

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #237

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 9

Saul is Converted and Blinded

1. Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest.
2. And asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
3. As he journeyed he came near Damascus and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.
4. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
5. And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."
6. So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
7. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.
8. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
9. And he was three days without sight and neither ate nor drank.

Saul's name means *destroyer*. He was from the Tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, a pure Hebrew but with Roman citizenship, and a tent maker by trade.

The "People of The Way" was what early Christian believers were called. Remember that in Genesis *the Way* to the Tree of Life was barred by the Cherubim and a flaming sword. In Exodus *the Way* into the Holy of Holies was barred by the Veil. At Calvary the Father rent the Veil from top to bottom, making *the Way* open to all who received Christ because of His atonement on the Cross. Paul later tells us that Jesus Christ's flesh is a *new*

and living Way. Now we have access into the Holy of Holies by the Blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:6-11). Thus, Jesus is *the Way* to God by His own body and blood. He Himself said that He was *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14:1-6). Thus, these early Christians called themselves the people of *the Way*.

There is no doubt in my mind that Saul was greatly affected by the death of Stephen, a man he considered a bad man and yet he died with joy and peace. Perhaps to dispel the doubts he had, Paul decides to go all out against these Christians. He had apparently heard that there were Christians in Damascus, and so he decides to make the 140 mile journey, which would take about a week on foot. He was accompanied by the officers of the Sanhedrin, which was a kind of police force. Every Jew, no matter where he lived, must obey the Sanhedrin. This must have been a lonely walk for Paul because, since he was a Pharisee, he could have nothing to do with the Sanhedrin officers.

There are actually three accounts of Saul's conversion experience. They are found in Acts 9:3-9, Acts 22:1-21, and Acts 26:1-8. Kevin Conner gives us the most prominent points found in each account:

- a. The LIGHT came from heaven at MIDDAY, brighter than the sun.
- b. Paul and the others heard a VOICE.
- c. Saul was persecuting CHRIST, because of the mystical union between Christ and His Church (Luke 10:16; Ephesians 5:30).
- d. Saul acknowledges Christ as LORD. He thought he was talking to the Jehovah of the Old Covenant, which he was, but he must have been shocked to learn that this Jehovah was also the Jesus of the New Covenant. As soon as he acknowledges Jesus as Lord, he is born again.
- e. Saul SUBMITS and OBEYS the Risen Lord.
- f. The Lord CONFIRMS the call of God on Saul's life through Ananias. (Later Paul can be called an Apostle partly because he had both seen and heard the Lord).

Saul was blinded by the Glory of the Light of Jesus' Presence. This was both literally and figuratively, both naturally and spiritually. When the scales fell from Saul's eyes, this spiritually speaks of the blindness the Jews were walking in. When the scales fell from his eyes, he was able to see Christ in all the Old Testament scriptures.

Saul did a total fast from food and drink for three days and three nights.

Saul is Filled with the Spirit

10. Now there was a certain disciple of Damascus named Ananias and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."
11. So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he is praying."
12. "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."
13. Then Ananias answered "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem."
14. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."
15. But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel."
16. "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."
17. And Ananias went his way and entered the house, and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
18. Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized."
19. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

William Barclay says, "Without a doubt, Ananias is one of the forgotten heroes of the Christian Church. If it is true that the Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen, it is also true that the Church owes Paul to the way in which Ananias treated him as a brother." Ananias was willing to trust the Lord, in spite of the fact that he does question the Lord about the thing He is asking him to do. Saul had a reputation that had spread all over the Middle East concerning how vicious he was in seeking persecution of the Christians in the early days of the Church, and Ananias knew that. Yet Ananias chose to trust the Lord and do what He said.

Verse 13 contains the first reference in Acts to the new Christian believers as "saints." Paul frequently refers to the "saints" at such and such a place. Do you realize you are a "saint?" All believers are called to be saints, which is translated as "holy ones, set apart, or separated ones," but the Greek word literally means *different*. William Barclay comments on this: "...we who are Christians are not different from others in that we are chosen for greater

honor on this earth; we are different in that we are chosen for a greater service. We are saved to serve.”

