

ACTS LESSON 9

Acts Chapter 9

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Memory verses for this week: *Eph 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, Eph 3:19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

Introduction: In Chapter 8, we saw the intense persecution come down on the church as members were scattered into many remote areas. This was all in God's plan to see the Gospel expand to the 'outer regions' beyond Jerusalem and Judea. We saw Simon, the sorcerer, make a profession of faith in Christ, but the apostles knew he was still lost when he tried to pay them money to have the power to give out the Holy Ghost by the laying on the hands.

The chapter closed with Philip witnessing to the eunuch from Ethiopia, and this man turned to Christ and was saved. We begin this week with Saul going before the high priest to obtain letters to go to Damascus and to bind men or women who were followers of Christ.

Most of Chapter 9 details the conversion and early ministry of Saul of Tarsus. The middle of the chapter presents the events following Saul's conversion prior to his formal entrance into the ministry in Acts 13. For the first time since Acts 5, the focus returns to Peter. From the last quarter of chapter nine to first part of chapter ten, Peter is involved in events at three towns along the coastal area of Sharon at Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea.

I. The Conversion of Saul

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

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.

The narrative left off at Stephen's death is revisited. We are not told in any exact terms of the passage of time since Stephen's martyrdom, however, evidently some time had indeed passed. The word translated as yet (eti eti) implies a span of time had passed.

Saul continued *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.”* His vehemence against the early church was likened unto the snorts of a war horse impatient to charge into battle. Jacob had prophesied that *“Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf”* (Genesis 49:27). This greatest son of Benjamin now was fulfilling that prophecy as he snarled in hatred against the disciples of the Lord. In Acts 26:11, Luke recorded later that Paul had said, *“he was exceedingly mad against them.”*

Saul requested letters (literally epistles) from the high priest at Jerusalem for the synagogues at Damascus. Julius Caesar had granted jurisdiction to the high priest and Sanhedrin at Jerusalem over Jews in foreign cities. Saul sought these letters of introduction to these Jewish leaders in Damascus, authorizing him to arrest any Christian Jews he might find there.

The authority for such action had already been granted by Rome. Saul sought these letters to validate his personal authority in the matter abroad. In short, Saul, with a deep-rooted hatred in his heart, obtained a warrant with the intent to hunt these early Christians down in order to disband and destroy them by all means available with extreme prejudice.

Damascus was an ancient city even in New Testament. Located 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem, it was the capital city of Syria. Many years later, Nero would consent to the butcher of over 10,000 Jews there. Undoubtedly, Jewish believers had fled there from the persecution at Jerusalem. It was these Saul was hunting.

Notice that early believers were described as of “this way”. They, in the early days of the church, referred to themselves as having the way of life, or the way of salvation, or the way of the Lord. Jesus said, *“I am the way”* in John 14:6. Saul sought to persecute and imprison not only the men of “this way” but also the women. His plan was to return them to Jerusalem for further judgement. He, being zealous in his mission often also became judge and executioner.

As we found in Chapter 8, Saul is out persecuting the disciples of Christ. He truly believed he was doing God a favor to attack anyone who named the name of Christ. Saul (as did many of the Jews) had a great zeal for the Lord, but not according to knowledge.

Rom 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Rom 10:2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Phil 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Phil 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Phil 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Phil 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

We know later in life, after being saved, Paul seemed to never forgive himself for persecuting the church.

1 Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Gal 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

I think all of us can learn from Paul that no matter what we have done in our lives, when we come to Christ and determine to serve God, there is no telling what God may be able to do with us. Here is the man who called himself the chief of sinners, but perhaps no man ever did more for the cause of Christ once Christ died on the cross.

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

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

Saul having received the warrants, no doubt departed for Damascus at his earliest opportunity. As he neared Damascus on his journey, a brilliant light from heaven flashed round about him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, *"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* The word translated as shined (periastraptw periastrapto) has the sense of a blinding flash of light like a powerful lightning strike.

By assumption, I along with many others have placed Saul upon a horse in this account. This then leads to the assumption that he fell off a horse after the flash of light. This may or may not be the way it happened. Saul could have been

traveling on foot though not likely. 150 miles is a long journey for a man of his means and position.

