

Acts Chapter 9

Acts 9:1 "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,"

“Saul” The Apostle Paul was originally named Saul, after the first king of Israel. He was born a Jew, studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (22:3), and became a Pharisee (23:6). He was also a Roman citizen, a right he inherited from his father (22:8). Verses 1-19 recorded the external facts of his conversion (see also 22:1-22; 26:9-20; Philippians 3:1-14 records the internal spiritual conversion (see notes there).

He was the most prominent apostle in the early church due to his effectiveness in starting so many churches. Paul was from Tarsus of Cilicia and was born into a well-to-do home. Paul, as a rabbi, was required to learn a trade and so labored in the low-paying, menial task of tentmaking.

But two facts demonstrate the social status of his family:

- (1) his Roman citizenship (22:28);
- (2) his opportunity to study in Jerusalem under the foremost teacher, Gamaliel (22:3).

Paul' primary attribute however, was not his education but his zeal, which was as much a part of his life before his conversion as afterward. Paul was the first to martyr the Christians (7:48), and to wreak havoc in the Jerusalem church (8:1, 3-4), pursuing them even as far as Antioch. At that time God graciously saved him and commissioned him (Gal. 1:13-17).

Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9; Rom. 11:13), and immediately preached in Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus, and throughout Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21-23). About 10 years later while serving in Antioch, Paul was sent to Cyprus and Galatia in what is called his first missionary journey (chapters 13 and 14).

He later evangelized Greece (chapters 16 – 18) and then Asia Minor (called Asia in Acts 19). When he returned to Jerusalem he was arrested and imprisoned: two years in Caesarea (chapters 23-26), and two years in Rome (chapter 28). During his missionary journeys, he wrote (Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans).

While in Rome he wrote the so-called Prison Epistles: (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon). The book of Acts and 2 Timothy (along with the statements of church history), imply that Paul was released from prison, preached in Spain and the Aegean Sea area (wrote 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), was rearrested, and was finally martyred by Nero.

Paul was neither physically impressive nor an orator (2 Cor. 10:10; Gal. 4:13-15), but his unquenchable zeal and love, plus his powerful pen, have endeared him not only to Christians of the first century but also to those of the last 20 centuries. (Acts 7:58; Acts 9, 13-28; Galatians 1, 2; 2 Cor. 11 and 12).

The persecution described (in chapters 7 and 8), continues for some time, since “Saul” will not allow it to cease. Even after the Christians are scattered from Jerusalem and Judea, Paul travels 150 miles to Damascus to harass them.

You see Saul (Paul), at this time felt that he was doing God a favor by persecuting the Christians. He was a Pharisee, and he believed Jesus to be an imposter. Saul was not only going out and rounding up men and women followers of Jesus and putting them in jail, but he was doing it joyfully.

In fact, he would even go and get papers on his own to arrest these Christians. He was eager to arrest them and punish them. This breathing out above just meant that Saul’s spirit was in doing this punishment.

Acts 9:2 "And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

“Damascus” is a very ancient city, the capital of Old Testament Syria (Isa. 7:8). It is located about 150 miles northwest of Jerusalem in a fertile plain somewhat surrounded by mountains with desert on the east. Though it lacks sufficient rainfall, the region is well watered by the Abana and Pharpar rivers.

During the New Testament era, Damascus had a large Jewish population, and thus many Jewish Christians fled there when Saul (Paul) was persecuting the church (8:1; 9:1-2). Paul was bound for Damascus on a mission of destruction when God graciously saved him.

“If he found any of this way”: This description of Christianity, derived from Jesus’ description of Himself (John 14:6), appears several times in Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This is an appropriate title because Christianity is the way of God (18:26), the way into the Holy place (Heb. 10:19-20), and the way of truth (John 14:6; 2 Pet. 2:2).

Damascus is mentioned in the New Testament only in Acts (chapters 9, 22, 26), and twice by Paul (2 Cor. 11:32; Gal. 1:17), all in reference to Paul’s conversion. Today Damascus is the capital of Syria and has a population of about 800,000.

