

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 29

I. Exposition of Chapter Nine.

A. Verses 1-9 - Saul's Conversion on the road to Damascus.

1. Verses 1-2 – **“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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 the bound to Jerusalem.”**

a. We've been introduced briefly to Saul in **7:58** and **8:1**. Some other things which are good to know about Saul are:

- 1) Saul was born in Tarsus, an old city, and the capital of Cilicia (At, what is now, the Southern coast of Turkey). This is believed to be the same city to which Jonah attempted to flee (**Jonah 1:3**).
- 2) He belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and his father was likewise a member of the same, for Saul called himself **“...a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee...” (Acts 23:6)**.
- 3) Saul was also a tent maker by trade (**Acts 18:1-3**). It was a Jewish custom to teach boys a certain trade.¹
- 4) Saul of Tarsus was furthermore a Roman citizen. This was a high honor and privilege. It could be bought for large sums of money (**Acts 22:25-29**).
- 5) Saul received his religious education in Jerusalem and was trained under one of, if not the most, highly respected Pharisees, Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**). We saw the influence of Gamaliel demonstrated in **Acts 5:33-39**.

b. **“...still breathing out threats and murder...”** – The phrase **“breathing out”** would be better translated as **“breathing in”** like inhaling. Note the following:

“...the very breath that Saul breathed, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle. He breathed on the remaining disciples the murder that he had already breathed in from the death of the others. He exhaled what he inhaled...The taste of blood in the death of Stephen was pleasing to young Saul (8:1) and now he reveled in the slaughter of the saints both men and women.”²

c. **“...went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus...”** – This shows the zeal of Saul for Judaism. He initiated this with the high priest because of his great hatred for Christians and the fact that he considered them heretics. Saul, no doubt, thought what he was doing was for God.

1) Concerning these letters, Dr. Robert Utley states:

“Apparently these were letters of extradition for the Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem in the face of the Jewish persecution (cf. 9:14, 21; 22:5; 26:10).”³

2) Damascus was a city about 135 to 150 miles to the north-northeast of Jerusalem, about a week's journey by foot. It was within the Roman province of Syria. Scholars suggest that some of the believers may have fled the persecution in Jerusalem, by escaping to Damascus.

This may explain why Saul wanted authority to bring them back.

“In spite of his great learning (Acts 26:24), Saul was spiritually blind (2 Cor. 3:12–18) and did not understand what the Old Testament really taught about the Messiah. Like many others of his countrymen, he stumbled over the Cross (1 Cor. 1:23) because he depended on his own righteousness and not on the righteousness of God (Rom. 9:30–10:13; Phil. 3:1–10). Many self-righteous religious people today do not see their need for a Saviour and resent it if you tell them they are sinners.”⁴

d. **“...of the Way...”** – This is a great title for the Church. Dr. Stanley Horton states:

“The Way’ was an interesting title for the believers, one they could accept: Jesus is the way of salvation, the way of life.”⁵

2. Verse 3 – **“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from**

¹Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: “Our Hope” Publication Office, 1912), 163.

² A.T. Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. III, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 113. ³ Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 121.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 438.

⁵ Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 178-179.

heaven.” – Many times **“light”** is associated with the glory and presence of God. Regarding Jesus, at the transfiguration, the face of Jesus **“...shone like the sun” (Matthew 17:2)**. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John describes Christ and said; **“...His countenance was like the sun shining in its’ strength.” (Revelation 1:16)**. Dr. Robert Utley adds the following thoughts:

“Paul vividly remembers this event! It is just possible that this light is theologically/physically related to the Shekinah glory of YHWH’s presence with Israel during the wilderness wandering period. The Hebrew concept of ‘glory’ takes on an aspect of bright light from this historical event. This light would have showed Saul the rabbi that this was the personal presence of God.”⁶

3. Verses 4-5 – Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

a. Saul fell to the ground as did all the others who were with him (cf. **Acts 26:14**). This is something that people of that day would do to show humility, respect and sometimes worship.⁷ Of course, it’s also possible that the very presence and glory of God knocked them to the ground.

b. Saul **“...heard a voice saying to him...”** – Not only did Saul hear a voice but there is evidence that he actually saw the Lord as well.

“Saul both heard the voice of the Lord Jesus and saw Him (cf. 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Though there is no explicit statement of Saul’s seeing Christ, it is implicit in the reference to a light from heaven. It was fundamental to Saul’s apostleship that he saw the resurrected Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1).”⁸

c. **“...Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** – Notice that from Jesus’ perspective, to persecute His church is to persecute Him! He takes it personally! He is the Head and we are His body.

“After riveting his attention, Jesus asked Saul ‘why’ he was ‘persecuting’ Him—not His followers, but Himself. Saul would have understood the voice as God’s, since in rabbinism a voice from heaven always connoted a rebuke or instruction from God.”⁹

1) This statement of Jesus must have shocked Saul. Richard Longenecker adds an interesting thought:

“Therefore when the voice went on to ask the question ‘Why do you persecute me?’ Saul was without doubt thoroughly confused. He was not persecuting God! Rather, he was defending God and his laws!”¹⁰

d. **“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’** – There is some differences in opinion as to whether or not Saul is just referring to Jesus as “sir” here or if he is indeed referring to Him as Lord and acknowledging Him as God. It seems quite clear, however, that Saul recognizes God is speaking without knowing it was Jesus yet, referred to the One speaking to Him as Lord, as in God! **“But he did know that he had been struck down by a light from heaven and had been addressed by a voice from heaven, both of which signaled the divine presence. So his use of the term ‘Lord’ was probably meant in a worshipful manner...”¹¹**

e. **“Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’** – Saul now knows exactly Who he is speaking to him and realizes that Jesus really is alive – risen from the dead! The phrase; **“It is hard for you to kick against the goads”** is not in the better and earlier Greek manuscripts. But this statement *is* found in **Acts 26:14**.¹²

4. Verses 6-7 - 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.” And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.”

a. Saul, after getting his first question answered, now asks a second – “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Two things to notice here: first, after knowing it’s Jesus, he still calls Him Lord and second, after receiving a revelation of Jesus Christ, the next question should be for all of us, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

⁶ Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003),

121.

⁷Horton, *Acts*, 180.

⁸Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 375.

⁹Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 208.

¹⁰Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 167.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 376.