

Acts 9:1 ¶ And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, Acts 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

I think this verse actually reveals that Saul was more than just a consenting witness to the murder of Stephen. In fact, it seems that maybe that event only incited him to want to become more aggressively involved in destroying all others that were followers of Jesus. The high priest gave him the authority to do just that in the city of Damascus in Syria. However, this wasn't the first such writ of authority he had exercised.

Acts 8:3 "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison."

Later testimonies reveal the passion with which he persecuted believers.

Acts 26:9–11 "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

Galatians 1:13–14 "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."

Acts 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

Acts 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

When Saul was near Damascus, he was suddenly surrounded by a shining light from heaven. It must have been quite frightening to cause him to fall down. Next, he heard a voice addressing him and asking him why he was persecuting Him. Saul's response was to ask the speaker to identify Himself. The word "Lord" in his question was a term of respectful address—not an immediate recognition that the voice was of Divine origin.

The Lord then told Saul that He was Jesus, the One whose followers he was persecuting. To "kick against the pricks" is a reference to a pointed stick that

was used to control an ox that didn't want to follow the directions of the farmer. Often the ox would kick when pricked, and the farmer would have to prick him harder.

We know that Saul had heard a very eloquent presentation of the gospel from Stephen, but he had refused to accept its truth. He was "kicking at the pricks" that the Lord was directing toward his heart. This time, however, Jesus chose to prick more pointedly and speak to Saul directly.

Saul immediately understood the truth about Jesus. He knew that He had risen from the dead as His followers claimed. He knew that Jesus was at the right hand of God just as Stephen had declared. His response—Lord (this time with full understanding of His Divine Being), what do you want me to do?

Jesus tells him to go into the city, and he will be told what to do.

Another important truth from Saul's encounter is that the Lord considers actions taken against His followers as actions directed against Him personally.

Acts 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

Acts 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

Luke reveals that the men that were traveling with Saul stood by as silent witnesses. They heard a voice, but they saw no man. According to Saul's testimony as recorded later in this book, his fellow travelers also fell to the ground, but did not understand what Jesus said to him.

Acts 26:13–14 "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me...."

Acts 22:9 "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

It seems that they heard something, but nothing they could understand.

Saul was blind for three days and had nothing to eat or drink during that time.

Acts 9:10 ¶ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

Acts 9:11 And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

Acts 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

In this section we are introduced to Ananias, evidently one of the leading Christians in Damascus. Saul makes reference to him in later testimony.

Acts 22:11–13 “And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me....”

The Lord Jesus appeared to Ananias in a vision and told him to go to the street called Straight and ask at the house of Judas to see Saul of Tarsus. He even tells Ananias that Saul is praying (as he waits for God’s direction). He reveals to Ananias that Saul has been given a vision of a man named Ananias coming to place his hand on him so that he may receive his sight.

Focht: The street called Straight still exists today and connects the east and west gates of the city. Saul was of Jewish birth, Greek culture and Roman citizenship. He was highly educated. Tarsus was a top academic center of the Roman Empire. Saul trained in Jerusalem under Gamaliel who only accepted the best.

Acts 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

Acts 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

I can’t help but wonder if Ananias had heard from the Lord before. He tells the Lord that he has heard of this Saul of Tarsus. His reputation preceded him. He was known for all the evil he had done against the believers in Jerusalem. He even knew that the chief priests had given Saul authority to take captive all in Damascus that were followers of Jesus.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Acts 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.

The Lord doesn’t respond to the information Ananias shared; He just tells Ananias to go in spite of what he has heard. He reveals to Ananias that He has chosen Saul to declare Jesus to the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. In fact, the Lord tells Ananias that Saul is going to suffer much as He declares the truth about Jesus.

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Ananias posits no more objections and heads to Straight Street. When he entered the house of Judas, he put his hands on Saul and addressed him as “Brother.” The Lord had declared Saul to be a transformed man and Ananias immediately accepted him as part of his spiritual family. He told Saul that the same Jesus that had appeared to him on the road to Damascus had sent him to restore his sight and empower him with the Holy Ghost. Immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see. He got up and was immediately baptized making a public declaration of his faith in Jesus. Again, from later testimony we know that Ananias encouraged him to be baptized.

Acts 22:12–16 “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight....And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Ananias reminds me of the truth that Peter declared; all true believers are priests before God, and can be used of God to do great things.

1 Peter 2:9–10 “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Acts 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Acts 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Acts 9:21 But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Finally, Saul ate and was strengthened physically. He stayed an unspecified number of days with the disciples in Damascus. While there, he immediately began to preach the truth of Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God, in the synagogues. All that heard him were amazed. They knew that Saul had persecuted and imprisoned many for accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah. It seems that they had already heard that he was on his way to Damascus to take more prisoners back to the chief priests.

The more he preached, the more powerful became his message declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. He was already highly educated in the scripture, and it seems that his personal encounter with the Savior caused him to see many of those Old Testament prophecies with new understanding. I am sure that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life facilitated that understanding.

