

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 10
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
CHAPTER 9 A**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 9 gives an account of Saul's conversion. Saul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, a terrifying enemy of those who proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Messiah. His conversion was humanly speaking impossible. Yet God in His mercy sought Saul and he became the greatest preacher, missionary and apologist of the Christian faith. Before his conversion, Saul went as far as Damascus to arrest and bring back Jews, who professed belief in Jesus Christ, to stand trial in Jerusalem. He considered these Jews as heretics. But on the road to Damascus, something happened that changed him completely.

The first part of Chapter 9 features the conversion of Saul (vv.1-31). The remaining part (vv.32-43) features the Apostle Peter's evangelistic and pastoral journeys to the neighbouring regions. The chapter can be divided into four sections: (1) Saul's state of mind and heart before his conversion (v.1-2); (2) Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus (vv.3-18); (3) Saul's state of mind and heart after his conversion (vv. 19-31); and (4) Peter's evangelistic and pastoral visits to the neighbouring regions (vv.32-43) (which will be considered in the next lesson).

COMMENTARY

**Saul's Pre-Conversion State of Mind
and Heart**

Saul was an accomplice in the killing of Stephen in that he approved of it. He watched over the clothes of those who stoned Stephen to death (7:58). Saul's birthplace was Tarsus, the capital city of Cilicia that was a Roman province in the south-east of Asia Minor. In those days, the city of Tarsus boasted of wealthy inhabitants and was a centre of higher learning comparable to that of Athens and Alexandria. Saul doubtlessly enjoyed the best education his native city could provide. His father, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, was a Pharisee, the strictest religious sect of the Jews (23:6). After his basic education, Saul was sent to Jerusalem to study the Scriptures of the Old Testament under the celebrated rabbi, Gamaliel. Here, he spent many years studying the Scriptures. As he had a prominent part in the death of Stephen, he must have been a very active member of the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was bent on stemming the spread of Christianity. Saul being a very active and zealous member of the Sanhedrin was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (v.1). He desired to go as far as Damascus to the synagogues there. Accordingly, he obtained a letter of authority from the High Priest. This letter would allow him to bring Jewish men and women (heretics), who embraced "the way", back to Jerusalem to be submitted to the disciplinary action of the Sanhedrin. It is interesting to note that women were included too. This implies that women also featured prominently in early Christian work. The book of Acts highlights the lives of Christian women

who bore noble testimony to the faith and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why Damascus? It was a strategic city of the province of Syria. It was the hub of a vast commercial network of trading caravans connecting Mesopotamia and Persia in the north with Israel, Arabia and Egypt in the south. It was a thriving and bustling city. Damascus had a large Jewish community, which had, in the course of time, influenced the Gentiles to profess Judaism. Saul apparently did not want the Christians to spread "the way" to others. "The Way" was a common expression among Christian believers then. It referred to "the way to be saved" (16:17) or "the way of the Lord or God" (18:25).

Saul's Conversion on the Road to Damascus

As Saul and his entourage approached Damascus at about noon time (22:6), a "light from heaven" shone round about him. The light was brighter than the noon glare. The Lord Jesus revealed Himself in it. Hit by this great light, Saul fell to the ground. He heard a voice which said: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (v.4). Saul answered: "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord replied: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (v.5).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrected, living, and unseen Lord, knows what was happening. He intercepted Saul before he could arrive in Damascus to carry out his wicked deed against the disciples of Christ. The Lord Jesus called him "Saul" which was his Hebrew name. Jesus spoke to him in familiar Aramaic.

Saul immediately and instinctively knew that the speaker of the voice was the "Lord." The word "Lord" refers to "God." Saul was not an idolater. He believed that he

worshipped the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The voice identified Himself as "Jesus". Note that the Lord did not identify Himself as the Messiah, the Son of Man or the Son of God. He identified Himself as Jesus of Nazareth, the man who was crucified, the man who was a stumbling-block to the Pharisees. Saul had to be taught that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. Jesus said: "*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*". Jesus compared Saul to a rebellious young bullock, and Himself as a farmer using pricks to prick him.¹ The Lord Jesus was attacking Saul's conscience. Saul must have failed to get Jesus of Nazareth out of his mind, having heard reports of His teaching, miracles, character and claims. The Lord Jesus was saying that it was hard for Saul to kick against these constant recollections. Having been told the identity of the speaker, Saul, now trembling and astonished, asked another question: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord Jesus told him to continue with his journey to Damascus and await further instructions. These words affirm the truth that Saul was born again.

