

FPFWC Christian Development



The Birth of the Church

May 2023

Spring Quarter

May 27, 2023

Lesson #4 – Saul of Tarsus

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 9:9-17

ICE BREAKERS-

1. What value do you experience from incorporating fasting into your spiritual walk?
2. How can we make ourselves available for ministry opportunities?
3. What stops a believer from boldly obeying God?

Key Verse: “Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him 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 be filled with the Holy Ghost. —Acts 9:17

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Lesson Context: Saul

We first meet Saul—later known as Paul, beginning in Acts 13:9—when he acted as a witness to the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58; 8:1 (see also 22:20). He is presented elsewhere as an ambitious young man who was building a career in the rabbinic tradition of Jerusalem and as a trusted servant of the temple officials and religious leaders (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4–6). He could never have been a priest, because he was from the tribe of Benjamin rather than the priestly tribe of Levi (see Deuteronomy 18:1; Hebrews 7:5; etc.). But he could have become one of the greatest of the Pharisees, like his teacher Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

The climb up this career ladder accelerated when Saul oversaw a direct assault on the believers in Jerusalem, where he searched for them house to house and threw into prison those he found (Acts 8:3; 26:10). He apparently did effective work at that, for the high priest agreed to authorize him to go to Damascus to find Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment (9:1–2; 22:19; 26:9–11). His ambitious trip to Damascus was the occasion of the resurrected Jesus appearing to Saul and asking, “Why persecutest thou me?” (9:4).

This Damascus Road story is told three times in Acts: once as narrated by author Luke (Acts 9:1–19) and twice as told by Saul/Paul himself (22:3–16; 26:9–

18). As today's text opens, Saul had been struck blind by the Lord on that road. Subsequently, Saul was led by the hand into the city (9:1–8).

LESSON COMMENTARY

9:8–9. Saul's companions escorted him to Damascus. He remained blinded for three days during which time he fasted and undoubtedly reflected thoughtfully on his condition. Saul's blindness was designed to demonstrate his own spiritual condition—he was spiritually blind.

9:10–12. The Lord spoke to Ananias **in a vision**, a common way of communicating unusual information in Acts (cf. 10:1–3 [Cornelius]; 10:9–23 [Peter]; 16:9–10 [Paul]). In each of these situations God gave instructions that were unexpected and required courageous obedience. Ananias was specifically told to go to a house on a **street called Straight** where he would find Saul, who was **praying** and had also seen a vision about the restoration of **his sight**.

9:13–14. It is not surprising that Ananias protested. He had heard about Saul's persecution of the Lord's **saints**. We find here for the first time in Acts the designation of believers as **saints**, those who are set apart for the name of Christ (v. 13; cf. 26:10). Though the term is used only one other time in Acts, Paul used it frequently in his epistles to identify Christians (e.g. Rm 1:7).

9:15–16. The Lord assured Ananias that Saul was about to become a different man. Longenecker explains the dramatic changes that would occur in Saul: (1) instead of a persecutor he would become the Lord's **chosen instrument**; (2) instead of concern for Israel alone his mission would be both to Gentiles and Jews; and (3) instead of personal prominence and glory, he would experience the same kind of suffering he had inflicted on others (see Longenecker, "Acts," 373).

9:17. Ananias obeyed. God restored Saul's sight and gave him the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. This was the moment Saul became a true follower of Jesus, with the **scales falling from his eyes** as symbols of his new understanding and faith. Although Ananias had called him **brother Saul** (9:17), this was not because Saul was already a believer but because Ananias addressed him as a fellow Jew (Rm 9:3). Saul was immediately **baptized** and regained his strength.

LESSON NUGGET – The Lord said an interesting thing about Paul to Ananias, "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." In 2 Corinthians, Paul listed the many things he suffered for the cause of Jesus Christ including: imprisonment, beatings, shipwreck, and in perils of robbers, just to name a few. Do you suppose the Lord showed Paul all these things? The amazing thing to me is that Paul would still follow Him. I mean, if the Lord had shown me that kind of a future, I think I would have asked Him, "Lord are there any alternative plans?"

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word For Today Bible, The Full Life Study Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary