

New Morning Magical – for 7-22-20

Transformed from a Persecutor to an Evangelist

We ended yesterday in Acts 1 and I really jumped on poor Brother Peter, but look at him in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit falls on the disciples, now Apostles, and Peter rises up and gives his first speech under the anointing. He uses prophecy from Joel, and precedence from Psalms, but he is full of the spirit and is being guided by the spirit, so that his speech is not from himself so much as it is a word from on high. I debated on whether to read it this morning, but I think I will because it is such a marvelous contrast to Peter's speech in the first chapter of Acts.

Here's Peter in Acts 2:

14 Now Peter, standing with the eleven, lifts up his voice and declaims to them: "Men! Jews! and all who are dwelling at Jerusalem! Let this be known to you, and give ear to my declarations,

15 for these are not drunk, as you take it, for it is the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which has been declared through the prophet Joel:

17 'And it shall be in the last days,' (God is saying) 'I shall be pouring out from My spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your youths visions shall be seeing, and your elders dreams shall be dreaming,

18 And surely on My men slaves and on My women slaves in those days shall I be pouring out from My spirit,' and they shall be prophesying.

19 'And I will give miracles in heaven above, and signs on the earth below, Blood and fire and vapor pillars of smoke,

20 The sun shall be converted into darkness and the moon into blood ere the coming of the day of the Lord, The great and advent day.

21 And it shall be that everyone, whosoever should be invoking the name of the Lord, shall be saved.'

22 Men! Israelites! Hear these words: Jesus, the Nazarene, a Man demonstrated to be from God for you by powerful deeds and miracles and signs, which God does through Him in the midst of you, according as you yourselves are aware --

23 This One, given up in the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, gibbeting by the hand of the lawless, assassinate,

24 Whom God raises, loosing the pangs of death, forasmuch as it was not possible for Him to be held by it.

25 "For David is saying to Him, I saw the Lord before me continually, seeing that He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

26 Therefore gladdened was my heart, and exultant my tongue. Now, still my flesh also shall be tenting in expectation,

27 For Thou wilt not be forsaking my soul in the unseen, nor wilt Thou be giving Thy Benign One to be acquainted with decay.

28 Thou makest known to me the paths of life. Thou wilt be filling me with gladness with Thy face.'

29 "Men! Brethren! Allow me to say to you with boldness concerning the patriarch David, that he deceases also and was entombed, and his tomb is among us until this day.

30 Being, then, inherently, a prophet, and having perceived that God swears to him with an oath, out of the fruit of his loins to seat One on his throne,

31 perceiving this before, he speaks concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither forsaken in the unseen, nor was His flesh acquainted with decay.

32 This Jesus God raises, of Whom we all are witnesses.

33 Being, then, to the right hand of God exalted, besides obtaining the promise of the holy spirit from the Father, He pours out this which you are observing and hearing.

34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, yet he is saying, 'Said the Lord to my Lord, "Sit at My right

35 Till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet.'

36 Let all the house of Israel know certainly, then, that God makes Him Lord as well as Christ -- this Jesus Whom you crucify!"

37 Now, hearing this, their heart was pricked with compunction. Besides, they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "What should we be doing, men, brethren?"

38 Now Peter is averring to them, "Repent and be baptized each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins, and you shall be obtaining the gratuity of the holy spirit.

39 For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all those afar, whosoever the Lord our God should be calling to Him."

40 Besides, with more and different words, he conjures and entreated them, saying, "Be saved from this crooked generation!"

Once the Spirit had come on the Apostles, they became authoritative in their speech and anointed by God to perform many signs, wonders, and miracles, while, at the same time, drawing huge numbers of converts from the Jews in the region.

One of these converts was named Stephen, who was admired and loved by all, except of course, the Jewish religious hierarchy. Stephen really let them have it with the whole story from Moses through Christ and pointedly said more than once about Yeshua, "whom you crucify."