The men who journeyed with Saul heard the voice but they did not see Jesus. No matter what liberal critics may say, this experience of Saul on the Damascus road was not a dream or any such thing. The

¹The expression, "to kick against the prick," or the goad, is derived from the action of a stubborn and unyielding ox, kicking against the goad. And as the ox would injure no one by it but himself--as he would gain nothing--it comes to denote an obstinate and refractory disposition and course of conduct, opposing motives to good conduct; resisting the authority of Him who has a right to command; and opposing the leadings of Providence, to the injury of him who makes the resistance. It denotes rebellion against lawful authority, and thus getting into greater difficulty by attempting to oppose the commands to duty. [Barnes' Notes]

language used in Acts was plain and simple. The phenomenon was real and it was an appearance of the resurrected and now glorified Jesus Christ. The strongest testimony to this truth is Saul himself. Later, he narrated this incident before others (22:3-21; 26:9-23). When Saul opened his eyes, he found that he was blind. He had to be led by his fellow-travellers into the city.

Ananias Sent to Heal Saul

In Damascus, Saul stayed in the home of one called Judas. He did not drink or eat for three days. He “prayeth” and waited.

The Lord spoke to Ananias, a disciple of Christ in Damascus, in a vision and commanded him to go to a house in Straight Street (v.11) to heal Saul of his blindness. Ananias was an ordinary Christian. He was not an apostle or a doctor and he did not possess any magic with which to heal Saul’s blindness. He had heard of Saul’s reputation and he voiced his concern that Saul had done great harm to “thy saints at Jerusalem”, and had authority to bind all those who called on the name of Christ (v.13). However, the Lord Jesus for a second time told him to “go” (v.15) and elaborated that Saul was His chosen disciple to preach His name to the Gentiles, to kings and to the nation Israel. He would suffer many things for Jesus Christ’s sake. Ananias obeyed and went to Judas’ home. On meeting Saul, Ananias placed his hands on Saul and said: “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and filled with the Holy Spirit” (v.17). And immediately, Saul regained his sight and was baptised.

A few observations are in order at this point. First, the word “saints” is commonly used in Acts and the Epistles, and it is used here for the first time. It means “the holy ones” denoting those who belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, Ananias was an ordinary believer but the Lord Jesus used him to heal and baptise Saul. This shows that any ordinary Christian who loves and obeys the Lord can be used to lead someone to the saving knowledge of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ananias addressed Saul as “Brother Saul” -- all Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ because God is their Father in Heaven.

Third, Saul was to be the Lord’s chosen Apostle to the Gentiles. This was mentioned first because it was his primary calling. Saul faithfully fulfilled this calling in his lifetime. He also witnessed to kings, King Agrippa (chapter 26) and King Nero (2 Timothy 4:16). He was forewarned of the hardships and sufferings he would encounter in his life witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. Ananias’ mention of “the Lord, even Jesus” is significant for it was meant to firmly impress on Saul that it was Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord Himself, whom he had encountered. Thus the humanity, divinity and Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth were unmistakably put before him.

Saul, the Disciple & Preacher

Saul stayed for a few days in Damascus. In that time, he straightaway preached Christ in the synagogues that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. He now belonged to the very people whom he had previously persecuted and captured. This he made clear to all from the very beginning when he became a disciple

of Christ. He preached first to his fellow Jews in the synagogues so that they would know that he had changed. Indeed, they were amazed at his radical change from a persecutor to a preacher of Jesus as the Son of God. "After many days" (v.23) which could refer to the three years that Saul spent in Arabia (Galatians 1:13-18), he returned to Damascus. He confounded the Jews who found a more vehement witness in Saul than Stephen. They were infuriated and sought to kill him. They watched the gates to prevent Saul from escaping. But their plan was providentially known to the disciples who let him down over the wall at night in a basket (v.25)!

