

Acts Chapter Nine

Acts 9:1-6

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do."

- When church scatters after the death of Stephen—High Priest/council is satisfied—Saul is not—asks permission to pursue and prosecute. Sought extermination (same spirit as Nazis).
- Description of this is found in two other locations—plus referenced repeatedly—Acts 22, Acts 26, Phil 3:4-7, Gal 1:13
- Breathing threats and murder against disciples (more than a pupil; one who adheres/accepts instruction given him and makes it his rule of conduct).
- Letters from High Priest sent to synagogues of Damascus—anyone under their authority. He had no authority on his own to act in such a manner.
- Could take men and women to prison—anyone belonging to the Way (what Jesus called Himself). This name is used 5x in Acts. (It is a way of living more than a set of doctrines).
- Saul thought he was taking a stand against false religion
- This lets us know that there was a community of the church large enough in Damascus to be concerned about.
- Light from heaven—find out in Acts 22:6 that this took place at mid-day, yet light was brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13).
- II Cor 4:6
- Saul, Saul—when God repeats a name, it conveys deep emotion.
- Persecuting Me—true crime: he was persecuting God, not man.
- His call to repentance has begun. Saul is being converted—but called as well—to a task that the Lord raised him up for.

Paul was highly intelligent—well educated—biblically literate—zeal and passion for God. When Jesus appears to him, he realizes that the Law and the Prophets are being fulfilled. He realizes Jesus is alive, and He is Who He said that He was.

- This calling to carry a message is being given to one who had most desired to crush the message.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "When God calls someone, He bids them 'come and die'."

Acts 9:7-9

And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

- Companions heard voice—speechless—saw no one—did not understand.
- Led into Damascus—had to learn to walk by faith/not sight
- Following encounter, Saul sits three days in darkness (like a seed before it sprouts). Three days—significant: Jonah in whale and Jesus in tomb.
- Left alone 3 days to consider just 30 words.
- Spiritually traumatic—Saul is helpless (First step in AA)
- People of Sodom had been blinded by God—still pursued their wicked goal.

Acts 9:10-16

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, *here am I*, Lord." And the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- Ananias—a believer in Damascus—who knew how to hear the voice of the Lord and obey. He has a vision (a supernatural spectacle; to be gazed at).

- The Lord said in a vision—to hear with your 'eye
- He doesn't know that Saul is helpless

Instructions to contact a man:

Saul of Tarsus: Saul was about to lay hands on the church (so to speak) and now he required hands to be laid on him. He is praying—he has had a vision.

Very specific vision: specific street, house, man, what the man was doing, and the vision that he had.

Ananias had heard of Sauls' mission/threats—did not desire contact with him. (This man is harmful to church). What if he listened to his fear more than walk this out by faith?

Lords direction: Go (on basis of His voice, more than what you know)—He is a chosen instrument (Acts 13:2, Rom 1:1, Gal 1:15, Rom 9:22-23)—to bear name (to be completely identified with; to carry His presence) to gentiles (surprise), kings (probably Nero) and Israel—how much he will suffer (Acts 20:23).

- Called to 'bear name' not be a witness.
- God used both Stephen and Ananias to have initial impact on his life.

Acts 9:17-19

And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.

- Calls Saul brother—based on God's word to him.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit—how he will gain spiritual sight.
- Scales fall from eyes—sight regained.
- Baptized
- Ate—strengthened
- Encounter on Damascus road broke Saul—Holy Spirit fills that broken vessel.

Acts 9:19b-22

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and *who* had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

- Gal 1:13-18 fills in part of the story from this time period.
- Spends several days with disciples—testimony of Ananias probably helped smooth the way.
- Proclaims Jesus in synagogue
- Saul begins to live out II Cor 5:17
- 'Son of God'—not used much in OT—usually refers to people of Israel (Israel is my son, my firstborn) and the son of David (Messiah—II Sam 7:12-14).
- Brethren amazed (offended? Forgiving?)—his reputation had preceded him.
- Confounding Jews—proving Jesus is the Christ
- Persecution comes to Saul

Acts 9:23-25

And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through *an opening in the wall*, lowering him in a large basket.

- When Jews can't win argument—get violent.
- Now Saul is the hunted rather than the hunter.
- II Cor 11:32-33: this incident takes place while Aretas is king (37-39AD). Taking into account the 3 years mentioned in Gal 1:18—this incident took place after that—can surmise Saul was probably converted approximately 34-36 AD.
- Disciples help him escape

Acts 9:26-31

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death. But when the brethren learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

- Stayed with Peter 15 days
- Brought to apostles by Barnabas
- Barnabas=son of encouragement
- Preaching—threatened—sent by disciples to Caesarea—then Tarsus
- 14 year interval

Saul of Tarsus—Saul the Rabbi—Saul the persecutor—Saul the blind—Saul the convert—Saul the preacher—Saul the unknown—Paul the apostle

Church (all Judea)—enjoyed peace—built up—going on in the Fear of the Lord—comfort of Holy Spirit—continued to increase.

Acts 9:32-35

Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all *those parts*, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed." And immediately he arose. And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

- Story picks up with Peter—traveling. Previous pattern: apostles staying near Jerusalem.
- Lydda—approximately 35 miles from Jerusalem (near the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv).

Acts 9:36-43

Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated *in Greek* is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, "Do not delay to come to us." And Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon.

- Tabitha/Dorcas=name means deer
- When Dorcas dies—they send for Peter
- 'Tabitha arise'—similar to the way Jesus prayed (Mk 5:38-43, Lu 8:50-56)
- First time Christians are called 'saints'.
- Jews were strictly forbidden from associating with anyone who routinely worked with dead animals
- Law of the time—tanner had to live at least 75 feet outside a village because of constant ritual uncleanness.

Acts Chapter Nine—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

In verse 22, Paul is proving Jesus is the Christ. What verses from Psalm 22 might he use?

Dig:

- 1) What is the condition of Saul's heart at the beginning of chapter 9?
- 2) What sin is exposed in Saul's life?
- 3) How does Saul differ from his teacher, Gamaliel, in his approach to the early church?
- 4) What is the extent of God's calling on Saul's life?
- 5) What three audiences does the Lord plan on sending Saul to?
- 6) Why does Ananias lay hands on Saul?
- 7) What is Saul's first confession concerning Christ after his salvation?
- 8) Who helps Saul escape in Damascus? What does this show us about Saul's ministry in these early days of his faith?
- 9) What is the initial response in Jerusalem to Saul's conversion? How is this resolved?

10) What is the state of the church at the close of chapter nine?

11) Is there one aspect of Saul's life that is transformed immediately?

Discuss:

- 1) Where was the early church dependent on the Holy Spirit / supernatural for evangelism? Where is the church dependent today?
- 2) By reading this chapter, what would you describe as the ministries of the church? How is your local congregation engaged in these activities?
- 3) Dorcas was raised from the dead....Stephen was not. What can we learn as a church by reading these two accounts?

Point of Prayer:

Pray for that person in your life who seems the farthest from receiving Christ.

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) Is there someone you know that seems 'least likely' to respond to Jesus and His salvation offer?
- 2) How did the Lord arouse your attention so you could respond to the Holy Spirit and believe in Christ?

- 3) Has the Lord ever given you an assignment you didn't want to go on?
- 4) Who has had the role of Ananias or Barnabas in your life?
- 5) How easy is it for you to see/believe the best about someone?
- 6) Have you shared Christ with someone this year? What was their response?
- 7) Would a miracle change any of your current beliefs?