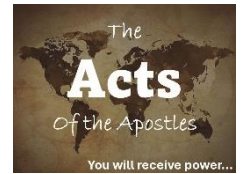




The Story of the Conversion of Saul Acts 9:1-31 (Lesson #14)



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OUTLINE of Acts Chapter 9:1-31

- 1) The chapter opens with Saul filled with rage against the church, going to the high priests and asking for letters to bring believers from the synagogues in Damascus bound back to Jerusalem. (9:1-2).
- 2) On his way into Damascus Saul has an encounter with the living Lord Jesus (9:3-5).
- 3) The Lord directs Saul to proceed into the city and he will be told what he should do (9:6).
- 4) The men who were with Saul saw the light and heard noise but they did not see or hear Jesus (9:7).
- 5) Saul had to be led by the hand into Damascus because the whole experience left him physically blind where he spent three days neither eating or drinking (9:8-9).
- 6) The Lord sends a disciple named Ananias to lay his hands on Saul that he might regain his sight (9:10-16).
- 7) After Ananias voiced some concern, he obeyed the Lord and went and found Saul and prayed for him where Saul regained his sight and was filled with the Spirit (9:17-18).
- 8) Saul spent many days with the disciples of Damascus, and immediately started preaching in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God (9:19-20).
- 9) All were amazed as Saul confounded the Jews proving that Jesus was the Christ (9:21-22).
- 10) Ultimately the Jews plotted to kill Saul and he escaped from Damascus (9:23-25).
- 11) Luke tells us that Saul went to Jerusalem and attempted to join himself with the apostles, but they were afraid and did not believe that he was a disciple (9:26).
- 12) Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and convinced them that he had been saved and how he preached boldly in Damascus (9:27).
- 13) Saul preached boldly in Jerusalem and even disputed with the Hellenist, who then sought to kill him (9:28-29).
- 14) When the brothers learned about the plot to kill Saul, they sent him to Tarsus via Caesarea (9:30).
- 15) Then Luke tells us the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up, and the Lord continued to multiply the number of believers (9:31).

9:1 ¶ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

9:1-2 - At the start of chapter 8 we were introduced to this man named Saul. In 8:1 we were told that Saul approved the execution of the deacon Stephen. Having finished the discussion of Stephen and Philip, Luke moved back to discuss Saul.

Saul was “breathing” out threats of murder against the disciples. The word translated “breathing” is the Greek word: **ἐμπνέω (empneo)**, it is a **Hapax-Legomenon**. It literally means to inhale.

Saul's threats and murder had become his breath! Saul was filled with rage and desired to single-handedly destroy the church of Christ (see Acts 8:3-4 and Acts 26:9-11).

He is breathing out, murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, against the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Again, in the history books (Gospels and Acts) the leading title for believers was disciples. As we discussed, it means one who is a learner, a student.

Saul goes to the High Priest and asks for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus. We cannot be sure which high priest he went to as we have lost track of time markers over these first 9 chapters.

John MacArthur: *"The high priest, in his capacity as president of the Sanhedrin, was viewed by the Romans as the head of the Jewish State. He thus had authority over Jewish internal matters such as this one."*

Saul seems to be ever widening his ring of persecution, it is now extended to Damascus.

But, this also means that **Christianity has spread to Damascus!** It appears disciples had fled Jerusalem to Damascus **to escape Saul and the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin.**

Saul goes to the High Priest for letters: *that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

Notice, just in passing, Saul is looking for people belonging to **the way!**

The way, appears to be the most common early term for those who had placed faith in Jesus (Acts 19:9, 23:22:4; 24:14, 22), the term Christian will not be coined until Acts 11:26. This title "the way" apparently finds its genesis in Jesus description of Himself in (John 14:6), *"the way, the truth and the life."*

When Paul is retelling this story, he calls believers people of **"this way"** (Acts 22:4).

Saul, having received the letters that he has the approval of the High Priest, to proceed into synagogues in Damascus, and bind any who belong to **the way**. It seems to imply that they will stand before the Sanhedrin.

Vs 3 - As he was on his way likely from Jerusalem to Damascus. He approached Damascus, it appears he is on the outskirts of the city, then **suddenly, light from heaven shone around him**. In the Greek it means it **flashed around him**. In the account in **Acts 22**, Saul said **this all happened at noon**. In Acts 26, Saul said the light was **brighter than the sun!**

For this light to be brilliant in the middle of a Middle Eastern day means that it was very bright!

There can be little doubt this was the **Shechinah glory of God**.