Saul’s preaching created quite a bit of confusion among the Jews. All of a sudden a well-known Pharisee who had been aggressive in persecuting the

followers of Jesus was now declaring Him to be the Messiah and the very Son of God. Saul is a prime example of the truth that no one is beyond salvation. Those we love that seem to be so hard-hearted and beyond our reach are not beyond the loving reach of our Savior.

We know from Paul's letter to the Galatians that he spent some time in Arabia some time after his conversion experience and came back to Damascus before going to Jerusalem. Luke just didn't include that information in his account of events. It reads to me like his journey to Jerusalem was three years after his conversion.

Galatians 1:15–18 “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.”

This would have given Saul three years of field experience and/or time of preparation before presenting himself before the apostles.

Acts 9:23 ¶ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

Acts 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Acts 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket.

Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

After preaching several days in Damascus upon his return, Saul found out that there was a group of Jews planning to kill him. They evidently planned to attack him once he left the city since they were watching the gates so carefully. So, a group of followers of Jesus devised a plan to let him down the side of the wall in a basket at night. We learn from his letter to the Corinthians, that it was from a window. I would assume from a business or home that formed part of the wall—similar to how Rahab enabled the Jewish spies to Jericho escape.

2 Corinthians 11:33 “And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”

It worked, and Saul headed to Jerusalem to join the disciples there. Even after three years, the disciples in Jerusalem were still afraid of Saul. They thought he was an impostor.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

Barnabas, however, became Saul's advocate. He brought Saul before the apostles and told them about his personal visitation from the Lord on the road to Damascus. He then reported that Saul had boldly preached the gospel in the name of Jesus in that city. Taken in context with the verses from Galatians above, it seems he basically spent a couple of weeks in Peter's company going about Jerusalem.

Acts 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

Acts 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

During that time Saul spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. As a Grecian Jew himself, he engaged other Grecian Jews in debating the truth of his message. Evidently, he made enemies in the process, and they planned to kill him. When the believers in Jerusalem were made aware of the danger he was in, they took him to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus, his hometown.

Eerdman's Dictionary tells us the following about Tarsus: "Strabo describes the city during the 1st century C.E. as surpassing Athens and Alexandria in culture and learning. The city had a long history as a seat of learning and a school of philosophy."

After Saul left, the churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria experienced a time of relative peace and growth—both physically and spiritually. They were especially sensitive and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit during this time.

I liked the observation made by David Guzik: "*The fear of the Lord...the comfort of the Holy Spirit*: Each of these are needed in the Christian walk. At any given moment a disciple of Jesus may more need the fear of the Lord or the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Often, God wants the comfortable to be afflicted (gaining the fear of the Lord) and the afflicted to be comforted (by the comfort of the Holy Spirit)."

Acts 9:32 ¶ And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all *quarters*, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

Acts 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

Acts 9:35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

Luke once again turns his narrative back to Peter, who is expanding his ministry

more and more outside Jerusalem. As Peter is traveling throughout the country, he stops to see the believers in Lydda. According to Easton's Dictionary, it is "about 9 miles east of Joppa, on the road from the sea-port to Jerusalem." Joppa was the main seaport for Jerusalem. It is not far from where Ben Gurion Airport outside Tel Aviv is located in Israel today.

In Lydda was a man named Aeneas who had been bed-ridden with palsy (paralyzed) for eight years. Luke tells it short and sweet. When Peter saw Aeneas, he told him to get up and make his bed because Jesus the Messiah had made him whole—and he did! Everyone in Lydda and Saron (evidently a name for the general area in the plain of Sharon) saw him and turned to the Lord in faith after hearing what Peter had done.

Acts 9:36 ¶ Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Acts 9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid *her* in an upper chamber.

Acts 9:38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring *him* that he would not delay to come to them.

Next we are introduced to a faithful disciple in the city of Joppa named Tabitha, also known as Dorcas. This woman was widely recognized as one who did good works and was especially diligent to help those in need. She was sick and died while Peter was in Lydda. They prepared her for burial and laid her in an upper room. The disciples at Joppa had heard that Peter was in Lydda, so they sent two men to him begging him to immediately come back with them to Joppa. I would assume they also told him why.

Acts 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

Acts 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning *him* to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 9:41 And he gave her *his* hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

Acts 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

Peter went and they took him to the room where her body lay. All the widows gathered around Peter weeping and showing him the many coats and garments Dorcas had made for them.

Peter sent everyone out of the room and knelt down to pray. He then turned toward the body and said, "Tabitha, arise." Amazingly, she opened her eyes and sat up when she saw Peter. He then took her by the hand and lifted her up.

Then he called out to all the mourners and presented her to them alive! Again, it didn't take long for this news to travel throughout all Joppa; and many placed their faith in the Lord in light of this evidence to the truth of Peter's message.

Acts 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

After healing Dorcas, Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a man known as Simon, a tanner, one who makes leather from animal hides. Because his occupation required him to work with dead animals, Simon was basically an outcast from normal society. Peter, however, was going to learn that it wasn't things from the outside that made one unclean, but things on the inside.

The upcoming chapter will expand his understanding in this area.