



# **Book of Acts**

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conversion of Saul of Tarsus**

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**Theme:** Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (son of Shem)

**Barnes' Introduction:** This chapter commences a very important part of the Acts of the Apostles—the conversion and labours of Saul of Tarsus. The remainder of the book is chiefly occupied with the Gentile world. As the fact that the gospel was to be thus preached to the Gentiles was a very important fact, and as the toils of the apostle Paul and his fellow-labourers for this purpose were of an exceedingly interesting character, it was desirable to preserve an authentic record of those labours; and that record we have in the remainder of this book.<sup>1</sup>

**Bible Background Commentary Introduction:** The three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts display some differences (Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26; all fit the accounts in his letters). Classical literature often reports messages given to messengers and then repeats them verbatim on their delivery. Fortunately, rhetorical style by Luke's day preferred variation, which makes the repeated narratives much less repetitious, hence more interesting to read.<sup>2</sup>

**McGee Introduction:** This chapter tells about another remarkable conversion. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch was in a chariot; the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was down in the dust. Probably he was riding a little donkey when he went up to Damascus, and he was knocked right down into the dust.

When we get to the Book of Philippians, we shall look at the theological, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Here, we are dealing with the facts of what actually happened on the road to Damascus.<sup>3</sup>

**ESV Introduction: Acts 6:1–12:25** The Witness beyond Jerusalem. Beginning with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (6:1–7), the Christian gospel was proclaimed to an ever-widening circle—to Samaria (8:4–25), to an Ethiopian (8:26–40), to a Gentile God-fearer (10:1–48), and to the Gentiles of Antioch (11:19–30). Key figures in the outreach were the Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the apostle Peter, and eventually Paul and Barnabas. The stage was then set for Paul's ministry that would go to the “end of the earth” (1:8).

The Conversion of Saul. The conversion of Saul may seem like something of an interruption in the Acts narrative, since in this section of Acts (chs. 6–12) Luke deals primarily with the witness of the Jerusalem church through the dispersed Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) and the apostle Peter. Paul's conversion fits into this time frame, however, and as a Greek-speaking Diaspora Jew he was a “Hellenist” himself and eventually the prime leader in their outreach to the Gentiles. His conversion is related in detail three times in Acts: here in narrative form, and twice subsequently in Paul's testimony before a Jewish mob (22:3–11) and before King Agrippa II (26:2–18). Luke does not record the date of Paul's conversion, but a reasonable estimate is c. a.d. 33–34.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

<sup>2</sup> Bible Background Commentary; New Testament

<sup>3</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## **Hebraism vs. Hellenism**

Hebraism - those born in Israel.

Hellenistic Jews - born in the Greek empire, but Jewish.

( **Zech 9:13**) "I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece"

(For example: Judas Maccabeus against Antiochus Epihanes.)

Sadducees - were Hellenists (materialistic, worldly, deny the supernatural.

Pharisees - were the Hebraists (strictly adhered to the Law, espoused Moses, believed in angels and resurrection, they were the supernaturalists).

## **Tarsus**

Free Greek city, having received its liberty from Mark Antony; received title of "metropolis" of Cilicia, as well as other privileges, conferred by Augustus. The great university of its time; surpassed even Athens and Alexandria in its zeal for philosophy; derived its civilization, and its origin, from Greece, having been founded by an Argine colony.

## **Saul**

Father and mother: Hebrews; Pharisees (not Sadducees). Raised in the Hellenistic culture. Yet, sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel. Saul is a Pharisee to the core! He is on the Sanhedrin, Sanhedrin governs not only over Jerusalem, but over all Judaism.

## **The conversion of Paul (9:1-2)**

Luke's account now switches to describe the conversion of Paul, who will dominate the rest of Acts. While making Paul the focus of his interest, Luke never loses sight of the fact that the Holy Spirit, and hence God, is the true center of his story.

However important Paul turns out to be, he is *not* Luke's main character. He is but one of the human characters who enact the larger drama of God's fidelity to his promises. Luke's concern therefore is for the more properly religious dimensions of the event: how this unexpected turnabout was caused by the direct intervention of the risen Jesus in history, and how the 'conversion' of Paul was in reality the call of a prophet. (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, volume 5, page 167) Luke begins his description of Paul's conversion in chapter 9 by continuing the story of his persecution of the church. "Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples," says Luke of Paul's campaign of persecution against the church in Jerusalem (9:1).

Paul even travels to other towns, Damascus in particular, in order to round up Christians. As he later tells King Agrippa, "I even went to foreign cities to persecute them" (26:10). To Paul, stamping out the Christians is a necessary part of doing God's will. They are teaching a blasphemous heresy that threatens the people of God (the Jews) and the sanctity of the law and temple. It is surely God's will that such people should be punished severely.

Paul can justify his actions against the church by looking to the heroes of Israel's history. Phinehas killed an Israelite man and Midianite woman who were defying the law

of God (Numbers 25:6-15). Elijah killed the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40). Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, used violence to root out the enemies of God and apostates among the people (1 Maccabees 2:1-28, 42-48).

Thus it is that Paul sets out toward Damascus with the zeal of an avenging prophet. He has letters from the high priest with authority to extradite any Christians he finds in the synagogues of Damascus. Paul will capture them and return them to Jerusalem for punishment (9:2). Most likely those being hunted down are the Hellenistic Christians who fled Jerusalem, not those who lived permanently in Damascus. So far as we know, the high priest has no direct authority over the latter, since they are not in his immediate jurisdiction.

Later, Paul explains that the entire council signed the order of extradition he was given (22:5). Thus, Luke is pointing out that the Jewish leadership continues to be in the forefront of trying to eradicate the new sect of Jesus believers. Some questions have arisen over exactly what powers of extradition the letters from the high priest gave Paul. Two centuries earlier, Rome had decreed that Jews who fled to Egypt could be extradited to Jerusalem (1 Maccabees 15:15-24). They were then to be punished according to Jewish law.

Whether this authority to extradite exists in the time of Paul is not known. It's possible the high priest still holds the power of extradition from the Roman authorities. If not, the Sanhedrin may be relying on its clout with local synagogues to cooperate in this matter. The political situation in Judea is unstable, with the Roman governor not wanting to intervene in "Jewish matters." Thus, the council may hope to punish as many Christians as possible without the advance knowledge or intervention of the Roman authority.<sup>4</sup>

### **Acts 9:1**

**And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,**

[**And Saul**] - again the connective. He had been engaged before in persecuting the Christians, but he now sought opportunity to gratify his desire on a larger scale.

[**Breathing out**] - really says, "Breathing hard still." He has motivation behind his commitments.

**Clarke: Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter**—The original text is very emphatic, and points out how determinate Saul was to pursue and accomplish his fell purpose of totally destroying the infant Church of Christ. The mode of speech introduced above is very frequent in the Greek writers, who often express any vehement and hostile affection of the mind by the verb to breathe, to pant. St. Luke, who was master of the Greek tongue, chose such terms as best expressed a heart desperately and incessantly bent on accomplishing the destruction of the objects of its resentment. Such at this time was the heart of Saul of Tarsus; and it had already given full proof of its malignity, not only in the martyrdom of Stephen, but also in making havoc of the Church, and in forcibly

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

entering every house, and dragging men and women, whom he suspected of Christianity, and committing them to prison.<sup>5</sup>

**Went unto the high priest**—As the high priest was chief in all matters of an ecclesiastical nature, and the present business was pretendedly religious, he was the proper person to apply to for letters by which this virulent persecutor might be accredited. The letters must necessarily be granted in the name of the whole Sanhedrin, of which Gamaliel, Saul's master, was at that time the head; but the high priest was the proper organ through whom this business might be negotiated.

**Barnes: Yet breathing.** Not satisfied with what he had done, Acts 8:3. The word *breathing out* is expressive often of any deep, agitating emotion, as we then breathe rapidly and violently. It is thus expressive of violent *anger*. The emotion is absorbing, agitating, exhausting, and demands a more rapid circulation of blood to supply the exhausted vitality; and this demands an increased supply of oxygen, or vital air, which leads to the increased action of the lungs. The word is often used in this sense in the classics. (*Schleusner*.) It is a favourite expression with Homer. Euripides has the same expression: "Breathing out fire and slaughter." So Theocritus: "They came unto the assembly, breathing mutual slaughter," *Idyll*. xxii. 28.

**Barnes: Slaughter.** Murder. Intensely desiring to put to death as many Christians as possible. He rejoiced in their death, and joined in condemning them, Acts 26:10,11. From this latter place, it seems that he had been concerned in putting many of them to death.

**Barnes: Went unto the High Priest.** The letters were written and signed in the name and by the authority of the sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. The high priest did it as president of that council. See Acts 9:14, 22:5. The high priest of that time was Theophilus, son of Artanus, who had been appointed at the feast of Pentecost, A. D. 37, by Vitellius, the Roman governor. His brother Jonathan had been removed from that office the same year. (*Kuinel*.)

**Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, &c.**—The emphatic "yet" is intended to note the remarkable fact, that up to this moment his blind persecuting rage against the disciples of the Lord burned as fiercely as ever. (In the teeth of this, NEANDER and OLSHAUSEN picture him deeply impressed with Stephen's joyful faith, remembering passages of the Old Testament confirmatory of the Messiahship of Jesus, and experiencing such a violent struggle as would inwardly prepare the way for the designs of God towards him. Is not dislike, if not unconscious disbelief, of *sudden conversion* at the bottom of this?) The word "slaughter" here points to cruelties not yet recorded, but the particulars of which are supplied by himself nearly thirty years afterwards: "And I persecuted this way *unto the death*" (Ac 22:4); "and when they were *put to death*, I gave my voice [vote] against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to [did my utmost to make them] blaspheme; and being

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange [foreign] cities” (Ac 26:10, 11). All this was *before* his present journey.<sup>6</sup>

### **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.**

[letters] Sanhedrin had jurisdiction beyond Jerusalem. Damascus was the capital of Syria.

[this way] - 4x used: here, 19:9, 23; 24:22. Speaking of the Christians. The way of the Lord.

[this way, whether they were men or women] Acts 18:25-26; Acts 19:9,23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14,22; John 14:6. Whether they were men or women—Provided they were Jews; for no converts had as yet been made among the Gentiles; nor did the power of the high priest and Sanhedrin extend to any but those who belonged to the synagogues. Pearce. In every country where there were Jews and synagogues, the power and authority of the Sanhedrin and high priest were acknowledged: just as papists in all countries acknowledge the authority of the pope. And as there can be but one pope, and one conclave, so there could be but one high priest, and one Sanhedrin; and this is the reason why the high priest and sanhedrin at Jerusalem had authority over all Jews, even in the most distant countries.

**Clarke: Letters to Damascus to the synagogues**—Damascus, anciently called *Damask*, and *Darmask*, was once the metropolis of all Syria. It was situated at fifty miles’ distance from the sea; from which it is separated by lofty mountains. It is washed by two rivers, Amara or Abara, which ran through it, and Pharpar, called by the Greeks Chrysorrhoas, the golden stream, which ran on the outside of its walls. It is one of the most ancient cities in the world, for it existed in the time of Abraham, Genesis 14:15; and how long before is not known.

**Barnes: To the synagogues.** Matthew 4:23. The Jews were scattered into nearly all the regions surrounding Judea; and it is natural to suppose that many of them would be found in Damascus. Josephus assures us that ten thousand were massacred there in one hour; and at another time eighteen thousand, with their wives and children. (*Jewish Wars*, b. ii. chap. xx. \_ 2; b. vii. chap. viii. \_ 7.) Acts 2:9-11. By whom the gospel was preached there, or how they had been converted to Christianity, is unknown. The presumption is, that some of those who had been converted on the day of Pentecost had carried the gospel to Syria.

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<sup>6</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 9:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**BBC:** Official letters of introduction authorizing or recommending their sender were common, and Josephus confirms that Palestinian agents could take orders from the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Jewish communities outside Palestine respected the high priest, and letters from him authorize Saul to carry out his mission with the full cooperation of synagogues there. Because the high priest had exercised extradition rights over fugitive Judeans when he ruled Palestine under the Romans, local synagogues in Syria likely still recognized this right, although the local ruler would probably not. These synagogue communities could cooperate with Saul in his mission to weed out the Jewish Christians.

The Essene sect at Qumran also described itself as “the way”; this was a natural designation for a group that believed that it alone followed the way of righteousness. Essenes had apparently also settled in Damascus, if their writings on this point are meant literally. Tens of thousands of Jews lived in Damascus (as many as eighteen thousand were massacred there in A.D. 66).

Saul (later called Paul) was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Christ (“who belonged to the Way”). Why would the Jews in Jerusalem want to persecute Christians as far away as Damascus? There are several possibilities: (1) to seize the Christians who had fled, (2) to prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities, (3) to keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome, (4) to advance Saul’s career and build his reputation as a true Pharisee, zealous for the law, (5) to unify the factions of Judaism by giving them a common enemy.

**McGee:** When the persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the church went underground. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but many of the others were scattered—we found Philip up in Samaria and along the Mediterranean coast. The thing that triggered it was the stoning of Stephen, followed by persecution.

The other religious leaders in Jerusalem were satisfied after they had run the Christians out of Jerusalem. They were willing to let it stay at that point. But not Saul of Tarsus! He was the one who was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. He hated Jesus Christ. I do not think that the Lord Jesus Christ ever has had an enemy greater than this man Saul of Tarsus. He went to the high priest and said, “Look, I’ve heard that a group of them have run off up there to Damascus, and I’m going after them.” The fact of the matter is that he intended to ferret them out, anywhere they went. His goal was to exterminate the Christians.<sup>7</sup>

**that if he found any of this way, whether men or women**—Three times *women* are specified as objects of his cruelty, as an aggravated feature of it (Ac 8:3; 22:4; and here).

**JNTC:** Sha’ul was so incensed against the Messianic Jews (8:3) that he was not satisfied to conduct his inquisitions and persecutions only in Yerushalayim. Letters from the *cohen hagadol* would carry weight in the Diaspora. Under Roman rule the *Sanhedrin* did not have temporal power; but in internal Jewish matters it was honored even beyond the borders of Israel, for example, in Damascus (v. 3).

