

The Book of Acts  
Chapter 9:1-26 -- Part 1

*Acts 9:11-12*

*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,*

*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.*

I. Review/Introduction

1. Chapter 8 began with Stephen's burial and the house-to-house arrests of many other Christians. The church scattered from Jerusalem to other cities in Judaea and Samaria.
2. Then Philip went to Samaria and preached, cast out devils, healed and baptized. Peter and John joined him and prayed and people were filled with the Holy Ghost.
3. One of those Philip baptized was a sorcerer named Simon, who apparently was not totally sincere, in that he thought he might be able to buy the power to fill people with the Holy Ghost.
4. Philip was led to the desert area where he met and witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch, and after baptizing him, the Spirit caught Philip away to a city about 20 miles away.
5. Acts Chapter 9:1-31 covers the conversion of Saul, his early ministry, and verses 32-43 covers the ministry of Peter on the Mediterranean coast.

II. The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Verses 1-25)

A. Saul the persecutor

1. After the stoning of Stephen, Saul led a violent campaign of persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem.
2. Saul no doubt heard Stephen preach about Jesus, but rather than following Jesus, he followed Jesus' followers to persecute them with a vengeance.
3. In chapter 19 we learn that Saul wasn't satisfied just to scatter the Christians from Jerusalem, as they fled north, he obtained authority to pursue, arrest, and imprison Christians as far north as Damascus, 150 miles north of Jerusalem.
4. **[Map of Gaza to Damascus]**
5. *Acts 9:1-2*  
*9 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*  
*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.*
6. It is important to understand what drove Saul in his fervor to persecute Christians. Like many Pharisees of his day, he honestly believed Christianity was a heresy against the Law of Moses, which he was a stronger defender of:  
*Phil 3:5-6*  
*5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;*  
*6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

7. Listen as he retells this story later to King Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great:  
*Acts 26:9-13*  
*9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*  
*10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.*  
*11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*  
*12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,*  
*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.*
8. The cause that he pursued 150 miles north to Damascus, was that he honestly believed Jesus to be an imposter and thought that he was fighting on God's side against heresy.
9. But just before he entered the city of Damascus, where he intended to arrest all the Christians, he was himself arrested by the Lord Jesus.
- B. Jesus appears to Saul
  1. For your benefit, many of the details of this story we are about to read in Acts 9, are retold again in Acts 22 and Acts 26 when Saul, then known as Paul, retells this story in his own court trials.
  2. Suddenly a great light from heaven shined upon him and he fell powerless to the ground:  
*Acts 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*
  3. Acts 22:6 says this miraculous manifestation took place at midday, and in Acts 26:13 Saul testified that the light was brighter than the noonday sun.
  4. The extreme brightness made him fall from his beast:  
*Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*
  5. So, shocked, fallen to the ground, and we will soon read, blind, Saul lay in the dust and quickly realized that it was the Lord who was speaking to him:  
*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.*
  6. Saul knew who he had set out to persecute—or he thought he knew—he was after Christians.
  7. But now the voice of the Lord accused Saul of persecuting Him—the Lord God Himself—Jesus.
  8. And in doing so, he was kicking against the pricks, or the ox goads. God was pricking his conviction of heart to lead him in the correct path.
- C. A blind man gets spiritual sight
  1. It is significant how Saul, who in but a moment of time with only a few words from Jesus, now surrendered totally to the Lord.
  2. But it is my feeling that Stephen's preaching had started a work of conviction in Saul's heart that he was kicking against to his own hurt.

3. But now that message was getting clearer by the moment.
  4. Although he couldn't see with his natural eyes, his spiritual eyes were just beginning to open as he trembled and asked:  
*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.*
  5. When Saul realized he had been fighting against the Lord, suddenly all the fight went out of him and he surrendered to Jesus.
  6. It is important to understand this—that no matter how hard someone has been kicking against the conviction of God's Spirit on their heart, it doesn't take many words of Jesus, once received into their heart, to totally and completely transform a life.
  7. **Saul's two questions revealed that rapid transformation:**
    - a. **"Who art thou, Lord?"**
    - b. **"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"**
- D. Three days on Straight Street
1. Next we read that he had traveling companions, but they also had all fallen to the ground with him. Now they got Saul up and lead him:  
*Acts 9:7-9*  
*7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*  
*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.*  
*9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*
  2. It was then he discovered he was blind. And now thoroughly humbled, he had to be led into Damascus.
  3. We will soon read they led him to the house of Judas who lived on Straight Street, and there he stayed and fasted and prayed for three days before God sent the man Ananias to pray for him.
  4. We could dwell long on a discussion about what must have been going through Saul's mind and what was happening in his heart during these three days of silence, blindness, and prayer, before God gave him the next instruction.
  5. Did he feel remorse and despair? All his past zeal and works in which he had taken such pride had been totally discounted by the Lord.
  6. He realized that the enemy he had been pursuing was God Himself. What a devastating reality he had to contemplate during those three days of solitude.
  7. His only hope was that the very Jesus whom he had been persecuting, told him He was sending someone to tell him what he must do next.
  8. What mercy!
  9. And speaking of mercy, how ironic it was that Saul's purpose in coming to Damascus had been to harm the disciples of Jesus in Damascus. But now, a disciple of Jesus was receiving a message from Jesus to go speak to speak to Saul and to give him his sight.  
*Acts 9:10-12*  
*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.*  
*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,  
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.*

