

God's Grace at Work in Saul and Peter Acts 9

Introduction

Luke introduced Saul in Acts 7:58 as a *young man* who guarded the clothes of the witnesses who stoned Stephen. This act showed that Saul was **consenting** to his death (8:1). Not only had Saul consented to the martyrdom of Stephen, he purposely tried to help destroy Christianity (8:3). The first verses in Chapter 9 show that Saul's zeal to persecute the church (*the Way*) did not decrease. In fact, he wanted to go beyond Jerusalem to look for Christians that had fled to Damascus. But, God had other plans for Saul.

Saul was born and grew up in the Gentile city of Tarsus. His parents were strict Aramaic speaking Jews. Saul was taught Aramaic and was sent to Jerusalem to study Jewish law by the respected teacher and leader, Gamaliel (5:34). Saul's description of himself in Philippians 3:5-6 shows that he had great pride in his Hebrew heritage and religious status. However, everything changed on the road to Damascus.

Outline of Acts 9

- I. Saul Meets Jesus - Acts 9:1-19
- II. Saul Preaches Jesus - Acts 9:20-31
- III. Peter Ministers in Jesus' Name - Acts 9:32-43

I. Saul Meets Jesus - Acts 9:1-19

Saul wanted to do more than just hunt down and destroy the Jerusalem Christians. He wanted to find and persecute believers in Christ wherever they were, even outside the borders of Israel. Later in Acts, he will confess before King Agrippa that the followers of The Way enraged him and he wanted to go after them everywhere (Acts 26:11).

The Christians are described as part of *the Way*, a term used several times throughout

Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) to refer to the followers of Christ who is *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6). Believers, at this time, had not made a break from Judaism, so they continued to meet in their city's synagogues. Paul's plan was to go to the synagogues of Damascus, arrest the Christians, and take them as prisoners back to Jerusalem. Since the high priest had religious authority over the Jews, Saul received permission from him.

Saul started out for Damascus and was almost there when a miracle took place. *Suddenly*, as Saul and his companions walked down the road, a light *from heaven* shone all around him. It was a **supernatural** light, brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13). It was the *light of the world* (Matthew 5:14) shining His grace upon Saul. The light caused Saul to fall to the ground.

As he lay on the ground, Saul heard a voice asking, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* Now, Saul believed he was persecuting a group of rebels against Judaism, the religion he loved. How shocking it must have been to find out that he was the 'bad guy.' He asked, *Who are You, Lord?* He did not know that he was speaking to the Lord Jesus Christ, but he used the title, "Lord," probably because he recognized the voice was supernatural.

The voice answered, *I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.* By persecuting the church, Saul was persecuting Jesus. This remains true today. Those who mistreat Christians are really mistreating Christ.

Jesus told Saul to get up and go to the city of Damascus, and wait for further instructions. His companions saw the light (22:9) but did not see Jesus. They heard the voice but probably could not tell what was being said (22:9). They

were *afraid*, and they *stood speechless* (22:9). When Saul opened his eyes, he could not see. Acts 22:10 tells us that that Saul was blind from the *glory of that light*. His companions led him by the hand into the city of Damascus.

For three days, Saul was without sight. He also did not eat or drink during those days. Verse 11 says that Saul spent the days in prayer. While Saul was praying, the Lord was preparing a messenger to send to him.

Ananias was a **devout** man and well respected by the Jewish community (22:12). He was also a Christian. That means he was one of the men Saul was going to Damascus to persecute. Now, the Lord chose Ananias to go on a special mission to meet Saul.

The Lord appeared to Ananias in a vision and instructed him to go to Saul. He even gave him the street address of where Saul was staying. It is comforting to know that the Lord Jesus knew exactly where to find Saul. When you feel alone or afraid, remember, God knows exactly where you are, and He is with you.

The Lord prepared Saul by appearing to him in a vision also. He told Saul that a man named Ananias would come to him and lay his hand on him. Then, Saul would regain his sight.

At first, Ananias was nervous about going to meet the famous Jew named Saul. He knew about Saul's reputation, and he knew why Saul had come to Damascus...to persecute the Christians. But, the Lord explained to Ananias that He had chosen Saul *to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel*.

Ananias obeyed the Lord. He went to Saul at Judas' house on Straight Street (9:11), laid his hands upon him, and called him *Brother Saul*. He welcomed him into Christian fellowship. Ananias was proof to Saul that it was the Lord Jesus who had appeared to Saul on the road. *Immediately*, as Ananias laid hands on

Saul and spoke to him, *something like scales* fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see. At this time, Saul was also baptized, probably by Ananias.

After eating for the first time in three days, Saul was strong enough to go out and begin preaching. As you study the book of Acts, you will see that Saul goes first to the synagogues of the cities that he visits. That is where he began in Damascus, also.

He had come to Damascus to persecute the believers in Jesus, but, instead, he preached Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The people who heard Saul could hardly believe their ears! The same man that had destroyed the Christians in Jerusalem was now preaching about Christ with boldness.

Saul's arguments proving that Jesus is the Messiah totally frustrated the Jews. They became so confused that they could not even answer Saul. So, they plotted to kill him. They watched the city gates day and night hoping to catch him when he left the city. Saul had to leave Damascus through a window of a house on the wall, just like the Jewish spies had left Jericho (Joshua 2:15), and just like David had escaped from King Saul (1 Samuel 19:12). Saul had gone to Damascus to persecute, but he left Damascus as the one being persecuted.

Returning to Jerusalem put Saul in an unusual position. The Jewish religious leaders had heard about what happened in Damascus, so he couldn't go to them. On the other hand, the Christians knew him too well as the zealous persecutor. They had no intention of associating with him.

