

**Reading Together**  
**New Testament Bible Reading**  
**May 16 - 22**

**Monday, May 16 – Acts 7: 54 – 8: 8**

As chapter 7 comes to a close, Stephen is killed by being stoned to death. As he is dying Stephen has a vision of heaven, and in this vision he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Normally we think of Jesus as being seated, in heaven, at the right hand of God, but many commentators believe the reason why Jesus is standing is either out of concern for Stephen or to welcome Stephen as he enters the gates of heaven. Imagine being greeted in heaven by Jesus with the words “Well done good and faithful servant.” Either way it is a beautiful vision that ushers Stephen from this life to the next. After Stephen’s death widespread persecution breaks out against the church, and Saul (later to become the Apostle Paul) is in the middle of it. But it is all part of God’s plan. This persecution causes the church to scatter, but like dandelion seeds blowing in the wind, as the church is scattered the gospel takes root in many new places and new churches spring up everywhere. The end result is that in a relatively short number of years, the church rather than just being confined to Jerusalem, spreads throughout the Roman Empire

**Tuesday, May 17 – Acts 8:9 - 25**

If you think back for a moment to Acts 1:8 you will remember that Jesus told his disciples they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem (the center of the Jewish nation), Judea (the region right around Jerusalem), Samaria (the region next to

Judea that was inhabited by people who were half Jewish), and then to the ends of the earth (the Gentiles). What we read about here in chapter 8 is the start of the Gospel expanding beyond the borders of Judaism, first into Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. In today's reading we read what happens as the Gospel comes to Samaria. Many people see the miracles and are converted to Christianity. One of those converts is a man named Simon who gets a little confused and thinks he can buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. In no uncertain terms Peter tells Simon that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God that can't be bought and sold. Like we often do, Simon was clearly still struggling with the old way of thinking. The Gospel and the Holy Spirit that comes through the Gospel is a free gift of God.

### **Wednesday, May 18 – Acts 8: 26 – 40**

Now we see the Gospel begin to extend to the ends of the earth. As if by divine appointment Philip (one of the deacons chosen by the early church in chapter 6) meets an Ethiopian, who was an official in the Queen of Ethiopia's court. We see the Holy Spirit at work as Philip meets this man along the road and shares the Gospel with him. It turns out the man was reading from Isaiah 53 and he didn't understand what he was reading, so Philip, being in the right place at the right time, explains how those verses are about Jesus coming to die on the cross. The man becomes a believer and Philip immediately baptizes him and makes him a follower of Christ. This is just the start of the Gospel going to the ends of the earth. What happens next will have an even greater impact toward that end.

## **Thursday, May 19 – Acts 9: 1 – 19**

In this chapter, Saul, whom we now know as Paul, is on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus. He is going under the authority of the High Priest, and he thinks he is doing God's work. But as he is on his way Saul is blinded by a bright light and he hears the voice of Jesus ask him why he is persecuting Jesus. Notice how Jesus makes it clear by this statement that persecuting the followers of Jesus is the same as persecuting Jesus, and you begin to understand better what Jesus meant in Matthew 25: 40, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me." Saul is told to continue on to Damascus and wait for further instructions. As Saul waits in Damascus, God sends a man named Ananias to go and restore Saul's sight. After Ananias does restores Saul's sight he baptizes Saul (Paul) and he is commissioned by God to become the first missionary of the early church (verse 15) with a mission of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles (the ends of the earth).

## **Friday, May 20 – Acts 9: 19 – 31**

Now it is Saul's turn to be persecuted! At first people are astonished at Saul's conversion, but soon they plot to kill Saul. God is watching over Saul, as he will do for the rest of Saul's life, and God brings Barnabas into Saul's life to be an encourager to Saul and help Saul make the transition from persecutor to persecuted. Saul needed Barnabas' help because there were still many Christians who were fearful and distrustful of Paul because of what he had done to Christians in the past. Barnabas' association with Paul helped to overcome that fear.

## **Saturday, May 21 – Acts 9: 32 – 43**

Now Luke turns his attention back to Peter, and reminds us that even as the gospel spreads out there are still believers coming to faith among the Jews in the area around Jerusalem. There are two miraculous healings that cause many to become believers and cause the fame of Jesus Christ to grow. But even as God is using Peter to reach the Jews, he is also preparing Peter to have a ministry to the Gentiles.

## **Sunday, May 22 – Acts 10: 1 – 23**

In Acts 10 Peter is up on a rooftop praying and he has a vision of a large sheet coming down from heaven filled with all kinds of animals that were unclean, and therefore a good Jew would never consider eating. Three times the voice of God tells Peter to kill the animals and eat them, and three times Peter refuses. When God gave Moses the dietary regulations that the Jews were to follow, it was to keep them separate and distinct from the nations around them. Now that Jesus has come there is no longer a need for separation. In fact, just the opposite is true. God wants the walls to come down that separate Jew from Gentile, so that the Gospel can go to the ends of the earth. This vision is to prepare Peter for what God is calling him to do next, take the Gospel to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius who is a highly placed commander in the Roman Army. Again we see God at work making sure that it is not just the Jews who have an opportunity to receive Christ. Christ is for all!