

Bible Study #12

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Acts 9

Acts 9

- **Acts 9:1-2** “*But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.*”
 - Paul’s conversion is so important that it is recounted three times, each bringing out a different aspect or emphasis (**Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-22; 26:4-23**)
 - This first presentation immediately follows a discussion of Philip’s mission in *Samaria* and *Galilee*
 - After Saul ravaged the Church in Jerusalem he heard about a breakout of this heresy in *Damascus*
 - There was a bunch of Jews living in Damascus at the time
 - So he decides to head up to there to deal with this situation

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Saul's authority from the Sanhedrin is similar to another example of extradition power given to the high priest found in **1 Mac 15:16-21** when the Romans granted him special powers
- **"The way"** is the earliest name for Christianity referring to the followers of Christ as living a whole way of life similar to the Old Testament term "the way of the Lord" meaning a way of life that is pleasing to the God in keeping with His covenant

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:3-9** *“Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him... his eyes were open and he could see nothing.... And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”*
 - Saul is heading North past *Galilee* on the road that runs from Jerusalem to Damascus
 - Luke anticipates that you will understand his language which leads us back to **Isaiah 7 & 9** and to some of the Old Testament theophanies (an overwhelming experience of the presence of and holiness of God)

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Such events were often accompanied by heavenly light such as at the **transfiguration** of Jesus (**Lk 9:29-31**)
- **Is 7:14** says: “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign... you will call his name **Immanuel** (God is with us)
 - Matthew refers to this same passage from Isaiah in **Mt 1:23**

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Discuss the story of King Ahaz and his interaction with the Prophet Isaiah**
- **Israel (North) 930 to 722 BC = 208 yrs -20 kings**
- **Judah (South) 930 to 586 BC = 344 yrs -20 Kings (8 good)**

2nd Sam 7: 8-17

2 Kings 16:1-5

Isaiah 7:1-13

Isaiah 8:5-10

2 Kings 16:6-10

2 Kings 17:1-8

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Is 9:1-2** speaks of the people of Zebulun and Naphtali walking in a great darkness (like Saul) who (with the preaching of Jesus) have seen a great light
 - Saul is in utter darkness even before he saw the great light
 - Unfortunately, he does not understand what the Old Testament is all about
 - The Law (Torah) is the Word of God which the Psalmist says is the “light to my feet”
 - Saul thinks that he understands that what the Christians are saying and doing is a heresy against the ways of God

Acts 9 (Cont)

- *Yet he does not understand what is going on and therefore **he is in total darkness***
- *After his encounter with the Light of Christ, the light of the world who will enlighten his path, Saul is struck totally blind (irony)*

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Is 9:6-7** speaks of the birth of a child known as the “Prince of Peace”
 - **Isn't it interesting how Isaiah quote from Handel's Messiah!**
 - **O contraire ! Handel wrote this great music for a group of Christians who knew the Old Testament**
 - **Unfortunately most Christians today do not know that this is from Isaiah 7 & 9 dealing with a virgin birth which he ties to the Christmas story**

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Returning to Saul being struck down by the light on the Road to Damascus

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Contrary to most accounts, Saul did not fall from a horse as he was most likely walking to Damascus!
- Returning to **Acts 9** we see Saul in total darkness being led into the city of *Damascus* by his companions

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:10-15** “Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias.... How much evil he has done to thy saints. (Remember **Dn 7**) and here he has the authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name... But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a **chosen** instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles”
 - In this piece of dialogue we see a bit of Semitic background
 - What does “chosen” mean?
 - *The name “Saul” in Hebrew means “chosen”*
 - Luke, most likely, was told about this event of Saul’s conversion as he was not present when it happened
 - Luke’s gospel was aimed at the gentiles and at this point of the story we are moving to the region of the gentiles
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Acts 9 (Cont)

- God is clearly in charge here as we see that “his ways are not our ways” (**Is 55:8-9**)
- In Luke’s gospel Simeon prophesied that Jesus had been sent as a “light for the revelation of the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel” (**Lk 2:32**)
- Saul is being sent to proclaim Jesus to the same groups
- In addition “kings” recalls Jesus’ prophecy to his disciples “that they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prison, and they will have you led before **kings** and governors because of my name (**LK 21:12**)

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:16** *“For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*
 - Here we discover that Saul (like Jesus) must suffer
 - Who was Saul persecuting?
 - Stephen and the rest of the Christians
 - By doing this he was in fact persecuting Jesus because the Christians were baptized into Christ as members of his body
 - Thus when persecuting members of Jesus’ body he was persecuting Jesus
 - This becomes a major theme in the Pauline Epistles
 - The former persecutor will now himself be asked to endure persecution for Jesus’ sake

Acts 9 (Cont)

- From this event we discover the theme that Jesus is the head of the Church and the church is the body of Christ
- Through our baptism we likewise become members of His body as we function as hands, or feet or other parts of the Body of Christ
- If one part of the body is persecuted, the entire body feels it
- If one part is sick, the whole body is sick
- Thus, when the Christians are persecuted, Christ is suffering
- At this point Saul understands that through the suffering of Stephen and all those he was persecuting, he was actually persecuting Jesus
- After which Jesus will show him how much He is suffering and He does this because Saul is about to be baptized