Verses 3-6: This was the first of 6 visions to be seen by Paul in Acts (16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-18; 23:11; 27:23-24).

Acts 9:3 "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:"

“A light from heaven”: The appearance of Jesus Christ in glory (22:6; 26:13), visible only to Saul (26:9).

This Light from heaven is the Light of the world (the Lord Jesus). He was so eager in his persecutions that only the Lord Jesus could stop him.

Acts 9:4 "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

“Why persecutes thou me?” An inseparable union exists between Christ and His followers. Saul’s persecution represented a direct attack on Christ (Matt. 18:5-6).

Remember that Saul was a Pharisee and he was a proud man. To fall before the Lord would be humiliating, but to fall on his face before this Light is a very humbling experience. This voice leaves no doubt who it is when a person hears it.

This voice coming from deity is saying that Saul is persecuting Him. Remember Saul is a religious man who thinks he is doing right, so this will come as a great shock to him.

Acts 9:5 "And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Saul is depicted as a rebellious beast that fights against the prod of its master (Acts 26:14). He is persecuting Jesus in that he is afflicting the body of Christ. When someone does something for or against a Christian, Jesus Christ not only knows but feels it just as we do (Matt. 25:35-40). He is moved with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15).

We see here, that Saul has been just like so many sinners before they come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. They and he, were going headlong to destruction. We see Saul was even putting himself in great hardship to do this deed, thinking it was right in his own sight. He hadn’t stopped to consult with God and make sure he was on the right course.

Self-indulgence gets many on the wrong path. Jesus, at some point in time, comes in nearness to each of us with His glorious Light. It stops us dead in our tracks and creates a point at which we can follow Jesus to eternal life, or follow the way of the world to destruction and hell.

Notice that Saul calls Jesus Lord. He recognizes that this is the Lord of the universe. Saul is wise in that he asks his name, so that he too, might worship Him. We see that this encounter of Saul with the Light of the world will change him forever. Saul has wanted to please God all along; he just didn't know the will of God. You cannot do the will of God, until you know the will of God.

This dramatic encounter happens to very few people. I believe the Lord did this, because of His foreknowledge of what Saul would do. The Lord pricks our heart and sometimes we do not accept it. The Lord tells Saul; he has been pulling against Him.

Acts 9:6 "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

So many times, the people who have been the most outspoken against the workings of the Lord are the very ones who do the greatest work for the Lord, once they receive Him as their Savior and Lord. This encounter has left Saul trembling before God. Saul had been a powerful man and was a proud man as well. This was quite a come-down for him.

The cry of everyone who has decided to follow Jesus is "Lord, what would you have me to do?" Very few get a direct answer like Saul did here. Now Saul's part in this is to obey the Lord.

Acts 9:7 "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

"The men which journeyed with" Saul are important as witnesses to this event. Saul is not experiencing some emotional or traumatic seizure. Someone is communicating with Saul as these men bear witness. A study of Saul's two parallel accounts (in chapters 22 and 26) makes the events clearer.

This verse says that the men "stood speechless." But this must be understood to say that whereas Saul continued to lie on the ground as Jesus spoke with him, these men were able to get up, because they all had fallen to the ground (26:14). This verse says that the witnesses heard "a voice," whereas 22:9 says they did not hear the voice.

This seeming contradiction has two possible explanations. First (9:7), could be saying that the witnesses heard Saul's voice but did not see anyone to whom Saul could be speaking, whereas (22:9 say), "They heard not the voice of him that spake to me." They neither saw nor heard anyone.

The second explanation takes note of the Greek grammar and seems to fit the meaning of the passage better. Chapter 9 says that the witnesses heard a voice (Greek "phones", genitive case); chapter 22 says that they did not hear the voice (Greek "phonen", accusative case). The first form allows hearing that may or may not involve understanding; the latter form involves hearing with understanding.

Hence chapter 9 apparently says that the witnesses heard without understanding the voice of the One who spoke to Saul. Chapter 22 says that they did not hear with understanding, thus saying the same thing. A comparable situation occurred when God spoke from heaven to Jesus, but many in the crowd only discerned it as thunder (John 12:28-29).