He may have been dismounted or had disembarked a carriage and then saw the light and fell. After Saul fell, he heard a voice summon him personally and ask him a question. The spokesman was Jesus Christ. In persecuting the early church, Saul in fact was persecuting Jesus Christ, for the church is the body of Christ.

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.

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.

Saul, frightened by the events asked, *“Who art thou Lord?”* Though Saul may not as yet have fully comprehended the lordship of Christ, he while there on the road to Damascus had been given a powerful glimpse of the glorified Christ in His resurrected body. I Corinthians 15:8 indicates that Saul saw more than just blinding light. He saw Jesus Christ in His majesty and glory.

He, though not fully comprehending all the implications of Whom he was seeing, immediately comprehended He was the Lord. Indeed, someday as sinful men are resurrected into the presence of the glorified Christ for judgment, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10). Saul in great fear perceived His authority and asked “who art thou Lord” Jesus’ reply was direct and powerful. *“I am Jesus who thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”*

Jesus with great authority equated Saul’s persecution of the church as persecution of Himself. He moreover commented that it was hard for him to *“kick against the pricks.”* The allusion is to an earlier day and beasts of burden. As an oxen might balk and refuse to cooperate with the teamster driving it, the teamster had at his disposal a sharpened stick for urging the animal on. If the beast kicked back in defiance, there at times were additional metal tipped goads placed strategically behind the animal on the axletree of the cart. As the ox would kick back, it would be wounded in the leg subduing it. Jesus likened Saul’s, rebellious persecution against Him as an exercise in futility. It is hard to fight the Lord.

Saul was frightened to the point of trembling. In his astonishment he cried out, *“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* In that instant, Saul totally surrendered to the glorified resurrected Christ. Not only was trust by Saul in Christ implicit, he

further submitted at that same instant to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He not only trusted Him, Saul was willing at the same time to do whatever the Lord so willed. Saul in that instant learned the fear of the Lord. In so doing, he totally submitted himself to Christ, trusting Him completely. There often is an interval of time between trusting Christ as Savior and submitting to His Lordship and becoming obedient. In Saul's case, it happened all at once.

Saul had previously considered himself faithful to God and doing His will by killing the Christians. But then he saw the resurrected Christ in His glory. He totally surrendered, trusting Him completely. Jesus, in turn, instructed him to proceed on his journey into Damascus and await further instructions.

We see that Paul meets Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He heard the voice of the Lord saying "Why persecutest thou me?" We need to understand that when we go against the church, we are going against Jesus Christ. When we speak negatively of a brother or sister in the Lord, this is a child of God, and the church is very near and dear to Christ. It was for us and for the church that he died.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Paul asks "Who art thou?", and Jesus tells him that it is He whom he persecutest. We know that the name Jesus means "savior", and Jesus is the Savior to all who come unto Him. In a dream, the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph, Mary's husband before Christ was born.

Mat 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Mat 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Saul asked the Lord what He would have him to do. Christ tells him that he would receive instruction after he entered into Damascus. Every man and woman saved by Christ should seek to do the very will of God. When we ask, God answers us by His guiding Spirit and by the Word of God. When we know that will which is always in accordance with the Bible, we should go all out with all our heart to fulfill the will of God in our lives.

Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

Col 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

There is no doubt in my mind that when Jesus sought out Saul on the road to Damascus, he was saved that day. In every account of his spiritual conversion, Paul always goes back to the day he met Jesus on this road.

Acts 22:6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

Acts 22:7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 22:8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

Acts 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Acts 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

Acts 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Acts 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Matthew Henry said this about Saul.

The place and time of it: *As he journeyed, he came near to Damascus; and there, Christ met with him.*

(1.) He was in the way, traveling upon his journey; not in the temple, nor in the synagogue, nor in the meeting of the Christians, but by the way. The work of conversion is not tied to the church, though ordinarily public administrations are made use of. Some are reclaimed in slumberings on the bed (Job 33:15–17), and some in traveling upon the road alone: Thoughts are as free, and there is as good an opportunity of communing with our own hearts there, as upon the bed; and there the Spirit may set in with us, for that wind blows where it listeth. Some observe that Saul was spoken to abroad in the open air that there might be no suspicion of imposture, nor of a trick put upon him in it.

