

## **Bi134 Acts**

### ***Lesson Bi134-18 The Spirit Empowers Saul***

Mbewe lived in a village in northern Malawi, Africa. He had been following Christ for several years, and was a faithful elder in the local Assemblies of God Church. However, in all those years, he had never led even one person to Christ. He had wanted to, but he was afraid to try. Then one Sunday morning his pastor preached a message on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He told of how, in the book of Acts, when people were filled with the Spirit, they became bold witnesses for Christ. Mbewe longed for such boldness.

So, when the pastor asked who wanted to be filled with the Spirit, Mbewe went to the front of the church. During the prayer time, he opened his heart to God and simply asked Jesus to fill him with the Holy Spirit. At that, the Holy Spirit came upon him. He was filled with the Spirit. As the power of God flowed through his being, he began to speak in other tongues.

After that, Mbewe began to witness with boldness. In a short time he had led several people to Christ. He now leads the outreach ministry in his church. In the past few years he has helped to plant four churches in surrounding villages. Today's story from the Book of Acts is similar to Mbewe's story. In it Saul of Tarsus is filled with the Spirit and becomes a powerful witness for Christ.

You will remember from our last lesson that, as Saul and his band approached the city of Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in a bright light. As a result, Saul was blinded and his traveling companions had to lead him by the hand into the city. They took him to the house of Judas located on Straight Street.

Also living in Damascus was a certain disciple by the name of Ananias. The Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision. He told him to go to Judas' house and pray for Saul that his eyes might be given back their sight. Ananias had heard the reports about Saul's persecution of the church in Jerusalem. He knew Saul had come to Damascus to do the same there. So, he was reluctant to obey the Lord, and he told the Lord so. But the Lord commanded Ananias, "Go! I have chosen this man to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." The Lord further told Ananias that he would fill Saul with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:10-16).

Ananias obeyed and went. When he arrived at the house, he found Saul in prayer. He greeted Saul and told him why he had come. Ananias then laid his hands on Saul and prayed for him. Immediately what appeared to be scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. What's more, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul then got up and was baptized. He took some food and regained his strength.

Paul's being filled with the Spirit resulted in his becoming a powerful witness for Christ in Damascus. This is exactly like the disciples' filling at Pentecost had resulted in their becoming powerful witnesses in Jerusalem. Immediately Saul began to tell everyone that Jesus is the Son of God.

At first, the Christians in Damascus distrusted him because of his reputation. Nevertheless, he kept on preaching and teaching the people that Jesus was truly the Messiah. This went on for quite a while—perhaps three years. Then some Jews decided to kill him. So, one night he escaped over the wall of the city in a basket and headed for Jerusalem.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples there, but they too were afraid of him. That's when Barnabas befriended him and introduced him to the apostles. He told them about how Saul had met Jesus and how for some time he had been fearlessly telling others about Christ.

Paul then began moving through Jerusalem preaching boldly the message of Jesus. However some Greek-speaking Jews began to plot to murder him, just as they had murdered Stephen. Because of this, his friends whisked Paul away to the coastal city of Caesarea. From there he set sail for Tarsus (Acts 9:17-30).

Saul's receiving the Holy Spirit is the fourth key outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. The other three, which we have already looked at, are the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, the second Jerusalem Outpouring in Acts chapter 4, and the Samaritan Outpouring in Acts chapter 8. Because the Spirit was poured out on Saul in Damascus, we call this outpouring the Damascus Outpouring. As with the other three outpourings, this one resulted in Spirit-empowered witness. Upon being filled with the Spirit, Saul immediately began to proclaim Christ to the lost. This is another example of the empowering-results-in-witness pattern found throughout Acts. Luke is definitely trying to teach us something. He wants us to know that it is essential for every believer to be empowered by the Spirit in order to become an effective witness for Christ.

Some have wondered, did Saul speak in tongues when Ananias laid hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit? There is strong evidence that he did. For he would later write to the Christians in Corinth telling them, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1Cor 14:18). Also, later on in the book of Acts, when Paul lays his hands on the disciples in Ephesus, "they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:6). We can expect the same thing to happen today. When believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered as Christ's witnesses, they will speak in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance just as those first disciples did on the Day of Pentecost. Then, like Saul, they will go out and tell others that Jesus is the Son of God.

Saul's conversion and subsequent empowering by the Spirit is one of the most significant events in history. Had he not been saved, and had he not been filled with the Spirit, we would not have the 13 books he wrote, which make up about one third of our New Testament. As a result, our understanding of Christ and his redemptive work would be greatly diminished. Furthermore, the Early Church would have had no apostle to the Gentiles as we read about in the last 16 chapters of the book of Acts. The world would look much different today if Saul had not been saved and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We learn two important lessons from the account of Saul's being filled with the Holy Spirit.

First, we learn the importance of being empowered by the Spirit in order to be effective witnesses for Christ. We have emphasized this lesson already in our study. However, because in Acts Luke chooses to emphasize it again and again, we will do the same. In this story, Jesus was so intent on Saul receiving the Spirit that he appeared to Ananias in a vision. The Lord told him to go pray with Saul. Then, once Saul received the Spirit, he immediately began to witness for Christ.

A second lesson we learn from this story is that God can use anyone who will be filled with the Spirit and obedient to his voice. One does not have to be an apostle or preacher to be used by God. The Bible calls Ananias a "certain disciple." He was probably a layman in the Damascus church. However, he was full of the Spirit and committed to God's mission, so God was able to use him. Though we never read of him again in the book of Acts, this simple man overcame his fear and helped to change the course of history. He was used by God to lead the great apostle to the Gentiles into the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The same is true today, God will use anyone who will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and remain committed to him and his mission.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us that followers of Jesus must be filled with the Spirit. It also teaches us that anyone who will commit themselves to God and his mission can be powerfully used by God.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God intends for all of his servants to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and to do his work.

Let's **review** some of the significant things we have learned from studying the story of Saul's conversion and empowering.

1. Why did God send Ananias to the house where Saul was praying?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "God sent Ananias to pray with Saul that he might be healed of his blindness and be filled with the Holy Spirit," you answered correctly.
2. Why was it important for Saul to be filled with by the Spirit?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that it was important for Saul to be filled with the Spirit because he needed to be empowered as Christ's witness, you are correct.
3. What does today's lesson teach us about who can be used by God?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Anyone who will be filled with the Spirit and commit themselves to the mission of God can be powerfully used by him," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times until you can share it accurately with others, and until you understand the two lessons we learn from the story. You are then to pray with someone to be filled with the Spirit as Ananias prayed with Saul.