Barnabas, the *Son of Encouragement*, (Acts 4:36-37) was truly an encouragement to Saul. He went to Saul, became his friend, and took him to the apostles. Once there, Saul was able to testify of his miraculous conversion and explain how the Holy Spirit had filled him with boldness to preach in the name of Jesus.

III. Peter Ministers in Jesus' Name

The last time we read about Peter, he was on his way back to Jerusalem after visiting Samaria with the apostle John (8:25). Now, we find him traveling through Judea and Samaria visiting the saints.

One of the towns Peter visited was Lydda. There, he met a man who had been paralyzed and confined to his bed for eight years. Peter called him by name saying, *Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed* (9:34). *Immediately*, Aeneas obeyed. He had been healed in the name of Jesus, the Messiah. Aeneas used his healthy legs to spread the good news that Christ had made him whole. *So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord* (9:35).

About 12 miles northeast of Lydda was the ancient seaport (Jonah 1:3) of Joppa. One of the Christians there was a woman named Tabitha, which was her Aramaic name — in Greek, her name is Dorcas. It was common for Jews to have both a Greek and an Aramaic name when they lived in a mixed city of Jews and Gentiles. Dorcas was a woman who showed her faith by doing good deeds to help the poor. She specifically ministered to needy widows by making clothing for them (9:39). Unfortunately, Dorcas became sick and died. Her body was washed according to the Jewish ceremonial law and then laid in an upper room.

The disciples knew that Peter was in Lydda, only 12 miles away, so they sent and asked him to come quickly. It was too late to send for a physician, but it was not too late to send for Peter.

Peter went to Joppa and to the upper room where Dorcas' body had been laid. All the widows whom Dorcas had helped were there weeping. They eagerly showed Peter all the clothing she had made for them.

Peter sent everyone out of the room just as Jesus had done when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:22-42). This

was not an occasion for public display, but a time for the glory of God to shine through. Peter knelt to pray and then spoke to the body saying, *Tabitha, arise*, very similar to Jesus' words to Jairus' daughter, *Little girl* ("talitha") *arise*. Tabitha opened her eyes and saw Peter. She then sat up, took Peter's hand, and he lifted her up. Peter called all her Christian friends back into the room and presented Tabitha alive — by the grace of God. The word of the miracle spread throughout Joppa and many hearts were turned to the Lord.

God had a purpose for Peter's ministry in Lydda and Joppa. He was getting Peter ready and paving the way for him to preach to Gentiles. Both Lydda and Joppa were part Gentile. The **tanner** with whom Peter stayed was considered unclean because he worked with the skins of dead animals (Leviticus 11:39-40). All of this interaction with Gentiles helped prepare Peter for what would happen next. †

Prayer

Pray that God will make you an encouragement to others, like Barnabas was to Saul.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to (Ananias), "Go, for (Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."*

Vocabulary

consenting - giving permission or agreeing with something

supernatural - beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature

catastrophes - large disaster

devout - totally committed to a cause

tanner - a person that converts an animal hide (skin) into leather

QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 8

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Review last week's lesson and notes.

1. What is most memorable about Saul's experience of meeting the Lord Jesus?

2. How did the miracles which Peter performed in Lydda and Joppa bring glory to God?

DAY TWO: Read Acts 10:1-16.

3. Circle T (true) or F (false) next to each of the following statements about Cornelius. Give the verse where you find each true statement. Correct each false statement.

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| a. | T | F | He was a centurion of the Italian cohort. |
| b. | T | F | He was a devout man who feared God. |
| c. | T | F | He gave alms to the Jews. |
| d. | T | F | He prayed when he had problems. |
| e. | T | F | An angel appeared to him in a vision. |
| f. | T | F | He sent men to Joppa to find a priest. |

4. a. What happened to Peter in verse 10, and what did he see?

- b. From Leviticus 11:1-23, name some animals Peter may have seen. List them according to whether they were clean or unclean.

CLEAN ANIMALSUNCLEAN ANIMALS

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- c. What did the voice tell Peter to do, and what was his response?

5. a. Fill in the blanks.

A voice spoke to _____ a second time saying "What God
has _____ you must not call _____.

- b. How many times did this happen? Why do you think it had to be repeated?

DAY THREE: Read Acts 10:17-23.

6. What did Peter think about the vision he had seen?

7. What did the Holy Spirit say to Peter, and how did he respond?

8. a. What did Peter learn about Cornelius?

- b. What 2 things did Peter do after this?

DAY FOUR: Read Acts 10:24-33.

9. a. What had Cornelius done to prepare for Peter's visit?

- b. How did Cornelius greet Peter, and how did Peter respond?

10. a. What did Peter explain to Cornelius about Jewish custom?

- b. What did Peter say to Cornelius which shows that he now understood the meaning of the vision he had seen?

11. What did Cornelius and all his friends want to hear? Give verse.

DAY FIVE: Read Acts 10:34-48.

12. What do you learn about God in verse 34? What do you think this means?

13. a. From verse 35, give 2 requirements for being accepted by God.

b. ? (Thought Questions) What does it mean to fear God?

c. How can a person be righteous in God's eyes? See Philippians 3:9 and Hebrews 11:6.

14. a. From your answers in question 13, did Cornelius fulfill the requirements for being accepted by God?

YES or NO

b. ♥ (Heart Question) From what you learned about fearing God and righteousness, has God accepted you? Tell why or why not?

15. a. What do you learn about the Lord Jesus Christ from Peter's speech?

b. Underline the statements which describe what happened next.

The Holy Spirit fell on those who were listening.

The believing Jews were astonished.

The Jews were furious and left.

The Gentiles spoke with tongues and magnified God.

The Gentiles were very confused.

Peter commanded that the Gentiles be baptized.