

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

Chapter Nine

Saul is Born Again into Paul

Peter's Miracles

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Now the Lord takes His church to new heights as Jesus raises Saul from a spiritually dead person and makes him anew as the great apostle Paul. The same event occurs in the life of each of God's children that have been added over the years since the beginning of the church age. As we read about the conversion of Saul to Paul I hope that all of us will think deeply about the same change that happened to us. Praise the Lord for His mercy as He brings us into the family of God!

Luke first introduced us to Saul at the beginning of chapter 8. Here we saw that Saul was a devout Jew seeking to rid the world of this new religion.

Acts 8:1 “And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:2 And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

Acts 8:3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

Just a little later in time we see Saul is still conscientiously about his work.

Acts 9:1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

Acts 9:2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:3 And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

Acts 9:4 and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul was probably the most devout Jew alive at this time. His education was phenomenal and he thought that he was serving God by removing this terrible new religion called “The Way” from the world. He surely must have thought like the Jews involved in the crucifixion of Jesus that He was a blasphemer of the highest rank because He said that He and the Father were one:

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.”

Saul was a monotheist Jew and such statements by Jesus as the above certainly made Saul think that this new religion was polytheistic and it must be stamped out. Saul may have thought that he had an historic precedent in the person of Phinehas (Num 25:7-11) who killed an immoral man and woman with a spear and God honored this action and praised Phinehas.

Num 25:1 "While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

Num 25:2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Num 25:3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.

Num 25:4 And the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

Num 25:5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

Num 25:6 Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Num 25:7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand;

Num 25:8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked.

Num 25:10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 25:11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.

Num 25:12 "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace;

Num 25:13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel.' "

God indeed is serious about His requirements for His followers. Certainly it must have also seemed to Moses that a similar situation had arisen with these followers of Jesus corrupting the Jewish religion as Jews were joining The Way.

Saul was not content to just be following the directions of the Jewish leaders; he made a special trip to obtain letters giving him the authority to persecute the followers of Jesus in Damascus. The religion had already spread into Samaria and now it had spread to Damascus, which was 120 miles further to the north. He must have been full of self confidence as he was heading north to further bring these people to Jewish justice. In the midst of his self righteous he was stopped dead in his tracks by the very God that he thought he was serving!

Acts 9:5 And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,
Acts 9:6 but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do. "
Acts 9:7 And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.
Acts 9:8 And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.
Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Luke fills in more of the details of this event in Acts 22 and 26. Luke will also later relate for us that Paul also said that he saw Jesus and not just light. Everyone else only saw a light and heard noises but could not understand any of the words so this event was only for Saul/Paul. Saul was spiritually blind and now God made him physically blind so that his spiritual eyes could be opened. What a stupendous situation for Saul! He knew that he was serving God by trying to stamp out this new religion that was causing serious damage to his religious beliefs but now he was stopped dead in his tracks by the very person that he thought was a charlatan. Jesus really had been raised from the dead and now He appeared in a mighty way to Saul and told him that he was persecuting the person that Saul thought had been a blasphemer. He must have been curled in the fetal position in great shock as all reality was now being revealed to him. He must have already started feeling great guilt as he realized that he had hurt and imprisoned many followers of God. He was in such shock and in total darkness so that he could not eat or drink. Trying to understand this situation and express this situation here is too much for me.

Acts 9:10 "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, here am I, Lord."
Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,
Acts 9:12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight. "
Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem;
Acts 9:14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name. "
Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;
Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

What Ananias was being asked to do would be comparable to God converting Hitler and then asking a Jewish rabbi to go meet with Hitler for he was going to be a servant of God now. After hearing about the terrible antics of Hitler any rabbi would have been terrified to go to him and help him in his new position as a follower of God. Remember that Ananias was from Damascus and so he was probably high on Saul's list of people to persecute and now God was using Ananias to lead Saul into the city! God told Ananias

that Saul was praying, which tells us what Saul was doing in his pit of existence. God also told Ananias that Saul would be expecting him because God had given Saul a vision of Ananias coming to him. What an abundant life God had in mind for Saul! He had told Saul that He was going to tell him how much he was going to have to suffer for Him! This is the true altar call! You who have been born again by the mercy of God come forward and learn how you must suffer in this life for your God! Not exactly a “seeker friendly” attitude! The only reason God gave Ananias was that Saul was God’s chosen vessel and that he would be used to bring God’s word to the gentiles and to the Jews.

