

31. The Lord Caused Churches to Multiply

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how completely the Lord changed and transformed the life of Saul as he went from being a persecutor of the church to one who was able to prove from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ. We want to help our children gain that same understanding. In our topic today, we are going to see how the Lord used the persecution that caused the followers of Jesus to flee from Jerusalem to cause churches to multiply throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria and Galilee.

Acts 9:23-25 says, “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” It was actually about three years before Saul returned to Jerusalem. Part of that time was spent in the city of Damascus and part of that time was spent in the desert of Arabia where Paul received instruction from Christ to equip him for his ministry.

During the period called “many days” Galatians 1:15-17 says, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Here, we see that Saul spent part of this period out in the desert southeast of Damascus as that area was part of Arabia. There, Saul received personal instruction from Jesus to equip him for the ministry that the Lord had for him as the apostle to the Gentiles.

It was after this time in the desert of Arabia, when Saul returned to Damascus, the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him. Saul and the other disciples learned about the plot to kill him. At that time, the city of Damascus had a wall around the entire city. As a result, the Jews watched the gates of the city so that Paul could not escape. However, the disciples helped Saul escape by letting him down over the wall in a large basket.

Acts 9:26-28 says, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.” Here, we see that many of the disciples were fearful when Saul tried to join them. Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.” Because of the things that Saul had done in the past, most of the disciples probably thought that Saul was using this as a way to find other Christians that he could arrest. As a result, most of the disciples acted out of fear and did not trust Saul.

However, Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. As you remember, a man by the name of Joses had his name changed to Barnabas. Acts 4:36 says, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the

country of Cyprus.” Here, we see that Josep had his name changed to Barnabas because of the fact that he was such an encouragement to the other Christians. We see that he now became an encourager to Saul who introduced him to at least Peter and James. Galatians 1:18-19 says, “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.” Barnabas introduced Saul to at least these two key leaders in the early church.

Barnabas told at least these two how the Lord had stopped Saul on the way to Damascus. He said that Saul had seen the Lord on that road and had talked to him. Then, he said that Paul had boldly preached in the city of Damascus. As Acts 9:20 says, “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Peter listened to Barnabas and then Saul spent fifteen days getting better acquainted with Peter before he was forced to leave Jerusalem.

However, Acts 9:29-30 says, “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” Just as he had been bold in the city of Damascus, Saul also spoke boldly about the Lord Jesus during the time that he was in the city of Jerusalem. When Saul was in Damascus, Acts 9:22 says, “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.” Now, we see that Saul did the same thing when he came back to the city of Jerusalem.

In fact, we read that Saul disputed with the Hellenists. This is the same group that disputed with Stephen in Acts 6. Acts 6:9-10 says, “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” Saul held the coats at the stoning of Stephen. This was the synagogue that was responsible for the stoning of Stephen. As a result, Saul was probably a close friend of the people in this synagogue and one of the leaders of this synagogue at the time that Stephen was stoned. Now, he was proving to them from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ.

Saul spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus even though he knew that these former friends were the men who had helped him stone Stephen. The last words of Christ before he had returned to heaven in Acts 1:8 were, ““But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”” Saul depended on the power of the Holy Spirit as he spoke and the Holy Spirit gave Saul boldness to speak about the death and resurrection to the very men who had stoned Stephen between three and four years earlier. Saul realized that they might stone him as well but the Holy Spirit gave him boldness to speak about the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the same power that we need in order for us to speak boldly about the death and resurrection of Christ to those who might oppose that message.

In fact, an attempt to kill Saul was exactly what happened. These same Jews that killed Stephen attempted to kill Saul also. Some of the other followers of Christ heard about the plan of the Hellenists to kill Saul. Then, these brethren traveled with him down to Caesarea and sent him to

his home town of Tarsus for his own protection. Saul understood the feelings of these Hellenists perfectly. He wrote about his own past in Galatians 1:13-14 when he said, “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” The Lord was allowing Saul to experience opposition even in the early years of his life in Christ to prepare him for his future ministry when the opposition would continue to grow.

Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Here, we see the results of the severe persecution that developed in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Instead of persecution stopping the growth of the church, it caused churches to develop throughout the regions of Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

Now, we see that these churches throughout the region were able to experience peace for a period of time. Persecution often lasts for a period of time; and when something happens to the leaders of that persecution, then persecution eases for a period of time. We also see that the churches throughout the region were being built up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” Churches are built up when the Christians in those churches are building up one another. The Lord greatly blesses that ministry.

We also see that the churches were walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord speaks of a godly reverence for the Lord. Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” When we have a reverence for the Lord, we will be submitting to one another. In John 14:16 Christ said, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.” Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be the Comforter of every Christian. We also see that the Lord continued to cause the churches to increase and multiply. In Acts 2:47, we saw that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Then, in Acts 6:1 and 6:7, we saw that the number of disciples multiplied. Here, we see that the number of churches multiplied.

In Matthew 16:18b, we see that Christ said “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As we provide an example by allowing the Lord to work through our lives, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the Lord will also work through their lives to build His church. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord multiplies His church.