

## Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 7, Acts 9:1-31

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: How far will God go to get our attention?

### Section 1: Acts 9:1-9 I Kill My Enemy When I Make Him My Friend

**9** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. <sup>4</sup>Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

<sup>5</sup>And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.<sup>[a]</sup> It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

<sup>6</sup>So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup>And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.<sup>8</sup> Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

A couple of things to notice first. The Christian movement is known as The Way. This would be more accurately, The Road. Remember, Jesus referred to Himself as The Way to the Father (John 14:6). He is emphatic that He is the only way. Now the church is that way, it is the embodiment of Jesus, through His Spirit, bringing people into restored relationship with the Father.

Secondly, notice the tight authority structure in Judaism. The High Priest has authority to grant Saul permission to weed out Christians in synagogues (Jewish meeting houses) in a city 150 miles away.

Saul sees Christianity as a virus and he wants to prevent it from hitting vital organs—major cities. Damascus was an important trade center with many arteries reaching throughout the known world. It could have launched the Christian virus throughout the system.

This experience is so devastating to Saul that he calls the One speaking, “Lord.” Jesus shows His identification with the church, which is His body. He says that Saul is attacking him when he attacks the church.

Saul didn’t know it, but this was God’s plan all along. When Saul attempted to stop the Spirit’s movement, he was given a personal visit from the supervisor. Can you imagine how psychologically destabilizing this was for Saul? To feel that you were God’s man, a zealot for His cause, doing His will, fighting for His honor, and then to meet God face-to-face and to find out He is Jesus. No wonder he didn’t eat or drink for 3 days. During these days Saul marinated on these ideas. He reviewed the Scriptures. He rethought over and over the encounter on the road. Could he have been mistaken? What about the others who heard the voice? What about his blindness? During this time he was told that Jesus would send Ananias and that he would receive back his sight.

## **Section 2: Acts 9:10-19 The Faith of Ananias**

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.”

And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

<sup>11</sup> So the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. <sup>12</sup> And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

<sup>17</sup> And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

Saul was right. There was a community of believers in Damascus. They were connected to Christ and heard His voice. He received very specific instructions. Ananias' reaction is natural. Saul had imprisoned many. Ananias was afraid.

Ananias calls Saul, brother. This is because they now have a common Father, God. Also, notice how many times the word "Lord" is used here. The Lord is the owner of something, the one who has power and control over it. When Ananias refers to Jesus as Lord, he is saying that he belongs to Jesus and that he will do whatever Jesus says. Ananias is also telling Saul that Jesus is simply the Lord, the owner and ruler of all.

Jesus has plans for Saul. He is to be a chosen vessel, a favorite container to carry Jesus to the Gentiles (this would have been unthinkable to a Jew), before kings, and to the Jews. Paul fulfilled all of these. Saul will also be shown what he will have to suffer for Jesus. As we see in the rest of Acts, he suffered greatly.

Ananias speaks to Saul and lays hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit. He regains his sight. In fact, we could say that for the first time he really saw things as they really are. He was baptized, identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He then spent days in Damascus fellowshiping in his new Christian family.

### **Section 3 Acts 9:20-25 Saul is infected**

<sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

<sup>21</sup> Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for

that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

<sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

<sup>23</sup> Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. <sup>24</sup> But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

Saul can't wait to share his new understanding of reality. Everything essential in his life has changed. The term "Christ" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew term, "Messiah," or "Anointed One." The Jews were looking for their Messiah, the one who would be anointed (filled with the Spirit), and would come to rule as the Lord. Saul now knows that Jesus is this Messiah he had been waiting for. His message is that Jesus is the Son of God. This is how Jesus introduced Himself to Saul (Galatians 1:15-16)<sup>1</sup>. Jesus is the Son of the Father in a unique eternal relationship with Him. Jesus is the pre-existent Word (John 1:1). God was no longer a single, sole individual. God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Imagine how Saul's thinking had changed. He now saw threads in the Old Testament that clearly pointed to Jesus (His life, death, and resurrection). He understood the coming of the Spirit. It all now made sense.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 669.

There is irony here. The same Saul who was persecuting the church is now being attacked by his former Jewish brothers. His suffering has started.

#### **Section 4: Acts 9:26-31 When the thorn is out you can walk with ease**

<sup>26</sup> And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. <sup>31</sup> Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

We see again the central place held by the Apostles. Their endorsement would bring Saul into the fold.

Barnabas<sup>2</sup> was one of those who sold his land and gave the money to the Apostles for the poor (Acts 4:36-37). He was a strong leader in the church.