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<sup>7</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**People ... who belonged to “the Way.”** Evidently this is how the early believers referred to themselves (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14&N, 22). Other Jews, in calling them *Natzratim* or *Notzrim*, identified them as one Jewish school or sect among many (24:5&N); but the term “The Way” is a claim to universal validity for Yeshua’s doctrine and practice. Indeed, Yeshua called himself “the Way” (Yn 14:6).

**Bring them back to Yerushalayim** for trial and punishment (22:5). Apparently Sha’ul had become the *Sanhedrin*’s prosecuting attorney (on his *Sanhedrin* membership see 7:58&N, 8:1&N, 26:10&N).

He wanted to extradite people from Damascus across two borders to Jerusalem. The basis in Roman law for doing such a thing might have been that Messianism was not a *religio licita*, a “legal religion” given certain protections by the Romans, whereas Judaism was. Against this idea is the fact that Roman Emperors Nero and Claudius saw the Messianics as a Jewish sect, hence would have included them in the protection given Jews.<sup>8</sup>

**ESV:** The account of **Saul** resumes from 8:3. Saul's papers from the high priest may have been official extradition documents or **letters** of introduction to the **synagogues at Damascus**. It is not known how Christianity had come to Damascus—perhaps through converts at Pentecost or by some of those “scattered” following Stephen's martyrdom (8:1). This is the first time in Acts that Christians are described as **belonging to the Way** (Gk. *hodos*, “road, highway, way of life”), meaning either the way of salvation (16:17; cf. Jesus' teachings in Matt. 7:14; John 14:6) or the true way of life in relation to God (cf. Acts 18:25–26; cf. Ps. 1:1, 6; 27:11). The expression also occurs at Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

### **"The way" (9:2)**

In his account, Luke refers to the threatened Christian community as "the Way" (9:2). It seems to be a name by which the church identifies itself. Luke uses the term several times in Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The name recalls the words of Jesus when he said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). The Qumran community also refers to its mode of life as "the way." To them "the way" points to the community's strict obedience to the Law of Moses. However, the Christians stress faith in the salvation of Jesus, who was "the Way."

It's easy to see why the word "way" or "road" is a Christian metaphor for "manner of life." It has to do with the believers' understanding that a person needs to walk in the path of God's salvation, in obedience and faith to him. Opponents, of course, think that the church is walking the wrong path. Outsiders refer to the church not as "the Way" but as "the sect of the Nazarenes" (24:5, 14; 28:22).

Interestingly, the church does not seem to refer to itself as "Christian" very often. The term was coined at Syrian Antioch (11:26), by outsiders, and the name appears only twice more in the New Testament (Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). "Christian" is at first an outsider name for the disciples, not one the community uses for itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 9:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

### **Acts 9:3**

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

[**Damascus**] Capital of Syria (2 Samuel 8:5; 1 Kings 11:24; 1 Kings 15:18-20; 1 Kings 20:1; 2 Kings 8:28; 2 Kings 10:33; 2 Kings 12:17; 2 Kings 13:3,24; 2 Kings 14:28; 2 Kings 16:5-9). One of the oldest cities in the world. Tradition says it was built by Abraham or his steward (Genesis 15:2).

**Clarke: Suddenly there shined round about him**—This might have been an extraordinary flash of the electric fluid, accompanied with thunder, with which God chose to astonish and confound Saul and his company; but so modified it as to prevent it from striking them dead. Thunder would naturally follow such a large quantity of this fluid as appears to have been disengaged at this time; and out of this thunder, or immediately after it, Christ spoke in an awful and distinct voice, which appears to have been understood by Saul only.

**And as he journeyed.** On his way; or while he was travelling. The *place*. where this occurred is not known. Tradition has fixed it at the mountain now called *Cocab*. Acts 9:2. All that we know of it is, that it was near to Damascus.

The light from heaven indicates the Shekinah, God's presence (related to the concept of *yeqarah*, "glory"), as God often revealed his glory in the Old Testament.

Damascus, a key commercial city, was located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world. Saul may have thought that by stamping out Christianity in Damascus, he could prevent its spread to other areas.

**JNTC:** The story of how Sha'ul came to trust in Yeshua is told again at 22:5–16 and a third time at 26:13–18, with varying details. See 26:13–14 on reconciling the differences. Compare also the visions described in Rv 1:9–20, Daniel 10:4ff.<sup>10</sup>

**ESV: Damascus** was 135 miles (217 km) northeast of Jerusalem, a six-day journey by foot. Settled as early as the second millennium b.c., Damascus was an oasis on the border of the Arabian desert and on the main route from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The Nabatean king Aretas IV maintained an ethnarch (i.e., governor) in Damascus (2 Cor. 11:32). Although the modern city of Damascus stands atop the ancient remains, one can still see the "street called Straight" (Acts 9:11) running east to west with its East Gate and monumental arch. Also visible are the ancient theater and the concentric courts of its temple to Jupiter (now replaced by a mosque). Jewish presence in Damascus (assumed by the mention of synagogues in vv. 2, 20) is confirmed in Josephus's record that many thousands of Jewish people were killed in Damascus during the time of the First Jewish

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<sup>10</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 9:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Revolt (a.d. 66–73; see *Jewish War* 2.559–561). For the brilliance of the **light**, see Acts 22:6 and 26:13, where it is described as exceeding the midday sun.



**On the road to Damascus (9:3)**

When Luke turns directly to Paul’s conversion experience, he places him on the highway, almost at the gates of Damascus. By this time, Paul has traveled about 150 miles (242 kilometers) from Jerusalem. Damascus is one of the cities of the Decapolis, which is a league of self-governing cities in eastern Syria and the area east of the Jordan river (Matthew 4:25; Mark 7:31).

Damascus is a large and thriving commercial center. It has been part of the Roman province of Syria since 64 B.C. The city has a large Nabatean Arab population, a fact that might figure later into this part of Paul’s life. (The Nabatean kingdom stretched from the desert to the Red Sea, and its capital was Petra.) Damascus also has a large Jewish

population. Josephus says that 10,500 Jews were killed in the city when the Jewish-Roman war broke out in A.D. 66. (*Wars* 2:561; 7:368).<sup>11</sup>

### **The moment of encounter (9:3)**

Acts 9 gives us the first of three accounts of Paul's conversion. The story is also told as part of Paul's speech before a Jerusalem crowd (22:5-16) and his testimony before Agrippa and Festus (26:12-18). This is one of the most significant conversions in the early church's history, and it's not surprising that Luke gives us three versions of it. Paul himself writes of the importance of his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road: "God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me" (Galatians 1:16).

The three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts show some minor variations, mostly in what each adds or omits from the basic story. We'll refer to a few of these differences (which don't affect the main story) as we make our way through the account here in chapter 9, and also when we discuss chapters 22 and 26.

The disagreement in detail between the three versions...is less significant than what the repetition tells us about Luke's perception of the event. The turning of a Pharisaic persecutor into the apostle of the Gentiles is a paradox so profound that it requires multiple retellings, with each version bringing out some further nuance of significance. (Johnson, page 166)

As Luke's story begins, Paul is nearing Damascus when a light suddenly flashes around him. The shock causes him to fall to the ground. That's when he hears a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (9:4). The men traveling with him, perhaps temple police, stand speechless, as "they heard the sound [Greek, *phone*] but did not see anyone" (9:7). Luke doesn't indicate whether Paul's companions saw the light, but they did not see Christ manifested (9:7).

In the other accounts later in Acts, we find that the bright light flashed, not at night, but at high noon. To Paul it is brighter than the sun, which makes it all the more shocking (26:13). In Acts 22, Paul says the men with him see the light, which chapter 9 doesn't mention. In this later account, Paul says that the men do not hear the sound, presumably meaning that they do not "understand the voice," as the NIV puts it (22:9). The Greek word *phone* can mean either "sound" or "speech." What apparently happens in this case is that the whole group hears a sound but only Paul understands it as spoken words.<sup>12</sup>

### **Acts 9:4**

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

**[why persecutest thou me? ... Who art thou, Lord? ... Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?]** These are questions 35-37 in the book of Acts. The next question will be in Acts 9:21.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

### Effects of God's Presence (Dake)

1. Deep sleep (Genesis 2:21; Genesis 15:12)
2. Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6).
3. I fell on my face (Ezekiel 1:28; Ezekiel 3:23; Ezekiel 43:4; Ezekiel 44:4).
4. I was afraid (Daniel 8:17).
5. A great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide (Daniel 10:7).
6. There remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned into corruption ... then was I in a deep sleep on my face ... set me upon my knees and palms of my hands (Daniel 10:8-10).
7. They fell upon their face and were sore afraid (Matthew 17:6).
8. For fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men (Matthew 28:4).
9. Moses trembled, and durst not behold (Acts 7:32).
10. He fell upon the earth ... trembling and astonished (Acts 9:4-9).
11. He fell into a trance (Acts 10:10).
12. Came trembling and fell down (Acts 16:29).
13. I exceedingly fear and quake (Hebrews 12:21).
14. I fell at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8).
15. Fear came upon me and trembling, which made my bones shake (Job 4:14).<sup>13</sup>

**BBC:** In the Old Testament and Jewish literature, people often fell to the ground when confronted with divine or angelic revelations. In Jewish literature names are often repeated when God calls to someone, drawing special attention to what is about to be said. Given the nature of the revelation, “Lord” here means more than “Sir”; perhaps Saul wonders if God or an angel is addressing him, or perhaps he simply cannot believe he is opposing God.

As Saul traveled to Damascus, pursuing Christians, he was confronted by the risen Christ and brought face to face with the truth of the gospel. Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. Beware of people who insist that you must have a particular type of conversion experience. The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings *you*.

Paul will recount this incident twice more in the Book of Acts. In fact, Paul never tired of telling about his conversion. We find him going over it again in his Epistle to the Philippians where he gets right down to the heart of the matter and tells what really happened to him. Here we are simply given the facts. He will go over them again when he gives his testimony before King Agrippa—that is a masterpiece.<sup>14</sup>

The question, **Why do you persecute Me?** (cf. Acts 9:5) is filled with significance for it shows the union of Christ with His church. The Lord did not ask, “Why do you persecute My church?” The reference to “Me” gave Saul his first glimpse into the great doctrine of Christians being in Christ. This same truth was implied earlier by Luke when he wrote

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<sup>13</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

<sup>14</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.  
cf. *confer*, compare

that the Lord continues His work on earth in the church (1:1). Also Ananias' lie to Peter was a lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Luke, with Paul, saw Christ and the church as the Head and its body.<sup>15</sup>

### **"Why to you persecute me?"**

The voice addresses Paul in Aramaic, something we learn from Paul's account of the event given before Agrippa (26:14). (Is it because this is the language Jesus spoke, or the one Paul spoke as a first language?) "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" the voice asks (1:4). The double name is used for emphasis, and is found in other stories of divine calling, including Abraham's, Jacob's and Moses' (Genesis 22:11; 46:2; Exodus 3:4). Paul is very confused. He doesn't see himself as persecuting God. Paul thinks he is doing God a service, defending his way against the apostate Christians. Saul then asks, "Who are you, Lord?" Saul doesn't yet know it is Jesus. He seems to understand his vision as a revelation from God. As the account shows, Paul is open to God's self-revelation, even though he is ignorant of his purpose.

The figure standing before Paul shocks him greatly when he answers, "I am Jesus" (9:5). It is not directly stated in this verse that Paul actually sees the risen Christ, but only that he hears a voice. But it is confirmed soon afterwards, when Luke introduces Ananias (9:17) and Barnabas (9:27) into the account. Ananias refers to "Jesus, who appeared to you" (9:17). It's clearly stated in the versions of this event Paul gives to Agrippa (26:16) and a Jewish crowd (22:14) that he sees Christ.

When the risen Christ tells Paul he has been persecuting him, he is making an important point. Paul is not rejecting human beings, but by his actions, he is rejecting Christ himself (Luke 10:16). In persecuting the church Paul is persecuting the body of which Jesus is the head (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-17; Ephesians 5:30; Colossians 1:18). Christ and his church are one, and he has a tangible presence on earth through his believers.

Paul learns that these Nazarenes—these followers of Jesus whom he despises—are not confused heretics. They, rather than he and the Sanhedrin, are the people of God, and Paul is the one who is confused.

Saul could not escape the fact that the Jesus whose followers he had been persecuting was alive, exalted, and in some manner to be associated with God the Father, whom Israel worshiped. He, therefore, had to revise his whole estimate of the life, teaching, and death of the Nazarene because God had beyond any question vindicated him. Thus he came to agree with the Christians that Jesus' death on the cross, rather than discrediting him as an imposter, fulfilled prophecy and was really God's provision for man's sin and that Jesus' resurrection confirmed him as being the nation's Messiah and mankind's Lord. (Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, page 371) This Messiah, the glorified Christ, has now appeared to Paul himself. Paul later stresses the importance of this revelation. He sees the risen and glorified Christ, and this is as real as Christ's appearances to his disciples after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9; Galatians 1:11-12, 15-17). It is a proof of Paul's apostleship and of his witness to Christ and the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:375). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>16</sup><http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

## **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 22 and 26 recount this experience and includes some details not recorded here.

**[I am Jesus]** - name from before birth.. “At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow...”

### **[Whom thou persecutes]:**

- 1) Christ and His people are one.  
He felt every throb of Stephen’s pain.
- 2) ..that against which you are fighting is not the zeal of mistaken fanatics; it is the march of God through history.

“Goads” - Saul was sincere, fighting whom he believed was an enemy of Judaism, the Law of Moses. This hints that there is a pricking going on inside Saul (perhaps the arguments of Stephen still echoed in his ears).

Cf. 6:8,9. Stephen’s conflict was with the Hellenists, not with the Hebrews: his fight was with the Sadducees. Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin, Saul heard Stephen’s presentation.

Saul went to the Sadducean High Priest for letters of authority against those who, while antagonistic to the ancient ritual of his people, nevertheless held to the spiritual verities of which he himself held...

Christ spoke to him in the Hebrew tongue (Cf. 22:6-16; 26:9-18).

Saul saw as well as heard: v. 17, v. 27; 22:14; 26:16.

Saul never forgave himself: 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13.

Saul was not the first of his family to be saved: “My kinsmen...who also were in Christ before me” (Rom 16).