Saul went to Jerusalem where he attempted to join the disciples but they were all afraid of him because they did not believe that he was a true disciple. Although they must have heard of his conversion, they acted cautiously and questioned his sincerity and the genuineness of his conversion. This was Saul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. Barnabas, the Levite from Cyprus, who was well known to the Jews in Jerusalem, came to Saul's aid. Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and declared to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and that he now preached boldly in the name of Jesus (v.27). After Barnabas' testimony of Saul, the apostles and disciples received him. Saul stayed in Jerusalem for fifteen days only (Galatians 1:18) but it was enough for the disciples to ascertain the genuineness of Saul's conversion and the power of his ministry. Saul preached and taught boldly to the Greek-speaking Jews. He "disputed" with them, the very same word used in Acts to describe Stephen's encounter with the Grecian Jews. They too sought to kill Saul. Once again the disciples came to know of their plot, and Saul went to Caesarea, the great

seaport of Palestine. There Saul boarded a ship which took him to Seleucia, the port of Antioch (capital of Syria), and thence to Tarsus, his hometown in Cilicia. Luke wrote that the churches had "rest" throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria. God graciously provided this rest so that the saints could build the church. The Holy Spirit gave the increase and the church multiplied in numbers.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Saul created havoc against the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was not oblivious to the fact that His disciples were being persecuted. Indeed, those who persecute Christians are in reality persecuting Christ. The Lord Jesus affirms this truth when he confronted Saul: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (v.4).

Ananias was an ordinary disciple but he was a faithful Christian filled with the Holy Spirit. Although he was not an apostle or a pastor or an elder or a deacon, he was willing and available when the Lord called him to go to Saul. He also knew the Scriptures well. Every Christian should study the Word of God, build up his faith and be ready when called upon to do His bidding. We should not leave everything to the pastors and elders of the church.

The most valuable lesson is the conversion of Saul. Before his conversion, Saul was an enemy who personally persecuted Christians and created havoc against the church. In His grace and mercy, the Lord called him and made him a chosen vessel for His purpose. When he was converted, Saul displayed clear signs of genuine conversion. Firstly, he had a new relationship with God. He prayed to Him. He acknowledged that Jesus Christ is not only his Saviour but also

his Lord. Secondly, he immediately testified his new-found faith. He was not ashamed nor was he afraid. He made it very clear that in the past, he had regarded Jesus as a mere man but now he believed and proclaimed Him as the Son of God, the Messiah. Thirdly, he loved to be with his fellow disciples. A newly converted Christian seeks fellowship with other Christians. He will witness his saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to the world. It has been said that if these three relationships – to God, to the church, and to the world—are not visibly present, we have good reason to question the reality of the person’s conversion. AMEN

2. Why did God not call Saul to minister to the Gentiles directly and went through Ananias? God spoke to Saul when he was on his way to Damascus and it was too difficult to add those extra few words.

DAILY READINGS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 9.1-2; Philippians 3:3-6.

Tuesday: Acts 9:3-9; 1 Timothy 1:12-14; Luke 19:10.

Wednesday: Acts 9.10-22; 1 John 3:14-17.

Thursday: Acts 9.23-31; Hebrews 12:12-13.

Friday: Acts 9:32-43; John 11-23-27; 1Corinthians 15:50-58

3. What did Saul receive from the experience he had on the road to Damascus?

4. How did Paul prove his sincerity from the very beginning of his Christian life?

Discussion Questions

1. In what way did Saul persecute Christ when he persecuted only Christians? What does this mean to persecuted Christians today?

5. What two salient marks of a Christian’s spiritual life are found in

Acts 9:31? Are these two marks found in your life?

6. Taking the life of Saul as a typical case, what are the visible marks of a true conversion?

7. What do we learn about God in this chapter? How do they apply to your life today?
