

City of Damascus – Pt 2

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today we return to our study of the city of Damascus.
2. In our first study we looked at how Damascus...
 - A. Was a very old city of Syria located about 150 miles north east of Jerusalem.
 - B. Mentioned in the Bible as early as Gen. 14:15 when Abraham defeated Chedorloamer's army.
 - C. Was an enemy of God's people, harassing them, fighting against them, and taking their territory.
 - D. Was connected to a significant event, being the city of Naaman the leper who was healed by Elisha the prophet, and how he became an example of one who *received God's grace by faith*.
 - i. We saw that though Naaman was hostile toward God and His people, God's grace to heal was revealed to him by a young Jewish slave girl he had taken in a raid on Israel.
 - ii. We saw how Naaman's reception of this grace required that he have enough *faith to seek out God's grace by going to God's prophet* in Israel.
 - iii. We saw how Naaman only received God's grace to heal *on God's terms*, which was *obedience of faith*.
 - a. God's word was very specific concerning him dipping *7 times* in the *Jordan river*!
 - b. At this Naaman became angry because *he thought* God would do it all, that the prophet would call on God and wave his hand. And his thoughts almost cost him the healing.
 - c. Fortunately, his servant convinced him to have enough faith to obey the prophet's words. And, he obeyed and was cleansed.
 - iv. As a result of this newfound knowledge, Naaman became a worshipper of Jehovah.
 - v. We looked at how salvation by grace through faith requires of us the same obedience of faith.
3. With that said I want us to fast forward to N.T. times where another significant event takes place that is also connected to Damascus.
 - A. That event is the conversion of Saul.
 - B. As we shall see, this second event is quite like the first in many ways, including how God's grace was obtained through obedience of faith on the part of the one seeking it.

BODY:

I. N.T. Damascus:

- A. O.T. Damascus was destroyed by the Assyrians in 732 B.C., which was the fulfillment of prophecy against it given by...
 1. Isaiah 17:1 – “The burden against Damascus. “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.”
 2. Amos 1:4-5 – “But I will send a fire into the house of Hazeal, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. ⁵ I will also break the gate bar of Damascus,...The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir,” Says the Lord.”
 3. Jeremiah 49:26-27 – (concludes prophecy by saying) “Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day,” says the Lord of hosts. ²⁷ “I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.”
- B. Yet, Damascus was rebuilt and later became a prominent city, but in this case one subject not to Syria, but to the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Seleucids, and the Romans.
 1. When the Romans invaded in 64 B.C. under general Pompey, they made Damascus the seat of the government in that province and it thrived, having a temple and great roads.
 2. In A.D. 37 Aretas, king of Arabia, became the ruler of Damascus (2 Cor. 11:32-33).
 - a. By this time, Damascus had become the home of a large population of Jews with numerous synagogues.
 - b. It seems apparent that the gospel experienced great success among these Jews there, which brings us to our second event associated with Damascus.

II. Event 2: The Conversion of Saul, the enemy of God's people, on the road to Damascus

A. Who was Saul? A man much like Naaman

1. Like Naaman, Saul, though being a Jew and not a Syrian, was very *hostile* toward God's people, the church.
 - a. He was the ringleader in the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:57-58 – “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”).
 - b. He became a relentless persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1, 3 – “Now Saul was consenting to his [Stephen's] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”).
2. Like Naaman, Saul wanted to make *raids upon God's people* and take them captive.
 - a. It seems that the number of Jewish Christians **in Damascus** had grown to the point that it caught Saul's attention and he wanted to stop this (Acts 9:1-2 – “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”).
 - b. So, rather than coming from Damascus to attack God's people, as did Naaman, Saul gains authority to travel *to Damascus* to arrest God's people and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial resulting likely in death or imprisonment!
3. Like Naaman, Saul committed these crimes against God and His people because he was ignorant of God and His way.
 - a. Initially, Naaman in his *ignorance* fought against God and his people, doing so until by grace he learned of and experience God's power.
 - b. Similarly, Saul was *ignorant* of God's will and fought against Him, only to be given the opportunity to receive grace (1 Tim. 1:13-14 – “although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it **ignorantly** in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”).
4. Like Naaman, Saul's *thoughts* of how things should be could have cost him his cleansing
 - a. Saul *thought* he should fight against Christ—a fraud (Acts 26:9-11 – “Indeed, **I myself thought** I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”).
 - b. His thoughts, like Naaman's, were keeping him on the wrong side of God's grace.

B. Like Naaman, Saul became an example of God's grace bestowed by faith:

1. Saul's conversion by grace **began** near Damascus when Jesus appeared to Him (Acts 9:3-5 – “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”).
- a. Many wrongly think that Saul's encounter on that road to Damascus *saved* him. But that is completely unsupported by Scripture and false!