Every conversion is a miracle.

**The Church, People of God**—Both Damascus and Jerusalem had local groups of disciples assembling for worship and fellowship. Both were churches, local representations of the entire church. Persecution made the church cautious. Still God brought new leadership to the church. Any action of persecuting the church is persecuting Jesus (v. 5) because the church is Christ’s body representing His presence and mission on earth. Whether in Damascus or in other parts of the world, those who serve Christ are the people of God and remain under His caring eye—even in the midst of persecution. One

name for the early church was “the Way,” a name which showed the church as pointing to Christ and, thus, to the Way of eternal life (Jn 14:6).<sup>17</sup>

**Clarke: Who art thou, Lord?**— Κυριε; Who art thou, SIR? He had no knowledge who it was that addressed him, and would only use the term Κυριε, as any Roman or Greek would, merely as a term of civil respect.

**Clarke: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest**—“Thy enmity is against me and my religion; and the injuries which thou dost to my followers I consider as done to myself.” The following words, making twenty in the original, and thirty in our version, are found in no Greek MS. The words are, It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks: and he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and the Lord said unto him. It is not very easy to account for such a large addition, which is not only not found in any Greek MS. yet discovered, but is wanting in the Itala, Erpen’s Arabic, the Syriac, Coptic, Sahidic, and most of the Slavonian. It is found in the Vulgate, one of the Arabic, the Ethiopic, and Armenian; and was probably borrowed from Acts 26:14, and some marginal notes. It is wanting also in the Complutensian edition, and in that of Bengel. Griesbach also leaves it out of the text.

**Clarke: It is hard for thee, etc.**— This is a proverbial expression, which exists, not only in substance, but even in so many words, both in the Greek and Latin writers. Κεντρον, *kentron*, signifies an ox goad, a piece of pointed iron stuck in the end of a stick, with which the ox is urged on when drawing the plough. The origin of the proverb seems to have been this: sometimes it happens that a restive or stubborn ox kicks back against the goad, and thus wounds himself more deeply: hence it has become a proverb to signify the fruitlessness and absurdity of rebelling against lawful authority, and the getting into greater difficulties by endeavoring to avoid trifling sufferings. So the proverb, *Incidit in Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim*. Out of the cauldron into the fire. “Out of bad into worse.”

**Barnes: I am Jesus.** It is clear from this, that there was a personal appearance of the Saviour; that he was present to Saul; but in what particular *form* whether *seen* as a man, or only appearing by the manifestation of his glory-is not affirmed. It was a personal appearance, however, of the Lord Jesus, designed to take the work of converting such a persecutor into his own hands, without the ordinary means. Yet he designed to convert him in a natural way. He *arrested* his attention; filled him with alarm at his guilt; and then presented the *truth* respecting himself. In Acts 22:8, the expression is thus recorded: "I am Jesus of Nazareth," etc. There is no contradiction, as Luke here records only a *part* of what was said; Paul afterwards stated the whole. This declaration was fitted peculiarly to humble and mortify Saul. There can be no doubt that he had often blasphemed his name, and profanely derided the notion that the Messiah could come out of Nazareth. Jesus here uses, however, that very designation: "I am *Jesus the Nazarene*, the object of your contempt and scorn." Yet Saul saw him now invested with peculiar glory.

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<sup>17</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

**Barnes: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?** This indicates a subdued soul; a humbled spirit. Just before he had sought only to do his own will; now he inquired what was the will of the Saviour. Just before he was acting under a commission from the sanhedrim; now he renounced their supreme authority, and asked what the Lord Jesus would have him to do. Just before he had been engaged in a career of *opposition* to the Lord Jesus; now he sought at once to do his will. This indicates the usual change in the sinner. The great controversy between him and God is, *whose will* shall be followed. The sinner follows his own; the first act of the Christian is to surrender his own will to that of God, and to resolve to do that which he requires. We may further remark here, that this indicates the true nature of conversion. It is decided, prompt, immediate. Paul did not *debate* the matter, Galatians 1:16; he did not inquire what the scribes and Pharisees would say; he did not consult his own reputation; he did not ask what the world would think. With characteristic promptness—with a readiness which showed what he *would* yet be—he gave himself up *at once* and *entirely* to the Lord Jesus; evidently with a purpose to do *his* will alone. This was the case also with the jailer, at Philippi, Acts 16:30. Nor can there be real conversion where the *heart* and *will* are not given to the Lord Jesus, to be directed and moulded by him at his pleasure. We may test our conversion, then, by the example of the apostle Paul. If our hearts have been given up as his was, we are true friends of Christ.

Paul refers to this experience as the start of his new life in Christ (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8; Galatians 1:15-16). At the center of this wonderful experience was Jesus Christ. Paul did not see a vision; he saw the risen Christ himself (Acts 9:17). Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him. True conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him.

Saul thought he was pursuing heretics, but he was persecuting Jesus himself. Anyone who persecutes believers today is also guilty of persecuting Jesus (see Matthew 25:40, 45), because believers are the body of Christ on earth.

Will you notice, here, the ignorance of Saul? He was possibly the most brilliant man of his day. He was probably a graduate of the University of Tarsus, the greatest Greek university of that day. He was a student in the school of Gamaliel, the Hebrew scholar. He was trained in the details of the Jewish religion. But he did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. “Who art thou, Lord?” Friend, to know *Him* is life. Saul didn’t know Him!<sup>18</sup>

Some interpret “Lord” in Saul’s question, **Who are You, Lord?** (*kyrie*) as “Sir.” It is possible for this noun to have this meaning, as it does in Matthew 13:27; 27:63; John 4:11; Acts 10:4; and elsewhere. However, there is too much that is supernatural in this passage to use the mere human vocative, “Sir.” Even though **Saul** did not immediately recognize this One as Jesus, he must have acknowledged a supernatural being. Jesus then identified Himself to Saul: **I am Jesus** (cf. 9:17).

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<sup>18</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.  
cf. *confer*, compare

The words, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (KJV), are not in the better and earlier Greek manuscripts. But this statement *is* found in Acts 26:14.<sup>19</sup>

**Spurgeon:** What surprise filled the soul of Saul when he perceived that the Nazarene whom he had hated was really divine. Little had he dreamed of persecuting the Son of God, he thought he was crushing out a troublesome imposture. O Lord, open the eyes of any other sincere bigot who may be persecuting thy cause without knowing it to be thine!

**ESV:** “**Who are you, Lord?**” Though Paul was ultimately blinded by the bright light (cf. vv. 3, 8–9), he indicates elsewhere that he actually saw the risen Christ on this occasion (see 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:16; cf. Acts 9:27). The scene is significant not only because of Saul’s conversion but also because it shows that he would have known of the resurrection from direct experience of Jesus and thus could come to appreciate why this was a key part of the Christian message (see 1 Corinthians 15).

### **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.**

Paul gets right to the point

**Trembling**—Under a strong apprehension of meeting the judgment he deserved.

**And astonished**—At the light, the thunder, and the voice.

**Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**—The word Lord, is here to be understood in its proper sense, as expressing authority and dominion: in the 5th verse it appears to be equivalent to our word sir. The pride of the Pharisee is now brought down to the dust; and the fury of the persecutor is not only restrained, but the lion becomes a lamb. What wilt thou have me to do? Wilt thou condescend to employ me among thy meanest servants?

**Go into the city, and it shall be told thee, etc.**—Jesus could have informed him at once what was his will concerning him; but he chose to make one of those very disciples whom he was going to bring in bonds to Jerusalem the means of his salvation:

1. To show that God will help man by man, that they may learn to love and respect each other.
2. That in the benevolence of Ananias he might see the spirit and tendency of that religion which he was persecuting, and of which he was shortly to become an apostle.

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<sup>19</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:376). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Persecuting his followers is persecuting Jesus, because they are his representatives (Luke 10:16).

Saul is right down in the dust on that road to Damascus. This is a remarkable conversion. He immediately reveals his conversion. This man who hated the Lord Jesus, who did everything he could against Him, now calls Him "Lord." And he asks what the Lord would have him do. He is ready to do the bidding of the Lord. He has been completely changed. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). We can surely tell what has happened to this man.<sup>20</sup>

### **Acts 9:7**

**And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.**

[**hearing a voice**] His companions heard the sound of the voice, but not the words spoken. Compare with Acts 22:9.

**Clarke: Stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man**—The men were stupified, hearing the voice or thunder, but not distinguishing the words, which were addressed to Saul alone; and which were spoken out of the thunder, or in a small, still voice, after the peal had ceased.

**Barnes: Hearing a voice.** Hearing a *sound or noise*. The word here rendered "voice" is thus frequently used, as in Genesis 3:8, 1 Samuel 12:18, Psalms 29:3,4; Matthew 24:31, (Greek;) 1 Thessalonians 4:16. In Acts 22:9, it is said, "They which were with me (Paul) saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the *voice* of him that spake to me." In this place the words "heard not the voice" must be understood in the sense of *understanding the words*, of hearing the address, the distinct articulation, which Paul heard. They heard a *noise*, they were amazed and alarmed, but they did not hear the distinct words addressed to Saul. A similar instance we have in John 12:28,29, when the voice of God came from heaven to Jesus: "The people who stood by and heard it, said that it thundered." They heard the *sound*, the *noise*; they did *not* distinguish the *words* addressed to him. See also Daniel 10:7, and 1 Kings 19:11-13.

Later on it says that they didn't hear. Is this a conflict? No, they heard a voice but that was all. They couldn't understand what was said. It didn't make any sense to them. They didn't see anyone. There was no one for them to see. They were speechless with amazement. We shall see this in more detail in Acts 22 and 26.<sup>21</sup>

Those traveling with Saul heard a sound and looked around expecting to see the one who spoke. Only Saul heard the voice with understanding; the message was for him. Some suggest that "voice" here refers to what ancient Hebrew writers define as the

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<sup>20</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>21</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:548). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*bath qol* (Heb.) or “echo.” This “heavenly echo” is hardly adequate to explain what took place. Luke’s words make it clear that others heard the sound but did not understand the words or message (Acts 22:9). Verse 7 states that Saul’s companions heard the voice (*akouontes*, Gk., with the genitive case), whereas 22:9 says they did not “hear the voice” (*ekousan*, Gk., with the accusative case). Both constructions say the same thing: The companions of Saul did not understand what the voice said to Saul. They heard the sound of the voice but did not understand the message of the words. They were spectators of this experience and not participants (9:4a; 22:9; 26:16).<sup>22</sup>

**ESV:** Saul’s companions heard the **voice** but saw **no one**. In his later testimony to the Jews, Paul spoke of them seeing the light but not understanding the voice (22:9). They had no vision of Jesus nor did they hear the message to Saul, but they could testify to a brilliant light and a sound, which pointed to an objective event that was not a matter of Saul’s imagination.

### **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.**

[**Damascus**] was one of the first cities that Alexander had conquered.

Saul means “destroyer,” Paul means “builder.”

[**he saw no man**] His eyes were open but he was blind (Acts 9:9). He saw no man, but he had seen the Lord while in the trance (Acts 9:17,27; Acts 22:14; 1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8).

**Clarke:** **When his eyes were opened, he saw no man**—Instead of no man, the Codex Alexandrinus, the Syriac, Vulgate, and some others, have nothing. He not only saw no man, but he saw nothing, being quite blind; and therefore was led by the hand to Damascus, being without sight.

### **Acts 9:9**

**And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.**

#### **Three days:**

Abraham	(Isaac dead to him for)
Joseph	(dreams in prison)
Esther	(fasted 3 days)
Jonah	(in the fish)
Christ	(in the tomb)
Nation Israel	(asks Jesus to return, Hos 6)

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<sup>22</sup> Believer’s Study Bible

What did Paul do for these three days? He did not eat nor drink, probably a lot of thinking (Phil 3:7; Gal 2:20).

Gal 2:20:	“I have been crucified with Christ.”	(Hebraism)
	“and it is no longer I that live”	(Hellenism, culture)
	“but Christ liveth in me”	(Christianity)

Thorn in the Flesh: mentioned in 2 Cor 12. Hint in Gal 4:13-15 that it is an eye problem. (Also in Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 2:2) Perhaps, he never fully recovered from this Damascus road blinding.

**Clarke: Neither did eat nor drink**—The anxiety of his mind and the anguish of his heart were so great that he had no appetite for food; and he continued in total darkness and without food for three days, till Ananias proclaimed salvation to him in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**McGee:** This man was blinded by the light that he had seen from heaven. Here was a man who was puzzled as much as any man has ever been. Some people jump up and down when they are converted. Some shout for joy. Not Saul of Tarsus. There never was a man as confused as he was. Had we met him on one of those three days in Damascus and had we asked him what had happened to him, his answer would have been, “I don’t know.” But he is going to find out.<sup>23</sup>

Saul's blindness and his fasting should not be seen as punishment but as a result of the intensity of his encounter with Christ. However, like the deaf-muteness of Zechariah in Luke 1, it was designed to produce a time of reflection.

### **Saul taken to Damascus (9:7-9)**

The stunned and shaken Paul struggles to his feet, but he has been blinded by the light (9:8). The men with Paul recover their composure and escort him to a house in Damascus. For the next three days the blind Paul fasts, no doubt meditating on the meaning of his encounter with Jesus.

In Luke’s account in chapter 9, there is no indication that Paul is told anything else about his future commission by the risen Christ on the Damascus road. The later account in Acts 22:10 supports this. There, Paul says he is told to get up and go into Damascus. "There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do," said Jesus. That’s where a man named Ananias enters the stage. The account in Acts 26, however, telescopes the entire incident as though all of Paul’s instruction comes at the time he is struck down (26:18). Paul’s commission to the Gentiles is stated in the following words: "To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (26:18).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:549). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

## **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*.**

[**vision**] Ananias saw the Lord and actually heard His voice in a vision. Visions are not mere ideas in the mind, but real pictures to the eyes (Genesis 15:1; Numbers 12:6; Numbers 24:4,16; Job 33:15; Ezekiel 8:4; Ezekiel 43:3; Daniel 2:19; Daniel 7:2; Daniel 8:1-2,27; Daniel 9:21; Daniel 10:5-8; Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 1:22; Luke 24:23; Acts 10:3,17-19; Acts 11:5). See Twenty-one Men who Had Visions from God.

