

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 28 | ACTS 9:1-12

ACTS 9:1-2 | THE PERSECUTION BY SAUL

- Chapter 9 begins approximately two years after Pentecost.
- The **disciples of the Lord** are the believers who are still in the **synagogues** (v. 2), thus the **high priest** has authority over their activity.
 - Note: when church and state are married, someone is always going to die.
 - At this point there was not name of this group other than **this way**, which was the way of believing that Jesus was their Messiah.
 - Those of **this way** were faithful Jews who were under persecution because followed the doctrine of the Apostles.
- Those who would be discovered (were the mission not cut short) would be taken **to Jerusalem**. Why to Jerusalem?
 - Because the entire Jewish world was still governed from Jerusalem for religious purposes.
 - Even though the citizens of Damascus were outside the realm of the Judean region, they were within the Roman Empire.
 - Roman Law would have trumped Jewish Law (as it later did for Paul), but many Jews were not Roman citizens.
 - Roman Citizenship was for:
 - Freeborn residents of Rome proper.
 - Soldiers of 10 years of service.
 - Individuals or territories that aided the empire.
 - Bribery of the list keeper.
 - Special action of the Senate.
 - Freeborn descendant of a freeborn citizen.

ACTS 9:3-9 | SAUL'S DAMASCUS ROAD EXPERIENCE

- Verses 3-4 –
 - Saul **came near Damascus**, thus what took place happened *outside of the boundaries of the Jewish people*. This is the first work of Christ outside of Jewish territory. At the time, Damascus was ruled by Nabateans based in Petra. This is not only the first mention of Damascus in Christianity, but also the last (outside of later repetition of this same account).
 - It is of interest that Saul is only called by this Jewish name prior to his conversion, after which he is called Paul. The use of the Jewish name *could* associate him with the rejection of God made by the Jewish people at the time of the selection of Saul as their first king (“they have not rejected you, they have rejected Me”). Saul represented the rejection of Jesus Christ by Israel. Graciously, God chooses the icon of rejection to become the bearer of the new Gospel to all the world.
 - The sudden **light from heaven** caused Saul to fall **to the earth**. Though most artwork depicts him falling from his horse, no horse is mentioned, and it is very unlikely that he was on a horse, as Jews typically did not ride horses in Biblical times.
 - The question from heaven is **why persecutest thou me?** Indeed, Saul’s persecution was against all the work of God through Jesus Christ, yet Saul gets an opportunity to defend himself!

- Verse 5 –
 - The term **Lord** is not exclusive to Jesus Christ but simply a term of respect. However, the Lord fully answers Saul’s question, along with either a proverb or (in my opinion) a statement of humor: ***it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.***
- Verse 6 –
 - Paul immediately sought the Lord’s will, and obeyed. In Paul’s personal testimony (Acts 26:15-18) Paul gives further details.
- Verses 7-9 –
 - We are not aware of the identity of **the men which journeyed with him**, but wouldn’t we love to know! Both Saul and the men heard a voice but **saw no man**.
 - For three days Saul was in blindness and did not **eat or drink**. Imagine the thoughts he must have been having as he now recognizes his error (and knows he will someday have to go back to Jerusalem to tell those who sent him).
 - Was Saul converted to Christianity at this point?
 - It is *always* called the conversion of Saul.
 - There is nothing called Christianity at this point, and everything beyond these verses is going to show that Saul joined the “assembly” of Messianic believers.
 - There is nothing in this passage about the cross (though it could be safely assumed that Saul now believed in the risen Messiah).
 - It can safely assume that Saul becomes part of the Messianic assembly but the church age has not been born. Its birth will not come until Saul is shown the mystery.

ACTS 9:10-18 | ANANIAS RECEIVES INSTRUCTIONS

- Verse 10 –
 - While standard Christian theology is that the age of grace began with Pentecost (when, they say, 3,000 people accepted Jesus as their Savior and started the first church), we now meet Ananias who was a **disciple at Damascus** whom the Lord uses to minister to Saul.
 - However, we must remember that Ananias was not a member of the Damascus church, he was a member of the Damascus synagogue (v. 2). Furthermore, he was abiding by the law to the extent he had good rapport with the Jewish leadership (see Acts 22:12).
 - To argue that “the church” was free from the Law and living “Christian” rather than Jewish lives at this point is to argue from your own theology rather than the Scripture.
- Verses 11-12 –
 - Ananias was to go to a street **called Straight** and look for one **called Saul**. There are actually two Greek words used here, both translated **called**. The first (associated with the street) is *καλεω* [kaleo], a word that often has theological implications *read into* its meaning. As can be seen here, it clearly does not inherently carry any theological meaning. This theological line is often used with *ecclesia* which is based on this root word, and some will emphasize that the word means *out of a call* or *the called-out ones*. Such theological meaning is going farther than the word itself carries. The second word (associated with Saul) is *ονομα* [onoma] which is also used in verse 12, where it is translated **named**.
 - We learn in this verse that Saul had already had a vision, though it did not seem to contain theological information, only logistical information about Ananias.