

## **ACTS CHAPTER 9**

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the leading persecutor of the Christians was perhaps the greatest event in church history after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Saul, after being converted was given a new name – Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles. God was continuing to work out His plan to bring the Gospel to the whole world.

### *The Damascus Road Conversion of Saul to Paul (vs. 1-9)*

**Vs. 1-2** – Notice the phrase “*Then Saul*” - We last saw Saul in **Acts 8:3**, where it says that he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Here he continued and expanded this work to the city of Damascus (about 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem; a six-day journey altogether). Why on earth would Saul want to go so far to persecute Christians. If CNN News could have interviewed Saul, then perhaps Saul would have said, “*Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified nobody is the promised Messiah? According to the Law, anybody who is hung on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? Of course not. His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. This is a dangerous sect and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith.*” Additionally, Saul may have desired to advance his career and build his reputation as a true Pharisee, zealous in the law and since

**Damascus was a key commercial city with several trade routes, Saul intended to prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities. The phrase “*Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*” - the picture is of an angry, violent man absolutely convinced of his own righteousness. In Philippians chapter 3 included in Saul’s testimony of his pre-Christ life he said he was a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the church. Saul hated the disciples of the Lord. He wasn’t seeking Jesus when Jesus sought him. We might say that Saul was decided against Jesus when Jesus decided for Saul. *(doesn’t this picture remind you of the events leading up to January 6, 2021 in America near the time of the conclusion of the presidential election)?***

**Regarding the phrase “*went to the high priest*” – Caiaphas was the high priest at that time...Saul did his persecuting work under the direct approval of the highest religious authorities. The phrase “*the Way*” was a title of the followers of Jesus.**

**Vs. 3-6 – In **vs. 3-6** we find God meets Saul on the Damascus Road.**

**Sometimes God comes to us to reveal who Jesus is in a spectacular way like with Saul and other times (if not most times) our conversion experience is quiet and personal experience with the Lord. God does not normally confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven. The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings it to you; do not**

allow others to make you believe it has to be some spectacular manner that you have to encounter the Lord for it to be authentic. In **vs. 4** when it says *“Then he fell to the ground”* - Saul’s reaction was not because of honor or reverence for God at this point of his life...it was simply a reaction of survival – Saul was terrified at the heavenly light. Hearing a voice but not seeing the one speaking. It’s mid-day, yet the light shining was far brighter than the mid-day sun and it shined upon Saul. And when the Lord says, *“Saul, Saul”* - it was to display deep emotion, that is why God repeats his name. Jesus did the same thing when He said *“Martha, Martha”* in **Luke 10:41** and when He said *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* in **Matthew 23:37**). And then Jesus says, *“Why are you persecuting Me?”* As the heavenly light overwhelmed him, Saul was confronted by the true nature of his crime: He persecuted God, not man (*King David realized this also when he committed adultery with Bathsheba – Psalm 51:4*). Saul thought that he was serving God by viciously attacking Christians, but he discovered that he was fighting God. This has been sadly true throughout history. Often those who are convinced they are doing God a favor, or they are doing God’s work do much of the worst persecution and torture ever practiced (look at slave owners who would teach the Bible on Sundays to their slaves but Monday through Saturday torture, rape, sell, demean etc. them.).

**Vs. 5-6** – Saul discovers for himself Jesus is alive. Although the apostles had already confirmed this Saul did not receive it nor believe it. Now since Saul now knows Jesus is alive, he has to change his mind about Jesus and His message. Saul had to repent, a very difficult thing for a self-righteous Pharisee to do. Saul also discovers he is a lost sinner who is in danger of the judgment of God. Saul thought he had been serving God, but in essence he was persecuting the Messiah. Be careful you notice the two questions an unsaved Saul asks of Jesus: **“Who are You, Lord? And what do You want me to do?”**

A Gallup Survey asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God. The top five responses were: (1) “Will there ever be lasting world peace?” (2) “How can I be a better person?” (3) “What does the future hold for my family and me?” (4) “Will there ever be a cure for all diseases?” (5) “Why is there suffering in the world?” Isn’t it strange that people would want to ask God these questions when they are already answered in the Bible. But they really aren’t the most important questions for us to ask. Saul asked the right questions. The converted Saul to Paul talks about this concept in Philippians chapter 3 with the key statement in **Philippians 3:10** – “that I may know Him.” Paul spent the rest of his life wanting to know more completely the answer to this question. In **vs. 5** when it says, *“it is hard for you to kick against the goads”* - A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick used to get an ox

going the way you wanted when plowing. One jabbed the hind legs of the ox with the goad until the ox cooperated. Essentially, Saul was the ox; Jesus was the farmer. Saul was stupid and stubborn – yet valuable, and potentially extremely useful to the Master’s service. Jesus goaded Saul into the right direction, and the goading caused Saul pain. Yet instead of submitting to Jesus, Saul kicked against the goad – and only increased his pain. Make note of the personal question in **vs. 6** when Saul asked the question with a **“Lord, what do You want me to do?”** We often are quite interested in what God wants others to do. But the surrendered heart asks, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Also, when Saul asked this question, Jesus only told him what to do right at that moment. This is often the character of God’s direction in our lives. He directs us one step at a time instead of laying out the full A-Z details of the grand plan all at once. As you engage the 2022 theme Divine ReFOCUS – this is something all Christians must ask...Lord, what do YOU want me to do in 2022 at your local church TMFBC and in my sphere of influence at home, on the job, and my extended family, while I am on vacation etc.

**Vs. 7-9** - The experience was incomprehensible to Saul’s companions, but as Saul opened his eyes (presumably shut tight in a terrified reaction to the heavenly light), he still could not see (when his eyes were opened he saw no one). We can almost hear God saying to Saul, “You shut your eyes against My

light and My Savior. Fine! Spend a few days blind physically as you have been blind spiritually!” Regarding the phrase, “*And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank*” - it seems that Saul was so shaken by the experience that he was unable to eat or drink for three days. All Saul could do was simply sit in a blind silence. This was a humbling experience, and a time when Saul must have challenged all his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God. In the three days of blindness and deprivation, Saul was dying to himself. It would only be after the three days of dying to self that he would receive resurrection life from Jesus. Up to now, Saul had been like a wild animal, fighting or kicking against the goads; but now he would become a vessel of honor, the Lord’s tool to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond. What a transformation! Saul had been saved by grace, though faith in the living Christ...not by the law.

*Ananias Baptizes Saul (vs. 10-19)*

**Vs. 10-12** - The term “*certain disciple*” does not mean Apostle but the name for those who were God’s people. In Acts chapter 9 we find various names used to describe “saved people” *disciple*” (vs. 1, 10, 19, 25-26, 26, 38) “*those of the way*” (vs. 2) – “*saints*” (vs. 13, 32, 41) – “*all that call on God’s name*” (14, 21) – and “*brethren*” (vs. 17, 30). In our day and age we most commonly use the word – “*Christian*” but that word did not come until **Acts 11:26** and it was

given as a insult by the enemy. The word “disciple” is the most common name used to refer to God’s people in the Book of the Acts. Ananias was an ordinary man – not an apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, elder, nor a deacon. Yet God used him because he was an ordinary man who was available to be used. If an apostle or a prominent person had ministered to Saul, people might say Paul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus. In the same way, God needs to use the “*certain disciple*” – “certain Christians” without a title today because He has special work for them to do. Notice the phrase Ananias used “*Here I am Lord*” – is that your response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to do kingdom advancement work. We shouldn’t be surprised if people like Saul (unsaved) receive God’s Word with initial resistance and questioning. Yet we should expect *disciples of Jesus* to receive God’s Word like Ananias did. We can know we are hearing from God based on the instructions given; God will not ask you to do something not found in His word. In the case of Ananias, the vision from God was specific. God told him about: A specific street (*the street called Straight*). A specific house (*the house of Judas*). A specific man (*one called Saul of Tarsus*). A specific thing the man was doing (*he is praying*). A specific vision the man had (*in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias*). And this specificity was necessary and important, because God asked Ananias to do something bold and dangerous in meeting

**Saul, the great persecutor. He needed confirmation along the way that God was guiding him, and God gave him ways to confirm this. And don't miss this huge spiritual nugget – the phrase “*behold he is praying.*” The fact that Saul was now “*praying*” instead of “*preying*” should have encouraged Ananias. This indicated a true change of heart in Saul. One might say that Saul had never really prayed before; he merely repeated formal prayers. Before Saul's Damascus Road conversion, Saul's prayers were more mechanical than spiritual. He had never prayed with Jesus as mediator. He had never prayed in Jesus' name. He had not prayed with a humble heart, near to God. Saul had said many prayers, but he had never truly prayed.**

