

Acts 9

Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-31)

The imagery of breathing out murderous threats is to give the idea that he is like an angry wild animal that is on the prowl. This is contrasted with the Paul we will come to know through the rest of Luke's book who becomes a shepherd and a lamb. If God can change the life of Saul, the greatest enemy of the Gospel who is like a ferocious animal, then he can change anyone and succeed in making his message reach the ends of the earth.

Saul is attempting to contain the spread of the Gospel by pursuing especially the Hellenistic Jews who are escaping Jerusalem and fleeing to the safety of the Jewish communities in the Greek world. He understands the importance of these communities and the real danger of the Gospel in the context of the Gentile world.

He has the approval of the High Priest. Here is another case of the Hellenistic Jews doing the dirty work of the Jerusalem elite. Gamaliel's advice was to let these men go because if it is from God then you will not be able to stop them but even more you will find yourself fighting against God. This is exactly what Saul is doing. He will not leave them alone so he is in direct conflict with God and God will deal with him.

Saul is on his way to Damascus and just about concluded with the 150 mile trek by noon (probably took one week). He is ready to stride into the city like a conqueror who has come to destroy the followers of the way. But suddenly there is a bright flash of light and a voice from heaven. Saul is blinded and knocked to the ground. The conqueror is now the vanquished. Instead of striding into the city with pride, he is led by the hand by his inferiors into the city. God has begun to deal with Saul and transform him just like Moses was humbled and transformed so that he could be a leader in God's Kingdom.

Jesus speaks to Saul and asks why he is persecuting Him (God). Who are you Lord? Echoes Moses on the Mountain asking, "Whom should I tell them is sending me?" – tell them "I am". Only here God identifies himself as JESUS. This is God the Son – and this must have "Rocked Saul's Theological World!"

"Get up and go and you will be told what you must do." Saul is no longer in charge but he is taking orders now from God. He chooses to obey – he is no longer fighting against God. The men who were with him heard the sound and saw the light but they did not understand the voice. This was a personal encounter and calling. He is on the floor for three days with no water or food seeking God as to the meaning of all of this. It is obvious that God was communicating with him at this time because he has a vision of Ananias coming to him and he also gets up preaching and persuading other Jews to believe in Jesus.

Now God goes to Ananias and he must be obedient even though he knew that Saul had come to persecute him and all other believers. God does not deliver Saul from his blindness directly because he is teaching him that he needs the intervention of the body of Christ. He is no longer independent but part of a team. Scales fall from his eyes and he can see again. This is both literal and figurative of his spiritual blindness.

God tells Ananias more in detail the calling that was on Saul's life to be the chosen instrument or vessel for the Lord's use. He was perfectly suited for this job and now God was cleansing him to be used for the task for which he was created.

After his conversion, Saul immediately begins to testify and preach in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. People were astonished by his preaching and the

transformation in his life. Isn't this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem? This term here also has the imagery of savage animals attached to it. It is the term for "mauled". This man who was once a beast is now preaching the gospel. Soon the Jews are out to kill him. This will be Saul's lot in life. He will be constantly pursued by the Hellenistic Jew. Saul is saved by his followers who lower him over the wall in a basket.

Echoes of Moses in the story of Saul's conversion in Damascus

- Both have a dramatic confrontation with God
- Both see the light of God
- Both end up on the ground
- Both are called by God who repeats their name twice "Moses, Moses"; "Saul, Saul"
- Both ask who are you God – "I am that I am"; "I am Jesus"
- Both are saved by others who put them in a basket, the floating basket on the Nile and the basket over the wall in Damascus
- Moses was the man that God used to call His people out from Egypt and Saul would be the man that God used to call His People out from among the nations.

Missions, then, is a fulfillment of what God did in the Exodus as people are called out from among the nations. God always loved them and had a plan for their redemption just like he did for the Israelites during the 430 years that they were in slavery when they thought that they were forgotten.

Paul, according to Galatians will go to Arabia for up to 3 years where he is most probably taught directly by the Lord and develops his theology.

He then goes to Jerusalem and tries to join the disciples but they are afraid of him. But just like Ananias in Damascus, Barnabas will open the doors for Saul and grant him access to the community of believers. Once he is finally accepted, Saul begins to speak boldly in the name of the Lord and begins to debate with the Greek-speaking Jews. In essence, he picks up where Stephen left off. He was instrumental in the death of Stephen, but he then stands in his place. They try to kill him just like the situation in Damascus so he is sent off to Tarsus to wait for God's time. Sometimes we are sent off to Tarsus to wait for God's time and for a person like Paul, this must have been very hard. However, it was God preparing him, just like God prepared Moses before he could use him as a deliverer for his people.

Verse 31 – At this point there is a time of consolidation of what God has done in the first geographical steps toward world evangelization. It is interesting that Philip was left in Chapter 8 moving up the coast of the Med. toward Caesarea where he ends up. Paul after the threats in Jerusalem is taken to Caesarea and put on a ship to Tarsus where he will await God's timing to activate his ministry. Finally Peter is moving up the Med. Coast as well to Joppa and finally to Caesarea. It does not appear that the apostles have a clear strategy, but the Holy Spirit is moving them to the geographical fringe of Judea-Samaria to prepare for the "assault" on the Gentile world. Caesarea and later Antioch will be the launching pads for this movement as now the emphasis switches from the "hill country of Judea-Samaria to the coastal plain and the Mediterranean basin which is the heart of the Roman Empire.

Aeneas and Dorcas (Acts 9:32-43)

The focus now switches to the works of Peter as an apostle of Christ. These miracles are a means of demonstrating that he is acting in the same spirit of Christ. Aeneas is a paralytic and the way in which he is healed is very similar to the way Jesus healed a paralytic in Luke 5:17-26.

The next miracle is the raising of Dorcas from the dead. This is very much like the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead in Luke 8:40-55. What was said by Jesus

and what was said by Peter to the dead woman was different by only one letter.
“Talitha koum – Tabitha koum”.