

**Acts 9 : v. 1-31** & Acts 22: v.1-22, Acts 26: v. 1-32

**Theme: Saul's Conversion – An Apostle to the Gentiles.**

Read: Acts 9:1-31

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. <sup>4</sup>Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

<sup>5</sup>And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

<sup>6</sup>So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup>And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup>Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup>Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias."

And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

<sup>11</sup>So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. <sup>12</sup>And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

<sup>13</sup>Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

<sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup>For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

<sup>17</sup>And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup>Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

<sup>19</sup>So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

<sup>20</sup>Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

<sup>21</sup>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?"

<sup>22</sup>But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

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

<sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup>And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup>When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

<sup>31</sup>Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

## Introduction

Acts chapter 9 records a very important event.

In fact Luke records this event three times in the book of Acts.

Although we have only read the first reported account, please read the other accounts referred to in the written message.

In case you don't have a copy of this, the other passages are Acts 22: v.1-22, and Acts 26: v.1-32.

When anything is repeated in the Bible, especially three times, **it is VERY important.**

The main character in the narrative is Saul. We were introduced to him in Acts 8:v. 1.

### **(Acts 8: v. 1 in the N.K.J.)**

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Although Saul was a very educated man, he had not accepted that Jesus was God in human form, who came to this earth to redeem sinful mankind.

Saul had absolutely no idea about the Grace of God, through the death of His Son Jesus.

Saul was following **God's Law from the Old Testament and he was obeying God's Law.**

We will note in a moment how Paul's conversion and background shaped his ministry and teaching in the New Testament.

**I am going to divide the text into three sections.**

Firstly we will learn about Saul's conversion, then about Saul and Ananias.

Finally we'll look at Saul's preaching and persecution.

Although the text seems to be mainly about Saul, we must not forget that God is in control of all of the events, doing a wonderful thing in the heart and life of a person.

It is also interesting to note that immediately Jesus involves other believers to co-operate in the life of Saul.

#### **1. Saul's Conversion. – 9: v. 1-9.**

In v. 1-2 we are told the reason for Saul's visit to Damascus. Saul was on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, which is about 300 kilometres, carrying letters of authority from the High Priest to arrest Christians in the Synagogues and return them to Jerusalem as prisoners. He would have had a group of soldiers with him for the journey.

As we look at Saul's conversion we notice several things.

**Firstly there was a great light that shone around him from Heaven – v.3.**

If you go to a sporting event at night, there are always very powerful floodlights.

(Put up a slide here of floodlights on a stadium)

However the lights are designed to illuminate the event. You don't look at the light, it might blind you. You look at what the light illuminates.

With Saul it was different. The light was the supernatural light from the Glory of Heaven. It happened suddenly and Saul fell to the ground.

The powerful light was designed to get Saul's attention, humble him, and to show him that somebody much more powerful was in charge of these events.

**Secondly there was a personal voice from Heaven. – v. 4.**

**The voice from Heaven said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"**

These are very important words from Heaven.

These words tell us that any persecution against Christian believers is also a personal attack upon the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus was telling Saul that Saul was not serving God as he thought. He was persecuting God.

The voice addressed Saul personally. He was called by his name.

**Thirdly there was a question by Saul – v. 5.**

Although I am sure that Saul had an idea that something supernatural was happening, he nevertheless asked an important question.

Saul said, "Who are you?"

**Fourthly there was an answer from Heaven.**

The voice said, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.”** It is only in the King James translation that the words **“it is hard for you to kick against the goads are used”**. We therefore need some explanation.

After Jesus identifies Himself as the voice from Heaven, He apparently says these words.

A goad is a very old English word that means an **agricultural stick** to guide cattle or other animals along the way. It appears that it is referring to Saul’s **resistance to be guided by the Holy Spirit**.

Saul thought that he was doing a great job for God by going to arrest all of these Christians, but in fact he was resisting the word of God. He was kicking against it so to speak.

#### **Finally there were instructions from Jesus to Saul**

The instructions from Jesus were to get up and go into the city of Damascus and when he arrived he would be told what to do.

The great Saul with all his power and authority was humbled, and had to go in faith to Damascus and get his purpose and instructions when he arrived.

Saul was blinded somehow, perhaps by the light or by Jesus, and had to be escorted all the way to Damascus by a soldier.

