

LESSON TEN

(9:1-31)

The Conversion and Early Labors of Saul,

9:1-30

At Jerusalem, 9:1,2

9 *But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

V. 1 - As Acts 26:11 shows, Saul was exceeding mad against the Christians. It is worth contemplating this man, zealous for the things of God, who was quite ungodly in his attitude, violating command #6 (one of the “top ten!”) about murder. It needs to be impressed upon our own consciousness that we may often do things ungodly (i.e., un-Christian) because of our ignorance of what God really wants of us.

but Saul - resuming the story from Acts 8:3.

still - His whole life was, at that time, characterized by threatening and murder. Jacob had said of Benjamin, that he would be a ravening wolf. One of Benjamin’s sons was surely that.

V. 2 - **Damascus** - An ancient city, on the main route that led from Africa to the Orient, prominent in world history. Some 150 miles north-east of Jerusalem, it was well-known in Abraham’s day (Gen. 14:15; 15:2). It played an important part in later times (as with Elisha and Naaman, who thought the Abana and the Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all those in Israel). Rezin of Damascus joined with Pekah of Israel to war against Judah. Under the Roman rule, Damascus became the center of the Nabatean (Arab) kingdom in 85 B.C. When Saul went there, Aretas IV ruled.

the Way - This concept of one’s life vocation is common to many religions. The O.T. has this idea, as in Psalm 1:6, Isaiah 40:3. Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22 have it also.

men or women - This helps us to see that Christianity was widespread and inclusive of both sexes.

On the Road to Damascus, 9:3-8a

3 Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. 4 And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he

said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; 6 but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing;

V. 3 - **a light from heaven** - This singular event in Saul's life is, without a doubt, one that revolutionized, not only his life, but the whole world forever. Yet the simple but profound truth is this: Saul had to know the facts about Jesus, accept those facts, through his obedience, in order to become Christian. While his conversion may be unique in some aspects, it is but par for the course in its basic framework. This is also mentioned in I Cor. 15:8; Gal. 1:16ff.

V. 4 - The account seems to say that Saul saw the light (as did those with him, who likewise heard the sound of a voice), but only Saul heard the Lord speak so as to understand. However, 9:27 shows that Saul saw Jesus, as well as heard his voice. The question posed to Saul shows the relationship of Jesus to the Church, his body, to which Saul was doing harm inasmuch as he was persecuting people who made up the body.

V. 5 - Saul's question may well indicate that he knew God had appeared, though the question does show that he didn't perceive how he was a persecutor of the Lord.

V. 6 - We will do well to point out the human agency in Saul's conversion, as well as the instructions for the future activities of Saul. God does his work through people. Actually, Saul's conversion began here but was not completed until Ananias helped him obey God's explicit commands. Another factor to consider: Saul's being chosen by God was made manifest at this time (26:15-18) and that aspect of his life was announced by Ananias, 22:14-15, and also in Jerusalem, 22:21.

V. 7 - The men did hear the sound and see the light, but did not understand what was said or who was speaking.

QUESTIONS

95. Damascus was in what country?

96. How did Saul persecute Jesus?

97. What was Saul told by Jesus?

98. What was the purpose of the appearance of Jesus to Saul?

In Damascus, 9:8b-22

so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise, and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, 19 and took food and was strengthened.

For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests." 22 but Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

V. 9 - Some think Saul fasted, while others believe that the lack of eating, etc., was merely from the shock and state of affairs. He did pray, v. 11. He had been told that further instructions would be forthcoming, but not from whom or at what time. As far as anyone knew, Saul was still Saul, unconverted. However, as v. 12 shows, God was dealing with him.

V. 10 - Whether Ananias was from Jerusalem, or became a disciple in Damascus (or elsewhere) we know not.

vision - The same term as in 11:5.

V. 11 - The "straight" street ran east-west, and still is used today.

rise and go - The Greek construction is like that in Luke 19:5 (make haste and come down) or in Matthew 28:19 (Go...) in that a participle is used (rise) and an imperative (go) in a way that makes both to be commands. **Tarsus** - The capital city of Cilicia, and a free city (all born therein were Roman citizens). It had a university which included a medical department and a prominent department of philosophy. The Stoic philosophy was taught in various places by at least six different teachers from Tarsus.

V. 12 - Saul, though not doing some other things, was having a vision from God, indicating what he might forthwith expect.

