

Acts 9

1-2 We read about Saul watching over the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen in the end of Acts 7. (8:3) Chapter 8 told of Philip's evangelism success with Samaritans and a Gentile convert to Judaism. Now in this chapter, we read of Saul's conversion, the man who will be the Apostle to the Gentiles. This is the progressive fulfillment of 1:8.

The ability of the Sanhedrin to extradite those who fled is well documented historically. Saul was going after the Christians that fled from Jerusalem to Damascus. (22:4) Damascus was a major city on the trade route between Jerusalem and Mesopotamia. It was about 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It contained a large Jewish population. Josephus wrote that 10 to 18 thousand Jews were killed there during the revolt of AD 66-70. The Damascus synagogues had a large number of Greek Gentile converts. They were especially open to the Gospel. The Greek speaking Christians that fled Jerusalem were finding the city to be a fruitful field, news of which must have reached Jerusalem, prompting Saul to plan this mission. The High Priest's persecution backfired and actually brought about more converts.

Before they were called Christians, they were called followers of "The Way" because of the conviction that Jesus is the way of salvation, the way to God, and the way to life. Their lives were in danger, just as Stephen's was. (26:9-11)

3 The Light shone from heaven, which means that Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God. Light was richly symbolic for the Jews. (Psalm 104:2) The presence of God was manifested as a ball of light, the Shekinah. (1Timothy 6:16) Saul may have recalled the Scripture from Isaiah 9:1, Those walking in darkness have seen a great light. He was coming out of spiritual darkness to the illumination of a truth; Jesus is Lord.

4 The question that would rock his world and change his life! Why are you persecuting me? Was it being locked into system of teaching in which he prided himself, yet he was acting completely contrary to the will of God? He was about to see that he was doing the opposite of what he intended. He was totally convinced but was totally wrong.

5-6 Who are you Master? I AM Yeshuah (the salvation of God) whom you are persecuting. He was persecuting Christians, the body of Christ. (Ephesians 5:30) We need to remember that fellow believers are the body. What we do to them is done to Jesus. This is consistent with Jesus' saying, "In as much as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me." Matthew 25:40 Then Saul received a call like Abraham's. Go and you will be told what you MUST do. It wasn't a request.

7-8 Those with him heard the sound but saw no one and apparently didn't comprehend the message. (Daniel 10:7) They may have been temple guards or other Sanhedrin officials. Saul was blinded, a reminder of his spiritual condition.

9 Stricken with grief that he had been so wrong, he fasted and prayed for 3 days. He must have remembered Stephen's message, thought over the Scriptures about Messiah, remembered the things he had said and done toward Christians, and grieved. Sometime during those three days he had another vision of the Lord. (cf. 9:12)

10-12 There is a chapel bearing Ananias' name that is supposedly over the site of his home. If the location is authentic, it was on the wall of the old city. He must have been one of the early Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah. 22:12

God gave Saul and Ananias a vision (horama) of what was to happen. This is similar to the vision given to Paul and Cornelius in the 10th chapter. The original East-West cardo (Straight Street) has been partially uncovered. It was fifty feet wide and colonnaded. On this street was the home of Judas, probably a Jew that did not believe in Jesus where Paul had arranged to stay. The mission had taken a drastic turn. Ananias was to confer a blessing and healing upon Saul through the laying of hands, an Old Testament tradition practiced by Jesus when He healed people.

13-14 The Christians had their informers and knew why Saul had come. Ananias was understandably concerned, and for his own sake told the Lord what the Lord already knew. Funny how we do that. This is the first time Christians are referred to as saints. No, you don't have to have two verified miracles to be a saint. You just need to accept Jesus as your Savior for God to see you as holy. (1Corinthians 1:2)

15-16 God knows what we couldn't even imagine. Ananias is let in on a prophetic word. Saul will preach to Gentiles, Jews, and even kings. (John 15:16) Contrary to Ananias fear of suffering at Saul's hands, the Lord shows him that Saul will suffer greatly for him. (2 Corinthians 11:23-33) "I will show him" – did that mean a prophetic vision or was it just the outworking of ministry one day at a time? Perhaps a revelation of the suffering to come helped him deal with the suffering he had caused. (1Corinthians 4:9)

17-18 As Ananias obeyed, and Saul's eyes were healed. He saw an analogy in this that he would use in his later writings (2 Corinthians 4:4). Notice that he was filled with the Spirit and then baptized. The Spirit empowered him for the work he was to do, and he made a public declaration of the change that had taken place in him without hesitation. (Acts 22:16) Baptism declared he was a convert and had a new Master. This is probably the most dramatic conversion in history.