(2.) He was near Damascus, almost at his journey's end, ready to enter the city, the chief city of Syria. Some observe that he who was to be the apostle of the Gentiles was converted to the faith of Christ in a Gentile country. Damascus had been infamous for persecuting God's people formerly—they threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron (Amos 1:3), and now it was likely to be so again.

(3.) He was in a wicked way, pursuing his design against the Christians at Damascus, and pleasing himself with the thought that he should devour this new-born child of Christianity there. Note, Sometimes the grace of God works upon sinners when they are at the worst, and hotly engaged in the most desperate sinful pursuits, which is much for the glory both of God's pity and of his power.

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

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.

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

Saul was not traveling alone. He had deputies and cohorts traveling with him, no doubt, to assist in the matter of arresting Christians and bringing them back to Jerusalem. Evidently, these heard "a voice" but did not see either the light or Jesus. The word from which the phrase no man is translated (mhdeiv medeis) can also be translated as 'nothing.' Though Saul fell to the ground in abject terror, they did not and evidently saw nothing. They nevertheless were speechless.

As Saul rose from the ground and opened his eyes, he realized he was now blind. A glimpse of the glorified Christ whom he had persecuted had blinded him. It may bear considering that Paul in later life suffered considerable eye problems. His eye troubles may have begun with his blinding on the road to Damascus.

God may have allowed this infirmity as a constant reminder that he had persecuted the church of God and therefore was the chiefest of sinners; and of having seen the resurrected glorified Christ. If so, even his infirmity was a constant reminder of whom he served and whose he was. The infirmity mentioned in II Corinthians 12, of which he besought the Lord thrice, may have had its beginnings here.

In verse 9, we find after Saul was stricken with blindness, he fasted for 3 days. Whether his fast was voluntary or whether he was so shaken, he had no appetite, we are not told. However, in any event, God gave him time to reflect upon and digest what had happened to him. He no doubt had time to reflect upon the wickedness and futility of having persecuted the church of God.

More importantly, Saul, no doubt, began to reflect upon the risen Christ he had witnessed, submitted to, and had trusted. Truly, these three days were a major turning point in his life. He, the persecutor, was about to become the persecuted. All he had hated and fought against now had been forcefully made clear to him

as the truth. To say he was a new creature in Christ is an understatement. What a time of spiritual and intellectual soul searching it must have been.

We have a record here how that Saul was suddenly blind after encountering the great light and his meeting with Jesus Christ. So many are blind to the gospel today, and think that they are seeing clearly. Saul for the first time in his life now had true spiritual vision, but his physical eyes could no longer see. Perhaps God used this blindness to bring him to a point of total reliance on the Lord. One of the great men of God of old once commented that God can never really use a man until he is broken with some great malady or situation in his life. When we are totally broken, we truly only have one way to look, and that is up. When we are flat on our backs, sometimes this is the time when God can use us greater than any other time. We all need to get a vertical view of things... looking up to the Lord for strength and guidance.

Satan wants us to keep our horizontal view, which is just looking at things from the earthly perspective. Charles Spurgeon said: "Paul was a great man and I have no doubt that on the way to Damascus he rode a very high horse. But a few seconds sufficed to alter the man. How soon God brought him down." We need to know that we are just clay in the potter's hand, and in ourselves we are truly nothing. Saul found it out here on this remote section of road.

Saul could not see, so the men lead him into the city of Damascus where he was to await for someone to come and tell him what great things God would have Paul do in his life. In verse 7, it tells us that the men with Saul heard a voice, but saw no man. Since Paul could understand the Hebrew tongue, Christ spoke to him in this tongue and none of the others understood the words.

Acts 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

Acts 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

*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.
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,
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.*

Living in Damascus was a Jewish Christian named Ananias. In a vision, the Lord instructed him to arise (implying it may have been at night). The Lord gave him specific instructions where to go. He was to go the street called Straight. Often the street system of an ancient middle eastern city was a crooked web. However, in Damascus, a broad street had been surveyed from the western gate to the eastern gate of the city.

