

# ACTS

## Chapter 9

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.<sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."<sup>13</sup> "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,<sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

**9:1** *Saul*. Introduced at the stoning of Stephen (7:58), he was born in Tarsus and trained under Gamaliel (22:3). See note on Php 3:4–14.

*murderous threats*. We do not know that Saul was directly involved in the death of anyone other than Stephen (8:1), but there appear to have been similar cases (22:4; 26:10).

*high priest*. Probably Caiaphas (see note on 4:6) and the members of the Sanhedrin, who had authority over Jews both in Judea and elsewhere.

**9:2** *Damascus*. Located in the Roman province of Syria, it was the nearest important city outside Palestine. It also had a large Jewish population. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 150 miles, four to six days' travel.

*the Way*. A name for Christianity occurring a number of times in Acts (16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; see 2Pe 2:2). Jesus called himself “the way” (Jn 14:6).

*prisoners to Jerusalem*. Where the full authority of the Sanhedrin could be exercised in trial for either acquittal or death.

**9:3** *a light from heaven*. “About noon” (26:13).

**9:4** *why do you persecute me?* To persecute the church is to persecute Christ, for the church is his body (see 1Co 12:27; Eph 1:22–23).

**9:5** *Who are you, Lord?* In rabbinic tradition such a voice from heaven would have been understood as the voice of God himself. The solemn repetition of Saul’s name and the bright light suggested to him that he was in the presence of deity.

**9:7** *heard the sound*. Those with Saul “heard the sound” but “did not understand” what the voice was saying (22:9; cf. Da 10:7).

**9:10** *Ananias*. Mentioned elsewhere only in 22:12. His was a common name (5:1; 23:2). The Greek form is derived from the Hebrew name Hananiah, meaning “The LORD is gracious/shows grace” (see Da 1:6).

**9:11** *Straight Street*. Probably followed the same route of the long, straight street that today runs through the city from east to west. It is a decided contrast to the numerous crooked streets of the city (see map of “Roman Damascus”).

*Tarsus*. See note on 22:3.

*praying*. Prayer is often associated with visions in Luke and Acts (see 10:9–11; Lk 1:10; 3:21; 9:28).

**9:13, 32** *saints*. See notes on Ro 1:7; Php 1:1.

**9:15** *before the Gentiles*. See Ro 1:13–14.

*their kings*. Agrippa (26:1) and Caesar at Rome (25:11–12; 28:19).

**9:17** *Jesus, who appeared to you*. The Damascus road experience was not merely a vision. The resurrected Christ actually appeared to Saul, and on this fact Saul based his qualification to be an apostle (1Co 9:1; 15:8).

**Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.** <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> 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?” <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. <sup>a</sup> <sup>23</sup> After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

**26** When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. **27** But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. **28** So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. **30** When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. **31** Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

**9:20** *At once.* Following his baptism.

*synagogues.* It became Saul's regular practice to preach at every opportunity in the synagogues (13:5; 14:1; 17:1–2, 10; 18:4, 19; 19:8).

*Jesus is the Son of God.* Saul's message was a declaration of what he himself had become convinced of on the Damascus road: Christ's deity and Messiahship (see NIV text note on v. 22).

**9:21** WERE ASTONISHED – The disciples are not prepared to obey the Lord because they are afraid of their persecutor. This shows a misdirected fear of the persecutor rather than God (cf. Luke 12:4-5). It also shows the problem that humans have in keeping up with the Lord's work. The Lord's work is revealed through events that over-throw human expectations. Humans calculate the future on the basis of their normal experience. These calculations leave them unprepared for the appearance of the Overruler, who negates human plans and works the unexpected. This is a problem not only for the rejecters of Jesus but also for the church, which, as our narrative indicates, is led by the Lord into situations beyond its fathoming. (Tannehill)

**9:23** *After many days.* Three years (Gal 1:17–18). It is probable that the major part of this period was spent in Arabia, away from Damascus, though the borders of Arabia extended to the environs of Damascus.

*the Jews conspired to kill him.* Upon his return to Damascus, the governor under Aretas gave orders for his arrest (2Co 11:32). The absence of Roman coins struck in Damascus between A.D. 34 and 62 may indicate that Aretas was in control during that period.

**9:25** *lowered him in a basket.* See 2Co 11:33 (cf. Jos 2:15; 1Sa 19:12).

OPENING IN THE WALL – Saul's escape was really very simple. Some of the houses that adjoined the wall around the city had windows that were high above the wall itself. From such a window, strong and loving hands lowered Saul to the ground in a basket. (LL)

**9:26** *he came to Jerusalem.* From Gal 1:19 we learn that all the apostles were away except Peter and James, the Lord's brother. James was not one of the Twelve, but he held a position in Jerusalem comparable to that of an apostle.

**9:27** *Barnabas*. See note on 4:36. – Barnabas begins to live up to his designation as “son of consolation.” He acts as mediator between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders. (Sacra)

**9:29** *He talked and debated*. Formerly Saul was arguing against Christ; now he is forcefully presenting Jesus as the Messiah.

