

The only thing that matters is that you are reading God's word regularly. While that is still true with this schedule, the goal with this one is to get a better understanding of the entire story of the bible. There is no substitute for reading God's word. Keep reading! My website is at <http://graceofourlord.wordpress.com>. I encourage you to get the actual reading plan I am currently following. You can get it from the same place I do - at [this link](#). They have some great guidance for the reading plan there as well, and they have it all in both PDF and in Kindle format!

October 2012						
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October Week 1 (Week 40) Summary

Acts 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 - Click the chapter below to go to the ESV Bible passage for that chapter and read or listen.

[Acts 6](#) - In verse one, the phrase "in these day," accompanied by the context, implies that some time had passed. The number of the disciples was still increasing. The Hellenists were Jews of foreign birth and Greek education. It is likely that many had ended up staying in Jerusalem after the events of Pentecost and the beginnings of the church had profoundly affected them. But a complaint arose from them that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and such. The New American Standard version translates the issue as they "were being overlooked," and it is likely that it was unintentional. The language difference would also result in some separation physically as well, so such an oversight in such great numbers could be expected.

When brought to the attention of the Apostles, it would of course be remedied, but they recognized that the work they were doing of preaching the word of God could not be neglected. So they told their brothers to choose seven men "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." There is some discussion as to whether these were the first deacons, but as Coffman notes:

"...the record here does not so name them, nor is there very much similarity between their status and that of the deacons Paul commanded Timothy to appoint. The men here were not assistants to elders of the church, but to the Twelve; and, furthermore, they were endowed by a laying on of the hands of the apostles."

The point is academic however, as the scripture does mention the Apostles using the words "serve tables." The significance to us is mostly the selection of Stephen as one of the seven. He is described as full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, grace and power; and "was doing great wonders and signs among the people." But before moving to Stephen's story, let's not overlook the significance of verse 7's description of the growth in numbers - that "a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." We are not told what is meant by "a great many" but the lower echelon of the priesthood numbered in the thousands; and conversion of a significant number of them would offer some explanation of why the Pharisees reacted so viciously in their treatment of the early Christians.

In a dispute that evolved into a conspiracy of lies and false witnesses, Stephen is seized and brought to the Sanhedrin. Verse 15 says "And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel." Although we do not know precisely what that means physically, it is clear that the Holy Spirit was at work in Stephen.

[Acts 7](#) - Chapter 7 opens with Stephen at the Sanhedrin being asked by the high priest "Are these things so?" The charges against Stephen from lies and twisted quotations of Jesus were that he "never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law," and that they had heard him say "that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us" ([Acts 6:13-14](#)).

Did Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, already know the fate that awaited him? Perhaps. The possibility must have been obvious. He does not actually address the charges against him, which hints that he must have known that such would be pointless. Instead, the speech that follows is a long account of the history of Israel, their continued blessings given by God, and their rejection of the Lord time and time again.

The Spirit brought him to full remembrance of the Scriptures in this account; and he concludes in verses 51-53 with a direct accusation on his own accusers. He first quotes God's own description of their forefathers as stiff-necked people ([Exodus 33:3](#)), uncircumcised in heart and ears ([Ezekiel 44:7](#)). He goes further though, first referring to their father's having killed the prophets, as Jesus had spoken in [Matthew 23:29-31,37](#). Then he turns the tables on them completely - charging them in verses 52-53 with the murder of "the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

This indictment by Stephen of these men was received with so much rage that mob rule prevailed. Stephen was taken from the city and stoned to death. The Jews who had no legal right to execution under Roman law nevertheless had it carried out with haste as their anger burned. In verse 58, the so-called "witnesses" cast the first stones, according to the law ([Deuteronomy 13:9](#)). These laid their garments at the feet of young Saul of Tarsus (stoning was hard work, and the outer garments would be in the way), who stood by and watched, as Stephen was killed. The vision Stephen had in verse 56 of Jesus at the right hand of God was undoubtedly for his own encouragement.

[Acts 8](#) - The chapter opens with the statement that Saul approved of Stephen's execution, and that from that day forward there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And Saul was right in the thick of it, dragging men and women out of their homes and putting them in prison for their Christianity. This was Saul's darkest hour, and he would later have great sorrow for it. It was a dark time for Christians in Jerusalem for sure. But the scattering throughout Judea and Samaria described in verses one and four was not without a positive gain, as those people continued preaching the word in new places.

Philip went to Samaria healing the lame and preaching the "good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (verse 12); and he baptized many new Christians. When the Apostles at Jerusalem heard about this reception, they sent Peter and John there to "lay hands" on some of them, so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. Those Christians would have the power to perform miracles and signs as Philip did, but only through the Apostles could this happen. Simon the magician's conversion seemed genuine, but his heart was not in the right place. But Peter's rebuke of him for trying to buy the gift of God seemed to evoke the right response (verse 24).