This does not say whether they heard what the Lord had said to Saul or not. They did hear a voice though, and knew that something very unusual had happened. I personally do not believe that they saw the Light that Saul saw, or else they would have been blinded.

We do know that the companions of Saul are aware that something extremely unusual has happened and that the Lord did it.

Acts 9:8 "And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought [him] into Damascus."

This great Light had blinded Saul to everything of this world. The “they” here, are Saul's companions. Saul had to be led as a blind man. It appears Damascus was very close and they continued there.

Acts 9:9 "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

This could have been a three day fast of Saul's. It was time to do some serious praying. Saul probably thought he might never see again. He was probably still in wonderment about what had happened to him as well.

He had to be confused about just exactly what this was all about. It was certainly time for serious prayer. We all should pray, "Lord open mine eyes that I might see."

Acts 9:10 "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I [am here], Lord."

“Ananias”: One of the leaders of the Damascus church, and therefore, one of Saul’s targets (22:12).

Ananias was a common name among the Jews, which in its Hebrew form was Hananiah. Three men have this name in the New Testament. The most important of the three was the disciple from Damascus who God used to minister to Saul (Paul), after his conversion. Paul describes him as “a devout man according to the law,” with a good testimony before others (22:12).

When Ananias laid hands upon Saul, he received his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit. It is significant that Ananias was simply a disciple (not an apostle), in that Paul’s apostleship was not founded on the ministry of another apostle (Gal 1:1, 12). Tradition says that Ananias later become bishop of Damascus and died a martyr.

Another Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, was part of the early church at Jerusalem (5:1-10). Their act of selling property to appear as though they were giving like the others (4:32-37), and then keeping back part of the money, resulted in God’s judgment of their hypocrisy with death.

The third Ananias was the high priest and president of the Sanhedrin at the time of Paul’s arrest (23:2). He was appointed high priest and priest in A.D. 48 and remained until 58. His haughtiness at the time of Paul’s arrest was characteristic of his whole tenure.

His apparent cooperation with the conspirators who were seeking to assassinate Paul (23:12-15), further reveals his unscrupulous character. In A.D. 66, when the Romans came to subdue the Jewish people, Ananias was himself murdered by assassins for his collaboration with the Romans.

Here again, is another way that the Lord speaks to His people. To Ananias, it was in a vision. (This is not the Ananias who was the husband of Sapphira). Notice Ananias answers as each of us should: "Here am I Lord".

Acts 9:11 "And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for [one] called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,"

“Street which is called Straight”: This street, which runs through Damascus from the east gate to the west, still exists and is called Darb el-Mustaqim.

“Tarsus”: The birthplace of Paul and a key city in the Roman province of Cilicia, located on the banks of the Cydnus River near the border of Asia Minor and Syria. It served as both a commercial and educational center. The wharves on the Cydnus were crowded with commerce, while its university ranked with those of Athens and Alexandria as the finest in the Roman world.

Sometimes the places the Lord sends us look hopeless in the flesh. In fact, sometimes we feel that it is dangerous to go where the Lord sends us. It is really none of our business though. The Lord can send us wherever He wishes. Our only part in all of it is to do exactly as we are instructed of God to do.

Whether we are successful or not, is not our concern. We just do what God tells us to do, and God does the rest. Success or failure is up to Him.

Acts 9:12 "And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting [his] hand on him, that he might receive his sight."

This would be a frightening thing for Ananias to do, but he must do it anyway, because that is what God wants. When he lays his hand on Saul, God will restore Saul's sight. God has gone ahead and prepared Saul to receive Ananias. God tells Ananias exactly where to find him.

Acts 9:13 "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:"

Ananias acts like the Lord does not already know all of this. His fear of this Saul, who has been capturing the Christians and throwing them in jail, is showing. Saul was most assuredly a dangerous man. What Ananias does not realize is that Saul has had an encounter with God.

Acts 9:14 "And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name."

Verses 15-17: Note that even Saul's commission does not come directly from God but through a God-appointed disciple. By contrast, his apostolic authority did come directly from Christ, not by succession through one of the apostles (Gal. 1:1, 11-12).