**A certain disciple—named Ananias**—A general opinion has prevailed in the Greek Church that this Ananias was one of the seventy-two disciples, and that he was martyred; and they celebrate his martyrdom on the first of October. It has been farther stated that his house was turned into a church, which remains to the present day, though now occupied as a Turkish mosque; but even the Mohammedans have the tradition, and treat his memory with great respect. However this may be, from Acts 22:12, we learn, what is of more importance, that he was a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there. See on Acts 9:17 (note).

**To him said the Lord in a vision**— In a strong impression made upon his mind, which left no doubt concerning its heavenly origin, nor of the truth of the things represented by it. It is very probable that the whole took place in a dream.

Another individual bears the name Ananias elsewhere in Acts (Acts 23:2), but this was a common name, the Greek form of the Hebrew Hananiah (e.g., Jeremiah 28:1; Daniel 1:6). His response is the proper one for an obedient servant of God ready to obey orders (1 Samuel 3:10; Isaiah 6:8). (Damascus, capital of modern Syria, was then the capital of the Nabatean Arabs.)

**JNTC: Chananyah** (“Ananias”) is described at 22:12 as being “an observant follower of the *Torah* who was highly regarded by the entire Jewish community” of Damascus. A *Torah* zealot like Sha’ul (22:3, Ga 1:13–14; also Ac 21:20, Ro 10:2) would not have found anyone else credible.

“**Here I am,**” Greek *Idou egô* (“Behold, I”), corresponding to Hebrew *Hineni*. Chananyah joined a select company when he gave this answer expressing ready and expectant submission to God. Avraham answered, “*Hineni!*” when God told him to sacrifice his son Yitzchak (Genesis 22:1), and also when the angel of *Adonai* told him to stay his hand (Genesis 22:11). Moshe answered, “*Hineni!*” to God’s call from the burning bush (Exodus 3:4). Shmu’el did the same when God first spoke to him (1 Samuel 3:4–10), likewise Yesha’yahu when the voice of *Adonai* asked, “Whom shall I send?” (Isaiah 6:8). Today anyone can say “*Hineni!*” to God by agreeing that he speaks to us through the Bible, repenting of his sins, accepting God’s forgiveness through Yeshua’s death as atonement, and offering himself to God unconditionally in obedient, holy service.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 9:10). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Saul's Encounter with Ananias. Jesus appeared to a believer in Damascus, instructing him to go to Saul, assist him in recovery of his sight, and inform him of his special calling.

**ESV:** The **Lord** is Jesus and not the Father (see v. 17). Ananias's response, **Here I am**, is reminiscent of OT predecessors such as Abraham (Gen. 22:1, 11), Jacob (Gen. 31:11; 46:2), Moses (Ex. 3:11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4–8), and Isaiah (Isa. 6:8).

### **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,**

“Street called Straight” - Goes East and West between the gates. Divided by Corinthian columns into three avenues: center for footmen; one for eastern traffic; one for western traffic. In eastern cities such would be the bazaar. About three miles now.

[**street**] Greek: *rhume* (GSN-4505). Translated "lane" (Luke 14:21) and "street" (Acts 9:11; Acts 12:10; Matthew 6:2).

[**house of Judas**] Nothing is known of this Judas.

[**Tarsus**] The capital of Cilicia, located on the Cydnus, and now called Tarasso. At one time it was a rival of Alexandria and Athens in the arts and sciences. Because the inhabitants during the time of Julius Caesar showed kindness to the Romans, they were granted full rights as Roman citizens (Acts 22:29; Acts 23:27).

[**he prayeth**] He was in earnest prayer to know the way of salvation and the will of God. He had not yet been saved from the law of sin and death. He had merely become awakened to his sinful state and was startled to know that he, in his zeal for God, had been fighting against God and Christ. It is this very period that Romans 7:7-25 describes: three days of physical blindness and spiritual struggle with the newly realized law of sin and death. In Romans 8:1-4 Paul was delivered from the law of sin and death. The historical record of this is in Acts 9:17-18. When Paul said he had lived in all good conscience to this day, he simply claimed that even in killing saints he was walking in all the light he knew at that time (Acts 23:1).<sup>26</sup>

**Clarke: Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight**—How very particular is this direction! And it was necessary that it should be so, that he might see the whole to be a Divine communication; the house was probably one in which Saul was accustomed to reside when at Damascus; and where he was known as a native of Tarsus. Tarsus was a city of Cilicia, seated on the Cydnus, and now called Tarasso. It was, at one period, the capital of all Cilicia, and became a rival to Alexandria and Athens in the arts and sciences. The inhabitants, in the time of Julius Caesar, having shown themselves friendly

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<sup>26</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

to the Romans, were endowed with all the privileges of Roman citizens; and it was on this account that St. Paul claimed the rights of a Roman citizen; a circumstance which, on different occasions, was to him, and the cause in which he was engaged, of considerable service.

**Clarke: Behold, he prayeth**—He is earnestly seeking to know my will, and to find the salvation of his soul; therefore, go speedily, and direct him. Some have laid needless stress on these words, as if they intimated, that “though Saul as a Pharisee had often said his prayers, yet he had never prayed them till now.” This is not correct: he could himself testify that, while he was a Pharisee, he had lived in all good conscience towards God; and consequently, in that time, made many faithful and fervent prayers; but he was praying now for instruction, and his prayers were speedily answered.

### **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.**

**[hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias]** Paul had already seen the vision of Ananias and now Ananias was dealt with by God to fulfill this vision.

**Clarke: Hath seen in a vision**—While God prepares Ananias, by a vision, to go and minister to Saul, he at the same time prepares Saul, by another vision, to profit by this ministry.

**[Ananias]** A Jew of Damascus (Acts 9:10; Acts 22:12); not the Ananias of Acts 5.

Each is informed about the other in a vision. Such twin visions occur rarely in ancient literature (e.g., Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.13; cf. *Tobit* 3); when they occur they allow no misunderstanding that the event was divinely coordinated (cf. *Genesis* 41:32). Ancient Jewish hospitality was great, and accommodations with a fellow Jew in Damascus would not be hard for Saul to secure, whether or not Judas has advance notice of Saul’s coming. Straight Street is probably the long street that ran east-west through Damascus, where tradition still places Judas’s ancient home.

Jews are attested in ancient Tarsus, the capital and most prominent city of Cilicia, which had prominent schools and boasted many philosophers. But cf. comment on *Acts* 22:3.

### **Ananias has a vision (9:10-12)**

Luke now introduces Ananias as the person through whom God will restore sight to Paul and explain his future. Ananias is a Jewish believer in Jesus from Damascus. Paul calls him "a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there" (22:12). Ananias has a vision from God in which he is told to go to the house of a man named Judas who lives on Straight Street in Damascus (9:11). This street is still one of the main thoroughfares of Damascus, the *Darb al-Mustaqim*. The traditional location of Judas’ house is at its west end.

Ananias is told that he will find Paul in this house, and he will be praying. Luke portrays Paul as a man of prayer (16:25; 20:36; 22:17) even as Jesus was in his earthly ministry (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:41). Luke also emphasizes that the church itself is a praying body. At crucial points in their personal lives and in the life of the church, the disciples pray for God's guidance and intervention (10:2, 9; 13:2-3; 14:23; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8).<sup>27</sup>

### **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:**

[**saints at Jerusalem**] All saved people are saints, so there is no grounds for making people saints after death (Acts 9:13,32,41; Acts 26:10; Romans 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 6:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Ephes. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 2 Thes. 1:10; Jude 1:3; Rev. 5:8; Rev. 13:7,10; Rev. 17:6).

### **Acts 9:14**

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

Ananias polite way of saying Lord do you know what you are talking about.

**Clarke: And here he hath authority, etc.**—Ananias had undoubtedly heard of Saul's coming, and the commission he had received from the chief priests; and he was about to urge this as a reason why he should have no connection with so dangerous a man.

“Not him, Lord; that's impossible. He could never become a Christian!” In essence, that's what Ananias said when God told him of Saul's conversion. After all, Saul had pursued believers to their death. Despite these understandable feelings, Ananias obeyed God and ministered to Saul. We must not limit God—he can do anything. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

### **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:**

[**Go thy way ...**] The 6th New Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 9:15-16, fulfilled). Next, Acts 11:28.

[**chosen**] Greek: *ekloge* (GSN-1589). Translated "election" (Romans 9:11; Romans 11:5,7,28; 1 Thes. 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10) and "chosen" (Acts 9:15). See the Four Elect's of God.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

[**vessel**] Greek: *skeuos* (GSN-4632). Used of material vessels (Mark 11:16; Luke 8:16; John 19:29; Acts 10:11,16; Acts 11:5; 2 Tim. 2:20; Hebrews 9:21; Rev. 2:27; Rev. 18:12) and of people (Acts 9:15; Romans 9:21-23; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thes. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Peter 3:7).

[**bear**] Greek: *bastazo* (GSN-941), to take up with the hands; raise as a flag; carry as a banner; support, exalt, and hold upright.

**JNTC: To carry my name to the Goyim**, Greek *ethnê*, “nations, pagans, Gentiles” (see Mt 5:47N). This astounding turn of events, after two thousand years in which God’s working in human history was largely mediated through the Jewish people, is the main theme of the book of Acts (see 1:8&N).<sup>28</sup>

### **Acts 9:16**

**For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.**

[**shew**] Greek: *hupodeiknumi* (GSN-5263), forewarn (Acts 9:16; Acts 20:35; Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7; Luke 6:47; Luke 12:5).

[**he must suffer for my names's sake**] Instead of expending his life in persecuting others he must expend it in being persecuted for that very preaching he once persecuted. This itself is proof of the reality of Christianity.

**Clarke: How great things he must suffer**—Instead of proceeding as a persecutor, and inflicting sufferings on others, I will show him how many things he himself must suffer for preaching that very doctrine which he has been hitherto employed in persecuting. Strange change indeed! And with great show of reason, as with incontrovertible strength of argument, has a noble writer, Lord Lyttleton, adduced the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and his subsequent conduct, as an irrefragable proof of the truth of Christianity. Some think that the words, I will show him, etc., refer to a visionary representation, which Christ was immediately to give Saul, of the trials and difficulties which he should have to encounter; as also of that death by which he should seal his testimony to the truth. If so, what a most thorough conviction must Saul have had of the truth of Christianity, cheerfully and deliberately to give up all worldly honors and profits, and go forward in a work which he knew a violent death was to terminate!

Faith in Christ brings great blessings but often great suffering too. Paul would suffer for his faith (see 2 Cor. 11:23-27). God calls us to commitment, not to comfort. He promises to be with us *through* suffering and hardship, not to spare us from them.

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<sup>28</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 9:15). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

**McGee:** God states two reasons for calling Saul. He was God's chosen vessel for two things. First, he was to bear the name of Jesus. Notice that he is not called a *witness* as the disciples were. Although Paul may have seen Jesus at His crucifixion, he had not walked with Him in the days of His flesh. He really knew nothing about Him until that day on the road to Damascus. Now he is to bear that name. That is the same name we are to bear today, the name of Jesus.

He is to bear that name before three different groups: Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Gentiles are first on the list. Paul will be the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Then to kings—he will appear before kings, probably including Nero himself, and then to the nation Israel. When Paul goes into a city, he always will begin in the Jewish synagogue. The synagogue will be his springboard to put him into the community, into the life of the city. From there he will reach the Gentiles. But he will go to the Jews first.

Secondly, the Lord said He will show Saul how great things he must suffer for His name's sake. He is chosen to suffer for Jesus Christ. In my judgment, there has never been anyone else who has suffered for the Lord as Paul the apostle suffered. None of us dare say, "I'm suffering more than anyone else. Why does God let this happen to me?" We may be suffering or we may think we are suffering more than we are. At any rate, none of us suffer as Paul the apostle suffered for the Lord.

Now as we look back on this remarkable conversion, you may remember that I said conversion requires the Holy Spirit using the Word of God through a man of God. Does this prove true in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus?

The Lord Jesus appeared to Saul personally. Before the Lord Jesus left His disciples, He told them that He was going away but that He would not leave them orphans. He promised them that He would send His Holy Spirit, and this is what the Spirit would do: "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:14–15). Now I think that when our resurrected Lord appeared to Saul personally, the Spirit of God opened his eyes spiritually and closed them physically so that he might see the Lord Jesus. So the Holy Spirit was definitely at work.

How about the Word of God? How was that used in the conversion of Paul? Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee. He knew a great deal about the Word of God. In fact, if there ever has been anyone saturated with the Word of God, he was Saul of Tarsus. When reading his epistles, it becomes obvious that he was very familiar with the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God were operative in Saul's conversion.

How can one say that God used a man of God as the human instrument to reach Saul? Although a man of God was not present at the time, I believe the man whom the Lord used to reach Saul was none other than Stephen. These two young men, Saul and Stephen, met only once, and that was when Saul stood with those who killed him. Stephen had looked up into the heavens and said, "I see heaven open and Jesus standing there!" (see Acts 7:56). Saul of Tarsus looked up into the heavens and couldn't see anything. Then he looked into the face of Stephen and he knew that Stephen was actually seeing something. I believe that Saul actually hoped that the heavens would open and that he, too, could have a vision of God. And he did on the Damascus road. It was Jesus Christ who was revealed to him.

I believe that God uses a human instrument in the conversion of every individual, although that individual may not be present at the moment of the conversion. That is the reason you and I should cast our influence for the Lord Jesus Christ at all times.

Recently I received a letter from a man who is a barber. A certain man had been his customer for twenty years. One time when the customer got out of the chair and was paying for his haircut, he asked the barber, "Have you ever heard Dr. McGee on the radio?" The barber said he had not; so the customer walked over to his radio and turned it to the station on which we can be heard in that town. He said, "Every morning at eight o'clock! You listen to him!" That was the last time these two men saw each other. The customer died suddenly within a day or so. You can guess the end of the story. The barber started listening to the program. He had been listening to it for over two years when he wrote to me. He has come to know Jesus Christ as his Savior. The human instrument in his conversion was his old customer.

