 24:13-36 and compare with today’s text. What are the similarities between Jesus’ resurrection conversation on the Road to Emmaus and Philip’s conversation with the Ethiopian?

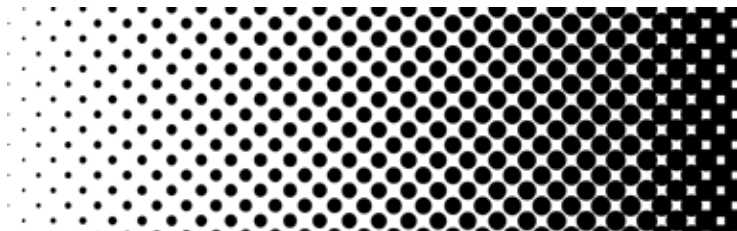
CARRYING THE TORCH

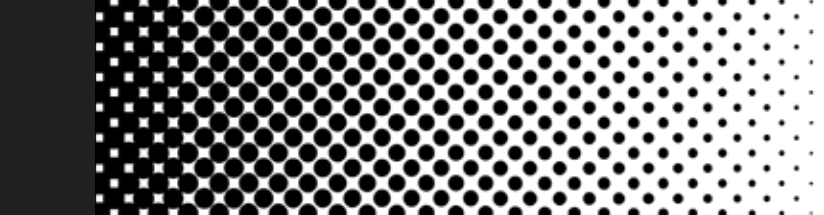


When the Bible talks about “Ethiopia” it is not the same as the nation today, but represents the whole region south of Egypt. It could be seen as “the ends of the earth” in a sense. So, the gospel makes its way to a traveling representative of ends of the earth, and this doesn’t happen through one of the twelve apostles, but one of their appointees. More interesting is that the emissary seems to have a very high stature, but would be considered of low standing when it comes to worship. This is who the gospel comes to. Also, Philip is obedient to an unusual request. Would we have listened and obeyed? Who would have thought that evangelism would have success in a desert? Who would have thought that the gospel would have success with a foreign eunuch, a person who embodies a “human desert” when considering legacy and reproductive power? This is the power of the story and it should encourage us in two directions. First, the good news of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Second, we shouldn’t be surprised where “new life” may sprout up when our obedience meets the power and provision of the Spirit of the Living God. Where are we lacking this simple obedience in our lives? This week find ways of increasing your obedience.

SESSION 7

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight,





and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened.

INTRODUCTION

Oh, how a mission can change. It was only a few sessions ago that Saul was depicted with some level of authority at Stephen's stoning, and now he goes to the high priest seeking a commission to take his threats about 140 miles to the north to Damascus. On his journey, Saul is struck by God, and this moment changes the landscape for the followers of the "Way" forever, and paves the way for the mission of Paul the Apostle.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Paul is still “breathing threats and murder.” Have you ever been indignant about something? What was your anger directed towards? How did it resolve?
2. Would it be more accurate to call this event a “conversion” or a “calling”? What does “conversion” presume? For example, does Paul still believe in his Israelite heritage and previous religious convictions? Does he still worship the same God? Explain.
3. Read Galatians 1:13-14 and 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Paul describes his own calling several times in his letters. As he looks back, what are some of the key things he recounts about the Damascus road experience?
4. In Acts 9:9-10, what are the actions that Saul takes after he is struck blind? Does this makes sense? Is this what you do when you are faced with a challenge? Explain.

5. Read Acts 1:3, 5:41, and 9:16. There is a common thread passed from Jesus to His followers. What is a reasonable explanation of why this is true?
6. What title does Ananias give Saul? What does this illustrate about Saul and Ananias?
7. Like Ananias, do you have a story that when you look back you realize would have had tragic results if you had not acted faithfully?
8. Thinking about this episode with Saul, how willing are you to let Jesus change your mission, or maybe your current direction, no matter what it costs?

