

History in the Making
Understanding the Book of Acts-Part Seventeen

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. Acts 9:1-10 NKJV

Introduction:

William Larkin-"The most important event in human history apart from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the conversion to Christianity of Saul of Tarsus. If Saul had remained a Jewish rabbi, we would be missing thirteen of twenty-seven books of the New Testament and Christianity's early major expansion to the Gentiles. Humanly speaking, without Paul Christianity would probably be of only antiquarian or arcane interest, like the Dead Sea Scrolls community, or the Samaritans."

What Paul testifies to in his letters to the Galatians and to Timothy, is described beautifully and in great detail in Acts 9.

I. Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus (9:1-9)

A. Saul the persecutor

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. Acts 9:1, 2

1. Breathed out threats
 - a. Hebrew word for anger is "anaph"-wringing of the nose, snort
 - b. Described by Psalmist

Smoke went up from His nostrils, And devouring fire from His mouth; Coals were kindled by it. Psalms 18:8 NKJV

Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils Psalms 18:15 NKJV

2. Threats and murder-not only tried, but executed (Stephen-see also)

This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Acts 26:10 NKJV

-before Agrippa

3. Not only drove them from Jerusalem, pursued and rooted them out wherever they fled-letters to priests of Synagogues in Damascus to extradite
4. Servant and who were of “The Way” an early name for Christianity sought any

But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. Acts 19:9 NKJV

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. Acts 9:23 NKJV

1. Almost to Damascus-struck down by a light and confronted by a voice, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”
 - a. Note Jesus identifies with his Body
 - b. Gamaliel’s words are true (fighting against God)
2. Saul replied-“who are you Lord?”
3. Saul was not prepared for the answer

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Acts 9:5 NKJV

4. What do you want me to do?
 - a. Go into the city
 - b. Further instructions will come
5. Men with him
 - a. Speechless-saw light-heard a voice
 - b. Helped him to the city
 - c. No food for 3 days

6. Some interesting truth

- a. While this narrative doesn't say, he actually saw Christ

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, [a] 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." Acts 9:17 NKJV

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. Acts 9:17 NKJV

- b. The physical effects were devastating (blindness) but the spiritual effects would last a lifetime

NOTE: Will later write:

Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 2 Corinthians 4:4 NKJV

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV

II. Saul's calling and baptism (Acts 9:10-17)

A. God's call to Ananias

Now there was a certain disciple at 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." Acts 9:10-12 NKJV

1. Double vision-Saul was having one too
2. Go to street-"straight"-ask for Saul
3. He has seen a vision of you laying hands on him and being healed

B. Protest of Ananias

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. Acts 9:13 NKJV

And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” Acts 9:14 NKJV

C. God's persistence

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.” Acts 9:15, 16 NKJV

1. Just go!
2. I have a plan for him!
3. He will suffer for My name!

NOTE: Paul later called this a privilege

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, Philippians 1:29-30 NKJV

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 NKJV

D. Ananias encounters Saul

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. Acts 9:17-19 NKJV

1. Healing
2. Spirit infilling (NOTE: No signs mentioned)
3. Was baptized
4. Ate-left for Damascus

NOTE: Ananias never mentioned again!

What an amazing one assignment!

III. Saul's Early Ministry (9:20-30)

A. The synagogues to which he was headed to persecute, he now enters to preach Jesus

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. Acts 9:20-22 NKJV

B. Saul escapes death

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. Acts 9:23-25 NKJV

1. Probably spent time in Arabia prior to this

Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Galatians 1:17 NKJV

2. But when he returns-they seek to kill him

C. Saul's encounter with the Apostles

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. Acts 9:26-30 NKJV

1. Apostles afraid

2. Damascus wins the favor of Saul

3. Even there he is threatened

a. V. 29 he disputed with the Hellenists

b. Same thing as Stephen (whom he had killed) while doing

Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. Acts 6:9 NKJV

4. He escaped Jerusalem and headed to Tarsus

We won't pick him up until chapter 11

Conclusion:

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. Acts 9:31 NKJV

Summarize the authenticity of the church

- ✓ Had peace
- ✓ Were edified
- ✓ Walked in fear of God
- ✓ Comfort of the Holy Spirit
- ✓ Multitude (grew)

Great Lessons

1. **History making church has great hope!** (If Saul of Tarsus can be converted-no case too tough).
2. **History making church has genuine transformations!**
 - a. Saul's conversion had uniqueness to it. Damascus road
 - b. Also important narrative (personal encounter, witness to the Gospel, a surrender of faith and repentance, incorporation into the church in baptism)
3. **History making church affirms those called!** Barnabas brings him to apostles, they affirm, he fellowships with the brethren.

How thankful Saul was!

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:12-17 NKJV