

### Use of online commentaries during our meetings

I don't know how others feel on this but my own personal view of this is that during the meetings we should focus simply on the text of the bible, and in allowing the Holy Spirit to lead. If people want to look things up either before, or after, the meetings—for example to clarify historical events, or take additional opinions on ambiguous phrases—that's absolutely fine; but I feel we should discourage it during the actual meetings.

## Week 5 Acts 8 - 9

Chapter 8 and 9 continue with yet more dramatic conversions. It can seem a bit repetitive but Luke obviously feels it's important enough to continue to emphasize.

### 8. 14 – 25

We've discussed previously the fact that generally in the New Testament Christian conversion and receiving the Holy Spirit tend to go together. Here we have an interesting situation—a group of people who, we are told, have “received the word of God” but have not as yet received the Holy Spirit.

This can seem perplexing although it actually accords well with the experience of John Wesley who “received the word of God” early in life, then actually attempted missionary activity for a couple of years, was even involved in successful conversion of others, before finally coming to true faith himself a bit later. Was he a Christian during this intervening period. I suspect Wesley himself would give a resounding “NO!” to that question.

### 8. 26 – 40

This the rather charming story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Why has Luke bothered to include the story of one man's conversion to Christianity, who is never mentioned again? I don't know. Perhaps it's because the man was most probably non-Jewish (even though he is reading Isaiah)

Also of interest in the story is the close association of baptism with conversion, something the modern church has almost universally abandoned.

## Acts 9

Now the most significant conversion of all – Paul.

When? This is not very clear, but probably a few years have passed. Chapter 12 can be reliably dated to AD 44 (death of Herod Agrippa I). Around AD 37 is often suggested for Paul's conversion, which seems reasonable.

John Wesley describes this as ‘one of the slower conversions in the book of Acts’ – it took all of 3 days!

Paul also is baptized on day 1 (19)

**9.26** – what do these little historical details tell us about the general reliability of Luke’s writing (as with other historical narratives in the New Testament)?

Elsewhere Paul I think claims to have actually met Jesus on the road, though the primary narrative doesn’t seem to say exactly that (but verse 27 seems to).

**9.36 – 42** Another one raised from the dead. Jesus may have been dead longer than most, but it’s far from unique. If it’s so relatively not uncommon, how do we interpret Jesus’ resurrection in this light?