

## Acts 9

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- The Most Famous Conversion in the History of the Church
  - Perhaps also the Most Unlikely – and Most Important for the future of the church

- I. 9:1-9 Saul on the Road to Damascus

9:1 *breathing threats and murder*

*Not “breathing out,” but “breathing in” (inhaling) ... or “breathing on” ... threatening and slaughter had come to be 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.*

– from AT Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament

- A. Paul brings up his role as a persecutor repeatedly in Acts and in his letters.
  - i. See (Acts 26:10-11; 22:4-5 and 18-20; 1 Tim. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13).

- B. 9:4 *Why are you persecuting Me?* Notice the “Me”.

- Important Principle: Those who persecute the church persecute Jesus – the Head of the Body.

*1 Corinthians 12:26 (NKJV) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

- C. 9:5 *Who are You Lord?* Notice how quickly Saul's tune changes.

*Kick against the goads* A *goad* is a sharp stick used to prod an ox in the right direction. This implies that the Lord had been working on Saul's heart for quite some time.

- D. 9:6 *trembling and astonished* This is an ardent persecutor of the church whose pride and determination are now gone. He would not happen easily. Jesus is just that awesome.

- Food for Thought: Consider the tragedy of those who reject Christ on earth to confront Jesus face to face a moment after they die. Their opportunity to repent is now gone forever.

- E. 9:9 *three days without sight* Saul now had some time to think through his life and past experiences. He no doubt thought about Stephen and his own activities in **Acts 8:3**.

## II. 9:10-19 The Ministry of Ananias

A. 9:10 *a certain disciple* Who was Ananias? We really don't know much else about him. Ananias was a relative unknown, but God chose to use him in Saul's life.

B. 9:13-14 What Ananias says about Saul is true. He's struggling with what God is really up to in Saul's case. "So Saul is now blind? And Your problem with that is what, Lord?"

- 9:15 Important Principle: God likes to use unlikely vessels. Do you feel unlikely to be used?

- 9:15-16 Important Principle: God uniquely prepares us for the ministry He plans for us.

- Saul was brought up in a Greek environment – so that he could be sent to the Gentiles.
- A Roman citizen – so he had the right to appeal to Caesar in his trial – the highest ruler.
- He was a devout Jew, a scholar in the Scriptures – so that he could speak to Jews
- As a persecutor of the church he was prepared to suffer for Christ to fulfill his ministry.

- God can similarly use every detail of your life – the good, the bad, the indifferent – to prepare you for the work that He has for you. Nothing is beyond His sovereign purposes.

- 9:16 Important Principle: Suffering can be part of God's calling upon a person's life.

C. 9:18 *and was baptized* Saul publicly identified with Christ as soon as possible.

D. 9:19 Ananias, this almost unknown brother was greatly used in Saul's life at the beginning of his walk with the Lord.

- Important Principle: Each life we impact for Christ can impact another life – or maybe more.

- Explanation: This is the only recorded event we have in the life and ministry of Ananias – but look what Paul went on to do. How many people remember Mordecai Ham? In 1936 he held an evangelistic meeting in Charlotte, NC, and a 16 year-old name Billy Graham gave his life to Christ. Thank God for faithful brothers like Ananias – and Mordecai Ham.

## III. 9:20-25 Saul in Damascus

A. Saul began as a persecutor – and soon people respond to him with similar hatred.

## IV. 9:26-31 Saul in Jerusalem

A. 9:26 The saints in Jerusalem had the same problem Ananias did at first. They just can't believe Saul of Tarsus is now really one of them.

B. 9:29 *they attempted to kill him* This is what happened back in Damascus (9:23-24).

C. 9:30 *to Tarsus* Saul's birthplace in Cilicia – Barnabas finds him there in Chapter 11.

- Paul fills in some gaps for us in **Galatians 1:13-24**

Galatians 1:13-24 (NKJV) <sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup>And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

<sup>15</sup>But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, <sup>16</sup>to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup>Then after three years [**we are now at Acts 9:26**] I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup>(Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

<sup>21</sup>Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. [**So this is now 9:30**] <sup>22</sup>And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup>And they glorified God in me.

- Several years will now go by before we meet up with Barnabas and Saul again in Acts 11.

#### V. 9:32-35 Peter and the Healing of Aeneas

A. 9:32 *Lydda* is about half way between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean coast.

B. 9:35 *Sharon* is the coastal plain that included Lydda.

#### VI. 9:36-43 Peter and the Raising of Tabitha

A. 9:36 *Joppa* is an ancient port city on the coast. This is where Jonah went and found his ship going to Tarshish. In that day it was near the Roman headquarters of Caesarea. Today it is near Tel Aviv.

*Tabitha* (Aramaic) and *Dorcas* (Greek) both mean "gazelle". Personally I prefer Tabitha.

i. She never worked a miracle or preached a sermon. Her claim to fame: She was "full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." For the moment this was her epitaph.

- 9:36 Important Principle: This would be a wonderful summary to have of your life.
  - Tabitha wasn't a preacher, a teacher, a miracle worker or an evangelist, but her life was full of good works. When she dies everyone is weeping and they call Peter to pray over her. God listens – He thinks this is one worth keeping around for a while.
- B. 9:43 Peter is now on the coast in Joppa. This sets Peter up for the events of Chapter 10 – another important chapter.