

## 8. The Conversion of Saul—Acts 9:1-25

The study of the fulfillment of the Great Commission of the Lord comes to the conversion of Saul in Acts 9:1-25. Previous lessons have studied how the gospel went to Jews of all nations, to the crippled and poor, to people of all nationalities, and to people of different races and political persuasions. Now the gospel goes to Saul of Tarsus—perhaps the greatest enemy that the early church had known up until this time. This study has met Saul twice earlier. In Acts 7, he was at the stoning of Stephen where “the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Acts 7:58. Acts 8:1 describes Saul’s complicity in Stephen’s death, “And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.” Acts 8:3 tells the depth of his involvement in the persecution of the church: “But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

### All Nations Includes Those Who Have Done the Very Worst Deeds

9:1 *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*

When the Lord said to preach the gospel to all nations, this included those that had done the very worst deeds. It is difficult to imagine how one could have been worse than Saul. He consented to the murder of Stephen, laid waste the church, and, now, breathes murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples, binding them and taking them as prisoners. Today, the gospel is still to go to those who are wicked and opposed to the church. The religious leaders of the world should not be excluded from efforts to preach the gospel, nor should murderers and killers. The gospel was to go to all nations.

### The Lord Appeared to Saul

3 *As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

5 *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

*"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

The Lord appeared directly to Saul, speaking to him. This was truly a great miracle—light flashed and the Lord spoke. Yet, Saul was not saved at the point of this great miracle. Miracles do not save. He still had to hear and obey the gospel to be saved, just as the Lord had commanded in the great commission. The Lord said, “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” In Paul’s account of his conversion that he made before the people in Acts 22, he included a question that he asked the Lord: “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’” Saul asked the same question asked by those Jews on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37: “Brothers, what shall we do?” Saul, just as they did, wanted to know what to do.

### The Gospel Must Be Preached by Men

7 *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

10 *In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.*

11 *The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he*



is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

The miracle was clear, evident, and apparent to all. The men traveling with Saul saw his condition and heard the sound, but did not see anyone. Saul remained in this condition waiting for Ananias to come to him. In the meantime, Ananias had his own vision and the Lord instructed to go to Saul on Straight Street. As with the other example of conversion, the gospel had to be preached to Saul.

## When Saul Heard the Gospel, He Was Baptized

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Ananias did as the Lord instructed and went to Saul. Ananias said that his mission was two fold: that Saul might see again and that Saul might be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is clear from verse 12 that Ananias placed his hands on him to restore his sight. Once this happened and he could see again 'he got up and was baptized.'" This sequence is made even more emphatic in Acts 22 when Paul told his story to the people:

2 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

He first received his sight, and then was told, "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'" According to Acts 2:38, it would be with the baptism and washing away of his sins that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

## Conclusion

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

In the end, Saul of Tarsus had his sins forgiven and became a fervent disciple of the Lord, just as commanded in the Great Commission. He later was called Paul beginning in Acts 13:9 Even those who murder Christians and persecute the church are proper subjects who must hear and obey the gospel, receiving the Lord's salvation. Two purposes were served by the Lord's appearing to Saul. He was convicted and convinced of what he must do and he qualified to serve the Lord as his apostle. 1 Cor 15:8-9 records the rest of the story: "And last of all he appeared to me also. . . . 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

## Study Questions

1. Describe Saul's treatment of Christians. \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did Saul receive his sight? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What did Ananias tell Saul to do to wash away his sins? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What two purposes were served by the Lord's appearing to Saul? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How did Saul receive the Holy Spirit? \_\_\_\_\_