**Vs. 13-16 – In these verses God overcomes Ananias' objections. Regarding the phrase “*Lord, I have heard from many about this man*” - the *disciples* in Damascus must have anxiously prepared for the coming persecution. Saul had already seen a vision of a man named Ananias coming to minister to him in his vision, so how could Ananias not want to obey God. The phrase “*He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name*” calms the logical and well founded initial thoughts of Ananias towards Saul. God shared with Ananias that He had a call upon the life of Saul. And at this time, God had not yet revealed that calling to Saul. God first tells this to Ananias so that he would not be afraid to do what He is calling him to do. Often times God will ask us to do**



something we don't fully understand or we think; Lord, you must have somebody "*else*" in mind to do this. But we don't have to understand everything completely before we respond in faith to God immediately. The phrase in **vs. 16** – "*For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake*" was a sobering addition to the great call God put upon the life of Saul. Saul would leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with much suffering. So often we see someone else's anointing or assignment and we can find ourselves wishing that was "me" but we have no idea what that person had to go through to get to where God has elevated them. This same Saul would write as Paul in ***Philippians 1:29*** (read verse).

**Vs. 17-19** – The act of *laying his hands* and the words "*Brother Saul*" powerfully communicated the love of God. Blind Saul could not see the love on Ananias' face, so he communicated it through his touch, words, and his voice. Also note Saul was not dreaming when he was on the road to Damascus – Saul actually saw the Resurrected Jesus (to be an apostle of Jesus you had to be selected by Jesus Himself, and you had to have seen/witnessed the Resurrected Jesus). God did an effective job of breaking Saul, but it wasn't His intention to leave him broken. God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him and leave him filled. That is what is meant by "*be filled with the Holy Spirit*" in this verse. Saul's calling on the Lord preceded his baptism. He got

baptized after he was saved; not to get saved. In this section *3 object lessons* we should be able to glean: (1) God can use even the most obscure saint. (2) We should never allow our human fear to be dominant over the instructions from the Lord. (3) We must never underestimate the value of one person brought to Christ because we never know to the degree God may use someone we share the Gospel with. Note the phrase in **vs. 19** - *When he had received food, he was strengthened*: Saul immediately began to be strengthened both physically and spiritually. God was concerned about both areas of need and so should the present day church. We cannot tell people how loving, kind, and generous Jesus is yet the church is silent when it comes to meeting some needs in the community of which it sits. The unsaved need to be strengthened physically in addition to spiritually. The church cannot turn its back on needs in the community in which it sits. Also, in **vs. 19** regarding the phrase *“Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus”* - Saul was now numbered among the disciples of Jesus, and became friends with those he had previously tried to imprison or kill. This shows the remarkable, radical nature of his transformation. Additionally, Saul’s conversion reminds us that God finds some who, by all appearance, are not looking for Him at all. Seeing how God reached Saul encourages us to believe that God can reach the people in our life that we think are very far from Him. We often give up on some people and

think they will never come to Jesus; but the example of Saul shows God can reach anyone.

*(Saul Preaches Christ vs. 20-22)*

**Vs. 20** – Saul was a skilled student of the great rabbi Gamaliel, so he took advantage of the synagogue custom that invited any able Jewish man to speak from the Scriptures at synagogue meetings. Saul conveyed a deep theological statement as he verbalized his faith and began preaching by declaring rightly that Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus is the Christ. He did not use the theological phrase “*hypo-static union*” but that is exactly what he described; Jesus was fully man and fully God at the same time while on earth. If you are going to preach and teach; Jesus needs to be your subject and verb. Many people think when Jesus is called the *Son of God* it is a way of saying He is not God, but something less than God – only “the son of God.” But in Jesus’ day, everyone knew what this title meant. To be called the “son of” something meant you were totally identified with that thing or person, and their identity was your identity. When Jesus called Himself the Son of God, and when others called Him that, it was understood as a clear claim to His deity.

**Vs. 21-22** – What was most convincing about Saul’s preaching was his transformed life. The Bible gives us great information about how to defend

the Gospel, but great information must be backed up by transformation of your life; your walk must match your talk if you are going to be used greatly by the Lord. In **vs. 21** regarding the phrase *“Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name”* - people were genuinely amazed at Saul’s conversion; it was hard to believe just how powerfully Jesus could change a life. Years later, Paul himself would write: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) Paul lived that verse long before he wrote it. In **vs. 22** the phrase *“Proving that this Jesus is the Christ”* - Saul, was an expert in the Old Testament, so he could easily see how Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. We have the entire canon of Scripture, what should be crystal clear to everyone now is that we are living in the season (most likely the literal season) of the return of Jesus for His church called the Rapture based on the Scriptures.