Dr. C.I. Scofield is the man who edited the Scofield Bible. Before his conversion he was an outstanding international lawyer, but he had the problem of being a very heavy drinker. He had a godly mother who prayed for him continually. She died before Dr. Scofield was converted. On one occasion Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was praying with Dr. Scofield. He told us that he heard Dr. Scofield say, "Lord, if my mother doesn't know that I have been converted. would You please tell her so?" God uses a human instrument in the conversion of every person, although that person may not be present at the moment of conversion. I don't think a person can be converted without a human instrument. So why don't *you* be an instrument? That doesn't mean you have to get a person to his knees; it does mean that you get the good news of Jesus Christ to him. There will not be a real conversion without a man of God using the Word of God, directed by the Spirit of God.

Now, going back to Saul of Tarsus where we left him in Damascus, he is still sitting in solitary blindness, praying. Brilliant young man that he is, he is still somewhat confused since his conversion. So the Spirit of God appeared to Ananias and sent him over to help him.<sup>29</sup>

### **Afraid of Paul (9:13-16)**

Ananias is quite hesitant about going to meet Paul. He has heard reports about him and knows that he came to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest Christians. Ananias refers to the Christians as "saints" (*hagioi*). This is the first time Luke uses the term in describing the church community (also in 9:41 and 26:10). The saints or holy ones are those whom God sets apart for his service. All Christians are saints. They are not "saints" because of their own goodness but because of what God does to them, making them his own. Christians are commonly called saints in the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters. (See, for example, Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 6:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:4; and Ephesians 1:1.)

Even though Paul has persecuted the saints, the Lord insisted that Ananias visit Paul. Ananias is told: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15).

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<sup>29</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:549). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Once Paul receives his commission, he continues to regard himself as someone who has been "set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). (See also Galatians 1:15-16 and Ephesians 3:7-9 for Paul's understanding of his distinctive election to special service.) Paul's threefold witness before Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel amounts to a programmatic prophecy for his life's mission. Luke describes Paul's work in Acts in terms of this commission.

Paul will take the gospel to the Gentiles (13:46-47) and defend himself before kings such as Agrippa, and even Caesar (26:2-23; 25:12). Paul will also preach to the "people of Israel." At almost every turn Paul begins his preaching in the Jewish synagogue (14:1; 17:2; 18:19). However, while Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews ("the circumcision"), we must not draw too hard a line on this division of labor. After all, Peter opens the way to the Gentile world by preaching the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius. And Paul regularly preaches to Jews.

Paul's calling will not be filled with personal glory, however. He is forewarned that he will have a life of pain and distress. In the words of Jesus, delivered to Paul through Ananias: "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (9:16).<sup>30</sup>

### **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.**

**[brother, and sister, and mother]** Used of relatives (Genesis 14:16; Genesis 29:12); neighbors (Deut. 23:7); any Israelite (Leviticus 19:17; Deut. 22:1-4; Jeremiah 34:9); any man (Genesis 9:5; 1 John 3:15); a companion (2 Samuel 1:26). It is a fraternal epithet among Christians (Acts 9:17; Acts 21:20; 1 Cor. 7:12; 2 Cor. 2:13; Hebrews 2:11-12; 1 Peter 1:22).

**[even Jesus]** This word is not in the Greek. Here Jesus is called Lord. He was made "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Christians in Acts call Him "Lord Jesus" 21 times. Peter calls Him "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). Jesus calls Himself "Lord" (Acts 9:5; Acts 22:8; Acts 26:15). The Greek: *kurios* (GSN-2962) is the common equivalent of the Old Testament Jehovah and is used 667 times of both the Father and the Son. Both are Jehovah and Lord but two separate persons of the Deity (Matthew 22:44; Psalm 110:1).

When Ananias came to Saul, the first thing he did was to identify the One who sent him, the Lord Jesus, as the same One whom Saul met on the road to Damascus.

**[filled with the Holy Ghost]** The first instance of the Holy Spirit being imparted through an ordinary believer (cp. Acts 8:14-23; Acts 19:1-7; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

**Clarke: Brother Saul**—As he found that the Head of the Church had adopted Saul into the heavenly family, he made no scruple to give him the right hand of fellowship, and therefore said, Brother Saul.

**Clarke: And be filled with the Holy Ghost**—So it appears that the Holy Spirit was given to him at this time, and probably by the imposition of the hands of Ananias. To say that it would be degrading to an apostle to receive the Holy Ghost by means of one who was not an apostle is a very flimsy argument against the evidence which the text affords that Saul did receive this Spirit by the ministry of Ananias: besides, Saul was not an apostle at this time; he was not even a Christian; and the Holy Ghost, which he received now, was given more to make him a thorough Christian convert than to make him an apostle. No person will deny that he was baptized by Ananias; and certainly there was as strong an objection against an apostle receiving baptism from one who was not an apostle as there could be in receiving the Holy Spirit from such a person. It is very likely that Ananias was either one of the seventy disciples commissioned by Jesus Christ himself, or one of those who had been converted on the day of pentecost. If he were the former, any authority that man could have he had. But who was the instrument is a matter of little importance; as the apostleship, and the grace by which it was to be fulfilled, came immediately from Jesus Christ himself. Nor has there ever been an apostle, nor a legitimate successor of an apostle, that was not made such by Christ himself. If we consider the authority as coming by man, or through any description of men, we should be arrested and confounded by the difficult question, Who baptized the apostles? Jesus Christ baptized no man, John 4:2. Who then baptized Peter! Can the Roman conclave answer this question? I trow not. It would be as difficult to answer it as to prove Peter's supremacy. We have no evidence who baptized the apostles, who themselves baptized so many others. The truth is, none but Christ ever made an apostle; and none but himself can make and qualify a Christian minister.

Ananias found Saul, as he had been instructed, and greeted him as “Brother Saul.” Ananias feared this meeting because Saul had come to Damascus to capture the believers and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). But in obedience to the Holy Spirit, Ananias greeted Saul lovingly. It is not always easy to show love to others, especially when we are afraid of them or doubt their motives. Nevertheless, we must follow Jesus' command (John 13:34) and Ananias's example, showing loving acceptance to other believers.

Although there is no mention of a special filling of the Holy Spirit for Saul, his changed life and subsequent accomplishments bear strong witness to the Holy Spirit's presence and power in his life. Evidently, the Holy Spirit filled Saul when he received his sight and was baptized.

**McGee:** What a change! He is still Saul of Tarsus, but now he is *Brother* Saul. He is not the enemy. He is a brother. Any person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ is a brother to any other believer. Unfortunately, I must add that brothers don't always act like brothers.

Saul is to receive his physical sight. Also, he is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is to be filled with the Holy Spirit for service. This is the experience which reveals itself in

the life of the believer. He was baptized with the Holy Spirit on the Damascus road. In other words, he was saved on the Damascus road. But it wasn't until this man Ananias came to him that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He is going to become a witness for the Lord Jesus. He will receive his physical sight and his spiritual sight.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ananias visits Paul**

With this understanding about Paul's future role, Ananias goes to the house of Judas, meets Paul, and places his hands on him. He says: "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17). By laying his hands on Paul and calling him brother, Ananias is welcoming him into the community of believers. Immediately, something falls from Paul's eyes, and he can see again. Ananias now leaves the story as mysteriously as he enters it.

In Acts 22, Luke gives a fuller account of Ananias' part in the conversion. There, he describes Paul's commission in these words: "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth" (22:14). The title "the Righteous One" refers to the Messiah. This is the title Stephen uses in his Sanhedrin speech when he accuses the council of rejecting their Messiah (7:52). Paul, who may have heard the speech, is now faced with accepting the One he rejected, and whose messenger he approved of killing.

Ananias also tells Paul that he will be a witness to all people of what he has seen and heard. Finally, Ananias tells Paul: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (22:16). Paul responds immediately. He is "baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength" (9:18-19). Though Luke doesn't directly say so, Paul receives the Holy Spirit. That, after all, is a major reason why Ananias is sent to Paul—to lay his hands on him so he might receive the Spirit (9:17). "That Saul should have received the filling of the Spirit through the imposition of the hands of such an obscure disciple as Ananias shows clearly that Luke did not reckon the imposition of *apostolic* hands to be necessary for this" (F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, revised edition, page 188).<sup>32</sup>

### **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.**

Cf. Acts 22:12-21

[**scales**] Greek: *lepis* (GSN-3013). Only here, but in Leviticus 11:9-10 of the Septuagint.

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<sup>31</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:550). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>32</sup><http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

[baptized] Water baptism followed the receiving of the Spirit here and in Acts 10:44-48, but preceded it in Acts 2, Acts 8, and Acts 19.

**Clarke: There fell from his eyes as it had been scales**—This was real: he had been so dazzled with the brightness of the light that we may suppose the globe of the eye, and particularly the cornea, had suffered considerable injury. The structure of the cornea was doubtless much disturbed, and the whole of that humor would be rendered opaque, and incapable of permitting the rays of light to pass through the different humours to the retina, where all the images of things transmitted through the lenses, or humours, are distinctly painted. In the miraculous cure the membrane was restored to its primitive state, and the opaque matter separated from the cornea, in the form of thin laminae or scales. This being done, the light would have as free a passage as formerly, and the result would be distinct vision.

The healing may have not been complete in the since that Paul may refer to this ailment as the thorn in his side.

*(2 Cor 12:7-10) <sup>7</sup>And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. <sup>8</sup>For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup>And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

**Didn't recognize the High Priest:**

*(Acts 23:4-5) <sup>4</sup>And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? <sup>5</sup>Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

*(Gal 4:15) Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*

*(Gal 6:11) Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.*

**Clarke: And arose, and was baptized**—That he was baptized by Ananias there is every reason to believe; as he appears to have been the chief Christian at Damascus. As baptism implied, in an adult, the public profession of that faith into which he was baptized, this baptism of Saul proved, at once, his own sincerity, and the deep and thorough conviction he had of the truth of Christianity.

**ESV: something like scales fell from his eyes.** This physical event was also a symbol that Saul's spiritual blindness had been overcome and he could now see and understand the truth (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14 for a related image). (Note that the change of Saul's name to Paul [which will be first reported in Acts 13:9] is not connected with his conversion; he continues having a right to both names, the first Jewish, the second Roman; Paul continues to call himself [and to be called] Saul until his ministry in Cyprus [13:9].) **was baptized.** Through baptism Saul made an immediate public declaration of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

### **Acts 9:19**

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

**Clarke: When he had received meat, he was strengthened**—His mind must have been greatly worn down under his three days' conviction of sin, and the awful uncertainty he was in concerning his state; but when he was baptized, and had received the Holy Ghost, his soul was Divinely invigorated; and now, by taking food, his bodily strength, greatly exhausted by three days' fasting, was renewed also. The body is not supported by the bread of life, nor the soul by the bread that perisheth: each must have its proper aliment, that the whole man may be invigorated, and be enabled to perform all the functions of the animal and spiritual life with propriety and effect.

**Clarke: Then was Saul certain days with the disciples**—Doubtless under instructions, relative to the doctrines of Christianity; which he must learn particularly, in order to preach them successfully. His miraculous conversion did not imply that he must then have a consummate knowledge of every Christian doctrine. To this day we find that even the genuine Christian convert has a thousand things to learn; and for his instruction he is placed in the Church of Christ, where he is built up on his most holy faith by the ministry and experience of the disciples. Without the communion of saints, who is likely to make a steady and consistent Christian; even though his conversion should have been the most sincere and the most remarkable?

### **Acts 9:20**

**And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.**

**[Son of God]** - word appears in John's epistles 23x; Paul's epistles 29x; Peter's confession at Caesarea Phillipi 1x.

**[straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues]** The Holy Spirit anointing enabled Paul to preach immediately. In prayer he received an abundance of revelations from God (1 Cor. 2:1-16; 2 Cor. 12:1,7; Galatians 1:11-16; Galatians 2:7). He had studied Scripture for years and by the new anointing of the Spirit he could and did preach and convince men that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9:20,22).

**[Son of God]** Although Saul had carried the letters authorizing his mission (Acts 9:2) on his own person and presumably not delivered them, word of his mission had gotten around in Damascus's Jewish community. "Son of God" is characteristic of Paul's style, not Luke's; writers tried to imitate the style of those whose speeches they reported, and it is not likely that Luke would know Paul's style this early unless he knows him personally

**McGee:** Saul of Tarsus begins to witness immediately. Why? Because he is filled with the Holy Spirit. He began to preach "Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

Friend, you must know who Christ is before you can believe what He did. He died to pay the penalty for your sins. It is because He is the Son of God that He could die for your sins. I couldn't die for your sins; you couldn't die for mine. No human being can die a redemptive death for another human being. Only Christ could do this, because He is the Son of God. So Saul began to preach that Christ is the Son of God. That is the first thing you must know.

**ESV:** Saul likely received instruction in the Christian "way" from the **disciples at Damascus**. In Galatians, Paul notes that during this time he "went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" (Gal. 1:17). ("Arabia" here means the Nabatean Kingdom, northeast of the Dead Sea, not the Arabian Peninsula.) **synagogues**. The pattern of Paul's beginning his witness in the synagogues occurs throughout Acts, as does the pattern of opposition developing there (Acts 9:23)

### **Paul's early preaching**

After spending a few days with the disciples in Damascus, Paul begins "to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (9:20). The fact that Paul wastes no time in beginning his witness demonstrates that he is to perform a vital mission. But we should note that he preaches to Jews, not Gentiles. Paul almost always begins his preaching in a synagogue. He goes to a synagogue first, and then moves to other places only after he is rejected and expelled (13:5, 13-16; 14:1; 16:13, 16; 17:1; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 28:17).

The substance of Paul's initial preaching is a basic and simple gospel of Jesus' Messiahship, as understood by the church. Jesus died and was resurrected. He fulfilled the role of the hoped-for Messiah, and Jews should put their faith in him because he represents salvation for his hearers. Luke says that Paul preaches that "Jesus is the Son of God" (9:20), without explaining how this term is understood; this is the only time in Acts that this title appears. In his own writings, Paul uses the title "Son of God" and "Son" 15 times. These are scattered throughout several of his epistles. (Some examples are Romans 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:19; Galatians 2:20.)

Paul is now asserting the very things about Jesus that he persecuted others for saying. Naturally, the unconverted Jews are astonished at the almost unbelievable turnaround in Paul's attitude toward Jesus and the church. The man who was the sworn enemy of the Christians is now preaching Jesus. Luke records the bewilderment of those who hear him: "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" (9:21).