Ananias was then to enquire for the house of Judas. He evidently was the Jewish man to whose home Saul had been taken to upon his arrival in Damascus. Ananias was informed that Saul of Tarsus was there praying. The Lord further instructed Ananias that Saul had *“seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”*

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:

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

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:

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

Ananias protested to the Lord of Saul's reputation of which he had heard. He was aware of the purpose of his journey to Damascus and that he had authority to arrest all that named the name of Christ. A modern day analogy might be a Jew in Nazi Germany being instructed to go and look up Heinrich Himmler and identify himself as Jew. Ananias was evidently terrified.

Jesus' answer to Ananias is quite instructive. He informed Ananias that Saul was *“a chosen vessel unto me.”* Jesus referred to Saul as a “chosen vessel.” Royalty had the choice of the finest of gold or silver vessels. Paul would later humbly write how God had given him the treasure of salvation and of his ministry in an “earthen vessel” (II Corinthians 4:7). Of course, Paul was speaking of his physical body. Yet, nevertheless, God viewed him as a vessel of choice.

The grace of God is in view in choosing one so vile as Saul the persecutor. Yet, from another perspective, God chose a man who would show not only great depth of character both in his morality and tenacity, but also one who had been thoroughly trained academically and theologically for the ministry ahead. God not only chose Saul, but quite evidently had already been grooming him for the

ministry which he would soon pursue. A lesson remains in training our children so they might be a vessel fit of the master's use at His discretion.

Though we are told little or nothing about Saul's parents, as devout Jews, they had done a masterful job in training character and godliness into Saul. God revealed to Ananias that this Saul would soon bear His name (1) to the gentiles, (2) to kings, and (3) to Jewish people. Saul's later ministry followed that exact track including several Jewish kings, as well as Roman leaders. He was, perhaps, the greatest missionary and soul winner of all time. His ministry was not only to the Jew first, but also to the gentile world he so widely would travel.

Jesus also informed Ananias that He would show Saul how great things he must suffer for His name's sake. Indeed, Saul's ministry would be one of great suffering. Paul's suffering in the years to come were not so much any sort of chastisement for his persecution. Rather, he could more fully appreciate what he suffered having been on both sides of the issue—the persecutor and the persecuted.

We see a man named Ananias who was tender to the calling of the Lord. God tells him to go to the street called Straight and to find the man named Saul who was praying to God. Saul had done much evil to the saints there in Jerusalem, and he was a known enemy of every Christian. Ananias asks the Lord if he should really go. We know that Saul had letters of authority from the high priest to bring back Christians bound to Jerusalem where they would be imprisoned, and some put to death.

I'm sure you and I would have questioned God about going to a known enemy of the Lord ourselves. But God answers, and tells him that Saul is praying, not harming Christians now. And Saul had been chosen of God to bear His name before the Gentiles, and to kings, and to the children of Israel. Paul was chosen to suffer for the cause of Christ. Perhaps no one ever suffered more (with the exception of Jesus himself) for God's work.

2 Cor 11:21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

2 Cor 11:22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.

2 Cor 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

2 Cor 11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

2 Cor 11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

2 Cor 11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

2 Cor 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

2 Cor 11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

When I stop and look at what Paul faced in his life, I realize that I've done nothing in comparison for God. God help us to use Paul's example, and let it fire us up to be dedicated and effective disciples for Jesus Christ.

II. Paul is Filled with the Spirit and Baptized

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.

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.

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

Ananias, the fearful disciple, evidently was calmed by the Lord's description of Saul's impending ministry. Notice how upon meeting Saul, he addressed him as "Brother Saul." His enemy had become his brother in Christ. He told Saul that Jesus had sent him that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

It is noteworthy that there is no record of Saul speaking in tongues upon being filled with the Holy Ghost. Contrary to the presumption of charismatic and Pentecostal thought, believers did not routinely speak in tongues upon being filled with the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. The result of Saul's being filled with the Holy Spirit is recorded in verse 22 where he was empowered in his preaching.

Notice that Saul received the Holy Spirit prior to being baptized. This is a fatal wound for those who teach that baptism somehow is a part of one's salvation. Reception of the Spirit is an integral part of conversion. Being filled with the Holy Spirit speaks of empowerment.

