

Acts 9

How would you describe Saul at this point..... his attitude, his perspective (vv. 1-2)? He was a mad man.....fanatical, radical, passionate.....a self-appointed man determined to singlehandedly stamp out this “revolution” called the Way. He was unquestionably convinced of his own righteousness. He knew with absolute certainty that he was doing God’s work. He was spiritually blind.

Why did Saul choose Damascus as a target? Located over 100 miles from Jerusalem, Damascus was of strategic importance; a hub of commerce from which trade caravans reached into Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and Arabia. Christianity could quickly spread from Damascus if not contained. It was a commercial crossroads.

What observations do you have about Saul’s encounter with Jesus (vv. 3-6)? The encounter was initiated by Jesus. The light was from heaven. It must have been blinding.....not a couple of 100 watt bulbs being turned on. Jesus mentioned twice that Saul was persecuting Him.....not the people. He had a specific mission planned for Saul which will be revealed to him (v. 15).

What was ironic about the way Saul entered Damascus (v. 8)? He was led like a child by the hand—the very antithesis of the way he anticipated he would take Damascus by storm. He had been spiritually blind but now he was physically blind.

As Saul was being led into Damascus, imagine what must be going on in his mind as he hashes over what had just happened. **What conclusions might he come to? What did Saul learn? What did God reveal to him?**

- Saul realized the error of his ways—his whole way of dealing with God was wrong. His entire concept of God was wrong. He had been zealously wasting his life. This was a real wake up call for Saul.
- Saul sincerely thought that he was serving God in viciously attacking Christians, but now he discovered that he had been fighting against God. He had been deceived. Religious people today are often convinced that their way is the only way. They are passionate.....but they are wrong!

On the road to Damascus, the light went on for Paul—and he was never the same. **Have you ever had an encounter with the living God? Are you able to say, “The Lord met me on the road I was traveling?”** Each of us has our own story to tell, a unique story designed specifically for us. But the basic story doesn’t change—all of us at one time were walking down the wrong path, away from God. God chose Saul and chased him down like the lost sheep and grabbed ahold of Saul’s heart in His time. Saul was blind but the scales were removed and he was able to see. Each of us has a “before and after” story to tell and it is probably our most powerful witnessing tool.

What do we know about Ananias (v. 10)? Ananias was an ordinary man, a follower of Jesus, but not an apostle, nor a prophet, a pastor, an evangelist, nor an elder. God used him because he was an ordinary man. If an apostle or a prominent person had ministered to Saul, people might say Saul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus. God chooses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. That way, He gets the glory.

How did Ananias react to the vision from God (v. 13-14)? He was fearful, a skeptic. Yet he was memorialized in the Bible for doing one job.....for being faithful and obedient.

What was the Lord’s great plan for Paul that He revealed to Ananias (v. 15-16)? Paul would become God’s primary instrument in taking the gospel to the Gentile world. He was designated to be the apostle to the Gentiles (v. 15). **What else would the mission include?** Intense suffering (2 Corinthians 11:22). **Who was designated as the apostle to the Jews?** Peter (Galatians 2:7-8)

However, Paul didn’t neglect or divorce himself from his Jewish roots. **What was Paul’s pattern whenever he entered a city?** He went to the synagogue first to preach to the local Jews and try to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel* (Romans 9:2-4). He may have been the apostle to the Gentiles, but Paul continued to have a great heart for his Jewish brethren.

Application: God has a mission for each one of us which is really no different than Paul's—taking the Gospel to our world. We are nothing more than missionaries cleverly disguised as military members, spouses, businessmen, etc.

What did Saul do as soon as the scales fell from his eyes (vv. 18-19)? The first thing he did was to identify with Christ and the disciples of Christ by water baptism. He did this even before breaking his fast of three days.¹

What happened once Saul's sight was restored and he gained some strength (v. 20)? He began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (vv. 22, 29). It is easy to see the genuineness of Saul's conversion by witnessing the radical change it made in him. He was a totally different person. He did a complete 180.

How did the Jewish community in Damascus react to Saul and his preaching (vv. 20-23)? They were baffled by his preaching—preaching which proved that Jesus was the Christ. Because of his newly found zeal for Christ, they conspired to kill him just like they had done with Stephen and the prophets before him. The modus operandi of the Jews has always been.....reject the message they don't want to hear and kill the messenger.

How did the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem react to Saul (v. 26)? With great fear. **Why were they afraid?** His pre-conversion reputation had preceded him. Saul needed time to establish credibility with the Christians he had persecuted so vigorously. **Who served as a peacemaker for Saul (v. 27)?** Barnabas

What did Saul do in Jerusalem (vv. 28-29)? While Saul was in Jerusalem, he resumed Stephen's work of debating the Hellenistic Jews. He was himself a Hellenist, as Stephen was, having been born and reared in Tarsus.² Eventually they tried to kill him.....just like the Jews in Damascus.

Why did the church enjoy a time of peace (v. 30-31)? Saul was no longer leading the charge to persecute the Christians. He left Jerusalem and was no longer a source of conflict. Plus, the effect of scattering (8:1) was to dilute the concentrated presence of Christians in Jerusalem. Peace was a function of the Holy Spirit.

Luke now returned to Peter's continuing ministry in Judea (vv. 32-35). **What happened in Lydda?** Peter found a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years and healed him. Note that Peter took the initiative which is the same way God interacts with us (John 6:44, 65). **What was the impact of this miracle?** Many of the residents were saved as a result of witnessing the miracle. Just the way miracles are supposed to work. They see and they believe. They had the faith of a child as Jesus described (Mark 10:13-16).

Peter then went to Joppa where Tabitha (Dorcas) had just died (v. 36). What was Dorcas' spiritual gift (v. 39)? She had the gift of service, that was expressed in sewing—a gift that was practical and ministered to the hearts of many. She left a legacy of kindness and generosity. If you have a talent or passion, consider it to be a God-given gift and ask God how He would have you use it.

How did the people respond to Peter's healing (v. 42)? The same way they reacted to the healing of the paralytic (v. 35). They became Christians—many believed in the Lord.....as opposed to believing in Peter. Miracles are designed to draw people to faith and to bring glory to God. Their hearts had been prepared to see and believe.

What was the significance of Peter's willingness to stay with a tanner (v. 42)? Many Jews thought tanners practiced an unclean trade since they worked with the skins of dead animals, and they would have nothing to do with them.³ According to the laws of that time, a tanner had to live at least twenty-five feet outside a village because of his constant ritual uncleanness.

What does this show us about Peter? He was more broad-minded when it came to fellowshiping with Gentiles than many of his peers. He had gotten past the rules; past the legalism of the Pharisees. He was starting to grasp the concept of grace.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>) p. 156

² Ibid. p. 160

³ Ibid. p. 164