SO YOU KNOW: This will come up, but Saul not only saw this amazing light, at midday, he also saw the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

Vs 4 - And falling to the ground... Saul **heard a voice**, speaking to him saying: *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

Saul clearly heard a voice from heaven, and he completely and fully understood what the voice was saying.

Notice the question: Why are you persecuting me? Up until this moment Saul had been **persecuting Christians**. But the voice is asking **why** are you **persecuting me?**

Although Saul was not personally persecuting Jesus, he was doing so, for to **persecute the body** is to **persecute the head**.

APPLICATION: What we do to believers we do to Jesus.

Vs 5 - And Saul responded, **who are you Lord?** At this point, Paul only knows this voice is coming from heaven. He does not know who the voice belongs to.

He refers to this voice from heaven as Lord, sir. This is a legitimate question. **Who are you Lord?**

BUT, then the voice responds: **I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.**

One wonders what went through Saul's mind at this point. Saul was certain that Jesus was dead, and He was a blasphemer. Here this same Jesus is speaking to him from heaven!

Vs 6 - Then further instructions: **Rise, go into Damascus, and you will be told what you are to do.**

Vs 7 - Now the men traveling with Saul, stood speechless. They could **hear the voice**, so this was not happening in Saul's head, **but they could not understand what the voice was saying:**

Saul provides some additional details in (Acts 22:9).

So, the men traveling with Saul, saw the light and heard something, but they could not understand the voice, nor could they see anyone. This implies that Paul could see Jesus, but do not worry this will come back around!

But Paul experienced much more than they experienced. He heard the voice, he understood the voice, and by way of implication he saw the one that was speaking to him!

A POINT: This is **descriptive** and not **prescriptive** for God does not normally manifest his glory around a person, nor do they hear an audible voice, nor do they see the Lord. But that is what is happening here!

Vs 8-9 - Saul arises from the ground and although **his eyes were open**, he was **not able to see anything**. As Saul had been **spiritually blind**, now he is **physically blind**.

Although Paul's eyes are open, he is physically blinded from the event.

Saul's entry into Damascus was **much different** than what he expected or likely imagined. Instead of coming into Damascus as the **great Jewish hero to save Judaism from these heretics**. Saul is brought into Damascus, **led by the hand like a little blind child into the city of Damascus**.

Now you will find out in a moment, that that Saul is staying in the home of a **man named Judas**. More on this in a second.

For three days, Saul was blind physically, as he had been blind spiritually! He was unable to see and he neither ate nor drank during this time.

For three days he fasted from both water and food and likely considered all that Jesus had said to him on the road!

We suspect he did a bunch of soul searching and we are certain he was praying!

10 ¶ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 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." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."

Vs 10 - As he was there in Damascus. Luke shifts gears to tell us about a disciple (a learner, a pupil) who lives in Damascus. There in the same city there was a disciple named Ananias.

Ananias appears here in Acts chapter 9 and then disappears off the scene. He is not an apostle, he is not an evangelist, he is not a Deacon.

But here in a handful of verses he displays an amazing faith and will be mightily used by God.

FOR MY FELLOW DISCIPLES: You never know, what amazing mission God has for you. Remember, he is looking for tools that are clean and close, He is not looking for ability, but availability.

The Lord Jesus **came to Ananias in a vision**, we do not know what this looked like, but the Lord **clearly communicated** with Ananias and Ananias **communicated with the Lord**.

The Lord came to Ananias in a vision and said "Ananias", and Ananias responded, **Here I am Lord**.

Vs 11-12 - Then the Lord said to Ananias: *rise and go to the street called Straight, and at Judas' house you will find a man named Saul, who is praying.*

OK, so this is all we know about this Judas. We can guess that Judas was not saved, and this was likely the place where Saul was going to stay while in Damascus. But we do not know.

At any rate, Judas owned a home in Damascus and somehow, he was connected to Saul, in that, Saul stayed in his home following the loss of his eyesight on the road to Damascus.

Equally, we see that the Lord told Ananias that Saul was in Judas' home and he was **praying!**

FURTHER, the Lord tells Ananias, that **Saul has seen in a vision a man named Ananias** come in and lay his hands on him and he would **regain his sight**.

Now God has called **Ananias to go on a mission**.

If I were to ask you, who might you have thought that God would involve in bringing the great apostle Paul to faith, what would be your answer? Peter, John, Phillip, how about a certain disciple who up until this story you had never heard of and after this story you will never hear of again.

APPLICATION: We have talked about this a number of times. When God wants to do something, He rarely does it Himself. He normally reaches into His tool box and get a tool that is clean and close.

Ananias is the tool for this job.