V. 13 - Note Ananias described Christians as “saints.”

V. 14 - **authority** - The Greek word means the freedom to act, thus the right to act. It is in Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; etc. It seems to be evident that the Sanhedrin could act as the account indicates, and that Rome would back them up; even outside the geographical area of Palestine.

call upon your name - The connotation is that of giving allegiance to, under authority of, etc. See the same ideas in v. 15, 16.

Perhaps Ananias is a good example for us: how often Christians fail to see God’s plan, and refuse his direction, pitting our wisdom against his wisdom. Samuel was like this in I Sam. 16:1-2.

V. 15 - Saul’s own comments on his selection by God can be seen in Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15. His special assignment was to Gentiles, though all people were included, Rom. 1:14-15.

V. 16 - Saul would soon feel the sufferings which Jesus promised, as a part of the body which others would persecute (as he did) in all good conscience. As he would write in Rom. 8:17-18, to suffer with Christ would result in reigning with Christ; and that sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory yet to be revealed. Part of the suffering came because he, as a Jew, would have nothing to do with Gentiles, Acts 22:21ff. Doubtless, many prejudices he had from his own background and training had to go.

V. 17 - Ananias stated two reasons for his visit: Saul’s sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Since nothing more is explained, we can suppose that he received the same gifts as the other apostles. The remainder of his life seems to indicate that he could do what other apostles could do.

Note that Ananias and Saul apply the word “Lord” to Jesus, indicating their understanding of who Jesus was in relationship to God and to them.

V. 18 - The substance falling from Saul's eyes is described by Luke as being like flakes/scales. It may be supposed that the reason why Saul was sightless was these (so-called) scales. Comparison with Acts 22 will show that Saul received his sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit from Ananias, but yet had to be immersed to receive from the Lord remission of sins. This makes an instructive case study. Saul had seen Jesus, fasted and prayed after having spoken to Jesus, and yet was still in his sins (22:16).

V. 20 - This verse shows that Saul immediately preached a new message, a good example of a converted life.

V. 21 - **made havoc** - Saul thus describes himself in Galatians 1:13,23. The verb means "to lay waste" or "to destroy."

V. 22 - Jesus promised power (1:8) for his chosen witnesses, and Saul was a recipient of it along with the twelve. With it, he attempted to prove, by placing O.T. prophecies alongside Jesus' life, that Jesus was the Messiah. Of course, it was only proof to those who would accept it as such. To those who would not do so, a plot was begun against Saul's life, much as against Stephen in Acts 6.

confounded - Greek has the idea of confusing, bewildering or stirring up, as in 2:6; 19:32; 21:27, 31. The paradox of Saul's conversion at first amazed the hearers, but amazement soon wore off, and a different reaction set in, to follow Saul wherever he went.

QUESTIONS

99. Was Saul in a saved or lost condition during the three days of v. 9?

100. What was Saul doing in this three day interval?

101. Have you ever refused to obey God's direct commands? Why?

102. Have you read Acts 22 and 26 to get the total picture of this incident in Saul's life?

103. What did Ananias tell Saul?

104. Did Saul have any choice at all in doing that for which God had selected him? (Cf. Acts 26:19)

105. Did Saul preach that a person named Jesus of Nazareth actually existed? Or what did he preach about him?

106. How do you think Saul, before his conversion, could have been so sure of himself in regard to his relationship to God and yet so wrong?

In Arabia, 9:23a

23 When many days had passed,

V. 23 - Some put the incident of Galatians 1:15 here, as our outline shows.

Back in Damascus, 9:23b-25

the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket.

V. 23b - The continued proclamation by Saul in the city finally provoked Jewish opposition of such nature that his Christian friends intervened in his behalf, sending him away for his physical safety.

V. 24 - The Jews never gave up on attempting to get Saul, the turncoat, as is evidenced by the rest of Acts, and in the epistles. Many Jews (besides Saul of Tarsus) were zealous for the ways of Israel, and thought they ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (26:9), even as he once did.

V. 25 - This escapade in Saul's life was prominent in his memory, II Cor. 11:30-33, perhaps because it was not his way of doing things. He tended to run toward the crowd and trouble, not away from it. The Greek term for basket was the same term used to describe the baskets in the feeding of the 4,000, Matthew 15:37.

In Jerusalem, 9:26-29

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, 29 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him.

V. 26 - Why Saul thought that Jerusalem would be any more safe than Damascus is of interest - it soon proved to be also unsafe. Perhaps he was constrained to return to his former center of activity to preach what he once denounced.

When Saul arrived, Luke says he attempted to *join* the disciples there. The Greek word has the idea of uniting, fellowship, or binding together, as in marriage.