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:17-20** *“So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hand on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight... Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened. For several days... saying he is the Son of God.’”*
 - Saul’s healing of his blindness is a sign of his inner spiritual enlightenment
 - Next he is filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized
 - Now we hear Saul proclaiming in a synagogue in *Damascus* that Jesus is the “Son of God”
 - What do you think the people in that synagogue understood his message to be referring to?
 - He was proclaiming that Jesus, the son of God, was the **Messiah** (Christ)
 - Son of God was a title for the Messiah

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Remember that Solomon was called the son of David, the son of God
- Christ was is also the title for the King of Jerusalem in the Old Testament
- We must avoid turning this title into the Second Person of the Trinity which is Trinitarian language
- What Saul was proclaiming was that Jesus was the Messiah they were all waiting for (**2 Sam 7**)
- This does not mean that Saul did not believe that Jesus was the 2nd person of the Trinity
- Once people accept Jesus as the Messiah then he can be shown to be the Son of God and thus equal to God

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9: 21-22** *“And all who heard him were amazed, and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on his name? But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.”*
 - Saul’s conversion is as astounding as the healing of the beggar by Peter and John
 - As we know, Saul had come to *Damascus* for this purpose even though he did not know this
 - Saul’s persecutions were famous as even the people of *Damascus* had heard of them

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Now in fulfilling his new mission to witness to Jesus he begins at once to preach to the Christians as well as to the Jews who were his former allies that “Jesus is the son of God!”
- Compare the words in the passage with **2 Sam 7**
- Messiah or Christ was synonymous with “king” in the 1st century
- Saul, David, Solomon and their successors were all seen as a Messiah

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:23-29** *“When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ... and when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples;... and he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists”*
 - Although Saul was from Tarsus he would have known Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew
 - Remember that the Hellenist were Greek speaking Jews
 - So like Stephen, Saul went to Greek synagogues to speak with the Greek speaking Jews because he was a Hellenist
 - The word “disciples” is being used in the same manner as Christian

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Saul spends a long time in *Damascus* seeking to convince the Hellenistic Jews that Jesus was the Messiah
- This led them to conspire to kill him
- We do not know for sure when Saul left for Arabia, or when he returned to *Damascus*, but it was three years before he returned to Jerusalem
- Saul's flight from *Damascus* was reminiscent of the Israelite spies' escape from Jericho with the help of Rahab who let them down by a rope through a window in the city wall (**Josh 2:15**)

Acts 9 (Cont)

Upon his arrival in *Jerusalem* the disciples avoided him out of fear and disbelief that he was a disciple

It took Barnabas to incorporate Saul into the Jerusalem church
When Saul speaks to the Hellenists in *Jerusalem* they react in the same way as those in *Damascus* and again they tried to kill him

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:30** *“but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren (another name for the Christian) knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus”*
 - So the disciples took him to the port city of *Caesarea* and put him on a ship back to his native *Tarsus*
 - This is the *Caesarea* on the western coast and not *Caesarea-Philippi* north of *Capernaum*
 - This is a very important city in the Pauline Epistles and Acts
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Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:31** *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit was multiplied”*
 - The church has now been freed from the hostility of the Hellenistic Jews and all three regions: *Judea, Galilee, and Samaria* enjoy a time of peace
 - Remember Jesus’ commission to the Apostles was to share the “good news” in *Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria* and to the ends of the earth
 - Luke is giving a small summary here to set the stage for what follows
 - Luke attributes the fact that the church is growing in numbers due to the consolation of the Holy Spirit
- Now we return to **Peter**

Acts 9 (Cont)

- **Acts 9:32-43** *“Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years....And immediately he rose.... Now there was at Joppa a disciple ...and she opened her eyes ... and sat up. And he stayed in Joppa, and many days with Simon a tanner”*
 - *Lydda* was a small town south east of *Caesarea*
 - *Joppa* was a small coastal Jewish village south of *Caesarea*
 - Peter arrives and raises *Gazelle* from the dead
 - Luke suddenly switches from *Saul* to *Peter* who continues his visitation and healing to the churches throughout the region

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Here in *Lydda* Peter meets Aeneas, a man who is paralyzed and confined to bed for 8 years
- Peter boldly declares that Jesus Christ heals you and then commands him to “get up and make your bed”
- Luke emphasizes that this healing has an extraordinary impact on *Judea*

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Peter, after healing Aeneas, will perform an even greater miracle by raising the widow *Tabitha* (*Dorcas* in Greek) from the dead
- The disciples in Joppa heard that Peter was in *Lydda* so they sent for him
- Peter's action is **reminiscent of Jesus raising the daughter of Jarius** (Mt 9:24-25; Mk 5:40-41)
- This act ends like so many other miracle accounts with a statement that the deed became known
- Peter remains a long time in *Joppa* with Simon, a tanner

Acts 9 (Cont)

- Next we will take up the incredible story of the first gentile conversion in **Acts 10**