*(Saul Escapes Death vs. 23-25)*

**Vs. 23** – So powerful was Saul’s argument “from Scripture” that Jesus is the Christ that the Jews plotted to kill him. Regarding the phrase *“After many days were past”* we have to look in **Galatians 1:13-18** for Paul to give us details to what he is mentioning here in Acts. Paul described how he went to Arabia for a period of time, and then returned to Damascus. After his return to

Damascus, he went to Jerusalem. Paul spent a total of three years in Damascus and Arabia (**Galatians 1:18**); truly these were many days. And it is this 3 year period of studying and being groomed in Arabia under Gamaliel that seminaries have developed a 3 year curriculum for their Master's of Divinity degree program for pastors and those seeking to be a pastor.

**Vs. 24-25** – When we are in the will of God we are indestructible; God will not allow anything or anyone to utterly destroy us until we have completed our mission from the Lord. Saul enjoyed divine protection until his ministry was complete before God (just like we will). Regarding the phrase *“The disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket”* - Saul indeed knew divine protection in the midst of persecution, but he also learned that God's deliverance often comes in humble ways. There is nothing triumphant about sneaking out of a city by night hiding in a large basket.

***Saul with the Christians at Jerusalem (Vs. 26-30)***

**Vs. 26** – Regarding the phrase *“he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him”* - It seems strange that Christians in Jerusalem were so suspicious of Saul even three years after his conversion. They perhaps thought that Saul was part of an elaborate and extended plot; they perhaps wondered why he went off by himself for a while in Arabia; or just as likely, they

probably were reluctant to embrace such a dramatic conversion without seeing it with their own eyes. Simply, they did not believe that he was a disciple. God not only calls us to a ministry, but He also calls us to preparation when it comes to being a pastor or missionary...this 3 year period Saul was in Arabia he was studying under the guide of Gamliel the leading Jewish scholar of his day. Saul was in seminary for 3 years; he did not walk with Jesus for 3 years like the other apostles. Now at this point, some people might turn their back on Jesus Christ. They might say, "I've been serving the Lord for three years, preaching Jesus Christ, enduring assassination attempts and death threats. Now you don't want to accept me as a Christian? This is the love of Jesus? Forget it!" But Saul had a greater heart of love for Jesus and Jesus' followers. It no doubt hurt, but he understood that the disciples in Jerusalem remembered the Christians Saul killed and persecuted. If the disciples in Jerusalem lacked a little in love, Saul added a little more love to make up for it.

**Vs. 27** – Regarding the phrase “*But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles*” - Thank God for people like Ananias and Barnabas, who will welcome people into the family of God with simple friendship. Barnabas simply extended the love of Jesus to Saul, and as Paul would write later, love believes all things (*1 Corinthians 13:7*).

**Vs. 28** – Regarding the phrase “*He was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out*” - In ***Galatians 1:18***, Paul wrote that on this first trip to Jerusalem, he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. He also wrote that he never had an audience with all the apostles, seeing only Peter and James (Jesus’ brother) This time with the apostles in Jerusalem was important, because they finally and certainly welcomed Saul into the family of the followers of Jesus. But Paul made a point of the limited nature of his time with the apostles in Jerusalem to show clearly that he did not receive his gospel from the other apostles. Though he was no doubt blessed and benefited from that time, he received his message by direct revelation from Jesus on the road to Damascus.

**Vs. 29-30** – In **vs. 29** Saul again faced persecution and assassination attempts. This became a recurring pattern in his life. The story of Saul’s conversion begins with him leaving Jerusalem to persecute the followers of Jesus. It ends with him leaving Jerusalem as a persecuted follower of Jesus. In **vs. 30** for his own protection, the Christians in Jerusalem sent him out to Tarsus. It is believed between 8 and 12 years had passed in the life of Saul before he again entered into prominent ministry, being sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch. And again it would be Barnabas who reached out to Saul, remembering him and loving him. Saul was Saul of Tarsus, the young, successful, energetic rabbi. Then he was Saul the Persecutor; then Saul the

**Blind. He became Saul the Convert and then Saul the Preacher. Yet before he became Paul the Apostle, he spent somewhere between 8 and 12 years as Saul the unknown. Those were not wasted years; they were good and necessary years. God knows how He has to “season” us before He uses us on a larger scale.**