But Paul grows more powerful in his preaching and baffles "the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (9:22). The verb "proving" used here literally means "placing together," "bringing together," or "comparing." That is, Paul is

placing Old Testament references to the Messiah with each other—and alongside their fulfillment in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. This placing together is meant to lead Jews to see Jesus as the one who fulfilled what the Scriptures say about their hoped-for Messiah.<sup>33</sup>

### **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?**

**[amazed]** Greek: *existemi* (GSN-1839) this is the word that was translated as bewitched in Acts 8:9. To drive out of one's senses; to be amazed beyond measure (cp. Acts 2:7,12; Mark 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

**[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?]** This is question number 38 in Acts. The next question is in Acts 10:4.

**[destroyed]** Greek: *portheo* (GSN-4199), to waste (Galatians 1:13) and destroy (Acts 9:21; Galatians 1:23). It means to treat one as an enemy, destroy his goods, imprison him, and slay him. All this Paul did (Acts 7:58; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9:1-6,14; Acts 26:10-11).

The Jews **were astonished**. This response is understandable. The Greek verb *existanto* is literally, “they were beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses”; several other people had the same response to Jesus (Mark 2:12; 5:42; 6:51). This word is used in Acts five times (2:7; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). Saul’s intense persecution campaign had **raised havoc in Jerusalem** (cf. 8:3; 22:19; 26:11).<sup>34</sup>

### **Acts 9:22**

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

**[increased the more in strength]** Greek: *enedunamoo* (GSN-1743), was strengthened (Romans 4:20; Ephes. 6:10; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:17; Hebrews 11:34).

**[confounded the Jews]** Overwhelmed them with arguments until they blushed at their weak ones.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

cf. *confer*, compare

<sup>34</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:377). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

**[proving]** Greek: *sumbibazo* (GSN-4822), join together (Ephes. 4:16; Col. 2:2,19); compare, conclude (Acts 16:10); to bring to the same opinion by proven facts (Acts 9:22); to teach (1 Cor. 2:16). The idea here is that by comparing the life and works of Christ with the prophets it was clear that He was the Messiah. Instead of searching the Scriptures to see if these things be so, the Damascenes were occupied with the change in Saul's attitude and so failed to believe. Hence, there is no record of a Christian church in Damascus (cp. Acts 17:11-12).

Saul's arguments were powerful because he was a brilliant scholar. But what was more convincing was his changed life. People knew that what he taught was real because they could see the evidence in the way he lived. It is important to know what the Bible teaches and how to defend the faith, but your words should be backed up with a changed life.

The "very Christ" means the *very Messiah*. Saul confounded the Jews by preaching this. Saul of Tarsus is number one in several departments. He is number one in suffering; he is number one as a missionary. I think he is also number one in his I.Q.—he was a brilliant man. He was able to confound those who attempted to tackle him intellectually.<sup>35</sup>

### **Acts 9:23**

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

There is about a three-year gap missing here. At least two years of which he goes to Arabia (Gal 1:15-18; 1 Cor 15:1-4).

The Sinai desert preparation was for both Moses and Elijah, and Paul also. Paul insists that what he preaches he got directly from Jesus, not from Paul or the apostles. When? Probably in Arabia.

God never uses for the great work of interpreting His Kingdom any man who has not been definitely called and spiritually trained.

Jerusalem vs. Antioch: Gal 4:25.

Saul returns to Damascus, escapes to Jerusalem; then returns to Tarsus. (Later because of a new movement in Antioch, Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find him.) Between Damascus road apprehension and Jerusalem was three years.

**[after that many days were fulfilled]** After about three years when he had come a second time to Damascus and after being in Arabia that long (Galatians 1:18; 2 Cor. 11:32). Compare 1 Kings 2:38-39 where "many days" also implies three years.

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<sup>35</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:551). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[took counsel] Greek: *sumbouleuo* (GSN-4823), plotted (Acts 9:23; Matthew 26:4; John 11:53; John 18:14; Rev. 3:18).

**Clarke: And after that many days were fulfilled**—What follows relates to transactions which took place about three years after his conversion, when he had come a second time to Damascus, after having been in Arabia. See Galatians 1:17, 18. What he did in Arabia we know not; he probably preached Christ in different Jewish synagogues; but with what fruit we are not told. St. Luke, who could not have been ignorant of this part of his history, passes it over in silence; and any assertion, at this distance of time, RELATIVE to his employment in Arabia for those three years, must be both foolish and impertinent.

According to Galatians 1:17-18, Paul left Damascus and traveled to Arabia, the desert region just southeast of Damascus, where he lived for three years. It is unclear whether his three-year stay occurred between Acts 9:22 and Acts 9:23, or between Acts 9:25 and Acts 9:26. Some commentators say that “many days” could mean a long period of time. They suggest that when Paul returned to Damascus, the governor under Aretas ordered his arrest (2 Cor. 11:32), in an effort to keep peace with influential Jews.

The other possibility is that Paul’s night escape occurred during his first stay in Damascus, just after his conversion, when the Pharisees were especially upset over his defection from their ranks. He would have fled to Arabia to spend time alone with God and to let the Jewish religious leaders cool down. Regardless of which theory is correct, there was a period of at least three years between Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:3-6) and his trip to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26).

**ESV: The Jews** does not mean all Jews, of course, since many Jews had believed in Jesus and Paul himself was a Jew. But from this point forward in Acts, Luke often uses the phrase “the Jews” as a shorthand expression to refer to Jewish people who opposed the gospel (see 12:3; 13:45, 50; 14:4; 17:5, 13; 18:12, 14, 28; 19:33; 20:3, 19; etc.). Often it is the leaders of communities who are involved in this rejection. **plotted to kill him.** Enemies of the gospel cannot defeat it by free and open debate, so they often resort to force, falsehood, murder, and governmental suppression (cf. 9:29). But the gospel is from God and cannot be stopped. Elsewhere Paul specifies that “the governor under King Aretas” was helping in the attempt to kill him (see 2 Cor. 11:32–33).

### **Acts 9:24**

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

[gates] ordered to be guarded by the King (2 Cor 11:32,33).

**Clarke: They watched the gates day and night to kill him**—At this time Damascus was under the government of Aretas, king of Arabia, who was now at war with Herod, his son-in-law, who had put away his daughter in order to marry Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. As Herod was supported by the Romans, Saul’s enemies might intimate that he was in league with them or Herod; and, as the gates of the city were constantly

watched and shut, that no spy might enter, and no fugitive get away, they thought it would be easy to apprehend him; and doubtless got orders for the different officers at the gates to be on the look-out that he might not be permitted to escape.

**Barnes: Was known of Saul.** Was made known to him. In what way this was communicated we do not know. This design of the Jews against Saul is referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:32, 33, where it is said, "In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king kept the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped their hands."

Saul's Jewish opponents plan to assassinate him, not to execute him legally; but his own account in 2 Cor. 11:32-33 indicates that they had secured the cooperation of high officials in the Damascus government. Saul's preaching in other Greek cities under the control of Aretas IV of Nabatea (9 B.C.-A.D. 40) for as long as three years (Galatians 1:17) had possibly aroused opposition.

### **Acts 9:25**

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

**Let him down, by the wall** Probably, by a house built against or upon the wall, through the window of which they could lower him in a basket; and this way would have made his escape. His escape was something similar to that of the spies at Jericho, Joshua 2:15.

**Barnes: In a basket.** This word is used to denote commonly the basket in which food was carried, Matthew 15:37, Mark 8:8,20. This conduct of Saul was in accordance with the direction of the Lord Jesus, Matthew 10:23, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another," etc. Saul was certain of death if he remained; and as he could secure his life by flight without abandoning any principle of religion, or denying his Lord, it was his duty to do so. Christianity requires us to sacrifice our lives only when we cannot avoid it without denying the Saviour, or abandoning the principles of our holy religion.

**McGee:** 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.<sup>36</sup>

**ESV:** Sometimes God does not call his people to stand and lose their lives but rather to escape from the danger that he has revealed to them. Because **his disciples took** decisive action, Paul's life was preserved for his future ministry, for at this point he had not begun his major missionary journeys or written any of his letters.

### **Paul escapes (9:23-25)**

It is only be a matter of time before Paul himself becomes the target of persecution. Luke tells us that after Paul preaches for "many days" in Damascus, the Jews conspire to kill him (9:23). Paul somehow learns of the plot, but getting out of the city will be difficult. Jewish spies are watching the city gates night and day in hopes of spotting Paul and killing him. But the disciples devise a plan of escape. "His followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall" (9:25; 2 Corinthians 11:33). Houses were often part of the city wall, and their upper-floor windows opened to the outside of the city. This is apparently what Luke means by "an opening in the wall."

Paul's preaching in Damascus and his escape take place "after many days had gone by" (9:23). In Galatians, Paul gives a more exact time, saying the escape and his first trip to Jerusalem occur three years after his conversion (1:18). Paul also adds something to Luke's story of his escape in another letter. The extra details shows the extent of the conspiracy against him. He said in 2 Corinthians that "the governor under King Aretas" had Damascus guarded (11:32-33). This means that the Jews of Damascus are in league with a pagan political ruler in trying to track down Paul, just as the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem allied with pagan rulers in the crucifixion of Jesus.

After his escape, Paul returns to Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup>

### **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.**

[**assayed**] Greek: peirao (GSN-3985), tried. He sought fellowship with Christians, but they either did not believe that such a person would be saved, or they thought he was spying to find out whom to prosecute for being Christians. They did not suppose it possible that such a person could be converted to the faith of Christ. The full power of Divine grace, in the conversion of the soul, was not yet completely known.

### **Church suspicious (9:26)**

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, he finds that the church members are gravely suspicious of him. How can it be otherwise? The church still remembers, even after three years, how Paul dragged its members off to prison and had them flogged and beaten. Paul puts the

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<sup>36</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:551). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

feelings of the church regarding his turnaround in these words: "He who persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23). The church cannot deny Paul is preaching Christ, but perhaps they are not quite sure of his motives.

Still, some commentators are puzzled as to why the rank and file of the church should still be so distrustful of Paul. Surely, they heard of his dramatic conversion, his preaching activity and the persecution he suffered. Perhaps the church thinks that Paul's "conversion" is only part of an elaborate plot, a scheme to penetrate its ranks to ferret out believers for punishment. Whatever the case, Luke tells us the disciples don't believe he has really converted (9:26).

There's an indication that even the apostles are somewhat apprehensive of him. That may seem surprising, but none of them know Paul personally, except as a fanatic enemy (Galatians 1:17). The apostles may wonder why Paul, if he is really converted, did not contact them or the Jerusalem church for three years.<sup>38</sup>

### **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.**

**[Barnabas]** a Levite; a native of Cyprus (annexed as a Roman province, near coast of Cilicia where Saul was born. Both were Hellenistic Jews and eminent in their respective localities; he may have known him before. **[Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas]** Some texts read Joseph Barnabas, the same as Joseph Barnabas in Acts 1:23, called "Son of Consolation." See note, Acts 13:15. He became a prophet and an apostle (Acts 13:1; Acts 14:14). He brought Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:25-27). A co-worker with Paul (Acts 11:30; Acts 12:25; Acts 13:1-15:35). Separated from Paul (Acts 15:36-41). He went astray from truth (Galatians 2). He was reconciled to Paul (1 Cor. 9:6).

**[apostles]** Peter and James (Galatians 1:19). Why the saints at Jerusalem had not known of Paul's conversion three years before is not clear. He perhaps was unheard of during the three years in Arabia. If they had heard of his change at all they had no proof of it. He was no doubt a total stranger to the Christians at Jerusalem.

**McGee:** Good old Barnabas, whose very name means the "son of consolation and comfort"! He comes over and puts his arm around Saul. What a blessing he was to him! How we still need people who will put their arms around some new Christian and will help that new Christian along. Barnabas becomes the sponsor of Saul.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

<sup>39</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:551). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Clarke: Barnabas—brought him to the apostles**—That is, to Peter and James; for others of the apostles he saw none, Galatians 1:19. It appears that he went up at this time to Jerusalem merely to see Peter, with whom he abode fifteen days, Galatians 1:18. How it came that the apostles and Church at Jerusalem had not heard of Saul's conversion, which had taken place three years before, is not easy to be accounted for. The following considerations may help;

1. It is certain that intelligence did not travel speedily in those primitive times; there were few open roads, and no regular posts, except those between military stations.
2. Though there were many Jews in Damascus, and several Christians, yet the city was heathen, and under a heathen king, with whom the Jews at Jerusalem could have little commerce.
3. Though Herod had married the daughter of Aretas, yet, as he had put her away, there were great animosities between the two courts, which at last broke out into an open war; this must have prevented all social and commercial intercourse.
4. The Christians were at that time greatly persecuted by the Jews, and therefore the few that dwelt at Damascus could have little connection, if any, with their brethren at Jerusalem.
5. It might be the interest of the Jews at Jerusalem, supposing they had heard of it, to keep the fact of Saul's conversion as quiet as possible, that the Christian cause might not gain credit by it.
6. They might have heard of his conversion; but either did not fully credit what they had heard, or were not satisfied that the person who now presented himself was the man; for it is not likely that all the Christians at Jerusalem had been personally acquainted with Saul.

It is difficult to change your reputation, and Saul had a terrible reputation with the Christians. But Barnabas, a Jewish convert (mentioned in Acts 4:36), became the bridge between Saul and the apostles. New Christians (especially those with tarnished reputations) need sponsors, people who will come alongside, encourage, teach, and introduce them to other believers. Find ways that you can become a Barnabas to new believers.

Galatians 1:18-19 explains that Paul was in Jerusalem only 15 days and that he met only with Peter and James.

### **Paul in Jerusalem (9:27)**

Barnabas, whom Luke introduced earlier (4:36-37), now comes on the scene and saves the day for Paul. He brings Paul to the apostles and recounts to them his conversion and preaching in Damascus (9:27). One might wonder why Barnabas is the only person willing to vouch for Paul and take a chance in accepting him as a true believer. Whatever the reasons, Barnabas' action is certainly in keeping with his character (4:36-37; 11:22-30; 13:1-14:28; 15:2-4, 12, 22). He seems to be a good judge of a person's true self.