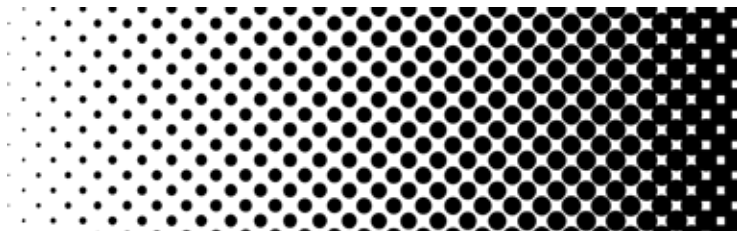
CARRYING THE TORCH

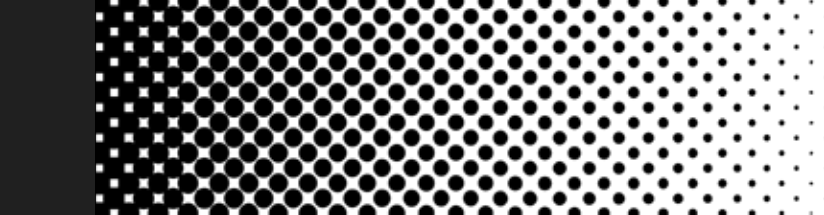


The tide turns so dramatically in this text. It is ironic that all of the names in this episode—Judas, Ananias, and Saul—have negative biblical stories attached to them, but whether Luke intended it or not, here God is redeeming all of those stories. The King calls us out. The gospel transforms. As Christians so far removed from these moments, is the power of Jesus’ direct involvement and transformation lost on us? Do we live assuming the same Spirit is active and moving? Do our daily comforts stifle our ability to see what is happening and the work that we should be deeply involved in? When Saul is struck, he fasts and prays. Likely, he is asking for answers from the same LORD he has dedicated his life to. Maybe we should be doing the same. Choose to fast and pray this week seeking Jesus’ desires for you. Ask someone to join you in the effort.

SESSION 8

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. 23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. 26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And





they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

INTRODUCTION

The Damascus synagogues were targeted for cleansing of the Christian threat, and now they are hearing the gospel . . . from Saul, no less! Luke assures us that everyone knew what Saul had come to do. His reputation had preceded him, but the transformation on the road to Damascus flipped the script, and like Stephen, Saul now presents ironclad arguments for Jesus being the Christ. The result? More plotting of murder, Saul being the newest target.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 4:16-30. After Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, find the similarities that Luke notes from the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
2. Time is compressed in biblical writing because the author's purpose is not like a play-by-play. Read Galatians 1:12-21 and 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 to piece the timeline of Acts 9:19-26 together as best you can. For example, how much time likely past before Paul traveled to Jerusalem?
3. Do you think the fear in Acts 9:26 is justified? Discuss.
4. Read Acts 9:27-28. What unites the two verses across the two locations noted? How has this phrase been used so far in Acts? (e.g. Read Acts 2:38, 3:6, 4:18, 5:40)

