



## Focus Points...*For Acts 9*

### Stop And Consider...

- \* Saul's insatiable passion for persecuting the early Church; and
- \* Ananias' caution in meeting the feared "Headhunter" of Christians.

### Look...

- \* At how God's Spirit turned what was thought to be unimaginably impossible to come true; and
- \* At Saul's changed heart; Aeneas' healing, and Tabitha's resurrection.

### Listen...

- \* To Luke's optimism and excitement about God's remarkable intervention to help the church;
- \* To the apostles, who never stopped preaching the Gospel; and
- \* To the people of Lydda, Joppa and all the surrounding regions expressing faith in Jesus Christ.

### Prayer:

Lord, by Your grace You change lives. As You called Saul to be Your apostle, send Your Holy Spirit that I may serve You with a passion like that of Saul. As You changed his heart to fulfill his new calling, change my heart that I may hear Your call and serve You. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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### Commentary:

God works in mysterious and unexpected ways. As Acts 9 opens, Saul was breathing "murderous threats" against Christians. His zeal for hunting down Christians could not be confined to Jerusalem. His obsessive passion to hunt down and murder Christians extended even to Damascus. There he hoped to protect the cause of Zionism. There he hoped to make more than just a dent on the Christian movement. He wanted to *annihilate* it.



But God had different plans for Saul...very different plans. Recognizing the voice of God (i.e. "*bat qol*"), the words of Jesus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" marked the beginning of a new life and spiritual direction for Saul.

Unlike Moses who resisted God's call (cf. Exodus 3), Saul did not hesitate to do what Jesus commanded. Though blinded, his cohorts led him into the city which

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Jesus had commanded Saul to go (9:6). There he stayed at the house of Judas on Straight Street, one of Damascus' major thoroughfares.

On the third day of his blindness, God intervened again. Appearing to Ananias in a dream, God directed Ananias to go to Saul. Given the vast persecution and Saul's infamous reputation as an insatiably blood-thirsty Christian killer, Ananias' concern was well-founded (9:13ff.).

Ananias must have been dumbstruck by the Lord's request. He must have been amazed at God's plan for Saul. If Saul really were to be God's chosen instrument to carry the Gospel throughout the world, seemingly that would be a miracle second only to Jesus' resurrection. The early Christians had seen many amazing signs and wonders. Saul's conversion could top all of them.

Note the sequence of events in 9:17ff. Ananias placed his hands on Saul for healing. The Holy Spirit having come on him, Saul believed and was immediately baptized as a Christian. Eating and regaining strength, Saul completed his three days of fasting and intense spiritual reflection (9:19).

According to Luke, Saul's ministry took off with a running start. He probably didn't need much instruction from the Damascus disciples. He knew the Christian message intimately. He knew the Christian claims of the Messiah. He heard the very voice of Jesus Himself. But now, Saul was on the other side of the fence. With the very passion with which he pursued and persecuted Christians, Saul redirected to sharing the Gospel.

Saul's powerful preaching immediately caused the chief persecutor to become the chief persecuted. Jesus' words to Ananias, Saul "must suffer for My name" (9:16) were fulfilled all too soon. From the moment Saul converted to Christianity, the Jews had him in their crosshairs day and night, waiting for an opportunity to kill the one who betrayed Judaism.

They needed to stop him. They knew how persuasive Saul was. They knew what a formidable force he was. And they feared what would happen if other Jews heard Saul's preaching.

Let down secretly in a basket to avoid capture (9:25), Saul's other major problem was gaining acceptance of other Christians—especially the apostles. Everyone knew what Saul had done. They knew how dangerous his murderous threats and activities were. Without intervention of some sort, getting the Church to accept Saul was a hard sell.

Joseph Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," became Saul's sponsor. In Acts 4, Luke noted how Barnabas had sold a field he owned and gave the proceeds to the Apostles. (4:36ff.) Formerly a Levite, Barnabas would have intimately understood Saul's Jewish roots. He would also have had the expertise to

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question and interrogate Saul in detail regarding his new-found faith. Convinced that Saul's conversion was genuine, Barnabas commended Saul to the other apostles. It was a remarkable act. Barnabas risked his credibility and his ministry by sticking his neck out for Saul.

His risk was successful. The Church's acceptance of Saul marked the beginning of a whole new even brighter chapter for the early Christians. Saul was emerging as the major player for two reasons: First, Saul preached the Gospel incessantly, amid threats on his life; and Second, Saul's defection to Christianity left the Jewish persecution without its major mastermind.

What were the results? The Christians enjoyed a time of peace and growth throughout the region (9:31).

Note how Peter's visit to Lydda and the healing of the paralytic is reminiscent of a well-established evangelistic pattern seen earlier in Acts 3:1ff. The result of the healing, of course, is predictable. "All those in Lydda and Sharon...turned to the Lord" (9:35).

The resurrection of Tabitha, the regional "Mother Theresa" figure in nearby Joppa, had the same purpose and effect as the Apostles' other healings: to move people to believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. If they hadn't believed in resurrections before, the resurrection of Tabitha would certainly challenge their minds and their faith.

In conclusion, the events of chapter nine are nothing short of momentous. Jesus' vision for an ever-expanding church was being realized. Having begun in Jerusalem, the Apostles were reaching far beyond Judea and Samaria. They were poised to go to the ends of the earth. With God's Spirit guiding them, nothing could stop them now. Like a mighty army, the Church of God was moving with the cross of Jesus, going on before.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, how powerfully Your Spirit worked among the early Christians. Even the most resistant forces fell down before You. Lord, break down whatever things resist Your Kingdom. Melt, move and change whatever barriers I may have, so that I may boldly proclaim Your salvation to everyone! In Your name I pray. Amen.

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TFF 1/08