

Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 9

Saul's Conversion

9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Saul's persecution of the members of the "Way" caused him to get permission to go to Damascus in Syria. Saul might need permission from the Sanhedrin to go into Syria to capture these believers to prove that he was who he said. He also may need to show that they were sanctioned arrests or they could be used as extradition papers. Believers were not called Christians until Antioch. Acts 11:26 tells us *"and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."* Saul wanted to bring the believers back bound (NIV) or as prisoners (NASB). Just before they arrived in Damascus, all of the travelers heard a voice. Saul saw a bright light, so bright it could be seen in the middle of the day. It appears that Saul knew it was from heaven because he said *"Who are You, Lord?"* Saul heard Jesus talking to him. Jesus asked Saul, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

9:6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

The men with Saul heard the sound or voice but didn't see the light. The Greek word 'phōnēs' is used throughout the New Testament to mean 'voice' as in John 10:16 but the NIV translates it as 'sound'. Voice could mean they could understand what was being said but Sound would mean they didn't. They were true witnesses if they heard and understood the voices. We know the other men did not see the light because only Saul was struck blind. Jesus told Saul to get up, enter the city and wait and it will be told you what you must do. Saul did just what he was told but he had to be led into the city. He was without sight and did not eat or drink for three days. Many believe that it had to be three days because Saul was dying to his old self and he would be resurrected to the new Saul in the same number of days that Jesus was in the tomb.

9:9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. In a vision, Jesus told him to get up and go to Saul on Straight Street to help Saul regain his sight. Ananias did want to meet Saul because Saul has done terrible things to the believers in Jerusalem and he is authorized to arrest believers in Damascus. In the case of Ananias, the vision from God was specific. God told him about:

- A specific street - Straight
- A specific house - Judas
- A specific man - Saul of Tarsus
- A specific thing the man was doing - praying
- A specific vision the man had - in Saul's vision he has seen a man named Ananias.

9:15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Jesus told Ananias that Saul was a chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles, the kings and the sons of Israel. Jesus also told Ananias that He would show Saul "*how much he must suffer for My name's sake*". So Ananias did what Jesus told him to do.

He went to Saul,
He entered Saul's house,
He laid his hands on Saul,
He healed Saul's eyes,
He prayed for Saul to receive the Holy Spirit.
Saul responded by being baptized. Then he got up and ate.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

9:19b Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

Paul immediately started telling people about Jesus. People that heard Saul preaching were in disbelief because they knew that Saul had persecuted the believers in Jerusalem. In the Greek, Saul was preaching that was Jesus the 'Huios tou Theou' which means 'Son of God'.

"To preach that Jesus is the Son of God is also to preach the perfection of His life, and especially His work for us on the cross. It is to preach how God saves us through the work of Jesus." (Guzik)

Saul could argue with the Jews because he was an educated Jew and he had seen the power of Jesus first hand.

9:23 After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

The Jews resorted to their old habits. If you can't win the argument, kill your opponent. Saul was saved because other believers lowered him over the wall in a basket.

"It was the beginning of many escapes for Paul, and sometimes he didn't quite escape. Sometimes they caught him, imprisoned him, beat him. He did indeed have to suffer many things for Jesus' sake." (Boice)

9:26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,[a] but they tried to kill him. 30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

So Saul returned to Jerusalem. He did not receive a warm reception because the apostles and disciples were afraid of him. Barnabas took Saul before the apostles and testified on Saul's behalf. Saul did not hide out in Jerusalem. He walked around Jerusalem speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. The result of Saul's behavior in Jerusalem was the same as it was in Damascus, Saul had to be shipped out of town to Tarsus. The church became peaceful and stronger when Saul left town.

Aeneas and Dorcas

9:32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. 34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

At verse 32, Luke makes a shift to talk about Peter's ministry. He heals a man that was bedridden or paralyzed for 8 years. The result of this healing was not just a physical healing but also spiritual healing of the man and those that lived in Lydda.

9:36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Tabitha/Dorcas was described as a woman abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. She lived in Joppa (Tel Aviv today). She fell sick and died. Since Peter was in Lydda which was close to Joppa, they sent for Peter. So when Peter got there, he sent them all out, he knelt down, he prayed and said, "Tabitha, arise." She was brought back to life. Believers rejoiced and many believed in the Lord because of the news of Tabitha's resuscitation.

"As in the three resurrections Jesus performed, the raising of Dorcas was not resurrection in the technical sense of immortality. Yet our English word resuscitation, hardly seems strong enough. Dorcas died, and she would die again." (K. O. Gangel)

Peter stayed with Simon the Tanner for many days. Luke included this information because he must be planning to use it again.