Caiphas was the high priest when Stephen was questioned by the Sanhedrin, and Caiphas was the one who gave Paul the authority to go all over the country and have people arrested who were Christians.

Have you ever noticed how the Lord does not see things or people as we see them? He is always looking at the potential in each one of us. He saw something in Saul that Saul’s contemporaries could not see. He chose a man who, in the natural, seemed like the most unlikely person to carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles. Ananias must have thought all of this was insane. Yet Ananias shows us an example of Christian love and forgiveness when he greets Saul as a brother in Christ. What an irony of the Christian faith, i.e. two men who were the bitterest of enemies, because of Christ, come together as brothers.

Saul Preaches at Damascus

20. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21. Then all who heard were amazed and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

22. But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Saul, as a new believer, wanted to immediately preach the Gospel, and he courageously went into the synagogues of Damascus. Even from the start, he was an effective teacher since he knew the Torah or law so well and now knew that Jesus was prophetically revealed in the Old Testament. Yet it was not smooth sailing. He was not ready for a public ministry and a leadership role in the Church but had to be tried and tested by God. Luke does not tell us this, but Paul later writes of this time period in his life (Galatians 1:17). He reveals that he went to Arabia so that he could spend time alone with the Lord away from all the public. Although saved and called and, having seen Jesus, a true apostle, he simply wasn’t ready to be promoted to public leadership in the Church

Saul Witnesses in Jerusalem

23. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

24. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.
26. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple.
27. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that He had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.
28. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.
29. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.
30. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.
31. Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

The sequence of events is this: Saul is converted on the Damascus Road. He preaches in Damascus. He goes away to Arabia. He returns to preach again in Damascus for a period of three years. Then he goes to Jerusalem, where the disciples were afraid of him and did not really think that he had changed. He escapes Jerusalem to Caesarea. He returns to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Notice that you begin to see an emphasis on the *name* of the Lord Jesus. We never want to use the Name of Jesus like a good luck charm or rabbit's foot. Yet there is such power in the Name for it is in His Name that we become Christians, that we cast out demons, and that we can ask whatsoever and anything (John 14:13). The Comforter comes in His Name (John 14:26). His Name purges us from sin (Psalm 79:9). It is our defense against enemies (Psalm 44:5). His name causes us to walk in joy (Psalm 5:11), and so many other things. Even thinking of His Name pleases the Lord. Malachi 3:16 tells us: *Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another, and the LORD hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD and that thought upon His name.*

This passage introduces again us to Barnabas. The first recorded deed of this Levite of Cyprus was the selling of his property and the giving of his money for the new Church. *Barnabas* means *Son of Consolation*. *Consolation* means *encouragement*, so we know Barnabas as the Son of Encouragement. In this passage Barnabas takes Saul to the disciples who

fear Saul. We will see those anointed in the Body of Christ in this day who like Barnabas will be quick to forgive, quick to recognize the restoration of former heathen sinners, some of whom will have done great damage to the Body of Christ, and quick to insist that these former sinners, changed by the grace of God, be brought into the Body. I will say more of Barnabas later, since he plays a prominent secondary role in the Book of Acts, but for now I will tell you that Acts 11 records him as “a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” In the dark days ahead we are going to need Barnabases in the Body of Christ.

Back to Saul-William Barclay reminds us that no one persecutes the person who is ineffective. The playwright George Bernard Shaw once said that the biggest compliment you could pay to an author is to burn his books. Someone else said that wolves do not attack painted sheep. Saul was the real deal, and thus those who hated Christianity wanted to kill him. The Jews could not refute Saul’s teaching, since he based everything on the Word, which they purported to believe. They could not debate him so they decided to resort to violence. Fortunately for all of subsequent civilization and the cause of Christ, they were unsuccessful. The Lord used these persecutions against Saul to show that Saul really loved the Lord and was willing to die for Him.