This was, by the way, a big impetus for so many in the area to confess faith in Yeshua, because, as you recalled, they may have been among those calling for Yeshua's death and told Pilate, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"*

So here comes Stephen, in Acts 7, a young man recently added to the number of believers, who was among those chosen to wait on tables wherever the assembly was meeting or residing. Stephen was snatched by the Jewish religious hierarchy to answer for his faith and he let them have it with both barrels! He recited to them practically the whole history of the nation of Israel from the Exodus out of Egypt to the present time.

I'll just read the last part of Stephen's indictment, which will result in his being stoned and Paul's introduction when he was still known as Saul. One of the patterns you'll see here has been repeated throughout the Old Testament: When people in authority don't like a message they're given, usually by a prophet, they try to silence the messenger, rather than learn from the message.

Here's Stephen, from Acts 7:51 and on:

51 Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in your hearts and ears, you are ever clashing with the holy spirit! As your fathers, you also!

52 Which of the prophets do not your fathers persecute? And they kill those who announce before concerning the coming of the Just One, of Whom now you became the traitors and murderers --

53 who got the law for a mandate of messengers and do not maintain it!"

54 Now, hearing these things, they were harrowed in their hearts, and gnashed their teeth at him.

55 Now possessing the fullness of faith and holy spirit, looking intently into heaven, he perceived the glory of God, and Jesus, standing at the right hand of God,

56 and said, "Lo! I am beholding the heavens opened up, and the Son of Mankind standing at the right hand of God."

57 Now, crying with a loud voice, they pressed their ears and rush on him with one accord.

58 And, casting him out, outside of the city, they pelted him with stones. And the witnesses put off their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul.

59 And they pelted Stephen with stones, while he is invoking and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

60 Now, kneeling, he cries with a loud voice, "Lord, Thou shouldst not stand against them this sin!" And saying this, he was put to repose.

Chapter 8

1 Yet Saul was endorsing his assassination. Now in that day there came to be a great persecution of the ecclesia which is in Jerusalem, and they were all dispersed among the districts of Judea and Samaria, save the apostles.

2 Yet pious men are Stephen's pallbearers, and they make a great grieving over him.

3 Now Saul devastated the ecclesia; going into the homes, dragging out both men and women, he gave them over to jail.

It's almost incomprehensible how threatened the religious authorities were by Yeshua's followers; almost as much as they were by Yeshua Himself! They really could not stand the overthrow of their power structure and the source of their personal wealth, by the way, which they'd built up over several generations, at least since the end of the Old Testament. They rejected wholesale, the long-awaited Messiah who had stood among them and heralded the salvation that they had looked for, and the kingdom they had expected to arrive. Yeshua just didn't look or sound like they expected, and they missed or ignored all the signs of His arrival. Now, when Stephen truthfully recounted Who Yeshua was and their culpability in his death, they simply could not bear to hear it. And there was Saul, standing by, guarding the cloaks of those stoning Stephen, and by bearing witness to it, he was endorsing it.

"Saul devastated the ecclesia; going into the homes, dragging out both men and women, he gave them over to jail," we read in Acts 8:3. He didn't just persecute; he DEVASTATED. Later Paul writes that he "ravaged" the ecclesia:

Here's what Paul says in Galatians 1:13:

13 For you hear of my behavior once, in Judaism, that I **inordinately persecuted** the ecclesia of God and **ravaged** it.

14 And I progressed in Judaism above many contemporaries in my race, being inherently exceedingly more zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Saul's inordinate persecution means, *"exceeding reasonable limits, excessive,"* and ravaged means *"savagely destroyed."* Saul was the archenemy of all believers in Yeshua. This is why Saul's radical conversion, which we are about to witness, was such stumbling a block and a point of confusion and contention among the early believers, and the Jewish hierarchy too! Saul was not trusted by either group! But, that's just like the Father, to pick the MOST unlikely person of all to become his greatest messenger. Talk about something about which everyone would have said, *"God would never."* Obviously, God did exactly what would never have entered anyone's mind, Jew or believer.

Well, it's time to witness Saul's conversion and his radical transformation from a persecutor to an evangelist; so, let's pick up the story tomorrow in Acts 9.

Until then:

May Yahweh bless you and keep you;
May Yahweh light up His face toward you
and be gracious to you;
May Yahweh lift His face to you
and appoint peace for you.

Amen