We are told in v. 9 that when he got to Damascus he was three days without sight, and he didn’t eat or drink.

#### **Application**

- a) **We need to be 100% sure about the identity of Jesus Christ.** Saul thought that he was serving God and obeying the rules, but he was actually going against God and offending Him. The reason for this is that he **didn’t understand the identity of Jesus Christ**.

Today in our world most of the major false cults do not believe in the identity of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message of Salvation by Grace through Faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. These cults and religious groups, some of them similar to Christianity, always fail when it comes to the identity of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. They introduce their own laws and rules for Salvation.

In January we have a guest speaker who is going to expose three of the major groups whose thinking is not correct about Jesus Christ. Therefore I am not going to expose these groups but I am going to ask you to study the “Doctrine of Jesus Christ.” It is one of the most important doctrines that you can study.

When I was at the Faith Mission Bible College we used a book called the “Great Doctrines of the Bible” which is free on the internet and old copies can be purchased in Japanese.

In this book there is a very good section on the “Doctrine of Jesus Christ”. It is essential that every Christian understand the Bible teaching about Jesus Christ.

- b) **We need to understand that our conversion is our commissioning.**

What do I mean by that? For Paul his conversion was his commissioning. Although he was later to be given an important job to do, he saw his conversion as a commissioning by Jesus to serve Him. We should be servants of Jesus the moment that we are born again through God’s Holy Spirit. If we are not growing and serving Jesus, then there is something wrong.

Many Christians are drifting in their Christian life. Like a boat without an anchor that is drifting out to sea.

We all know what happens to a boat that drifts, it eventually hits a rock or another boat and becomes a ship wreck.

Brad’s advice a few weeks ago was to find your “niche” and get on with it.

You may have to try various things in serving Jesus before you find the perfect place, but if you don’t do anything, you will continue to drift, which is dangerous.

## **2. Paul’s Baptism and Ananias – v.10-19.**

So Saul, recently converted, had spent three days in Damascus. He hadn’t eaten anything or had anything to drink, and he was blind. This was hardly the honeymoon period that most people experience or expect when they are converted. Life can initially seem much harder for some after conversion as people cope with the new you or you have to cope in difficult situations.

We are told in verse 11 that Saul was praying, so he was doing the right thing.

We are also told that he had a vision of a man named Ananias coming to him and laying hands on him that he might receive his sight.

So for Saul things were encouraging for the future.

Before all the blessing could happen to Saul, God had to prepare a man called Ananias.

It wasn't easy for Ananias to accept God's challenge to go and lay hands on Saul because up to that point Saul was a strong enemy of all Christians and his reputation had been reported by the Christians in Jerusalem. ( v. 13)

**Jesus told Ananias that He had a plan for Saul to be a missionary to the Gentiles, and to Kings and to the Jewish people. ( v. 15 )**

Ananias was obedient to the voice of Jesus in his vision.

He immediately went to find Saul and laid hands on him. Saul received his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

After he received his sight, he was Baptized and spent some time with the disciples at Damascus.

The story is dramatic but quite simple to understand.

**Q. What applications might we draw out from this passage?**

The first application I can see here is that **God prepares us** for **people and situations** that **He has prepared for us**.

What do I mean by that?

In the same way that God prepared Paul to enter the Christian Community and serve as an Evangelist, and God prepared Ananias to minister to Saul, God also prepares us for the people he has prepared for us.

I didn't realise that my preparation to be the Pastor of O.I.C. was to spend 4 years as a Missionary working in Kobe and then 20 years as a Pastor in England.

I also spent over 10 years as a volunteer speaker for Oak Hall Holidays, which enabled me to organise a trip for O.I.C. members to go to Israel.

It wouldn't have been possible without my connection to Oak Hall.

However, your situation is different from mine. Nevertheless God is preparing you for the next step in your service for Him.

By being obedient in what you are doing now in ministry will prepare you for what God will have you do in the future.

If we will only respond to the work of God's Holy Spirit in our lives, and be obedient to God's word, the Bible, then God will direct us in His path.

**Proverbs 3: v. 5-6 in the N.K.J.**

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart,

And lean not on your own understanding;

<sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He shall direct your paths.

**The second application concerns the acceptance of converted people who have challenging backgrounds.**

Today we live in a world that is very opposed to God's word, and people's behaviour is sometimes repulsive to Christian morals.