Acts 9:17 “And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized;

Having been told to go, Ananias went even though he may have been a bit worried. He did what God told him to do. He told Saul that Jesus sent him so that Saul would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The change was instantaneous. Saul could see physically and spiritually now and he got up and was baptized. He then ate and regained his strength. Now he spent time with the very disciples to whom he was coming to persecute. What a wonderful scene that would have been! He must have just been soaking up the truth told him by these disciples about the Lord Jesus. This man’s life was turned upside down. His friends and colleagues became his enemies and his enemies became his friends and new colleagues.

There were no apostles in Damascus. Saul was chosen directly by Jesus Christ, which authorized Saul to be an apostle, and therefore not under the authority of the other apostles but directly under the authority of his caller: Jesus Christ. Gerstner says that he is sure that Paul is the twelfth apostle directly chosen by God. Looking back at the choosing of Matthias for the replacement of Judas we do not see Luke telling us that God initiated the choosing of a replacement for Judas at that point (Acts 1:15). Rather we see that it is brash Peter who called for the replacement. The scripture also tells us nothing more about Matthias and that would seem to be a bit strange. Well, that is probably not terribly important but it is interesting and it is worth looking at how they chose Matthias as perhaps a way not to make decisions within the church:

- 1.) The disciples were not told to do anything but to just wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were even chastised about speculating about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6-8). They were still thinking in terms of a physical kingdom.
- 2.) It was then Peter who determined that they should choose another person to be the witness with them of the resurrection of Jesus. God did not command this action and they did not pray for guidance before discussing the issue and choosing two men.
- 3.) This action took place before Pentecost so they still did not have the indwelt wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for any action.

- 4.) They prayed for God's guidance to choose between the two people that they had put forward on their own initiative. They then cast lots for the decision and that is not a New Testament method of determining the will of God.
- 5.) Just because they finally did pray is no guarantee that God positively answered their prayer.
- 6.) Matthias was then chosen by lots to be the twelfth Apostle but no mention of Matthias is given in any other Scripture.
- 7.) With the choosing by God of Paul for an Apostle, they then would have thirteen apostles and that number is a problem.

This process is certainly worth our consideration. Certainly waiting on the Lord is a great lesson to learn:

"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."
Isaiah 40:31

Acts 9:19 and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,
Acts 9:20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."
Acts 9:21 And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"
Acts 9:22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ."

We then see the result of this transformation: he went about telling people in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God! The Jews expected Saul to be bringing back many members of The Way to be imprisoned but instead he was now preaching in their synagogues and proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God! When he came to the synagogue to speak he would have been recognized as the great Pharisee and he would have been given the Tora from which to teach for that is the way such great teachers were welcomed to the synagogues. Jesus was also so treated when He went to a synagogue once. What a surprise awaited the gathered Pharisees! Instead of Saul the great Pharisee being a hero for the Jews Saul is now their enemy. He was now using his tremendous intellect and education to show everyone that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. What a wonderful revelation it must have been for Saul in that he had all the training necessary to really understand all the prophecies made concerning the coming of the Messiah but he had to be born again so that he could really understand the truth and then proclaim it with power.

Luke uses phrases like "several days" in verse 19 and below "many days", but the actual passing of time was longer. We know from the following that some three years actually passed for those "several days":

Gal 1:17 “nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Gal 1:18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.”

Acts 9:23 “And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

Acts 9:24 but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

Acts 9:25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

It is not surprising that the Jews now wanted to kill Saul for he was a very impressive enemy. As we have seen many times before the Jews did not seem to be very wise at making plans! They wanted to kill Jesus many times before they finally succeeded for the killing of Jesus or of His apostles had to be done in God’s time. Saul would finally be killed by them but not until he had spread the Gospel throughout the region and left us with his wonderful teachings. God let Saul learn of the plan and directed the disciples to get Saul out of the city. They had to use an opening in the city wall and a large basket to put Saul down on the ground outside of the city. Remember another similar story?