Directions: Go to the street called Straight, go find Judas' home, there look for a blind guy from Tarsus named Saul, and you will find him praying.

Then God tells Ananias, I have given Saul a vision of a man **named Ananias** coming in and laying hands on him, and he will receive his sight. **That is Ananias' mission!**

Vs 13 - Ananias, voices his concerns to God. He tells God, Lord, I have heard **from many** about this guy and all the evil he has done **to your saints** in Jerusalem.

SO YOU KNOW: Saints will become a very common term for believers in the epistles, as will brethren. This is the first use of the title saints in the book of Acts. The leading title has been disciples.

Vs 14 - Ananias continues, Lord, I have also heard that he has come here to Damascus, and he has authority from the chief priests, not just the high priest but the leading priests to bind all who call on your name, to bind all who have placed faith in you!

This is a severe test of Ananias' faith, for at this point he knows nothing of Saul's conversion.

One more point, it is clear that the believers in Damascus had **heard that Saul was coming and why!**

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

Vs 15 - The Lord does not even **touch the concerns**. The Lord responds: **GO!**

I mean let's be honest, Ananias is not telling God anything He does not already know about Saul.

God doesn't even engage in the **he is a bad actor and will likely have me killed. Instead, God tells Ananias to GO!**

But then God tells Ananias something about Saul that he did not know, God says of Saul:

He is a **chosen instrument**. He is a tool that I plan to use, and he lists **three ways** in which Yahweh plans to use Paul!

- 1) To carry my name before the Gentiles. We will see this in the book of Acts. **Paul will fulfill this purpose.**
- 2) To carry my name before Kings. We will see this in the book of Acts.
- 3) And the children of Israel, we will see that Paul starts with Israel, before he goes to the Gentiles. We see this in (Acts 13:42-46).

Paul was God's chosen instrument to carry His name before the **Gentiles, Kings, and the children of Israel**. He is my messenger to carry my word, **now you simply GO!**

APPLICATION: Paul was a chosen vessel of God. But Ananias was a chosen vessel also. If you are a believer, you too are a chosen vessel of God. The only questions, what has God chose you to do and are you fulfilling His will for your life?

Vs 16 - Further, God says, and I will show him, **how much he must suffer** for the sake of my name.

Did this prophecy as given by God to Ananias about Saul, come true?

As we will see suffering for the gospel, will spread across Paul's entire career (see II Cor 11:22-27).

But it is not just Paul (Phil 1:29; Jam 1:2-4; Rom 8:18).

Suffering is par for the course for believers. It is how the Lord purges things out of our life. But, never forget that suffering is not worthy to even compare to the glory that shall be revealed in us!

Vs 17 - So Ananias **instantly obeyed**, he went and found the house of Judas and he **entered the house**.

Can you imagine the courage it took to knock on the door? But he knocked!

He laid his hands on Saul and said: **Brother Saul...**

This man was killing Christians, God says He is mine, and Ananias went and found the man he feared, lays his hands on him and says: Brother Saul...

Don't you love that. We are indeed family. God brings together people who might never even have spoken to one another and gives them a real love and concern for one another.

Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road, has sent me to you, so that you will **regain your sight** and be **filled with the Holy Spirit**.

REMINDER: We are filled with the Spirit when we first believe, but we must endeavor to be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is not a one and done (Eph 5:18-19).

But here, Ananias laid hands on Paul and he was **filled with the Holy Spirit**.

Vs 18 - Immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes.

The Greek word here is **λεπίς (lepis)**. It is a Hapax- Legomenon. In ancient Greek it was used to describe scales on fish or crocodiles and medical writers would apply it to when skin would fall of the body.

Now we are not told that scales fell off, rather **something like scales** fell off! Saul immediately regained his sight. He arose and was baptized in the name of Jesus.

Vs 19 - He ate, and he was with the disciples (there it is again) the learners, the pupils and he was with them for many days in Damascus.

It seems Saul left Judas' home and is now staying with some of the other believers in Damascus. Although Saul was a **new convert**, he was extremely knowledgeable in the Old Testament.

20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. 23 ¶ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Vs 20 - He **immediately and openly began to proclaim Jesus** in the synagogues in Damascus. He immediately and openly declared that **Jesus was the son of God! The persecutor become the proclaimer!**

This must have seemed a little strange, but he became close friends with those he came to imprison!

APPLICATION: The gospel can and does changes lives! And one more point, Saul was not looking for Jesus, rather Jesus came looking for Saul. Remember that as you pray for your lost loved ones!

This is the first and only use of this term **"son of God"** in the book of Acts. Saul immediately began to proclaim that Jesus is the **Son of God!**

Vs 21 - And all who heard him were **amazed**. The Greek word means to be **amazed, astonished** to be **beside themselves**.