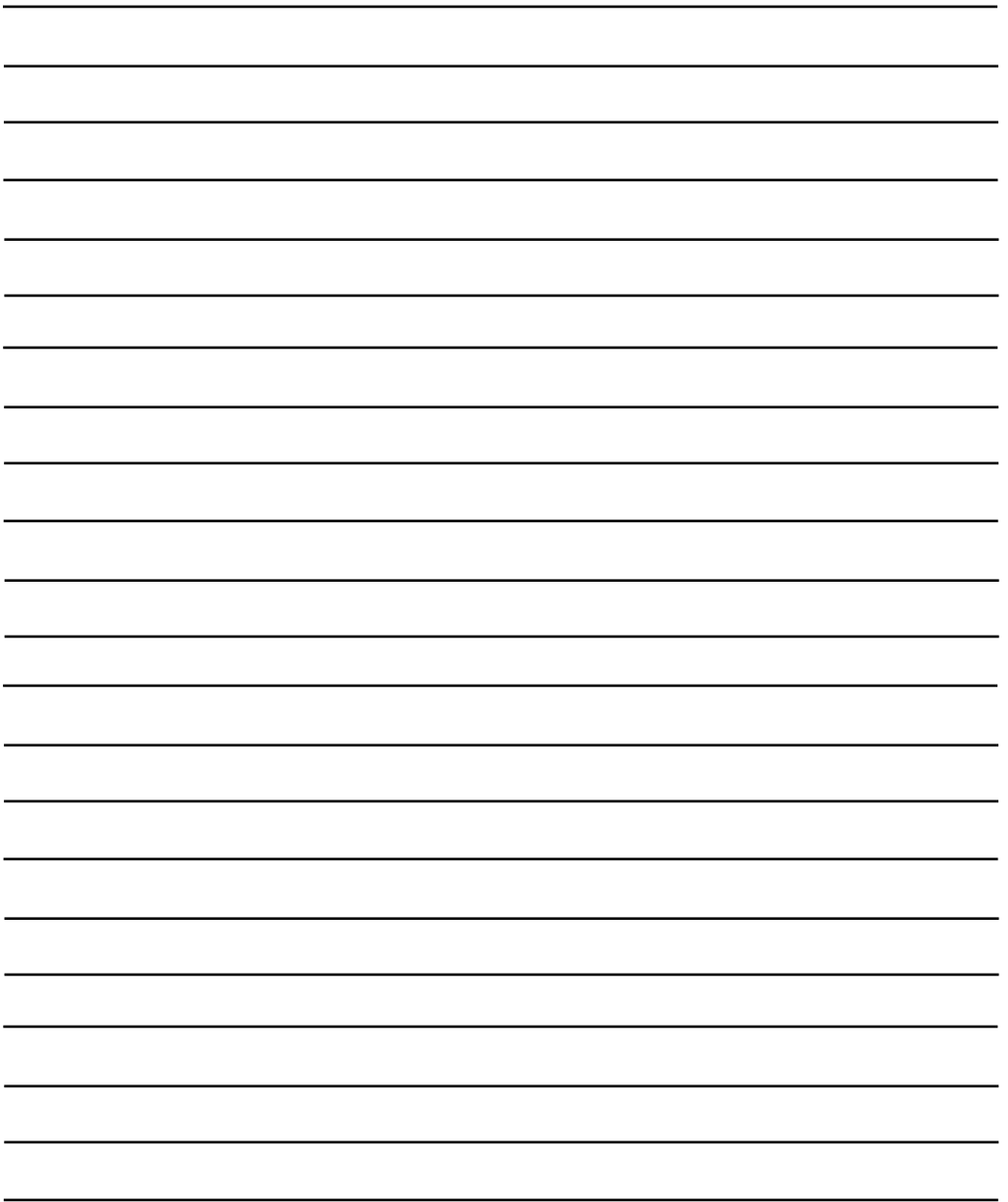
5. Barnabas advocates for Saul. Have you ever advocated for someone or invited them into a group when you knew it would cause tension? What happened?
6. Consider the the parties involved in Acts 6:8-11 and compare to Acts 9:26-29. Why is this a powerful display of the gospel?
7. In Acts 9:31, why is the noting of these geographies important?
8. How should we reconcile “fear” and “comfort” together in Acts 9:31? Discuss.