***The Church Prosper (vs. 31)***

**Vs. 31 – Acts chapter 9 began with a zealous man (Saul) breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). But God was more than able to turn this terrible threat into a great blessing. Saul is converted and although the persecution had not stopped all together, God has given the disciples peace in the midst of persecution. Church historians like Josephus records at this time a man name Caligula succeeded Tiberius as Roman Emperor. Caligula was bitterly hostile against the Jews, he wanted to erect a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem so the Jewish people turned away from wanting to persecute the Christians to wanting to keeping this blasphemous event from occurring in their temple. A common goal can unite enemies or merely people feuding for a while. *(illustration: for all the people saying the Ukraine Russia war is another end times sign of wars and rumors of war – the real thing Christians should be focused on is to ensure people are in***



*the ark of safety; they are doing what Acts 3:19 says). The churches... were edified: The word edified has the idea of being built up. The churches were growing in numbers and strength. Regarding the phrase “fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” - both of these are needed in the Christian walk. Often, God wants the comfortable to be afflicted (gaining the *fear of the Lord*) and the afflicted to be comforted (by the *comfort of the Holy Spirit*).*

### *Aeneas Healed (vs. 32-35)*

**Vs. 32-35** – A shift occurs here...the previous pattern of the apostles staying put in Jerusalem and those needing ministry coming from afar to them (*as reflected in Acts 5:16*) now shifted. Peter went *through all parts of the country to do ministry*, it was 35 miles from Jerusalem to Lydda. Regarding the phrase “*found a certain man*” - Peter discovered what I like to call a “*divine appointment*” when he found a needy man that God wanted to be miraculously healed for the edification of the people and for His glory. Peter found him as he was out ministering to others in the name of Jesus. If we will be like Peter, who went through all parts of the country, and just engage the people in our sphere of influence then we will also find opportunities for the miraculous power of God to be experienced by others. We cannot find “*certain people*” if we stay in our four walls and/or never witness. And notice how Peter gives all

the glory to God when he said, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you” - Peter clearly identified who was the healer – Jesus the Christ. Peter was only Jesus’ instrument. Peter relied solely on the power of Jesus for healing. When Peter said, “*Arise and make your bed*” he was perhaps consciously imitating what Jesus said when Jesus healed the paralytic man in *Mark 2:10-12*. The phrase “*So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord*” tells us why the healing took place. The miraculous healing of Aeneas made many people turn to the Lord – presumably, with Peter preaching the gospel to them.

*Dorcas Restores to Life (vs. 36-43)*

**Vs. 36-38** - This woman was a beloved member of the Christian community in Joppa, because she was full of good works and charitable deeds. Good works reflect being saved; they cannot be done to get saved. The phrase “*implored him not to delay in coming to them*” - Peter wasn’t in Joppa when Tabitha died. But since Joppa was not that far away and the Christians in Joppa had heard that God was doing miraculous things through Peter in nearby Lydda. They begged Peter to come, most likely while Dorcas was still alive or had just died.

**Vs. 39-42** – First of all there is no indication in the Book of Acts that it was common or popularly expected that dead Christians would be resuscitated to life again. This miracle (and a few similar in Acts) is listed just because they were unusual and remarkable. Most likely Peter was called to comfort and minister to the grieving widows and family members of Dorcas. Make careful note how Peter responded to this situation like he saw Jesus do in **Mark 5:38-43** – he got all the unbelievers and doubters out the room; there must be at least mustard seed faith present for the Lord to work a miracle. This was a remarkable, unusual miracle – something that has happened before and still happens today (though one is wise to not gullibly accept every reported instance of such). We should remind ourselves that Dorcas was not resurrected; she was *resuscitated* to her old life, where she would die again. Regarding the phrase in **vs. 42** - “*when he had called the saints and widows*” **Acts 9:32** and **41** mention the saints in Lydda and Joppa. This is the first time Christians are called saints in Acts. When the Bible calls Christians saints, the idea isn't of a super-perfect people; the idea is of a people who are different; set apart from the world at large; they are distinctive; they are people who confess and repent of their sins.

**Vs. 43** – There is a specific reason Luke mentions the occupation of Simon - This would be somewhat shocking to an observant Jew of that time because

**the law strictly forbids Jews to associate with anyone who routinely worked with dead animals. According to the laws of that time, a tanner had to live at least 75 feet outside of a village because of his constant ritual uncleanness. We see Peter becoming less concerned about Jewish traditions and ceremonial notions than before. This work of God in Peter's heart laid the groundwork for what God would do through Peter in chapter 10 with Cornelius and his family.**