Saul boldly proclaims Jesus in Jerusalem. He gets into it with the Hellenists (the Jews who had taken on the Greek culture—they spoke Greek). Greek was the universal language at the time and is why the New Testament was written in Greek. The persecution gets so bad that Saul has to flee to Caesarea and then on to his home town of Tarsus. We now see that the gospel has spread throughout this region.

What was the result of Saul joining the church?

1. There was peace. This means wholeness and unity.
2. The church was edified. This means that it was built up, the way we might secure a building, with beams and supports. The Holy Spirit was proving the infrastructure to make the church strong.
3. They were walking in the fear of the Lord. This doesn't mean they were afraid of Jesus. What it really means is that they weren't afraid of anything else.
4. They also walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The word comfort means "called alongside of." Jesus said He was sending another comforter, one who would walk alongside the disciples the same way He did (Acts 14:16).
5. The result is that the church multiplied, it grew.

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<sup>2</sup> Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, pg. 161

## What have we learned?

God is building His church. He may even reach out and directly confront those who severely threaten Him. We must always remember, this is Jesus' church. He is the Lord. It is His gospel. He inhabits the church through the Spirit. They are the cells of His body.

We must all be ready for the Lord to use us in His plans. Just as Ananias was called to pray over Saul, we might be called to step into unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations. The key is to know the voice of Jesus and to respond with obedience when He calls us to act.

## What the Text Says

### Section 1 Acts 9:1-9 Saul is Converted

Saul is out to destroy the church and stop this horrible infection (Christianity) that threatens the Jewish community. It has spread throughout Judea and Samaria and has now reached Damascus (a city 150 miles Northeast from Jerusalem). Damascus is an important trade center where the Christian faith could launch out to infect the entire world. Saul decides to stop this infection once and for all. Jesus Himself confronts Saul and tells him that when he attacks the church, he attacks Jesus.

### Section 2 Acts 9:10-19 The Faith of Ananias

Ananias belongs to Jesus. He is scared to meet Saul, but he obeys the orders of his Lord, his master. Notice how clear Jesus' directions are to Ananias. The geographic directions are particularly interesting. Jesus and Ananias have an intimate relationship.

### Section 3 Acts 9:20-25 Saul is Converted

A converted Saul begins preaching that Jesus is God's Son and that he is the Messiah. His message is so powerful that the Jews decide to kill him.

### Section 4 Acts 9:26-31 The Church Grows Strong

With Saul's threat eliminated, the church can now grow. It develops a strong superstructure and experiences the Holy Spirit. Jesus alone is their Lord and the one they fear (they do not fear anything else).

## Connecting to the Scripture

The Christian life behind enemy lines is an amazing adventure. The enemy will do all he can to get halt the momentum of the moving Spirit of God. He will attempt to distract, and derail, and, if needs be, he will come out and attack believers with violence.

We have to be careful. Too often we allow social situations to control our practicing our faith. When we know that our family will sneer at us, when we know that friends will reject us, when we know that people will get angry, or that we might lose friends or a job, or be outright attacked, we are tempted to keep quiet. We might even tell ourselves that we are just being thoughtful and polite. The reality is that the gospel does rattle the strongholds of Satan. It does make people who are unsaved very uncomfortable. Our faithfulness must always be to Christ and not to social conventions. Even as Saul was the chosen vessel for Christ, we also must be vessels for Him to carry his message to the unsaved.

The Christian adventure affects us on all levels. We are personally and individually related to God through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. We harvest this relationship through worship and prayer. We also renew our minds through studying the Scriptures. In the process we reconfigure our understanding of all things, even as Saul did. Our understandings become God's understandings. We take on the mind of Christ. We also relate to other Christians. They become our real family. Our brothers in Christ are eternal brothers, while our earthly brothers are only for this life. The Spirit equips us to minister to those in the body of Christ, to find our place, our function, and make a difference. Lastly, we relate to the world. When it comes to the world, we have a mission—share the good news of Jesus

## Questions to Ask During the Study

### Section 1 Read Acts 9:1-9

1. Have you ever had anyone really angry at you? Describe it. It is possible that your faith in Jesus will bring you at odds with the world around you? Could you be attacked? How would you handle this?

### Section 2 Read Acts 9:10-19

1. What does it mean to call Jesus Lord? In what areas does Jesus have Lordship in your life?
2. Are there any areas where you are still in control or are holding back from Jesus?
3. What if Jesus called you to the mission field? Would you be ready to go? If not, how do we come to the place where Jesus has Lordship over all, to the point where we will do whatever He asks?

### Section 3 Read Acts 9:20-25

1. How do you express the excitement over your new life in Christ? Who have you told lately about Jesus?

### Section 4 Read Acts 9:26-31

1. What things happen in the church in this section?
2. How can these same things be true in our church?
3. What is your function in the body of Christ? What ministry are you involved in? How could God use you this week to make a difference?