- First, I suspect Saul’s **profound knowledge of the Old Testament** was likely awe inspiring and amazing.
- Second, the drastic change in his life was amazing!

They were **also saying: Is not this the one who wanted to ruin, destroy, wreck** the church in Jerusalem.

Is this not the one, who has come here to wreak havoc on the church and take believers bound to Jerusalem and present them before the chief priests. **Is this not the same man?**

APPLICATION: When God gets a hold of someone, everything changes. We really become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Old things indeed pass away and behold all things become new (II Cor 5:17).

Vs 22 - Saul became stronger and stronger. The imperfect Greek tense gives us this idea of the power of his message continuing to gain strength as those who opposed his message grew weaker.

There in Damascus, he confounded the Jews who argued against Jesus being the Messiah. The word means to confuse, to disrupt, or bewilder. The more he preached the more they were confounded and bewildered!

Like Stephen, they could not stand against his arguments, they could not argue against his Biblical wisdom.

Regardless of the point they tried to overthrow, his biblical logic was too strong, his Biblical arguments to convincing, notice what Luke says **“proving that Jesus was the Christ!”**

Vs 23 - After a time, **likely a long time** after many days had passed...

Theologians believe that during this time (many days had passed), Paul left Damascus and went into Arabia and then after a time returned to Damascus (see Gal 1:15-17).

Upon his return and continued preaching that Jesus is the **promised Messiah**, the Jews stopped arguing and took a different approach. Having failed to overturn his **Biblical logic**, they plotted together to **kill him**.

Again, just like Stephen before, Saul’s Biblical logic, should have brought conviction and the embracing of the truth, but they would have none of that, so they plotted to kill him.

The **persecutor** becomes the **persecuted**, but he is also the one who is **protected!**

Vs 24 - Saul learned of their plot. As you read between the lines, it seemed they waited for him at the gate of Damascus, night and day, with the plan to nab him in order that they might kill him.

Vs 25 - Reading between the lines it seems that Saul shared this plot with those who had become his pupils, those who had become his followers, those who sought to be instructed at his feet. And the decision was made to sneak him out of the city.

To let him down, by night through an opening in the wall that surrounded the city, by lowering him on the outside of the wall in a basket! We get more details from the account in (II Cor 11:32-33).

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the

Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Vs 26 - So Saul escapes Damascus with a death-threat hanging over his head and he heads now for the first time to Jerusalem. He heads to the place where the apostles are located.

Then Luke tells us that: *he attempted to join the disciples.*

Notice Luke tells us, that they were all (Peter included) **afraid of Saul**, after all this **man had quite a reputation**. They did not believe that he had become a disciple. They likely assumed this was a Sanhedrin plot. They thought this was an **elaborate ruse**, possibly to imprison or even kill them (see Gal 1:15-19).

Notice this is happening some three years after his salvation, and yet his reputation was such that the apostles simply did not believe he was a believer.

Vs 27 - Barnabas saw who Saul had become, so he took him and **brought him to the apostles**, and declared:

- 1) Saul had seen the Lord on the road to Damascus
- 2) Jesus had also spoken to Saul
- 3) At Damascus Saul spoke boldly in the name of Jesus!

Not only that, but Saul had preached boldly in the name of the Lord in Damascus. So much so that many in Damascus wanted to kill him.

Vs 28 - So, Paul having been introduced to the apostles is now going in and out among the apostles there in Jerusalem. Also, there in Jerusalem Saul is preaching boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We can imagine that he is preaching that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah, that He was crucified, buried and on the third day, rose from the grave! According to Galatians 1:18 this lasted only 15 days.

Vs 29 - Saul begins to speak and dispute with other Hellenists. Does this sound familiar (Acts 6:9-10)?

Now he picks up Stephen's mantle and begins to dispute with Hellenist proving through the Old Testament that Jesus is the **promised Messiah**. Like with Stephen, now with Saul, these Hellenist could not overthrow his Biblical logic and his biblical proofs.

AND, like Stephen the Hellenists seek to kill him.

Vs 30 - When the believers there in Jerusalem learned about the plot by the Hellenist to kill Saul, they brought him down to Caesarea and then ultimately sent him back to his hometown of Tarsus.

Vs 31 - *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*

Notice not only the expansion of the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria but it also had peace and was built up.

With Saul, no longer leading the persecution, there was a period of peace and edification for the church.

The church is walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit and it MULTIPLIED.

The chief persecutor had become the leading proclaimer.

What would Theophilus make of all of this?