10. I'm sure the street name of where he was staying was seared into Saul's mind. "**Three days on Straight Street**" could be the name of a book, a movie, maybe my next sermon!
11. Spiritually speaking, **everyone who comes to Jesus needs to spend some time on Straight Street to get their heart recalibrated to Truth.**

E. Ananias the reluctant messenger

1. As tough a journey it was for Saul of Tarsus to get to Straight Street, so it was to get this disciple of Jesus, Ananias, to meet Saul there.
2. Yes, Jesus told him Saul was praying and was expecting Ananias, but he naturally had some misgivings about the task Jesus had just given him.
3. Saul had consented to the killing of Stephen, the first preacher to preach the gospel to him, and Ananias had learned of why Saul had come to Damascus, and now Jesus was asking him the next preacher to preach to Saul:

*Acts 9:13-14*

*13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:*

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

4. I wonder if Ananias thought he was informing Jesus of something He didn't already know.
5. But this humble disciple, of whom we never hear of again, also had his attitude adjusted on Straight Street:

*Acts 9:15-17*

*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:*

*16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

*17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house...*

6. Notice that God called this murderous man His "chosen vessel." Jesus has called us as His ambassadors to present the message of salvation to the world because He has many chosen vessels He intends to bring into His church.
7. The city of Brazil is full of people just like Saul that He intends to bring into His church, and it is up to us to listen to the Lord, get on Straight Street, and find them.
8. How many is God calling to a straight life but who are blinded by the hopelessness of their condition and are just waiting for someone to instruct them?
9. To you, it may not look like they are ready, but Jesus said they are a chosen vessel, a treasure in the field waiting to be redeemed.
10. A few years later when Paul arrived to preach the gospel for the first time in the city of Corinth, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and gave him some assurances about that wicked city:

*Acts 18:9-10*

*9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:*

*10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.*

11. And in my early morning prayer time, every day Jesus calls me to Straight Street and reminds me that in the city of Brazil, He has many chosen vessels, many treasures, and **“much people in this city”** that He intends to save.
12. Each of us should always be ready to testify to one of His chosen vessels.
  - F. Saul the chosen vessel is filled
    1. So Ananias obeyed. As Jesus promised Saul, “it shall be told thee what thou must do.”
    2. Notice how Ananias greets him—the chosen vessel:  
*Acts 9:17-18*  
*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.*  
*18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*
  3. When retelling this story in Acts 22:16, baptism was done “calling on the name of the Lord,” or in other words, in the name of Jesus Christ.
  4. As Ananias prayed, the scales fell from Saul's eyes. He arose, was baptized and received the Holy Ghost And we know, by his own testimony, that he spoke with tongues (1 Cor. 14:18).
  5. After getting arrested by Jesus, and then baptized and filled with the Holy Ghost, he ended his fast and then had fellowship with the saints he had come to arrest:  
*Acts 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*
- G. Saul escapes from Damascus (Verses 20-25)
  1. And after Saul received a good dose of the Holy Ghost, he joined the assembly of saints in Damascus for “certain days.”
  2. It is not clear if they had a prophecy conference over those few days, but Saul immediately began to preach that Jesus fulfilled the scriptures proving He was the Christ, the Son of God.  
*Acts 9:20-22*  
*20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*  
*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?*  
*22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*
  3. He was of course well educated in the Old Testament Scriptures, but after the Spirit enlightened his understanding of the scriptures and he increased in strength, he ably proved that Jesus fulfilled all the prophetic Scriptures concerning the promised Messiah.
  4. It especially amazed those who knew of his most recent mission of destruction.
  5. At first the Jews were merely astonished at Saul’s transformation, but as he increased in fervor and skill in his argument, they began to lay plans to stop him.  
*Acts 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:*
  6. It is not clear just how “many days” he was at liberty to preach Jesus, but this implies that it was some time before they organized a campaign of persecution against him.

7. Perhaps this lasted as long as it took for the message to get to the high priest that Saul had went over to the enemy side.
8. So now, just as the zealous Saul had been to kill Christians, the Jews now zealously crafted a plot to kill him.

*Acts 9:24-25*

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

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

9. With guards stationed to watch the gates, Saul was able to escape arrest by the help of the people he had come to arrest.

### III. Conclusion: listen to Jesus

1. Between verses 25 and verse 26, there is a gap of time not recorded here in Acts.
2. Verse 25 places Paul in Damascus and verse 26 places him in Jerusalem, but in his testimony in Galatians 1, we learn that before he went to Jerusalem, for approximately three years he spent time in Arabia where he received revelations directly from the Lord concerning the gospel. **[Map-Damascus-Arabian Desert]**
3. One of the names of the city of Damascus is “The Pearl of the Desert,”<sup>1</sup> due to its location on the edge of the Syrian Desert which covers 200,000 square miles.<sup>2</sup>
4. *Gal 1:12-17*  
*12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*  
*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:*  
*14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*  
*15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,*  
*16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*  
*17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.*
5. Saul said he had heard directly from Jesus and that is what had changed his life.
6. He had heard the arguments of the priests in his old religion, and he had heard the fiery, argumentative style of preaching of Stephen.
7. But it was when he became blind to the distractions around him, and he heard Jesus speaking to his heart, that he heeded God’s call by His grace.
8. Then he was willing to leave tradition behind and give it all to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Professor R.J., Assiut Training College, Assiut, Egypt: “Damascus: The Pearl of the Desert”

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian\\_Desert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Desert)