Acts 9:15 "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:"

“Chosen vessel”: Literally “a vessel of election” There was perfect continuity between Paul’s salvation and his service; God chose him to convey His grace to all people (Gal. 1:1; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). Paul used this same word 4 times (Rom. 9:21, 23; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:21).

“Before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”: Paul began his ministry preaching to Jews (13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4; 19:8), but his primary calling was to Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; 15:16). God also called him to minister to kings such as Agrippa (25:23 - 26:32), and likely Caesar (25:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:16-17).

You see, God realizes that Saul wishes to please Him. That’s really why Saul was capturing the Christians (he did not realize he was working against God). God knows Saul's heart.

Acts 9:16 "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Saul has a great calling on his life. He is to bring his message to the Gentile world. He, as many others, tried to carry it to his Hebrew brothers first though. The greatest call a Christian can have is to suffer for Christ. Only the truly strong, such as Job, can suffer for Christ and still remain true.

Saul's calling is great. I think it is important to note here, that the first king of the Hebrews in the Old Testament was named Saul, and now we see Saul called to service here to actually lead the people that he had been persecuting.

Acts 9:17 "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, [even] Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

“Putting his hands on him” (see note on 6:6).

“Be filled with the Holy Ghost” (see note on 2:4). The Spirit had already been active in Paul’s life: convicting him of sin (John 16:9), convincing him of the Lordship of Christ (1 Cor. 12:3), transforming him (Titus 3:5), and indwelling him permanently (1 Cor. 12:13). He was then filled with the Spirit and empowered for service (2:4, 14; 4:8, 31; 6:5, 8; see also note on Eph. 5:18).

Saul received the Spirit without any apostles present because he was a Jew (the inclusion of Jews in the church had already been established at Pentecost), and because he was an apostle in his own right because Christ personally chose him and commissioned him for service (Rom. 1:1).

Now, we see an obedient servant in Ananias. Ananias (even though he was afraid of Saul), went right on over and told Saul exactly what God had told him to say and do. This had to be a humbling experience for Saul as well. The very people he had wanted to destroy was where his help came from.

Not only will Saul's physical sight be restored, but his spiritual sight as well. Notice also that God, the Holy Ghost, will empower Saul to witness the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 9:18 "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

As I said in the verses above, the scales fell from his spiritual eyes, as well as his physical eyes. His sight was twofold: physical and spiritual. Now having eyes, he could see. The Light of Jesus had entered into his inner most being and drove out all the darkness.

Acts 9:19 "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus."

He was baptized to show that he had been born again not of the flesh, but of the spirit. He would rise from that watery grave (baptism), to a new life in Jesus Christ.

Acts Chapter 9 Questions

1. Who did Saul go to, to get orders to capture and imprison the Christians?
2. What town did Saul go toward?
3. Was there any difference shown between men and women, if he caught them?
4. Of what religious group was Saul?
5. Did he realize he was offending God?
6. What happened to Saul as he neared Damascus?
7. What did this voice say to Saul?
8. How did Saul answer?
9. What had this Light done to Saul physically?
10. What does Saul call Jesus the first time in verse 5?
11. In verse 5, who did Jesus tell Saul He was?
12. What does everyone have in common with Saul before we are saved?
13. What effect does this encounter with the Lord have on Saul?
14. What effect did the encounter have on the men with Saul?
15. Why did they have to lead Saul into Damascus?

16. This period of time Saul was not eating and drinking could have been a ____.
17. How long was Saul without sight?
18. What should be everyone's prayer?
19. What was the name of the disciple at Damascus that had a vision of the Lord about Saul?
20. How does Ananias answer the Lord?
21. Where did the Lord tell Ananias to go?
22. What was he to do when he got there?
23. Why did Ananias not want to go?
24. What did Ananias remind the Lord of?
25. What did the Lord call Saul in verse 15?
26. Who would Saul be sent to actually?
27. In verse 16, what will the Lord show Saul?
28. What did Ananias do?
29. Besides his sight what would Saul receive?
30. What fell from Saul's eyes?
31. What did Saul do immediately after he received his sight?