In verse 18, three things took place upon Ananias placing his hands upon Saul. Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales. Notice that the text does not say there were scales upon Saul's eyes. Rather the film of blindness upon his eyes fell "as it had been scales." Luke, the physician, so describes the event as he understood it.

He arose. He was willing, and he was baptized. Once again, the sequence of faith followed by baptism is presented. Never in the New Testament is faith and baptism ever found in the reverse order. Never were people baptized to initiate faith or enter a covenant. Believers' baptism was always after one had trusted Christ. It was an outward expression of the inward spiritual experience. It identified one with Christ for all to see.

Saul, the great persecutor of Christ and his disciples, now had formally and officially identified himself with Him in believers' baptism. It is the first step of obedience in the Christian life to this day.

After eating, Saul was strengthened. The word translated as strengthened (eniscuw enischuo) will shortly stand in contrast to Saul increasing in spiritual strength in verse 22. Here, the thought simply is of a restoration of physical strength. He remained for some time at Damascus with the disciples there. He who had come to persecute them had become a part of them.

Ananias does what God instructed him to do, and he comes and laid his hands on Saul, and his eyes were opened and he received his sight and was filled with the Holy Ghost. What a joy it must have been to have his eyesight back, and now to have both physical and spiritual sight. After this, it says that he was baptized. Notice how that it is always the Will of God for all who are saved to be spiritually baptized. We know that around 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost, and afterwards they were all baptized.

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

So many today are confused as to the part baptism plays in salvation. In truth, it has nothing to do with salvation. We are saved when we see our lost condition before God, the Holy Spirit draws us to God, and we repent of our sins and ask Christ to come in and forgive us of our sins. Baptism is one of two church ordinances that we follow (the Lord's Supper being the second), and it is our entrance way into becoming a member of the church. All people who are saved are in the family of God, but only those scripturally baptized believers are in the church.

After Paul received his sight and was baptized, it says he received food and was

strengthened.

III. Paul Preaches in Damascus

Acts 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Acts 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Saul immediately began to preach Christ. Receiving Christ so transformed him, he could not but preach. A strong indicator of conversion is the desire to tell others of Christ. Saul immediately gravitated to the synagogues to proclaim to his Jewish brethren his discovery that Jesus was not only the Christ, but *“the Son of God.”* His salvation so infected him with enthusiasm, he could not contain telling his former colleagues of the Torah the truth which he had found.

His Jewish audience in the synagogues of Damascus were amazed. They quickly picked up on how he was the one *“that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem.”* Now, he was preaching the very Christ he had hated. Truly, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things in Saul’s life had passed away. Behold, all things had become new.

There is a refreshing boldness and enthusiasm of a new convert to Christ. Such witnessing is powerful evidence an individual not only professes Christ, but in fact possesses Him.

Verse 22 finds Saul increasing *“the more in strength”*, This is insightful as it is not a reference to physical strength, rather of spiritual empowering. It, no doubt, is the result of his being filled with the Holy Spirit as noted in verse 17. See also Romans 1:16, Acts 1:8, Philippians 4:13, I Timothy 1:12, II Timothy 2:1, 4:17.

Saul confounded his Jewish adversaries, proving that Jesus Christ, whom they had rejected, in fact was their long sought-after Messiah. His foes had no answer. It is widely thought that between verses 22 and 23 are the events recorded in Galatians 1:17. There, Paul described he went into Arabia for three years. There, in the seminary of the desert, Saul of Tarsus was transformed into the Apostle Paul. His zeal of conversion was forged into a comprehensive apostle of the gospel.

It is quite likely that during these years alone with the Holy Spirit, God gave him the systematic, comprehensive understanding of New Testament theology which would become the backbone of his later ministry and writing. Though the New Testament had not as yet been written, God, through His Spirit, impressed upon Saul the understanding of the comprehensive truths of Christianity which would later manifest themselves forth in such epistles as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians et al. God enabled him to sort out and distinguish the transition between law and grace, the Temple and the church, and the Old and the New Testaments. He was in fact transformed from Saul to Paul.

