

Acts 9: Saul's Personal Growth, Persecution, And Fellowship With The Saints

Sunday AM 10/31/21

Introduction:

Acts 9.1-19 deals with the conversion of Saul. We pointed out, he was not saved, when he saw a bright light and Jesus spoke to him, he was not saved when he fasted and prayed for three days, **he was not saved when his sight was restored. He was saved when he was baptized. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'** **Acts 22:16.** Now we continue with "the rest of the story." **Acts 9.20-30**

I) Saul Goes to Damascus

20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Acts 9:20-22

A) Amazing facts

1. Saul was a known persecutor of the church.
2. He has letters to go and arrest Christians, and go into the synagogues in order to do so.
3. Now he goes into the synagogues in order to preach about Jesus.
4. Saul increased all the more in strength.
 - a. **NIV "Saul grew more and more powerful."**
 - b. Saul's own description in Galatians

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from

*my mother's womb and called me through His grace, **16** to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles **Galatians 1:15-16***

5** "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." **Jeremiah 1:5

B) There is time for spiritual growth.

1. The disciples (Apostles) spent three years with Jesus.
 - a. They were not ready to preach the Gospel when first called.
 - b. They had to learn, to realize, and experience Jesus' as part of their growth.

2. Saul's growth

- a. Like the other Apostles, received direct revelation.

26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. **John 14:26

11** But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. **12** For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. **Galatians 1:11-12

- b. While Saul was one "born out of due season" he was an apostle.

*For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. **6** Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. **2** **Corinthians 11:5-6***

3. Saul, Paul, pointed people to the word of God for their spiritual growth.

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

- a. Spiritual growth is necessary not just for Apostles or preachers but for everyone.
- b. Our growth comes from studying, understanding, and practicing the word of God

2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 1 Peter 2:2

II) Persecution of Saul

23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 24 But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. Acts 9:23-25

A) Damascus was a “Gentile” city

1. The Jews and leadership of Arabia did not get along. History says about ten years later ten thousand Jews were killed here.
2. It appears both were joining together to kill Saul. Those watching the gates would be the Roman soldiers, and the Jews.
3. Jesus spoke of persecution in the future.

34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”; 36 and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. Matthew 10:34-36

4. Saul/Paul experienced a lot of persecution in his life time.

32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 2 Corinthians 11:32

5. This would not be the last time he would leave a city under duress.

33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. 2 Corinthians 11:33

B) Saul did not get discouraged and neither should we.

1. Do not be surprised by skeptics or critics of the Gospel.
2. Success often gets the attention of those opposed to the Gospel.
3. Sometimes you have to go elsewhere but do not get discouraged.

III) Saul Seeks Fellowship in Jerusalem

26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. 30 When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. Acts 9:26-30

A) Facts

1. Saul leaves Damascus after 3 years, the last time he was at Jerusalem he was a persecutor of the Lord's people.
2. The disciples were afraid of him, a natural response.
3. They did not believe he had been converted. Similar stories can be told of those who were converted and people just not believing it.

4. Barnabas comes to Saul's defense by giving him the opportunity to speak of his conversion.
5. Saul was in fellowship with the church at Jerusalem until forced to leave.

B) Important lessons we learn from Jerusalem.

1. Saul was added to the Lord's church, **Acts 2:47**; he sought to have fellowship with the saints at Jerusalem.
 - a. Distinction between the universal church, the Lord's body, and the local group of saints.
 - b. One is baptized into the Lord's body and is saved, one joins themselves to a local group of saints.
2. Proper for people to question one's conversion.

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 1 Peter 3:15

- a. Congregations often ask simple questions in order to know more about those they are fellowshiping.

27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; Acts 18:27

- b. Sometimes we get it wrong in our local fellowship, but the Lord always gets it right.
3. We need more Barnabas' and fewer skeptics.
 4. There is no such thing as limited fellowship.
 - a. Saul was not being fellowshiped on a trial or limited basis.
 - b. He was accepted and working at Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

Spiritual growth takes time and work, do not get discouraged by others, work with the church in your area. These things will make you a better Christian.