Acts 9:26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:28 And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 9:29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.”

Saul in the presence of the disciples would have been about as welcome as an SS officer during WWII would have been to a group of Jews! Barnabas has been known as the great encourager and here Luke tells us how he explained the story of the conversion of Saul and his proclaiming of Jesus as the Son of God. Saul was then accepted by the disciples and he went about preaching the truth. We know from Paul’s writings that some time passed in these events:

Gal 2:1 “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

Gal 2:2 And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.”

Paul went to the see some other apostles and all determined that indeed Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ who was teaching the true gospel message.

But Saul was not only a great debater of the truth of Jesus, the Jews hated him as much as they had hated Jesus. So again the plans to kill Saul began in earnest. Saul had a tremendous ability to speak the truth but he was doing it so as to bring even more trouble on the early church. Of course such could have been fruitful if the timing were God's timing but we see that it was not, at least in this area.

Acts 9:30 “But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

The other disciples decided that it was time for Saul to take his methods somewhere else so they planned to send him back to his home town of Tarsus. Paul probably relates this time to us in:

Acts 22:17 “And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,

Acts 22:18 and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

Acts 22:19 "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee.

Acts 22:20 'And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.'

Acts 22:21 "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'”

Here is a timeline for Paul as we end our brief introduction to this apostle:

Paul was born in about 5 AD in Tarsus as an Israelite and had Roman citizenship by birthright. In about 15 AD he was in the school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. In about 32 AD he was at the stoning of Stephen. In 33 AD he was a persecutor of the church and in about 34 AD he was born again. He then went to Damascus and then went into Arabia for a period of three years to be in the Lord's Seminary (Gal 1:17). In 37 AD he went back to Damascus and then exited the city for safety. In this same year he then went to Jerusalem for a couple of weeks to discuss with Peter and James and then went back to Tarsus for safety. In about 46 AD Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Paul (Acts 11:25) and in 47 AD he and Barnabas went on a missionary trip to Antioch. Isn't it remarkable that Paul disappeared from our knowledge for about nine years? We will discuss Paul more as we progress through this wonderful writing by Luke.

So Saul left the scene and the church came into a time of peace and growing in the fear of the Lord. We now will not hear more from Luke about Paul until chapter 13.

Peter's Miracles

Acts 9:32 Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

Acts 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed." And immediately he arose.

Acts 9:35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord."

We left our discussion of Peter in Acts 8:25 when he came back to Jerusalem with John. Here we now find him fulfilling his role of a visiting missionary probably to some of the Christian communities that were dispersed due to the persecution following the stoning of Stephen. Most scholars believe that by now going back to Peter, Luke was showing that Paul and Peter were serving the same Lord and they were about the same ministry of serving Jesus. Since Aeneas is described as "a certain man" rather than a believer in Jesus, it is likely that he was not a believer. Except for the raising of three believers from the dead (Lazarus, Dorcas, and Eutychus), there are no examples of physical healing of believers mentioned in the New Testament. Believers have all had their sins forgiven, they have received the righteousness of Jesus into their account, and they have been adopted as children of God. What more do we need?

The passing of eight years is probably significant and it is probably about eight years since the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It seems that this then is the first instance of an apostle seeing this crippled man. We do not know how he was crippled but we are just told that Peter told him that Jesus Christ had healed him. Certainly now Aeneas would have to know more about the Messiah by Whom he was healed. Peter did not take any credit for the healing. Note also that the healing was instantaneous. There are no events in the Bible of someone being declared healed but who took time for the healing to be totally manifest. Jesus is in total, complete control over all of the world's forces. Peter also told Aeneas to make his bed much as our Lord told the paralytic:

Mark 2:11 "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home."