**TRIED TO KILL HIM** – When Saul returns to Jerusalem, he assumes the role of the fallen Stephen, debating with Hellenistic Jews, who plot to kill him. Later Paul will face accusations similar to the accusations against Stephen (21:28). (Tannehill)

**9:30** *Caesarea*. See note on 8:40.

*Tarsus*. Saul’s birthplace (see note on 22:3).

**SENT HIM OFF TO TARSUS** – A small but trusted delegation was selected and given the responsibility of getting Saul safely to the seaport town of Caesarea and probably putting him on a ship for his hometown of Tarsus. Luke tells us nothing about why Saul went home to Tarsus, nor what he did during the eight years he stayed there. There Saul remained until Barnabas came to Tarsus to bring Saul back into the picture. (LL)

**9:31** *the church*. The whole Christian body, including Christians in the districts of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The singular thus does not here refer to the various congregations but to the church as a whole (see note on 5:11).

*encouraged by the Holy Spirit*. The work of the Spirit is particularly noted throughout the book of Acts (see 13:2 and note on 1:2). This is why the book is sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. – Luke points us again to the source of power and growth for the Lord’s church. It is the immersion in the Word through which the Holy Spirit matures our faith, so that the disciples’ lives were living reflections of Christ for all the world to see. (LL)

<sup>32</sup> **As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda.** <sup>33</sup> **There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years.** <sup>34</sup> **“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.** <sup>35</sup> **All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.** <sup>36</sup> **In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas<sup>a</sup>), who was always doing good and helping the poor.** <sup>37</sup> **About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.** <sup>38</sup> **Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”** <sup>39</sup> **Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.** <sup>40</sup> **Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.** <sup>41</sup> **He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.** <sup>42</sup> **This**

**became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.** <sup>43</sup> **Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.**

**9:32 TRAVELED** – From the way Luke introduces Peter’s activity, it would seem that this is how all the apostles are occupied. By now there were undoubtedly many congregations scattered throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The apostles were the appointed teachers and preachers of the Word. (LL)

**SAINTS** – Again, the beautiful word “saints” is used by Luke when he refers to believers. In every community where they had settled, they lived lives worthy of the calling they had received (Eph. 4:1) and through such living attracted their neighbors to Christ. (LL)

**Lydda.** A town two or three miles north of the road connecting Joppa and Jerusalem. Lydda is about 12 miles from Joppa. – The modern city Lod, which was the OT name for the place, is the site of Israel’s Ben Gurion International Airport. (PBC)

**9:33 Aeneas.** Since Peter was there to visit the believers, Aeneas was probably one of the Christians.

**9:35 Sharon.** The fertile plain of Sharon runs about 50 miles along the Mediterranean coast, roughly from Joppa to Caesarea. The reference here, however, may be to a village in the neighborhood of Lydda instead of to a district (an Egyptian papyrus refers to a town by that name in Palestine).

**TURNED TO THE LORD** – Since the Gospel had not yet been written, the Spirit used those miracles to attest to the truth of the apostles’ teaching and preaching. (LL)

**9:36 Joppa.** About 38 miles from Jerusalem, the main seaport of Judea. Today it is known as Jaffa and is a suburb of Tel Aviv. – Thirty-five miles away from Jerusalem, Joppa was a port town already in the days of Joshua (Joshua 19:46). Saul’s persecution in Jerusalem probably brought the first Christian here. Philip had undoubtedly worked here for a while on his way to Caesarea.

**9:37 body was washed.** In preparation for burial, a custom common to both Jews (Purification of the Dead) and Greeks.

**upstairs room.** If burial was delayed, it was customary to lay the body in an upper room. In Jerusalem the body had to be buried the day the person died, but outside Jerusalem up to three days might be allowed for burial.

**9:38 near Joppa.** See note on v. 32.

**come at once!** Whether for consolation or for a miracle, Peter was urged to hurry in order to arrive before the burial.

**9:39 DORCAS** – The Dorcas societies or guilds in some congregations today do the kind of work which she did, sewing for those in need of clothing. (PBC)

**9:40 sent them all out.** Cf. 1Ki 17:23; 2Ki 4:33. Peter had been present on all three occasions recorded in Scripture when Jesus raised individuals from the dead (Mt 9:25; Lk

7:11–17; Jn 11:1–44). As when Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter, the crowd in the room was told to leave. Unlike Jesus, however, Peter knelt and prayed. – He also knew that Jesus had not raised up all the people who died during his ministry. What was Jesus’ will now? Peter sent everyone out of the room so that he could be alone to pray. (PBC)

**9:42** *many people believed.* Cf. Jn 12:11.

**9:43** *a tanner.* Occupations were frequently used with personal names to identify individuals further (see 16:14; 18:3; 19:24; 2Ti 4:14), but in this case it is especially significant. A tanner was involved in treating the skins of dead animals, thus contacting the unclean according to Jewish law; so he was despised by many. Peter’s decision to stay with him shows already a willingness to reject Jewish prejudice and prepares the way for his coming vision and the mission to the Gentiles.