The equivalent of Saul today might be a Muslim terrorist who has been involved in killing Christians or a Yakuza in Osaka.

When these people are converted to Christ it is not easy for Christians to embrace them because of their past life-styles.

If these people are truly converted then we must love them, embrace them and support them in the work that God has for them.

Our guest speaker at the retreat is an example of a life that has been wonderfully used by God, even though his background was very challenging.

We must never forget that in the eyes of God our sin is just as bad as the sin of Saul.

Nevertheless Saul had to suffer much in his ministry and it wasn't easy for him to serve Jesus.

**3. Saul's preaching and persecution – v. 20-31.**

In v. 20-22 we are told that immediately Saul preached that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He did this in the Jewish Synagogue.

The people in the Synagogue were amazed at Saul's change of heart.

However the Jews in the synagogue didn't accept his teaching about Jesus.

Saul was not discouraged by their rejection. He was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and continued to surprise the Jewish people.

The thinking of the Jewish people was entrenched in Judaism which had become a legalistic religion based upon the Old Testament Law. So many things were added to the original form of Judaism that the Grace of God, through the work of Jesus, was seen in a negative way.

The Jews plotted to kill Saul, but he escaped in a basket, being let down at night, through the walled city.

Eventually Saul returned to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him. They didn't believe his story that he had become a disciple of Jesus.

But, praise the Lord Barnabas believed him.

Barnabas took Saul to the Apostles and he told his story to them.

They believed his testimony and allowed him to minister to the Greek speaking Jews.

Sadly these Jews attempted to kill Saul.

When the believers found out about another attempt to kill Saul they sent him down to Caesarea and sent him to his home town of Tarsus.

After this we are told that the Churches experienced peace and the believers were edified in their faith and the Holy Spirit continued to save people from their sins.

The believers experienced a brief rest from persecution and a strengthening of their faith.

So what application can we identify in these verses.

The first application concerns the initial preaching ministry of Saul.

We are told that Saul immediately preached about Jesus, that He is the Son of God.

This preaching by Paul continued throughout his whole ministry.

All of his letters were about Jesus Christ and Salvation, or correcting people's thinking or behaviour, if they claimed to follow Jesus.

#### 1 Corinthians 1: v. 20-25 in N.L.T.

<sup>20</sup> So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. <sup>21</sup> Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. <sup>23</sup> So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

<sup>24</sup> But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

#### 1 Corinthians 2: v. 1.v. 1-2 - in N.L.T.

When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. <sup>2</sup> For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.

The challenge for all of us, whether we are preaching, teaching, or witnessing, is to concentrate on proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Other things may be important, but this is the MOST IMPORTANT thing.

The second coming of Jesus is important, God's purposes for the Jewish people and the land of Israel is important.

However we must not be distracted from proclaiming the Gospel because we are focusing on other things.

The Bible is Christ-centred, so we must follow God's teaching and be Christ-centred believers.

The second application has to do with Saul's two death threats.

Notice that Chapter 9 starts with Paul “breathing threats of murder against the disciples” ( v.1) Then as the Chapter ends the chapter tells us about two death threats against Saul.

I have to be very careful how I handle this application because I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. Saul was forgiven all of his sins when he repented and trusted in Jesus for his forgiveness.

However the Bible does teach that we reap what we sow.

I have listed 5 verses about sowing and reaping in the written text.

(Prov. 11: v. 18, Prov. 22: v.8, Galatians 6: v. 7-8, 2 Cor. 9 v.6, Luke 19: v.20-21)

Basically these texts teach us that when we sow righteousness then we reap a reward, but if we sow injustice then we will reap calamity.

If we sow to the flesh, we reap fleshy things, but if we sow to the Spirit then we receive spiritual things.

If we sow sparingly and are mean, we will reap sparingly, but if we are generous in our giving both financial and service, we will be generously rewarded.

Finally if we sow nothing, we will get nothing that is mainly focused with serving Jesus.

The point I want to make is about Saul.

Saul definitely sowed injustice in chapter 9: v.1 and then reaped the calamity in the later verses by the death threats.

David is an example of somebody whose heart was 100% for God and His kingdom, but made some unwise choices and reaped God’s discipline for those actions.

Therefore we need to be careful in our lives to be generous and righteous sowers of the word of God, and of our spiritual lives.

**May God help us through His Holy Spirit to do this.**