Ironically, Barnabas will later show the same kind of take-a-chance generosity to Mark (15:37-40), whom Paul will reject as an unworthy ministerial aide. In the end, Paul will see that Barnabas was right in giving Mark another opportunity to minister (2 Timothy 4:11).

Barnabas brought Paul "to the apostles," a phrase that at first look seems to refer to all of them (9:27). However, Paul says that on this occasion he stays with Peter for 15 days and "saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother" (9:18-19). Luke is apparently using a generalizing term. If someone sees Peter and James, the leading apostles, it is as though the person sees them all. If those two accept you, then the others will as well.

Luke says that during this visit to Jerusalem Paul "stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem" (9:27). Paul says in Galatians that he stayed with Peter, and saw James. Perhaps he also stayed with James for a time. This might account for Luke's assertion that "Saul stayed with *them*." We can take this as Luke's use of another general plural.

We don't know how long Paul stays in Jerusalem, but his visit probably amounts to weeks, not months. During part of his visit, Paul might also stay at his sister's house in the city (23:16). That he sees none of the other apostles need not seem strange. They may be doing evangelistic work elsewhere.

In Galatians Paul makes another statement about his visit that seems to contradict what Luke writes. In his epistle, Paul writes that he is "personally unknown to the churches of Judea" (Galatians 1:22). Yet, Luke says Paul preached in public, moved about freely, and had meetings with Peter and James—even staying with Peter.

The answer may be that Paul confines his public appearances to debates with the Jewish Hellenists in Jerusalem. Although Galatians says Paul does not meet with the disciples in the churches around Judea, it does not say he doesn't meet any of the *Jerusalem* believers. The answer may be that Paul's stay is confined to Jerusalem; he is therefore not known to Christian communities scattered about Judea. Because of the disciples' suspicion and fear of Paul, they probably would not make any effort to see him anyway.<sup>40</sup>

### **Acts 9:28**

**And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.**

**[with them] He was with them coming in and going out**—Freely conversing and associating with them; but this seems to have continued only fifteen days. See Galatians 1:18.

### **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.**

**[disputed]** (only here and 6:9 in Acts) with Hellenistic Jews. Saul picks up the ministry of Stephen, the very man to whose death he consented.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

**[boldly]** Greek: parrhesiazomai (GSN-3955), to have boldness, especially in speaking (Acts 9:27,29; Acts 13:46; Acts 14:3; Acts 18:26; Acts 19:8; Acts 26:26; Ephes. 6:20; 1 Thes. 2:2).

**[Grecians]** See Acts 6:1. Greek-speaking Jews of the dispersion who sojourned at Jerusalem but who had lived in various countries where Greek was spoken.

**Clarke: Disputed against the Grecians**—That is, the Hellenistic Jews, viz. those who lived in Grecian cities, spoke the Greek language, and used the Septuagint version for their scriptures. And thus the Syriac version has interpreted this place. See the note on Acts 6:1, where this subject is largely explained.

These are not Greeks. They are Israelites who have a Greek background. They had been brought up outside Israel somewhere in the Greek world. The witness of Saul was so powerful that they concluded the only way to get rid of his effectiveness was to eliminate him, to kill him.

The Hellenists here are not the same as the Jewish believers called “Hellenists” in 6:1; in this instance they were Jews and not Christians, perhaps some of the same who had seized Stephen (6:8–14). (For the term “Hellenist,” see note on 6:1.)

### **Speaks boldly (9:28-29)**

During his stay in Jerusalem Paul speaks “boldly in the name of the Lord” (9:28). He debates with the Grecian or Hellenistic Jews. This is the same group to whom Stephen preached, and which ultimately led to his arrest, trial and death. In a sense, Paul is taking up the work Stephen began with the Hellenists. In a bit of irony, Paul ends up at odds with the same group he represented, or even led, in its conflict with Stephen.

The very fact of Paul’s appearance before the Hellenists is a witness against them. This persecutor of Christians—one of their own—made a total about-face regarding Jesus. This dramatic change in Paul should alert the Hellenists to take another look at the facts about Jesus. But their minds are closed. Paul soon finds himself in the same difficulty as Stephen was in. Luke says tersely that the Hellenistic Jews “tried to kill him” (9:29).<sup>41</sup>

### **Acts 9:30**

***Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.***

Vision sends him away. Acts 22:17-21.

[Direct: Sail from Caesarea N. To Cydnus, the harbor for Tarsus; however, Gal 1:21: “came into regions of Syria and Cilicia”: landed at Seleucia and proceeded by land to Antioch, then North to Cilicia, ending in Tarsus.]

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

[**Caesarea**] Not Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13), but a city built by Herod between Joppa and Mt. Carmel (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 16, 2:1). Philip settled here (Acts 21:8). Always when mentioned singly it refers to this city.

**Clarke: They brought him down to Caesarea**—Calmet contends that this was Caesarea of Palestine, and not Caesarea Philippi; it being his opinion, and indeed that of others, that where this word occurs without any addition, in the New Testament, Caesarea of Palestine is meant, and not Caesarea Philippi. See on Acts 8:40.

**Clarke: Sent him forth to Tarsus**—This was his own city; and it was right that he should proclaim to his own countrymen and relatives that Gospel through which he was become wise to salvation.

In these short sentences we can see two characteristics of Paul, even as a new believer in Christ: He was bold, and he stirred up controversy. These would characterize Paul's ministry the rest of his life. The Grecian Jews were Greek-speaking Jews.

Saul's visit to Tarsus helped quiet conflicts with the Jews and allowed him time to prove his commitment. After Saul, the most zealous persecutor, was converted, the church enjoyed a brief time of peace. "Brothers" refers to fellow Christians, members of God's family.

Paul goes to his hometown. He probably went back home to tell his father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other relatives about Christ. We know nothing about them. Paul never talks about his family—with one exception. In Romans 16 he mentions some folk who are related to him.

### **Paul goes to Tarsus (9:30)**

The Jerusalem church apparently does not want a repeat performance of the persecution that followed Stephen's battle with the Grecian Jews. (We see from Acts 9:26 that the church, probably composed of Hebraic Jews, is still operating in Jerusalem.) When the disciples learn of the plot against Paul, they quietly and quickly escort him to Caesarea. He is put on a ship and sent home to Tarsus (9:30).

On the surface, this would seem to be something of a rebuff to Paul. Granted, the church is concerned for his safety, as well as their own. Paul is someone who always takes advantage of a preaching opportunity regardless of any death threats. On the surface, it seems as though the church is telling Paul to "get out of town before sunset." We will learn later that Paul may be a "problem" to the Jerusalem church. The reason is because it wants to maintain as good relations as possible with the orthodox Jewish population in the city. But Paul is so hated by the Jews that his mere appearance in Jerusalem stirs up strife, for himself and potentially for the church.

That is not to say the church would railroad Paul out of the city against his wishes. There is a more compelling reason for Paul's departure, one Luke doesn't mention in Acts 9. However, he does discuss it later, referring to the reason in Paul's speech before a crowd of Jerusalem Jews. In his defense at the time, Paul speaks of an occasion when he was in the temple praying, and he has a vision. Paul sees a manifestation of the Lord

saying to him, "Quick... Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me" (22:18).

Paul tries to argue, saying that his turn-around conversion is so dramatic that it will cause the Jews to listen to him. But the Lord tells him again to leave Jerusalem: "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (22:21). It can be inferred that the time of this vision is just before his hasty departure from Jerusalem (22:17). Paul's quick exodus to Tarsus is based on a heavenly mandate, to which he is obedient.

Luke does not say anything about Paul's long stay in Tarsus. He draws a curtain over Paul's life for what may be as long as ten years. Paul refers to this interval only in passing. He says that after leaving Jerusalem he goes to Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21, 23). More specifically, he is referring to Antioch in Syria and Tarsus in Cilicia.

Tarsus is the leading city of Cilicia, and Paul's hometown. It came under Roman control in 64 B.C., but is still a free city. Some estimate the population of the city in Roman times to be close to half a million. The historian-geographer Strabo says Tarsus is a leading center of philosophy, rhetoric and law (*Geography* 14.5.13). Tarsus is also an important center of Stoic philosophy, so Paul would be familiar with the leading Stoics and their beliefs. We will see later that he can quote from Stoic poets.

Later, when Barnabas needs assistance in building the church in the Antioch area, he goes to Tarsus to find Paul, and brings him to Antioch (11:25-26). From then on, Paul becomes the central focus of Acts.<sup>42</sup>

### **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.**

Churches had "rest":

Emperor Caligula's persistent determination to have an image of himself set up in the Temple of Jerusalem; influential Jewish deputation continually attempted to prevent this from happening. Petronius, governor of Syria ordered to make war on the Jews to force them to put the image of Caligula in the Temple. Thousands implore him not to do this, offering their own lives. Even Herod Agrippa, who was very influential at the time, intercedes, but probably ineffectually. But for Caligula's death, the measure would have succeeded.

This whole distraction between the Jews and Caligula over the image issue may have been part of why the church was a second priority for a while.

**Clarke: Walking in the fear of the Lord**—Keeping a continually tender conscience; abhorring all sin; having respect to every Divine precept; dreading to offend him from whom the soul has derived its being and its blessings. Without this salutary fear of God there never can be any circumspect walking.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

**Clarke: In the comfort of the Holy Ghost**—In a consciousness of their acceptance and union with God, through his Spirit, by which solid peace and happiness are brought into the soul; the truly religious man knowing and feeling that he is of God, by the Spirit which is given him: nothing less can be implied in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.

**Clarke: Were multiplied**—No wonder that the Church of God increased, when such lights as these shone among men. This is a short, but full and forcible description of the righteousness, purity, and happiness of the primitive Church.

**[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]** Five blessings of the church:

1. Rest or peace—no more persecution
2. Edification or building up
3. Walking in the fear of the Lord
4. Walking in the comfort of the Spirit
5. Increasing in numbers.

This verse is a brief description of the blessings, purity, and state of the early church. One chief reason for the rest from persecution was a Roman edict at this time that statues of the Roman emperor must be placed in the temple at Jerusalem. An army was sent to do this and to destroy all Jews who opposed. This so occupied the Jews with their own persecution that they had no time for persecuting Christians. The conversion of Paul could not have stopped all the widespread persecution in all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee.<sup>43</sup>

**ESV: the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.** There must have been hundreds of churches in the small cities and towns throughout this large region, but all of them together can be called a “church” (Gk. *ekklēsia*, singular in the earliest and best manuscripts of this verse, though some later manuscripts have the plural). The NT can apply the singular word “church” to the church meeting in a home (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), in an entire city (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), in a large region (as here), or throughout the whole world (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 5:25). **Peace** came to the church after the conversion of its prime persecutor (see also Gal. 1:22–24). **Fear of the Lord** does not mean fear of final judgment but is a common theme in Acts referring either to fear as godly awe, reverence, and devotion (as in Acts 2:43; 10:2; 13:26) or fear of God's displeasure and fatherly discipline (as in 5:5, 11; 16:29; 19:17; see also Heb. 12:7–10).

### **Peter's Ministry**

From here to Chapter 12 is Peter's ministry. Paul's ministry is in Chapters 13-28.

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<sup>43</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

### **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.**

[Lydda] A town about 30 miles west of Jerusalem and 12 miles Southeast of Joppa.

Believers - result of Philip's results (Acts 8:40).

[Peter passed throughout all quarters] We now continue the story of Peter who has been the most prominent of the 12 apostles in the book of Acts thus far (Acts 1:13-15; Acts 2:14,37-38; Acts 3:1-12; Acts 4:8-19; Acts 5:1-29; Acts 8:14-23). His story continues to Acts 12:19.

**Clarke: Which dwelt at Lydda**—A town in the tribe of Ephraim, almost on the border of Judea, and nigh unto Joppa: it was about ten leagues from Jerusalem, and was afterwards known by the name of Diospolis, or the city of Jupiter.

### **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.**

[Aenas] no evidence that he was a believer, it was not his faith that made this happen.

[palsy] Greek: *paraluo* (GSN-3886). He was paralyzed for eight years.

### **Acts 9:34**

**And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.**

[Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.] Compare the first healing by Peter (Acts 3:6).

[he arose immediately] This was a normal New Testament healing.

**Clarke: Jesus Christ maketh thee whole**—Not Peter, for he had no power but what was given him from above. And, as an instrument, any man could heal with this power as well as Peter; but God chose to put honor upon those primitive preachers of his word, that men might see that they were commissioned from heaven.

**Clarke: Arise, and make thy bed**—Give now full proof that Jesus Christ HAS made thee whole, by arising, and by making thy bed. He was at home, and therefore was not commanded, as the paralytic person, to take up his bed; but he was ordered to make it—strew it afresh, that all might see that the cure was perfect.

### **Acts 9:35**

**And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.**

**[turned to the Lord]** This has always been the result of genuine healings and miracles and will be again when believers fully believe (Matthew 17:20; Mark 9:23; Mark 16:17-18; John 14:12-15).

**Clarke: All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him**—Saron was that champaign country that lay between Joppa and Lydda. The long affliction of this man had been well known; and his cure, consequently, became a subject of general examination: it was found to be real. It was known to have been performed by the grace and mercy of Christ; and the consequence of all this conviction was that all these people became Christians.

**Barnes: And all.** The mass, or body of the people. The affliction of the man had been long, and was probably well known; the miracle would be celebrated, and the effect was an extensive revival of religion.

### **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.**

Joppa = modern Jaffa; 45 miles Southeast of Jerusalem; Jonah's seaport.  
(Acts 9:36-43; Acts 10:5-6,32; Joshua 19:46; 2 Chron. 2:16; Ezra 3:7; Jonah 1:3).

Tabitha - Syro-Chaldaic

Dorcas- Greek for antelope, gazelle

Tabitha in Aramaic and Dorcas in Greek both mean "antelope" or "gazelle." It was customary in the East to give names of beautiful animals to young women.

**[full of good works and almsdeeds which she did]** She spent her life in acts of kindness and charity. She was full of the love of God and man and given to good works. Sounds like she had the gift of helps; 1 Cor 12:28.