CARRYING THE TORCH

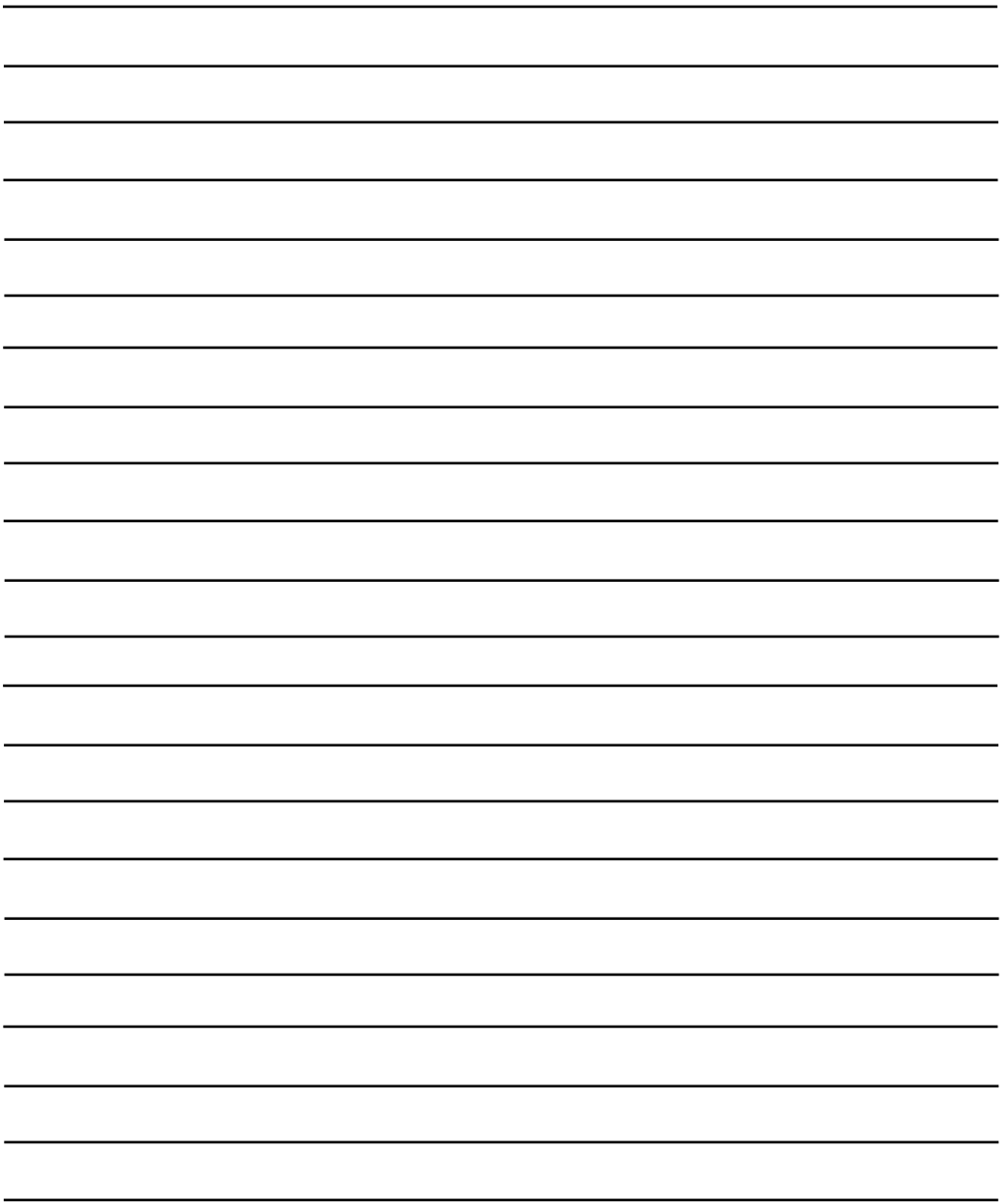


As we have already seen in Acts, apostles and other followers of Jesus share experiences with Him. For Saul, he has gone from the persecutor to proclaimer. He actually is shown disputing Hellenists Jews in Jerusalem. The irony is thick. A few turned pages ago, Saul stood approving of Stephen's death because of Stephen's dispute with the Hellenists from the Freedmen synagogue. Is this story similar to yours? To all of ours? We stand as enemies to our Christ and King, but through his life, death, and resurrection, we are invited to bend our knee in submission and then turn to proclaim Him in everything. This doesn't mean everything is sunshine and rainbows. While this section ends with a period of peace, it is important to note how we got here. It included persecution, suffering and even death in the name. Do you know your own story? How did you go from enemy to proclaimer of the name? Do you include the difficulties in your story? Take some time this week to review your own story and maybe share it with someone new.

