

~ACTS~

Lesson 29- The Transformation of Saul

We are in Acts chapter 9, and we have spent the last couple weeks learning about the miraculous conversion of Saul of Tarsus and how Saul was transformed from being Saul the persecutor of the Church into Paul the Apostle, a chosen vessel of the Lord to carry the Name of Jesus to the world. And that's where we left off last week in verse 16 as Jesus is telling Ananias to go bring Saul into the ministry. Today we will be looking at verses 17-30, but by way of review let's read verses 10-16 leading into our text today, **Acts 9:10-16.**

Saul was a chosen vessel of the Lord, but so was Ananias, and so is all who surrender their heart to Jesus to serve Him. This is what I call being the elect of the elect. Those who have surrendered their heart to Jesus as an honorable vessel, sanctified and useful for the Master. One who has positioned his heart to seek the Lord and prepared his heart to be used by God. And because of this, God will choose the faithful as His honorable vessels in His plan of redemption.

And here we see Jesus working with two of His chosen vessels as Ananias is obedient to bring Saul into the ministry. There were many excuses for Ananias to refuse, but he lays all that aside and puts his trust in Jesus and is obedient to His command. Last week we spoke of the rewards that are promised to those who are faithful. The rewards of Eternal Life with Eternal Glory. The reward of reigning with Jesus Christ as His Bride forever. So just think of the rewards that Ananias will receive for being faithful to God to bring the great Apostle Paul into the ministry. In verse 15 Jesus tells him to Go! And Ananias is obedient to the Lord, and he goes. And that is where we pick up our study in verse 17 today...

17) 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, (this same Jesus) has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Ananias enters the house of Judas and gets right to the point. He doesn't ask Saul if its ok to touch him and he doesn't introduce himself. He enters the house and is obedient to the command of Jesus. Ananias lays his hands on Saul and says, “**Brother Saul.**” That took some faith just to say those words. This is Saul the persecutor of the Church who has come to Damascus with authorization from the high priest to arrest and kill Christians. But Ananias, trusting in Jesus' words that this Saul is a chosen vessel, he calls him his brother. And I would suspect that he's not just saying this because he's a fellow Jew. Ananias is saying by faith that Saul is a brother in the Lord, and here in the house of Judas, Saul is about to be brought into the ministry by the hand of Ananias.

Ananias doesn't go into some long flowery prayer. Saul is simply healed as Ananias is telling Saul what God is going to do for him. Notice he says, **This same Jesus who appeared to you has sent me so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.** And in that instant, Saul was healed.

I want to draw your attention to the words “**receive your sight.**” This is one word in the Greek, *ἀναβλέπω*. It literally means “to look up.” There is an interesting connection to Saul receiving his sight physically and Saul looking up to Jesus and being healed unto Everlasting Life. This goes along with Isaiah's prophesy in which Jesus fulfilled in **Luke 4:18**. This is all foreshadowing Eternal redemption. And that is true with Saul. He received more than just physical sight. It is a foreshadowing to receiving spiritual Truth and having your eyes opened to Everlasting Life in Jesus. This is what Jesus said in John 9:39. The healing of the blind man was a sign to being awakened to Truth. Luke uses this same word, *ἀναβλέπω*, in another healing of the blind, Luke 18:42. Jesus asks the man what he wants, and the blind man replies, “*Κύριε, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω*” and Jesus says, “*Ἀνάβλεψον· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέ σε.*” Receive your sight, or look up, your faith has saved you. That's what has happened to Saul. His physical eyes were healed, but even more than that, Saul looks up to Jesus and his faith has saved him unto Eternal Life. And notice what follows

salvation, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit. As soon as Ananias says, **be filled with the Holy Spirit**, Saul is empowered to preach the Gospel in the dunamis power of God.

This is why any Christian is filled with the Spirit, to preach the good news that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and all who call upon Him will have everlasting life. And God empowers us with His Spirit so that we can go out to all the world and preach the Gospel. And that's exactly what we see with the Apostle Paul.

18) Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Notice the speediness of Luke's words... "Immediately" scales fell from his eyes and immediately, "at once" he received his sight, and he arose and was baptized. The Greek uses the word **τέ** to tie both these events together in one quick immediate action. He received his sight and was baptized immediately. Paul gives us his personal testimony of this account in **Acts 22:12-16**.

Something interesting to point out is that this is another example of a non-Apostle performing a miracle through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ananias was a chosen vessel of God and God used him to heal Saul. Plus, this is the first time a non-Apostle lays hands on someone to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is so significant, because here we see the greatest Apostle being healed, baptized in water and filled with the Holy Spirit by a disciple we really know nothing about. The only thing Scripture tells us about this man is that he was a devout Jew according to the Law, and he had a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, Acts 22:12. But most importantly, he was faithful to Jesus' command and we will see him crowned with Eternal Glory, Life, and Righteousness in heaven.

