

Book of Acts

Session 12: Acts 9

The former persecutor bravely faces persecution

1. Read Acts 9:20-31. When the Holy Spirit creates faith, bringing one who is spiritually dead to spiritual life, everything changes. Compare Saul's behavior before his conversion to his actions afterward.
2. How did the Lord protect Paul from persecution in Damascus?
3. What was the reaction of the Church when Saul traveled to Jerusalem? Who helped make introductions to the Apostles?

Note: "James" is referring not to the brother of John, but the brother of Jesus (C.f. Acts 1:14 and Gal. 1:17-19). Luke's use of the plural "to the apostles" may signify a broader use of the word apostle.

4. What did Barnabas tell the other apostles in Jerusalem about Paul?
5. How did the brothers in Jerusalem respond when they became aware of a plot on Paul's life?
6. Recap: Who were the "Hellenists" with whom Paul was disputing?
7. The Lord brought much good through Paul's conversion. A soul was saved. A voice was added to the Christian witness. What other effect did Paul's conversion have on the believers living in Israel? (See Acts 8:1-3.)
8. Sometimes love for the unbeliever or the false believer tells us not to argue or debate our faith. But is it really wrong to do so? Consider Paul's example.

Powerful deeds accompany powerful words

9. Read Acts 9:32-43. What blessings did the Lord bring about through the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha?
10. It's easy to say God worked great miracles through Peter by healing Aeneas, the paralytic, and raising Dorcas from the dead. But this raises the question: "What are miracles?"
- What's a popular definition of a miracle in American culture?

Distinction between Miracles and Divine Providence

- Miracles: when God directly intervenes in nature in such a way that the natural order of things is overruled to accomplish some special and unique purpose.
 - Divine providence: that activity of God whereby He uninterruptedly upholds (preserves), governs, and directs all life.
 - Miracles, as they appear in the Gospels and Acts, may be understood as *manifestations of the kingdom of God (i.e., God's rule and reign over things) as it has arrived with Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom.*
 - i. E.g. Jesus' response to the question of the Baptist, as to whether he is the one who was to come (Read Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:18-23; cf. Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:18; 26:19).
 - ii. E.g. Jesus' response to the charge that he cast out demons by Beelzebul in Mt and Lk (Mt 12:28/Lk 11:20).
 - As manifestations of the presence of the kingdom in Jesus, and as signs of his authority, there is no reason to suppose that miracles have ceased.
 - The question with regard to whether the Lord will heal someone is whether the risen Lord will choose to grant healing now or only at the resurrection.
11. Miracles of the sort Peter performed had a very specific purpose. Read John 20:30-31 and John 9:3. What *wasn't* the purpose of miraculous signs? What did God wish to accomplish through them?
12. Some today work false miraculous signs. Discuss how false miraculous signs compare to the actions of Peter. Read Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Matthew 24:24; and 1 Timothy 6:3-4. What standard can we use to determine whether the miraculous signs are of God or Satan?
13. In verse 43, we are told: "[Peter] stayed . . . with one Simon, a tanner." Why would that have been a strange place for Peter to stay? What did this further demonstrate to Christian and Jew alike?