



DEVOTIONAL FOR ACTS 7-12

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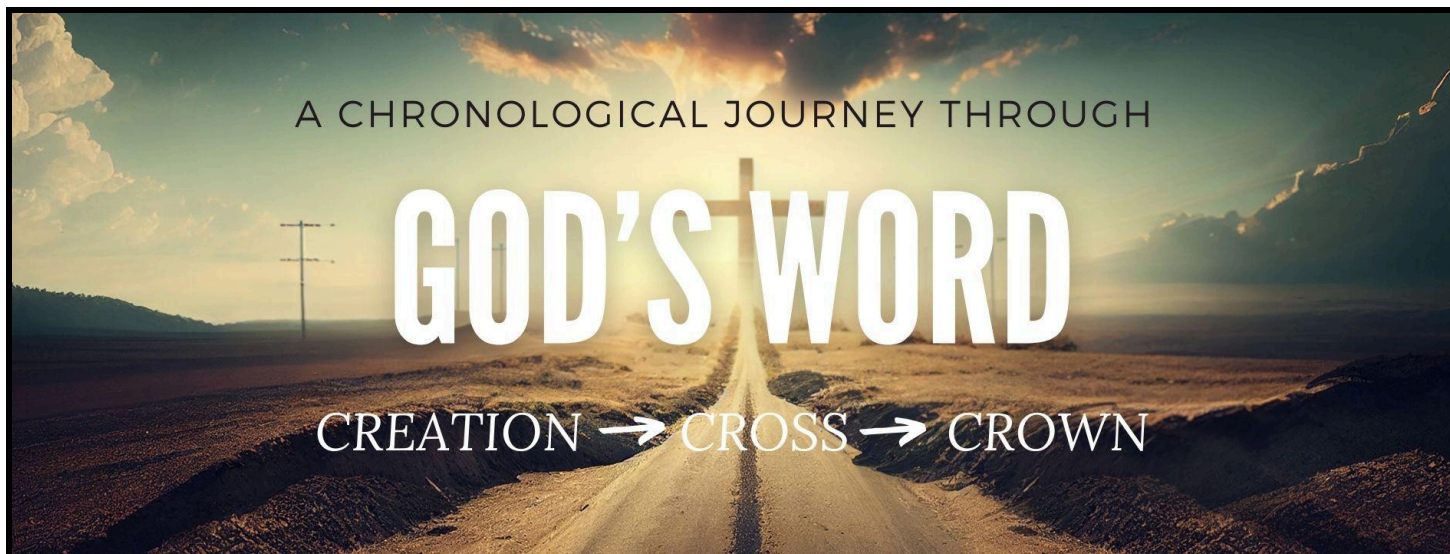
Our God is inscrutable, impossible to fully understand. In truth, God is beyond reproach in His plans and actions. Yet often, we ask, if we are following and worshiping our God, how can undesirable occurrences happen to us or to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Scripture provides some good examples of His divine, inscrutable ways.

Stephen is known as one of the first Christian martyrs, enduring an experience that we find hard to imagine and comprehend today. In Acts 6-7, Stephen preached the gospel of Christ with such power that everyone who heard him felt the truth. Before any other man in the early church, Stephen saw that the gospel of Christ was not only for Jews but was for all so that all might be saved if they believed in Jesus. Stephen loved God and helped others, especially the widows. Ultimately, the Sanhedrin falsely accused Stephen; they did not tolerate him or his devotion. When questioned on his beliefs, he preached the Word of God without mentioning himself or his gain.

God pursued His people, and they kept rejecting Him. God sent His chosen ones to speak truth to them; the stiff-necked people killed the prophets and killed the greatest one of all, Jesus, His Son. While Stephen was speaking, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and, through grace, caught a glimpse of the glory of God, with Jesus standing at the right hand of the throne.

I believe Stephen was offered this glimpse into heaven to strengthen and encourage him, allowing him to endure what the Sanhedrin were about to do. The Sanhedrin took Stephen outside the Gate, now known as Stephen's Gate, and stoned him. We can ask, wasn't he doing the work of God? What good can come from stopping the Word of God? But then, look what happens next. The Sanhedrin, being against the gospel of Christ, wanted the spread of the Word to stop. Still, the exact opposite occurred as read in Acts 8:4: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." God's inscrutable ways increased the spread of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Stephen's martyrdom reminds me that even when God's ways can't always be understood in my own life, I can still trust him.

Acts chapter 8 reminds us not to boast or idolize God's power and blessings but to share them. Though I love the peacefulness of being a Christian and following my Heavenly Father, I must make sure not to want those blessings for my gain. It's not about power; it's about surrendering to God.



There was a man in the Bible named Simon the Sorcerer. He performed great and unique acts that were not of the Lord. He selfishly wanted the power of God for himself and his gain. He tried to pay, with tangible money, for the power of God to do great works, not for others but for his prideful gain...not good (Acts 8:9-24)!

In the same chapter, we see a different attitude. Philip, who showed his devotion to God, helped an Ethiopian to understand God's word and baptized him. Acts 8:38-39 reads, "And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. God ways are inscrutable.

Another disciple of Jesus, Paul, who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament, showed a remarkable ability to support God's plans. Formerly a harsh persecutor of Christians, Paul's life was changed in a moment when he came face to face with God. He was ultimately martyred, too. God himself is the difference maker. He fills His people with His, those called to Him, to enable them to go through trials and tribulations and to be good witnesses for our Father.

The sovereignty of God is complete and absolute. He has the final Word in all things. He loves those that He calls and those that listen for His voice. Stephen, Philip, and Paul worshiped Him and no other. In Acts 11, we read that God shows no favoritism. Peter says that God loves the Gentiles as much as he does the Jews. "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way" (Acts 11:17)?

What Stephen, Philip, and Paul understood about the Lord is available to every person including you and me. Let us not look to God for mere things, peace, and blessings. Let's pursue God and His kingdom, asking what we can do for Him and His kingdom through His power and according to His purpose and plan.

Questions:

1. Does your faith allow you to trust God's plan without questioning His purpose?
2. Are you finding your walk and devotion to Christ for His kingdom purposes or your own?
3. What encouragement can you take from the stories in Acts?