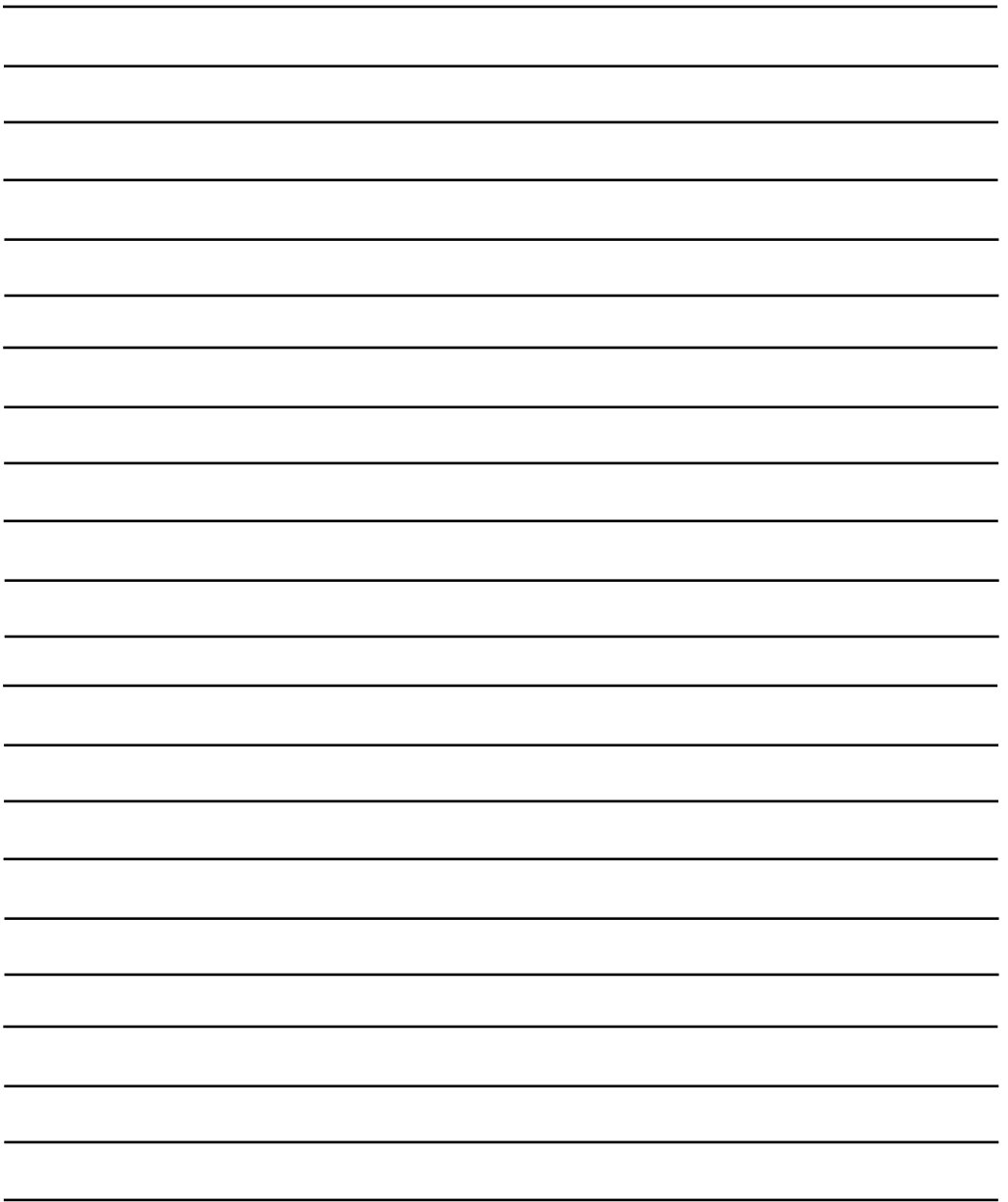
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