We see that Saul goes right into the place where the Jews gathered to worship God, and he preaches unto them Christ. What a change from his earlier position of hating Christians and being against Jesus Christ. Now he proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God. The disciples are still very fearful of Saul, knowing what he had done in the past. I'm sure at first they must have thought that it could be a trick to lure them out, but afterwards, they were amazed and thankful to see him on their side and proclaiming Jesus as the answer to men's troubled souls. How was it that Saul could prove that this was the very Christ, the one that came from God? He did it by taking the Old Testament scriptures and showing them how he was the one who had come according to the scriptures at the very time God chose.

1 Th 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

We can prove things by studying the bible, and seeing if what is taught is true or not. Many claim authority to do things in God's name, but we need to be sure that it all is in harmony with the scriptures. Jesus was the very Son of God, and the bible clearly provides us the facts by prophecy to prove that He is the Messiah.

IV. Plot to Kill Saul

Acts 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

Galatians 1:18 records that after his time spent in Arabia, Saul returned to Damascus. This evidently is to what the "after that many days were fulfilled" alludes. His Jewish adversaries thereupon "took counsel to kill him."

Acts 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Acts 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

Because his Jewish enemies sought to way-lay him by watching the gates of the city day and night, the disciples of Damascus let him down the wall in a basket by night. In II Corinthians 11:33, Paul later wrote how he was that night let down “through a window” in the wall.

Saul became quite popular for his stand for Jesus, right? No, standing up and proclaiming Jesus has never been popular with the world, and the Jews hated Saul for doing this. It says they plotted to put him to death. When we preach the Gospel, we divide people. Some will hear the truth and be saved, the others will be pricked in the heart and will rebel against us. Man’s pride does not want us to admit that we are lost and undone, and that we in ourselves can not do anything about it. The world teaches that if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish almost anything.

That is why so many work so hard to please God. But when it comes to salvation, we must all become humble servants, and give up on ourselves, and turn to the only sinless one, Jesus Christ, and he will abundantly pardon and saved. Our works are as filthy rags before God, and we have nothing to offer on our own to God in regards to forgiveness of sin.

Isa 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Isa 64:7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

The Jews were so against Saul that they stayed at it night and day to come up with a plan to put him to death. We need to know that we as Christians fight against more than flesh and blood, but evil in high places and principalities.

Would it not be wonderful if Christians were as determined as these Jews were in their evil, to do good and to accomplish the work of the Lord. The disciples who had been earlier afraid of Saul, now help him to escape this plot by lowering him down the wall in a basket.

J. Vernon McGee said this in his commentary about Paul’s escape.

When the Jews couldn’t win by argument, they resorted to another tactic, which was to eliminate the enemy.

I’m sure it must have been quite a thrilling experience to have been let down over the wall in a basket. Yet we never read anywhere in the New Testament that Paul toured the Roman Empire giving a lecture on the subject, “Over the Wall in a Basket.” That ought to

be a lesson for a great many folk who deal in sensationalism today. Here is a man who has had a most remarkable experience, but he has something more important to present. We must never let our *experience* get in the way of presenting Christ. We must never let our *person* get in the way of the person of Christ. Sometimes I hear the very pious prayer, "Hide the preacher behind the Cross." No, friend, that is not what he needs. Rather, we should pray, "Help the preacher to present Christ in such a way that the Spirit of God can take the things of Christ and show them to us. Help him to present Christ!" This was Paul's method. ¹

V. Saul Visits Jerusalem

Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

Acts 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

Paul afterwards journeyed to Jerusalem and attempted to join himself to the disciples. They understandably were quite leery of him. They may have thought he was returning as an agent of the Jews to infiltrate them for further damage.

Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." It is noteworthy that Barnabas took Paul under his wing. It has been thought by some that Barnabas, as Paul, was from Tarsus and could have known Paul. They afterwards received Paul and he came and went with them at Jerusalem.

In verse 29, there was a synagogue of Cilicia at Jerusalem (Acts 6:9) which was just such a Hellenistic one. The Grecians were Hellenistic Jews who, returning from the diaspora of the western world, had formed synagogues around Jerusalem according to the national background whence they had come.