Kevin Conner says of Saul: “In relation to the Apostle Paul it is seen that he holds a unique place among the Apostles of the New Testament, and it is possible that his name will be in the Twelve Foundations of the Holy City (Revelation 21:14). Paul is seen as a remarkable prophetic ‘Pattern’ of the End-times and Apostolic Ministry of the Last Days, which will bring the Church unto perfection and maturity (1st Timothy 1:16 and 1st Corinthians 15:8-10).”

The Bible does not tell us how or when Saul started going by the name Paul. In Acts 13, Luke simply identifies Saul as the one who is also called Paul. To have multiple names was very common in the New Testament. Jesus called Saul by his Jewish name, Shaul, when He encountered him on the Damascus Road. Paul was also a Roman citizen and had the Roman name of Paulus, which was a common name in those times. Why Paul started going by Paul instead of Saul might have been because Jews were intensely hated throughout the Roman Empire and very few Gentiles would listen to a despised Jew. Because he also had a non-Jewish Gentile name, the Gentiles would accept him more readily. We simply don’t know, but it was common for others in that day to have multiple names. For example, we all know the name Flavius Josephus who was the famous Jewish historian. Josephus was actually named Matatياهو (Matthew). He was a

general in the Israeli army and was captured by the Romans who knew him as Josephus. The Apostle Peter was named Simon Bar-Jonah, meaning Simon, son of Jonah. He was also called Peter, the nickname the Lord gave him, meaning a “rock.” And he was called *Cephas*, which is the Aramaic for the Greek *Petros*.

Finally, in this section as we briefly leave Saul or Paul, it might be helpful to mention that many theologians make much over the fact that Paul’s Jewish name was Shaul, the same name as the first king of Israel, King Shaul or Saul. Both were from the tribe of Benjamin. King Saul was persecuting David from the tribe of Judah. Saul of Tarsus was persecuting a descendant from the tribe of Judah. That is why Yeshua calls him by his Jewish name and asks Shaul, like David asked Saul in 1st Samuel 26, “Why are you persecuting me?”

Peter Heals Aeneas at Lydda and Raises Dorcas at Joppa

32. Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.
33. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.
34. And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately.
35. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.
36. At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.
37. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.
38. And since Lydda was near Joppa and the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.
39. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.
40. But Peter put 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.
41. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

42. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

43. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, the tanner. Peter heals a lame man at Lydda through the power of the Name of Jesus, causing two cities to “turn to the Lord.” I believe that we are going to see great revival take place when the Church begins to do signs and wonders. These miracles will turn the whole cities from the power of Satan and the Kingdom of Darkness to the power of Jesus.

This powerful chapter ends with the first record of any Apostle raising one from the dead. Jesus had commanded the twelve in Matthew 10:8: *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give.* It is interesting to note that the disciples at Joppa sent for Peter, the Apostle, to come. Apparently, only the Apostles had the power to raise the dead. This was the Gift of Miracles in operation. Peter followed the Lord’s example in clearing the room, kneeling down in prayer, most likely asking for the will of God in this specific situation and obtaining it, speaking the Word of Faith. Peter relied on the power of Jesus. Sometimes we think too much about what we can do and too little of what Jesus can do through us.

Dorcas is the Greek for the Hebrew name Tabitha. She is remembered for her care of widows and for clothing the poor. She was one of the most beloved and devoted members of the church at Joppa. The miracle of her resurrection brought many to the Lord.

In spite of this great miracle, however, not all believed. Jesus said in Luke 16:31, *And He said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

Whatever It Takes

Whatever it takes to draw closer to You, Lord,
That’s what I’ll be willing to do.
For whatever it takes to be more like You,
That’s what I’ll be willing to do.
I’ll trade sunshine for rain, comfort for pain.
That’s what I’ll be willing to do.
For whatever it takes for my will to break,
That’s what I’ll be willing to do.