**Clarke: Now there was at Joppa**—This was a sea-port town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, about a day's journey from Jerusalem. It is supposed to be the same which is called in the Old Testament Japho, which belonged to the tribe of Dan, Joshua 19:46. It is at present called Jaffa, and is still a place of considerable note.

**This woman was full of good works**—She spent her life in acts of kindness and charity. Her soul was full of love to God and man; and her whole time was filled up with works of piety and mercy.

The important harbor city of Joppa sits 125 feet above sea level overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Joppa was the town into which the cedars of Lebanon had been

floated to be shipped to Jerusalem and used in the temple construction (2 Chron. 2:16; Ezra 3:7). The prophet Jonah left the port of Joppa on his ill-fated trip (Jonah 1:3).

**McGee:** This woman was engaged in social service. She had the gift of sewing. Do you mean to tell me that sewing is a gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes, it was for this woman. Many people today are seeking for some exciting, fleshly gift such as speaking in tongues. May I suggest seeking a gift that is practical? I say very carefully and kindly, "Dear sister, learn to sew."

Sewing was the gift of Dorcas. I doubt that she ever spoke at a missionary meeting or taught a women's Bible class. I don't think she ever had such an opportunity because she was one of the early saints. But she did a lot of wonderful things for folk.<sup>44</sup>

### **Raised from the dead (9:36)**

Peter next goes to Joppa (modern Jaffa, or Yafo). It is 35 miles (56 kilometers) northwest of Jerusalem and 10 to 12 miles northwest of Lydda. Today, Jaffa is part of greater Tel-Aviv. Joppa is the only natural harbor on the Mediterranean between Egypt and Ptolemais (Acco), to the north. Thus, it serves as the seaport for Jerusalem. Herod the Great built the harbor of Caesarea, 30 miles north of Joppa, which is an important seaport in the first century, too.

Luke takes up the story of a much-loved disciple who lives in Joppa. In Aramaic her name is Tabitha, and in Greek, Dorcas (both names mean "gazelle"). Luke says she is a person "who was always doing good and helping the poor" (9:36). But suddenly Tabitha dies, and the church in Joppa is mourning its loss of a much-appreciated and needed servant.

When the church hears that Peter is nearby in Lydda, they send two men to urge him to come to see what he can do. When Peter arrives at Joppa, he is taken to the house where Tabitha is lying in preparation for her burial. Here all the widows are gathered. They are crying and showing Peter the clothing that Tabitha made for the poor.

Peter then goes upstairs where her body lays. He sends everyone out of the room, and kneels and prays. Finally, turning to the dead woman, he says, "Tabitha, get up" (9:41). He takes Tabitha's hand, helps her to her feet and presents her to them alive (9:41).

There are similarities between this account and the raising of Jairus' daughter by Jesus (Mark 5:21-24; Luke 8:49-56). Some of the similarities include:

1. the use of messengers to call the person who will raise the dead person,
2. the milling about of crying bystanders,
3. the excluding of outsiders from the room,
4. the call to the dead person to rise,
5. the taking of the revived individual by the hand.

The most striking similarity is that both Jesus and Peter issued a command for the dead person to rise, a short sentence in each case. Jesus had said, "Talitha...get up!" (Mark 5:41), whereas Peter cried: "Tabitha, get up" (9:40).

As he had seen Jesus do in the case of Jairus's daughter, he ordered the mourners out of the room and prayed. Then he spoke these words:

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<sup>44</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:552). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"Tabitha, get up" (which in its Aramaic form *Tabitha kumi* would have differed in only one letter from Jesus' command *Talitha kumi* ["Little girl, get up"]). (Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," page 382)

The parallel between Mark's account of the raising of Jairus' daughter and Peter's raising of Tabitha is striking. Interestingly, Luke uses a different construction for Christ's command (Luke 8:54), one that does not parallel his phrasing of Peter's command to Tabitha. This may indicate that Luke is not aware of the similarity. Yet, it is there nonetheless.

Both the raising of Tabitha and the healing of Aeneas mirror similar miraculous works performed by Jesus (Luke 5:17-26; 7:11-16). The accounts in Acts 9 also remind us of the power to heal and to raise the dead exhibited by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32:37). Taken together, these biblical accounts show God as one who continues to work through his servants — be they prophets or apostles or his own Son — to show his saving power. God brings his power to bear on behalf of the less-advantaged people of the world. Among those whom he liberates from death and sickness are widows like Dorcas and the poor and disenfranchised who have no one on whom they can rely.<sup>45</sup>

### **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.**

[**washed, they laid her in an upper chamber**] Early Christians washed their dead out of decency, love, and respect for them, and as a token of their firm belief in the resurrection of the dead.

**Clarke: She was sick, and died**—Even her holiness and usefulness could not prevent her from sickness and death. Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return, is a decree that must be fulfilled, even on the saints; for the body is dead, sentenced to death, because of sin, though the spirit be life because of righteousness.

**Clarke: Whom when they had washed**—Having the fullest proof that she was dead, they prepared for her interment. In most nations of the world it was customary to wash their dead before they buried them, and before they laid them out to lie in state.

### **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.**

**Clarke: Sent unto him—desiring—that he would not delay to come**—Tabitha died at Joppa, and Peter was at Lydda, about four leagues distant. But why did they send for Peter? We cannot tell. It is not likely that they had any expectation that he should raise her from the dead; for none of the apostles had as yet raised any; and if God did not

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

choose to restore Stephen to life, this favor could not be reasonably expected in behalf of inferior persons. However, they might hope that he who cured Eneas at Lydda might cure Dorcas; for it is probable that they had sent for Peter before she died; and in this sense we might understand the meaning of the text.

**Barnes: They sent unto him,** Why they sent is not affirmed. It is probable that they desired his presence to comfort and sustain them in their affliction. It is certainly *possible* that they expected he would restore her to life; but as this is not mentioned—as the apostles had as yet raised up no one from the dead—as even Stephen had not been restored to life—we have no authority for assuming, or supposing, that they had formed any such expectation.

It is important that Lydda is near Joppa, because corpses had to be buried right away. The distance of ten miles meant perhaps three or four hours' journey each way (for the messengers to Peter and Peter to Joppa); because it was customary to bury the corpse before sundown, even if Tabitha had died early in the day they could afford no delay.

### **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.**

[coats] Greek: *chiton* (GSN-5509), undergarment or tunic, usually worn next to the skin (Matthew 10:10; Mark 6:9; Luke 3:11; Luke 9:3; Jude 1:23).

[garments] Greek: *himation* (GSN-2440), outer garment, cloak, or mantle (Matthew 9:20; John 19:2; Acts 9:39).

### **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.**

[put them all forth] Not because he could not have faith with them in the room, but because of their mourning and noise.

[kneeled down] Same expression as in Acts 7:60.

[arise] The first resurrection by the apostles. See Matthew 9:25 and Matthew 10:8.

**Clarke: Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed**—It was not even known to Peter that God would work this miracle: therefore he put all the people out, that he might seek the will of God by fervent prayer, and during his supplications be liable

neither to distraction nor interruption, which he must have experienced had he permitted this company of weeping widows to remain in the chamber.

**And turning—to the body** The lifeless body, for the spirit had already departed.

**Said, Tabitha, arise**—During his wrestling with God, he had, undoubtedly, received confidence that she would be raised at his word.

**Clarke: And when she saw Peter, she sat up**—As Dorcas was a woman so eminently holy, her happy soul had doubtless gone to the paradise of God. Must she not therefore be filled with regret to find herself thus called back to earth again? And must not the remembrance of the glories she had now lost fill her with dislike to all the goods of earth? No: for,

1. As a saint of God, her Maker's will must be hers; because she knew that this will must be ever best.
2. It is very likely that, in the case of the revivescence of saint or sinner, God mercifully draws a veil over all they have seen or known, so that they have no recollection of what they have either seen or heard. Even St. Paul found it impossible to tell what he had heard in the third heaven, though he was probably not in the state of the dead. Of the economy of the invisible world God will reveal nothing. We walk here by faith, and not by sight.

### **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.**

Peter did exactly what Jesus did to his mother-in-law.

Christ raised from the dead only on 3 occasions:

- Jairus' daughter
- Widow of Nain's son
- Lazarus

Peter continuing the work of Christ as a member of the Body.

**Saints and widows**—In primitive times the widows formed a distinct part of the Christian Church.

**McGee:** Here is an example of the exercise of a sign gift. We have in the Book of Acts, the historical book of the church, the ministries of Simon Peter who was an apostle and of Paul who was an apostle. Simon Peter was a minister to his own people; yet he was the one to open the door for the Gentiles. Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul, and he was the Apostle to the Gentiles. The record states that each one raised a person from the dead. Quite possibly they raised others, but these are recorded to show that these men had sign

gifts. They could perform miracles. They could heal the sick. They could raise the dead. These were the marks, the evidences of an apostle. They were apostolic gifts. Paul says that the apostles are the foundation of the church in the sense that the church is built on them. They are the ones who put down the New Testament on which the church is actually built.

Today we do not need sign gifts. The issue today is doctrine. At the end of the era of New Testament writings, the apostle John wrote his epistles. Listen to his instructions for detecting deceivers: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 10–11).

Toward the end of Paul’s own ministry the record clearly shows that Paul did not exercise the gift of healing. For instance, notice that he left Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Why did not Paul heal his friend Trophimus? Paul, you see, had come to the end of his ministry, and the sign gifts even then were beginning to disappear from the church. At the beginning of Paul’s ministry, nothing of the New Testament had been written. Paul himself wrote the second book of the New Testament. When he went into a new territory with his message, what was his authority? He had no authority except sign gifts. However, after the New Testament was in written form, the emphasis shifted from sign gifts to correct doctrine. Paul warns that if a man does not have correct doctrine—even if he is an angel from heaven—you should not receive him. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

However, in these early days of the church, the apostles’ sign gifts were important. Notice the reaction of those who heard of Dorcas being restored to life.<sup>46</sup>

### **Acts 9:42**

**And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.**

**[many believed in the Lord]** The automatic result of miracles.

**Clarke: Many believed in the Lord**—That is, in Christ Jesus, in whose name and through whose power they understood this miracle to be wrought. This miracle, as well as that at Lydda, was not only the means of strengthening the faith of the disciples, and gaining credit to the cause of Christianity, but also of bringing many sincere converts to the Lord, so that the Church was thereby both builded up and multiplied.

Dorcas made an enormous impact on her community by “always doing good and helping the poor,” by making robes and other clothing (Acts 9:39). When she died, the room was filled with mourners, very likely many of the people she had helped. And when she was brought back to life, the news raced through the town. God uses great preachers like Peter and Paul, but he also uses those who have gifts of kindness like Dorcas. Rather than wishing you had other gifts, make good use of the gifts God has given you.

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<sup>46</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:553). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## **Acts 9:43**

**And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.**

Simon the Tanner: abhorrent profession to the Jews as it deals with contact with dead animals, blood, etc. The law said that he had to be outside the city.

First insight that Peter to some extent is overcoming prejudice, by his very willingness to stay with Simon the Tanner.

**[many days in Joppa]** Taking advantage of the revival among the people by this resurrection he continued to teach and preach Christ. If the "many days" here mean what they do in the note at <sup>□</sup>Acts 9:23, then he was a pastor here for about three years.

**[tanner]** A person who dealt in hides, whether of clean or unclean animals, was held in contempt by the Jews. Thus, Peter did not stay with the "millionaires" of Joppa, but lived in a humble abode.

**Clarke: He tarried many days in Joppa**—Taking advantage of the good impression made on the people's minds by the miracle, he preached to them the great truths of Christianity, and thus established them in the faith.

It was customary to name people by their occupation or parentage. Strict observers of Pharisaic opinions avoided tanners whenever possible, because their stripping of animal hides continually involved them with unclean carcasses. Second-century teachers reported (not necessarily accurately) that tanners had been forbidden in Jerusalem (many rabbis were more lenient if the tannery were near water, as Simon's house is—Acts 10:6). But Judaism stressed hospitality, and Peter, who probably never followed Pharisaic opinions anyway, is happy to receive it.

In Joppa, Peter stayed at the home of Simon, a tanner. Tanners made animal hides into leather. It is significant that Peter was at Simon's house, because tanning involved contact with dead animals, and Jewish law considered it an "unclean" job. Peter was already beginning to break down his prejudice against people who were not of his kind and customs that did not adhere to Jewish religious traditions.

### **Simon the tanner (9:43)**

Almost as a footnote, Luke mentions that Peter stays in Joppa "for some time with a tanner named Simon" (9:43). The rabbis considered tanning an unclean trade (Mishnah, *Ketubot* 7.10) because a tanner's work required regular contact with the skins of dead animals. This suggests that Peter is not overly scrupulous in observing some of the Jewish ceremonial traditions. Yet, he professes to be careful not to eat meats considered ceremonially unclean (10:4).

Peter seems to have an open mind regarding Jewish beliefs and practices; this prepares us for what will come shortly. He will be tested in the next chapter on matters "clean and unclean," but from a much broader perspective.

As an aside, we should note Luke's tendency to provide details that do not add anything pertinent to the account. But such details do underscore the historical accuracy of Luke's writing. Specifically, Johannes Munck observes that "it is characteristic of Luke in Acts that he gives an accurate address" for a number of places in which Paul lives or works during his life (*The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, page 88). Luke thus shows his attention to detail and to giving accurate information even on what might seem to be unimportant matters. In this case, we are told that the Simon with whom Paul stayed was a tanner, and he had a house by the sea. Luke also notes that Paul stays in Judas' house in the street called Straight in Damascus (9:11). In Corinth Paul preaches in the house of Justus who lives next to the synagogue (18:17). At Ephesus, Paul teaches in the School of Tyrannus (19:9). (See also 16:14; 17:5-7; 18:2-3; 21:8, 16; 28:7.)

With this short section, Luke informs his readers that the gospel has been preached in the province of Judea by the apostles, at least by Peter (after Philip did so). Now, the story of the gospel in Judea has been told. Peter, the servant of God, has entered the cities of the Plain of Sharon, and has done wonders in the name of Jesus Christ. Many see his work, give God thanks and are converted.

The Christian mission within the Jewish nation has widened from southern Judea to northern Judea. The reader is now prepared for the next leap of the gospel message that must be taken. The good news must be preached to Gentiles, and in areas beyond Judea.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts9.htm>