Tarsus, where Saul grew up, was also of Cilicia. It is most likely that he went there and preached Christ in his home synagogue. Acts 6 also mentions that this very synagogue had disputed with Stephen. It is quite possible that Saul had then been one of the young rabbis who had debated to no avail against Stephen

1J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

prior to his martyrdom. He now, quite possibly, returned to do exactly as Stephen had done some years earlier. However, once again Paul, even at this early juncture in his ministry, was the target of a death plot by the Jews.

Saul travels down to Jerusalem and joins in with the disciples. Many were very fearful of him (for good reason), but Barnabas goes before him and tells of all that he had done and how Saul had preached the gospel boldly there in Damascus. Before Saul went to Jerusalem, he made a trip to Arabia where he received a special revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ truly taught Paul, and it was a supernatural experience.

Gal 1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

Gal 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Gal 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

VI. Saul Returns to Tarsus

Acts 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

What a surprise he must have been to his family and friends there. He had been sent off to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of Gamaliel. Now this bright young rabbi returned as a disciple of this Jesus of Nazareth, of whom they no doubt had heard. There is no record in the Scripture of Paul having any fruit in his hometown or among his family. He, as Jesus, may have learned a prophet has no honor in his own country.

In verse 31, several comments are in order. Notice the word churches is plural. The vast reference to the church in the New Testament is to local churches in distinction to a monolithic 'universal' or catholic church. As the persecution spearheaded by Saul had faded, the churches of the region found peace.

They were edified. This was no doubt spiritual and mutual edification. They walked in the fear of the Lord. The churches also walked in the “comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Indeed, the Holy Spirit resides to encourage the churches. Finally, the churches were multiplied. They grew in number.

It was also at this general time (A.D. 39) the Roman emperor Caligula set up his image in The Temple at Jerusalem for Jews to worship. This, no doubt, greatly agitated them and diverted their attention from persecuting the church. They were occupied with their own troubles. God very well may have providentially allowed this to provide a period for the early churches to take root and grow.

We see that after Saul got saved, the churches had rest. They now walked in the fear of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit comforted them, and they multiplied.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

It appears that Paul remained in Tarsus until he was sought by Barnabas and brought to Antioch out of which church Paul became a missionary.

*Acts 11:25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:
Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

VII. The Healing of Aeneas

Acts 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

Acts 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his

*bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.
Acts 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole:
arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.
Acts 9:35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.*

Peter during this time made a practice of visiting each community where there was a body of believers. In so doing, he came down to visit “the saints which dwelt at Lydda.” Lydda was a small town located in the coastal plain of Sharon southeast of Joppa. There evidently was a body of believers (saints) there.

Though it is not explicit, it is implied that the man Aeneas there was one of the ‘saints.’ For eight years he had been bedridden with a form of palsy. He either was partially or totally a paraplegic. Peter informed him, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Peter informed Aeneas that it was Jesus Christ who was about to heal him. Whereupon, Peter ordered him to “arise, and make thy bed.”

Not only did Peter order him to get up, he told him to also do such a mundane chore as making his bed. For eight years, others had to take care of Aeneas. Now he could take care of himself. His healing was complete. “And he arose immediately.” Once again, Peter utilized the temporary interim gifts of the Holy Spirit granted to him in the interval between Calvary and the completion of the New Testament canon.

In Verse 35, All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.. Saron or more commonly pronounced as ‘Sharon’ was a coastal region and not a specific town. Lydda bordered the plain of Sharon. The populace of this region turned to the Lord upon seeing and hearing of his miraculous healing. This became a Christian region. There is no reason in the text to presume all means less than ‘all.’

We see that in verse 34, that it was Jesus Christ who healed the man. This miracle affected many, and they turned to the Lord. While you and I don’t have the power to lay hands on people and heal them today, we know that by prayer people can and still are healed. But the works we do, still have an affect on others, and by our actions, we can draw people to God or turn them away. In 1855, Edward Kimball led one of his Sunday School boys to the Lord.