Then, an angel of the Lord came to Philip and told him to go south to a "desert place" to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian, a court official to their queen, Candace. He was reading from Isaiah. The scripture he was reading in verses 32-33 is from [Isaiah 53:7-8](#). Philip told him that the passage was about the Christ, and told him "the good news about Jesus." As they came to water, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized. After doing so, Philip was carried off, and found himself at Azotus (the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod). From there, "he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea" (verse 40).

The significance of the story of the Ethiopian's conversion was more than to teach us about the power of God's word, or even to instruct us more about baptism. Philip was doing very well with conversions and could have stayed where he was doing the same. This demonstration of the providence of God in sending Philip to this one soul in this remote location was for the Ethiopian to continue back home and further the kingdom there.

Side note: In Philip's time, Caesarea was the seat of Roman government in Judea. Excavations there have provided significant discoveries. The following link to [BiblePlaces.com](#) contains some highlights and photos.

[Acts 9](#) - The Scripture now turns back to Saul, and states that he is "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." Then we are told of him going to the high priest for

letters to give to the synagogues in Damascus to aid him in arresting men and women there. It is in verse 2 that we get our first mention of Christianity having been referred to as "the Way." The reference also occurs in [Acts 19:9,23](#), [22:4](#), and [24:14,22](#).

On the way to Damascus, Jesus appeared with a light from heaven that shone all around Saul, asking why he was persecuting him and told him to go into the city and wait to be told what to do. The Ananias that was sent to Saul is obviously not the same one in chapter 5. The Lord had come to him in a vision and told him what to do about Saul. Ananias at first argued with the Lord because of Saul's well-known reputation, but He told him that *"he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."* Saul had been left blinded and had to be led into Damascus, where he remained for three days before Ananias laid his hands on him and restored his sight. And with that done, the worst persecutor of the church was then baptized!

His conversion complete, the man who just recently had been having Christians arrested and even murdered was now proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. Naturally, this created quite a stir among both believers and the Jewish religious leaders, the latter of whom were now plotting to kill Saul. But word of this plot came to Saul, and his disciples helped him escape "through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket." This was in verse 25. In verse 26, he enters Jerusalem, but we learn in [Galatians 1:15-24](#) that 3 years had passed before that happened. A good deal of that time he spent proclaiming the gospel back in Damascus a second time.

When he did arrive in Jerusalem, they were at first afraid of him. But Barnabas (who we met at the end of chapter 4) brought him to the apostles and told them his story. After that he came and went among them as he preached. But again his life was threatened. So the brothers "brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus."

In verses 32-42, we read of Peter's miraculous healing of Aeneas, who was paralyzed, and raising Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead - and "it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." Verse 43 tells us that Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a tanner named Simon.

Side note: The street named Straight mentioned in verse 11 is the subject of an article with photos at [this link to Ferrell's Travel Blog](#). And [this other article there](#) has a picture of the traditional house of Simon the tanner.

[Acts 10](#) - The book of Acts just continues to present us with such momentous occasions; and chapter 10 is clearly one of special significance. Cornelius of Caesarea was a Gentile soldier of an Italian cohort. a cohort could consist of from 600 - 1000 men, with 6 centurions in charge. A centurion was paid anywhere from 5 to as much as 20 times as much as the average Roman soldier, so Cornelius was likely considered wealthy. Identified in several verses as a God-fearer, he would have been attached to a synagogue and a believer in God, but not circumcised. An angel came to him in a vision telling him to have Peter brought to him, as well as where to find him.

Meanwhile, on the housetop at the home of Simon the tanner, Peter had a vision of his own (verses 9-16) that was perplexing to him at first. The vision occurred three times of all sorts of animals descending from heaven that he was commanded to eat - some of whom were unclean by Jewish law. Peter argued at first, but the voice said to him "What God has made clean, do not call common." Peter would come to understand that this landmark vision was not referring just to animals and food, but also to men. While he was still sorting through this, the Spirit told him about Cornelius's men who were now at his gate - that he was to go with them.

Being led by the Spirit, Peter judiciously took some of the brothers with them for witnesses of what was to occur. When they arrived from Joppa into Caesarea, Cornelius had gathered his friends and family and fell at Peter's feet. Whatever was in Cornelius' heart, Peter knew it was wrong to allow that sort of worship, and rebuked him in verse 26. In verses 28-29, Peter acknowledges that under Jewish tradition, coming to the house of a Gentile (let alone, eating with them) would make one ceremonially unclean, but says that God has told him that he "should not call any person common or unclean." So, he asks why Cornelius has sent for him.

So Cornelius tells him of his vision and that all present were commanded to hear what Peter has to say. With that, Peter preaches to them about Jesus and forgiveness of sins through His name. It was then that the Holy Spirit fell upon all present. The baptism of the Holy Spirit had previously been done directly from God to only the apostles, with it given to others only through the apostles laying on hands. But now, to the amazement of all circumcised believers who had come with Peter (verse 45), this second baptism was being poured out even to Gentiles.

Peter, acknowledging the gift that was given to them, then commanded that they be baptized with water as well. Peter's perspective had changed forever concerning non-Jews. Now the Lord's Kingdom would grow even faster! But this new perspective would not come without some resistance to change.