

## To The Ends Of The Earth

### LESSON 9: PREACHING IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA, PART 2 (ACTS 9:1-30)

Persecution had driven the disciples out of Jerusalem (except the apostles). Saul was the face of this persecution. However, instead of stopping the gospel from spreading, this persecution actually helped the gospel spread into areas outside the city of Jerusalem.

#### SAUL TRAVELS TO DAMASCUS (ACTS 9:1-19)

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**9:1-2.** Saul was an ambitious young man who was convinced the preaching being done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth needed to be stopped through persecution (Acts 26:9-11; Philippians 3:3-6). After persecuting disciples of Christ in Jerusalem, Saul was still breathing murderous threats against followers of Jesus. Specifically, he went to the high priest and requested letters that gave him authority to bring any belonging to the Way (followers of Jesus, who is the Way to salvation, John 14:6; Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22) back from Damascus (about 140 miles northeast of Jerusalem) as prisoners to Jerusalem. These letters bore the weight of the leader of the Sanhedrin. Saul's efforts may have been primarily directed at the disciples who had fled Jerusalem but also included others (like Ananias, Acts 9:13-14). Also note that additional details of Saul's persecution and trip to Damascus are recorded in Acts 22 and 26.

**9:3-9.** Saul had come near to Damascus around noon (Acts 22:6). Then, an intense light (brighter than the sun, Acts 26:13) flashed around Saul. He (and those with him) fell to the ground (Acts 26:14). Saul heard the voice of One speaking to him (and also saw Him, Acts 9:17, 27; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8). Specifically, this One addressed Saul (using his name twice), and asked why Saul was persecuting Him. Saul then inquired who was speaking to him, addressing Him as "Lord" (perhaps out of respect; perhaps recognizing it as a Heavenly Messenger). The Messenger identified Himself as Jesus, the One Saul was persecuting (by persecuting His disciples). Note some manuscripts (and Acts 26:14) record Saul being asked why he was kicking against the goads (sticks used to prod animals that, if kicked against out of rebellion and stubbornness, would result in self-harm). Some manuscripts (and Acts 22:10) record Saul asking what he must do to be saved. Jesus responded by telling Saul to get up and go into Damascus, where he would be told what he must do. Saul's traveling companions

were speechless, hearing the sound but not seeing what Saul saw (evidently also not hearing the words Jesus spoke, Acts 22:9). Saul was not disobedient to this Heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). He got up, now blinded, and was led by the hand into Damascus. He could not see and did not eat or drink for three days (perhaps demonstrating Saul's remorse for his wickedness, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11). However, he was not yet saved, as he needed to hear what he must do in the city.

**9:10-16.** In Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared in a vision to a disciple named Ananias (a devout man with a good reputation, Acts 22:12). Jesus instructed him to go to the street called Straight, to Judas's house, and ask for a man named Saul (from Tarsus), who was praying there. Additionally, Jesus revealed that a vision was given to Saul to expect a man named Ananias coming to and placing hands on him so he could regain his sight. Ananias was surely confused and reluctant to hear this, saying he had heard about Saul from many people. He heard what Saul had done to Jesus's saints (holy people; set apart from sin) in Jerusalem and how he had come with authority from the chief priests of the Jews to arrest all those who call on Jesus's name for salvation. However, Jesus instructed Ananias to go, because Saul was Jesus's chosen instrument to take His name to Gentiles (something that had not yet happened; Acts 26:16-18), kings, and Israelites. Although Saul would make His own choice about believing and obeying Jesus, God knew what his choice would be and had chosen to use him in these ways (similar to Jeremiah 1:5). Then, ironically, Saul would experience great suffering as a follower of Christ throughout the remainder of his life (2 Corinthians 11:22-33).

**9:17-19.** Ananias then obeyed the Lord to go where Saul was staying. Ananias put his hands on Saul. Calling Saul "brother" (probably in a Jewish sense), Ananias said he had been sent by the Lord Jesus so Saul would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and Saul regained his sight. Then, Saul was baptized (to wash away his sins, Acts 22:16). He was now saved, after coming into the city, being told what he must do, and having his sins washed away in baptism (like those in Acts 2:37-41)! Note that we are not told how Saul received the Holy Spirit (as Ananias was not an apostle and, therefore, could not give the miraculous gifts, Acts 8:14-19). Saul then ate, regained strength, and remained in Damascus for some time with the disciples of Jesus!

#### SAUL PREACHES JESUS (ACTS 9:20-25)

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**9:20-25.** As Saul continued in Damascus, he proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God in the synagogues! The Jews who heard him were amazed to hear the one who had been causing havoc for the followers of Christ (those who called on the name of Jesus for salvation, Acts 2:21; 4:13; 22:16) through persecution now proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. Saul then grew stronger in the faith and kept speaking about Jesus as the Messiah in a way the Jews in Damascus could not refute. Note that, at some point, Saul made a trip to Arabia (east of Damascus) and then returned to Damascus (Galatians 1:11-24). After some time passed, the Jews in Damascus conspired to kill Saul, watching the gates night and day with the intent to kill him. Yet, Saul learned about their plot and the disciples lowered him at night in a basket through a window in the wall around the city so he could escape (2 Corinthians 11:32-33; note that it was common for houses to be built against city walls).

### **SAUL JOINS THE DISCIPLES IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 9:26-30)**

**9:26-30.** After escaping from Damascus, Saul traveled to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19). When he arrived, he tried to join himself to the fellowship of the disciples (church) in Jerusalem. However, they initially did not accept him into their fellowship because they did not believe he was a disciple (having known his history as a persecutor). Barnabas (an encourager, Acts 4:36-37), took him to the apostles and explained how he had seen the Lord, talked with the Lord, and spoken boldly in the name of the Lord in Damascus (demonstrating his change). Then, Saul was accepted and joined in the fellowship of the disciples in Jerusalem. He was with them coming and going (engaging in the work and fellowship with them) and speaking boldly in the Lord's name. He even stood boldly for the Lord before the Hellenistic Jews. These, though, tried to kill him (Acts 22:17-21). The disciples found out, and Saul's stay in Jerusalem was cut short (per also the Lord's instruction, Acts 22:17-21), with Saul taken to Caesarea and sent to Tarsus (in Cilicia, where he was from, Acts 21:39; 22:3).

### **CONCLUSION**

The book of Acts has been demonstrating both the spread and the power of the gospel. We have now seen a fierce enemy and persecutor of Christ turn to be a zealous proclaimer of the gospel and disciple of Christ. Now, Saul has gone from being the persecutor to the persecuted.

### **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS**

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Why did Saul travel to Damascus?

What happened as Saul was nearing Damascus?

What did Jesus tell Saul he must do?

What did Jesus reveal to Ananias?

What happened when Ananias visited Saul?

When was Saul saved?

What did Saul do and experience in Damascus after he was baptized?

What did Saul do and experience in Jerusalem?

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