- b. Saul's encounter with Jesus is parallel to the young slave girl revealing to Naaman how God's grace could heal him. He then *knew* of this grace but *had not received it*.
 - c. In the same way, Jesus' appearing to Saul revealed to him the *means* of God's grace to save, which is Jesus. Yet, he had not received it!
2. Like Naaman, Saul would receive grace only if he **sought** it.
- a. Remember, Naaman had to **go into Israel** and find God's prophet to be healed!
 - b. Saul would only receive God's grace to save if he **went into Damascus** (Acts 9:6 – "So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and **go into the city**, and you will be **told what you must do**."").
 - c. Just like Naaman, if Saul didn't want God's grace offered to him, he didn't have to go! **But, if he wanted God's grace to cleanse him of sin, he had to go!**
 - d. Like Naaman, Saul **went to Damascus**, the place revealed, despite having to be led as a **blind** man (Acts 9:8 – "Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus."").
3. Like Naaman, Saul would only receive God's grace to cleanse his sins *on God's terms—obedience of faith*.
- a. God's terms were revealed through the disciple named Ananias, who was sent to Saul to instruct him of God's way for his life.
 - i. First, Saul had to accept his role as a vessel of Christ and bearing his name before Gentiles, kings, and the Jews, as well being willing to suffer many things for Christ's name (Acts 9:10-15).
 - i) In Paul's recounting of his conversion he explains that the purpose of Christ's appearing to him was so he could be that vessel and tell what he heard and saw (Acts 22:14-15 – "Then he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and **see the Just One**, and **hear the voice of His mouth**.¹⁵ For you will **be His witness** to all men of what you have **seen and heard**."").
 - ii) So, contrary to people's thinking, the appearing of Jesus wasn't to save Saul, but to prepare him to be a witness for Christ!
 - ii. Second, Saul had to be willing to be **baptized** to be **cleansed of his sins** that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - i) Ananias was sent to give Saul his sight and that he might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18 – "And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may **receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit**."¹⁸ Immediately there **fell from his eyes something like scales**, and he received his sight at once; and **he arose and was baptized**."").
 - 1. This is all it says of Saul's conversion here in Acts 9.
 - 2. But this is not the whole of God's revelation on his conversion.
 - ii) Again, in Paul's recounting of this event we learn that like Naaman he was instructed to be **baptized/dipped in water** to be **cleansed** (Acts 22:16 – "And now **why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord**."").
 - 1. People, let these words soak in. Don't let their significance escape you!
 - 2. For, they clearly show that Jesus' appearing to Saul, or even Saul's *praying* and *fasting* for three days (Acts 9:9), didn't save Saul!
 - 3. **He was still guilty of his sins**—those sins of rejecting Jesus, persecuting, imprisoning, and murdering God's saints, etc.!
 - 4. He **still needed cleansing**, which could **only happen in baptism!**

4. Like Naaman, Saul obeyed and was baptized to be cleansed of his sin and became a disciple (Acts 9:18, 20 – “Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he **arose and was baptized**...²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.”).
 - a. This process of Saul’s conversion fits Jesus’ instructions (Matt. 28:19-20 – “Go therefore and make **disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them to observe** all things that I have **commanded** you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”).
 - b. This process fits the apostles’ teaching concerning the purpose of baptism and its connection with the reception of the Holy (Acts 2:37-39 – “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”” ³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “**Repent**, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”).

CONCLUSION:

1. Just like with Naaman, Saul’s cleansing by God’s grace through faith shows us that to be cleansed:
 - A. One must hear and learn of God’s grace (John 6:44-45).
 - B. One must then be willing to *seek it* that grace on God’s terms—obedience of faith.
 - i. Therefore, just as was told of Saul, we must be willing to “**Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord**” (Acts 22:16).
 - ii. So, like Naaman and Saul, we have a choice to make—rebel and refuse to obey to be cleansed, or follow the enlightened way and obey to be cleansed.
2. To help you make that decision I remind you of Paul’s words concerning God’s grace that saved him and will save us (1 Tim. 1:15-16 – “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**, of whom I am **chief**. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that **in me** first Jesus Christ might show **all longsuffering**, as **a pattern to those who are going to believe** on Him for everlasting life.”)
3. What a wonderful reality—the God that saved Saul wants that to show us how His longsuffering is bestowed upon those who seek salvation in Him!
4. God will bestow that same grace and mercy on you if you will receive it by F-R-C-B-LF.
5. Why would you not come and gladly give your whole self in obedience of faith to such a loving and caring God?