This was not all that unusual, but who would have thought this young man, Dwight L. Moody, would ever grow up to become the leading evangelist of the day. None of us knows the positive effect the salvation of a soul will have on an individual and their family down through the years. Thank God for all the Christians who came before us who weren’t afraid to stand up for the name of Jesus. You and I most likely would not know the Lord had not been for the faithfulness of someone in the past.

VIII. Tabitha is Raised from the Dead

Acts 9:36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Acts 9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

Acts 9:38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

Acts 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

In the port city of Joppa (in more modern times called Jaffa—adjacent to Tel Aviv), an event amongst the disciples was reaching a crisis. What is clear is that the gospel, by one means or another, had gone to Joppa. Whether one of the disciples had gone there or whether some scattered from Jerusalem and its persecution had migrated there, we are not told. However, quite evidently, a body of believers was there.

One of those disciples was a woman named Tabitha. Her name was Aramaic and literally meant ‘a female gazelle.’ In more western terminology it implied a ‘roe’ or a ‘doe.’ In Greek, her name was Dorcas. Both were terms for natural beauty. In any event, she manifested a spiritual beauty by her “good works and almsdeeds” which she did. As noted in verse 39, she evidently had been most gracious and generous in making clothing for the needs of others.

The word translated almsdeeds (elehmosunh eleemosune) bespeaks giving to the needs of others. She was ready to help those, particularly of the household of faith, who were in need. Luke notes that she “was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.”

Sadly we find in verse 37, Tabitha became sick and died. Though the Jewish custom, particularly in fastidious Jerusalem, was to bury immediately, evidently in the out country away from Jerusalem, this was not so carefully observed. Other Christian women washed her body and prepared it for burial, laying her in “an upper chamber.”

Joppa was not too far from Lydda and the disciples in Joppa had heard of Peter’s presence there. They “sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.” It may be upon hearing of Aeneas’ miraculous healing,

the messengers to Peter were sent prior to Dorcas' decease. Or, it may be even after her death they sent to Peter, believing God through him could raise her from the dead. In any event, there was great faith evident on the part of the disciples at Joppa. This, without a question, was the basis for her healing.

Upon arriving at the home in Joppa, Peter was taken to the upper room where Dorcas lay awaiting burial. Though nothing is said about Dorcas' marital status, it might be implied she was a widow inasmuch as "all the widows stood by him weeping." They showed Peter all "the coats and garments which Dorcas made."

The final phrase "while she was with them" may imply she was not native of the community. It maybe persecution had driven her from, perhaps, Jerusalem. Then again, it may only be a reference to the time of her earthly journey.

Acts 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 9:41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

In a manner reminiscent of Elijah and the widow's son in I Kings 17:219-24 and Elisha and the Shunamite's son in II Kings 4:33, Peter knelt beside her and prayed. Then, turning to the body, he commanded, "Tabitha, arise." (Tabitha was the Aramaic version of her name.) Whereupon, she opened her eyes "and when she saw Peter, she sat up." Peter then gave her his hand and helped her to stand.

The word lifted her up (anisthmi anistemi), particularly in the context of giving her his hand, simply means to 'stand.' The word translated as called (fwnew phoneo) is not the common word (kalew kaleo) for calling. Rather, it implies he cried out for the saints and widows to enter and then presented her alive to them.

Acts 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

News of her miraculous resurrection spread quickly through Joppa and as a result "many believed in the Lord." Again, one of the purposes of the miracles in the early church was to authenticate and lend credence to their message. Here it clearly did so. Tanners by their very trade (tanning animal skins into leather) were considered as unclean by the more meticulous of Jewry.

One Rabbi had written, "It is impossible for the world to do without tanners, but woe to him who is a tanner." In light of the events about to take place in chapter

10, Peter's acquiescence to lodge with Simon the tanner may have been a God-ordained step of Peter's coming lesson on taking the gospel to gentiles. They, to the Jewish mind, were considered unclean even as the various animals prohibited by the Levitical dietary code were unclean.

It says that this woman, Tabitha, was a woman known for her many good deeds. What a great ability Christ gave these early apostles. Oh that we could go out and raise the dead, give sight to the blind, heal those who are sick. But God still has given us that most important ability, and that is to preach the Gospel to a lost and dying world. Many came and believed at the raising of this woman from the dead.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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