The man then immediately arose and everyone was amazed and they turned to the Lord. I have talked about how God uses miracles judicially throughout time and we see them appear in clusters surrounding specific important events in God's timeline of working with man. The miracles continued throughout the lives of the apostles and then they ceased to be needed to verify the validity of the message of God's people. Simply the continuity of the actions of the apostles in the face of great danger and the deaths of many Christian disciples since those times is evidence enough. People do not die for a lie. All of the apostles except for John were killed horribly for their confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Lord. John was boiled in oil but not hurt and then he was exiled. The church continues to grow as people saw the reality of the confessions of the apostles.

Acts 9:36 “Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did.

Acts 9:37 And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

Acts 9:38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, "Do not delay to come to us."

Acts 9:39 And Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

Acts 9:40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he 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 raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.”

Luke the doctor now tells us of another medical miracle done by an apostle. This particular instance is the ultimate miracle: the raising of a person from the dead. Jesus had done this with Lazarus and now it was the timing of God for Peter to bring someone back from dead. Joppa was a Jewish city on the Mediterranean coast and today it is in the area occupied by Tel-aviv. No doubt Peter went there as he was witnessing to the Jews. We remember that Ananias and Sapphira were buried on the same day that they died because that was the law in Jerusalem. But outside of Jerusalem the normal routine was to bury on the third day. Dorcas is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic name Tabitha. This area had already been involved in the spread of Christianity and Peter did not need to introduce the name of Jesus here. There is no doubt that the woman was really dead for her body had already been washed as was the ritual and her body was laid out in an upper room for mourning by the friends and relatives.

Peter knew that Jesus had done a similar healing as recorded by Mark:

Mark 5:41 “And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!")”.

So probably Peter followed his Lord’s example and asked the people to leave the room. He knelt in prayer and then displayed a tremendous amount of faith in continuing to follow his Lord’s example. He was an apostle and God had already worked miracles through him but this was an extreme case and Peter did not waver in doing God’s will.

Acts 9:42 “And it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:43 And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon.”

This last verse is not a small thing! The Jews hated the tanners and they were only allowed to practice their trade at a certain distance away from the city. These people

dealt with the skins of dead animals and so were declared unclean. So Luke telling us that Peter, a Jew, went to stay many days with a tanner is quite a statement! God removes prejudice as Paul told the Galatians:

Gal 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

It is so interesting to note here how the love of God's people for each other and their enemies reaches out to help many people.

There were no hospitals in the world before the time of Jesus Christ.

There were no orphanages in the world before the time of Jesus Christ.

There were no leper treatment centers in the world before the time of Jesus Christ.

There were no disaster relief agencies in the world before the time of Jesus Christ.

There were no great schools for wide education in the world before the time of Jesus Christ.

People who are born again into a temple of God no longer can just live in the world without trying to help others. I am not saying that Christianity is just a social gospel meaning that if we get people to be healthier and better educated that they then will be better people. But Christians care about other people. We do not just leave the other people to take care of the problems of the world even though our primary concern is:

*Matt 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Matt 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

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Another proposed timeline of the Apostle Paul²

10 - 31	Paul is born (his father is a Roman citizen) Grows up in Tarsus (family may have had ties to Judea, e.g. Paul's insistence that he is a "Hebrew" [2 Cor 11:22] and from the "tribe of Benjamin" [Phil 3:5]) Becomes a zealous member of the Pharisees
31/33	Actively persecutes members of a new Jewish sect centered in Jerusalem that claims Jesus as messiah (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9)
33/35	Is called by God to preach to the Gentiles.
35/38	Missionary activity in Arabia and Damascus (expelled under Aretas)
37/38	Two week visit to Jerusalem, meets Peter and James but not the larger church (Gal 1:22)
After 37/38	Missionary activity in Cilicia, Syria, from the Antioch church; possibly also Greece
47/50	Writes I Thessalonians
50/51	Gallio episode at Corinth
49/51	Jerusalem Council
52/57	Missionary activity in Asia Minor and Greece Writes Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Corinthians
56/57	Writes Rome from Corinth
57/58	Arrives in Jerusalem with collection, is arrested and imprisoned 2 years at Caesarea
59/60	Sea journey to Rome
62	Executed after imprisonment at Rome

1. <http://www.apostlepaulthefilm.com/paul/timeline.htm>
2. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/corinthians/chronology.stm>