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

Saul was exhausted and his energy spent after not eating or drinking anything for three days, but now he is revived. He was healed of his blindness, baptized in water, and filled with the Spirit. Now he eats some food, and his physical body is strengthened and he spends several days with the disciples. But notice what he's doing. He's not just hanging out in Judas' house with his newfound friends, he goes out and immediately starts preaching Jesus...

20) Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

This was the revelation of the New Covenant that the Spirit had been impressing on him for the last three days; that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Messiah whom they have been waiting for. Notice this inward change immediately changes his behavior. He is a new creation in Christ Jesus and he immediately is transformed from Saul the persecutor to Paul the Apostle. And the people in Damascus see this change but they're not sure what to think about it.

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?"

I think there is still some hesitancy with the people. I'm sure some of them were thinking that this may be a ruse to try and trap them, but you know Ananias was there helping comfort the people about Saul's transformation. But even with people's hesitancy, Paul is on fire for Jesus and he just goes out and preaches the Word.

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

There is a few fun things to point out in this verse. This statement, “increased in strength” is one word, ἐνδυναμόω. This says he is literally being empowered with the dunamis power of God. This isn’t the same physical strength we saw in verse 19, he is being filled continuously with the power of the Holy Spirit. And notice what he doing with this supernatural power of God; he is confounding the Jews by **proving that Jesus is the Christ**.

Paul is stirring up the hearts of the Jews in Damascus by preaching Jesus. And he is doing this by proving Jesus as the Christ. How is he doing this? By showing them Jesus in the Old Testament Scriptures. This word **proving** is συμβιβάζω. It means “to knit together,” The same word is used in Eph 4:16; Col 2:2, 19. Paul is literally knitting together all the prophecies of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and proving that Jesus is the Christ whom the Law and Prophets foretold would come, **Acts 26:22-23**. This is what Philip did with the Eunuch, this is what Peter did on the Day of Pentecost; and what Stephen did before the Sanhedrin Council. This is how the Apostles preached Jesus, from the Old Testament Scriptures. This preaching is stirring hearts. We saw this earlier in the book of Acts. When the Word of God is preached, it cuts to the heart and some humble and others harden. Paul is preaching the Word and no doubt there are some humbling and coming to Jesus, but the majority seem to be hardening their hearts and they want to kill him. Notice verse 23...

23) Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

These “**many days**” are actually three years. There is a three-year gap between verses 22 and 23. How do we know this? This is where we get a little glimpse of what we can expect with the study of the life of Paul as we go through the book of Acts because as we study the life of Paul, we can overlay things he says in his epistles and then put them together for a more complete picture of his life and ministry.

There are some key points that we learn from two of his epistles that give us some clues as to what was happening these three years he was away from Damascus. Let’s start by reading the next three verses in **Acts 9:23-26**. Let’s compare this with **Galatians 1:11-18**.

So why did God call Paul to Arabia? It was to teach him the revelation of the New Covenant, **Galatians 1:11-12, 15-17**. Just as the Twelve Apostles spent three years with Jesus personally, so likewise, Paul spent three years with Jesus being taught the revelation of Jesus Christ, **Romans 16:25; Eph 3:1-7**.

Paul tells us he went to Arabia, Gal 1:17. This is what is called Nabatean Arabia. The Nabateans had ruled this area since the 3rd century bc. They are the ones who built Petra. Which was their capital until 106ad. So Paul is in this Nabatean kingdom in Arabia, and notice what Paul says is also in this area, **Gal 4:25**. In the same letter just a couple of chapters later Paul says Mount Sinai is in Arabia. Is it possible that Paul went to Mount Sinai to receive the revelation of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ just as Moses received the revelation of the Law from Jesus on Mount Sinai as well?

We don’t know exactly how long Paul was in Arabia, but we know it was a total of three years from his conversion and his going down to Jerusalem. And again, from Galatians 1:17 we know he returned to Damascus before going down to Jerusalem. And when he returned to Damascus, the Jews wanted to kill him, so he escaped by being let down through a wall in a large basket.

When we put all these pieces together we see that these “many days” were a total of three years in which God called him out from Damascus to live in Arabia and he was taught by Jesus, then he went back to Damascus, but men were still trying to kill Paul, so he escaped the enemy by being lowered down in a basket, and he goes down to Jerusalem. Paul gives us a little more detail in **2 Corinthians 11:32-33**.

Acts 9:23 tells us the Jews were plotting to kill Paul, and 2 Corinthians 11:32 says the governor under king Aretas was trying to arrest Paul, so it seems that the Jews were working with the king to arrest and kill Paul. So the question is why would king Aretas care about killing Paul? * King Aretas was the king of

Nabatean Arabia and at that time, for about 4 years, 37-40AD he also had control of Damascus. And Paul had just spent 3 years in his kingdom in Arabia, and knowing Paul, he would have gone into the Jewish synagogues of Arabia stirring up their hearts of the Jews by preaching Jesus as the Christ. And according to Josephus, the Jews had favor with king Aretas because of some things that happened a few years earlier. So as Paul is preaching Jesus, this is creating a commotion with the Jews and news of this made it back to the king. So when Paul came back to Damascus, the Jews and Aretas began working together to arrest and kill Paul. This brings us back to Acts 9:23...

23) Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 2 Corinthians 11:32) the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest (Paul)

This word “plotted” is *συμβουλεύω*. The root word is *βουλομαι*, which means “royal will” as in the will of a king. Which ties in with king Aretas and 2 Corinthians 11:32. The Jews were working together with the will of the king to arrest and kill Paul.

24-25) 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.

2 Corinthians 11:33 says, *“but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.”* So Paul escapes from his enemies who are trying to kill him and he returns to Jerusalem after being in Damascus and Arabia for a total of three years.

Notice that **the disciples** are helping Paul as they lower him down. No doubt Ananias was one of these disciples, but I think Barnabas was with them as well because we find out in verse 27 that Barnabas is with Paul in Jerusalem as an advocate for the things Paul had done in Damascus.

26-27) 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.

Barnabas was Paul’s advocate because I believe he was there in Damascus with Paul. Barnabas was a witness for the things Paul was doing in Damascus Barnabas may have been one of the Christians who fled from Jerusalem up to Damascus because of the persecution and he was already in Damascus when Saul arrived. It is amazing to see how God is providentially working these events to bring Paul into the ministry with the Brethren. Remember, we were introduced to Barnabas back at the end of Acts chapter 4 when he sold his land and brought it to the Apostles. He had gained the name Son of Encouragement, *υἱὸς παρακλήσεως*, or Son of Comfort. One who comes alongside a brother in exhortation and comfort and that is certainly what he is doing for the Apostle Paul. He is another chosen vessel of God.

After three years, Saul returns back to Jerusalem, and I would conjecture that Barnabas is traveling with him as well. So Paul enters Jerusalem excited to meet Peter and talk with him about his experience with Jesus, but Saul had created so much havoc on the Church that even after three years his reputation stayed with him and verse 26 says... **he tried to join the disciples**, (imperfect tense- kept on trying); **but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.**

But Barnabas took him, *ἐπιλαμβάνομαι*, Barnabas received him upon himself and became the advocate for the Apostle Paul and **brought him to the apostles**. According to Galatians 1:18-19, only Peter and James the Lord’s brother was in Jerusalem, but Barnabas **declared to them**, *διηγέομαι*. He thoroughly led them through the details of his conversion by saying... **he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He (Jesus) 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.

So finally, the disciples accept Paul into the Brethren and according to Galatians 1:18 he was in Jerusalem for 15 days. And notice what he was doing during these 15 days.

29) And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

Paul just can't sit still. Everywhere this man goes, he is preaching the Gospel boldly and as a result, the enemy wants to kill him. Notice the Hellenists specifically are the ones trying to kill him here. These could be some of the same men who were disputing with Stephen 3 years earlier, Acts 6:9, and now they are seeing Saul who used to be their biggest ally was now their worst enemy. So they want to kill him just like Stephen.

30) When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Paul's drive for Jesus could not be stopped. This is why Jesus chose Paul to take the Gospel to the world. He is on fire for Jesus and because of this tenacious character, he could only stay in Jerusalem for 15 days before he had to escape from being killed. As we will see in our study of Acts, this is how Paul's entire life was. Notice how Luke refers to the disciples helping Paul, he says they are **the Brethren**. And no doubt Barnabas is with Paul helping him out of the city.

So Paul travels up to Caesarea and then back to his home town of Tarsus. The next time we see Paul is in Acts 11, which is about 3-4 years later in 43ad when Barnabas goes to Tarsus to bring Paul back with him to help him in Antioch, Acts 11:25-26.

*** History of king Aretas- king of Nabatean Arabia 9BC – 40AD**

Around 30ad, there happened to be an event that united the Jews with Aretas to have favor and sympathy toward the king. This is detailed in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 5. Aretas was the powerful king of Nabatean Arabia and he ruled from 9bc to 40ad. And it just so happened that king Aretas' daughter married king Herod Antipas, but then Antipas divorced his daughter to marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. And it was because of this that John the Baptist rebuked Herod for his fornication and Herodias had John arrested and her daughter Salome ask for John's head on a platter, Matt 14:1-8.

King Aretas became enraged against Herod Antipas for putting his daughter away, and he attacked Herod's domain. And then Philip, Herod's brother allied with Aretas as well and together they destroyed Herod's army. After this, the Jews perceived that this was God's judgement on Herod for killing John the Baptist and because the Jews hated the oppression of Rome, they became allies with Aretas as well.

So Herod, because of his defeat, went to Tiberius, the Caesar of Rome and asked for help. Tiberius then sent Vitellius, the king of Syria to help Herod, but when he saw the fierceness and fortitude of Aretas' army in Petra, he stopped the attack. It was shortly after this in 37ad that Tiberius died, and Caligula became emperor of Rome. And at this time king Aretas gained control of Damascus, either because it was a gift from Caligula to appease his anger against Rome, or Aretas took it by force from Syria when they tried to retaliate on behalf of Herod. Either way, Aretas gained control of Damascus for a short time, 37-40ad.