Galatians 1:18ff. may fit here (though Paul may have another visit in mind than what Luke records). If so, then only Peter and James were seen by him.

V. 27 - **Barnabas** - How he knew about Saul's conversion is unknown. That he accepted him and helped other disciples to do so is evident, regardless of how he came to his information. Note that he was aware that Saul spoke *boldly* in Damascus, as now he did in Jerusalem.

V. 29 - As is fairly clear, Saul was a Greek-speaking Jew, as was Stephen. Hence, he naturally gravitated to the synagogues of the Hellenists, as did Stephen in Acts 6, speaking and questioning/discussing/arguing/disputing (see this word in Mark 1:27; 8:11; 9:14; Acts 6:9; I Cor. 1:20) with them. He may well have been part of this group prior to conversion. They, probably because of inability to argue Saul down, resorted to the same general action as took place in Acts 6, by deciding to lay hands upon Saul to murder him. We note that Saul's witness in Damascus was very strong because of all the evidence he could present to his auditors that was personal in nature. In Jerusalem, the case was much the same; both in regard to his witness and the opposition to it.

At Caesarea, 9:30a

30 And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea,

V. 30a - Luke's record has Saul's brethren sending him to Tarsus. Saul recounted in Acts 22:17ff. that he was directed by God to leave the city, even though he protested. Caesarea was the seaport for Judea.

In Tarsus, 9:30b

and sent him off to Tarsus.

V. 30b - Saul will remain at Tarsus until Barnabas goes to get him in Acts 11:25.

**The Work of Peter, The Establishment of the Church in Antioch,
The Early Labors of Barnabas and Saul
9:31 - 12:25**

**The Work of Peter, 9:31 - 11:18,
At Jerusalem**

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.

V. 31 - It is interesting that though the Christians were in various places throughout the area, yet the word “church” is singular. Paul will refer to the “churches of Christ in Judea” (Gal. 1:22), thus showing that one may appropriately use either designation.

was built up - the Greek term means “being built up” (i.e., edified, etc.), a term often used by Paul in his epistles. No agent is stated for the “building up” process. Perhaps the fact that they were able to maintain a state of peace, being free from outward turmoil, harassment, etc. brought about such growth. The Greek word meaning “build up” occurs in such passages as Acts 20:32; Rom. 15:20; I Cor. 8:1; 10:23; Gal. 2:18; Eph. 4:12, 16; I Thess. 5:11.

it was multiplied - Perhaps a reason for the growth of the Church (other than the effect of being built up) in edification and numbers was the fact that “fear the Lord” and “encouragement by the Holy Spirit” were apparent among the Church members. Here is a good example for us to follow.

QUESTIONS

107. Have you read II Cor. 11 for Saul’s (Paul) account of his escape?
108. Does the Bible tell us how Barnabas knew about the events in Saul’s conversion?

109. Who were the Hellenists?

110. Why did Saul leave Jerusalem according to our text? The text of Acts 22:17ff? Can these two records be harmonized?

111. Do we know for sure how long Saul stayed in Tarsus or what he did there?

112. Can the word “church” be either singular or plural in meaning, though the form remains unchanged? How do you know?

113. Do you walk in the “fear of the Lord” and the “comfort of the Holy Spirit” as did the early Christians?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10

1. Which of the Ten Commandments did Saul violate in his persecution of Christians?

2. Discuss the location and history of Damascus.

3. Why was Saul going to Damascus and what happened to him on his way?

4. Was Saul aware that he was a persecutor of the Lord? Explain.

5. Where did Saul’s conversion begin and where was it completed?

6. Why didn’t Saul eat or drink for three days after arriving in Damascus?

7. Provide a brief history of the city Tarsus.

8. Explain the words “call upon your name”.

9. What is the result of suffering with Christ (Acts 9:16)?

10. What were the two reasons for Ananias visiting Saul?

11. Complete the textbook writer’s statement: “Saul had _____, _____ and _____ after having _____ to _____ and yet was still in his _____.”

12. For what purpose was Saul instructed to be baptized (22:16)?

13. At what point and time in his life did Saul receive the forgiveness of sins?

14. What does the term “make havoc” mean?

15. How could Saul prove that “Jesus was the Christ” (9:22)?

16. What can be learned about Saul’s activities by comparing Acts 9:23 and Galatians 1:15?

17. What is significant about the Greek word for “basket” in Acts 9:25?

18. What does the Greek word “join” mean (Acts 9:26)?

19. Why would Saul gravitate to the synagogues to speak about Christ?

20. Explain several factors that contributed to the growth of the early church (Acts 9:31).